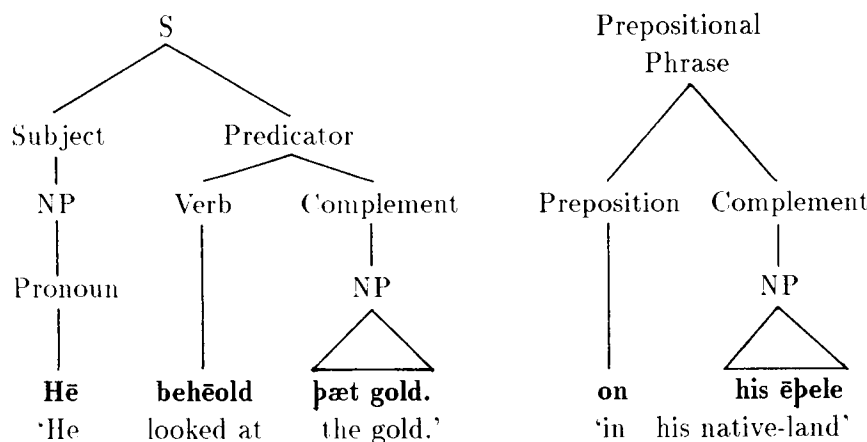


NUMBER, GENDER, CASE

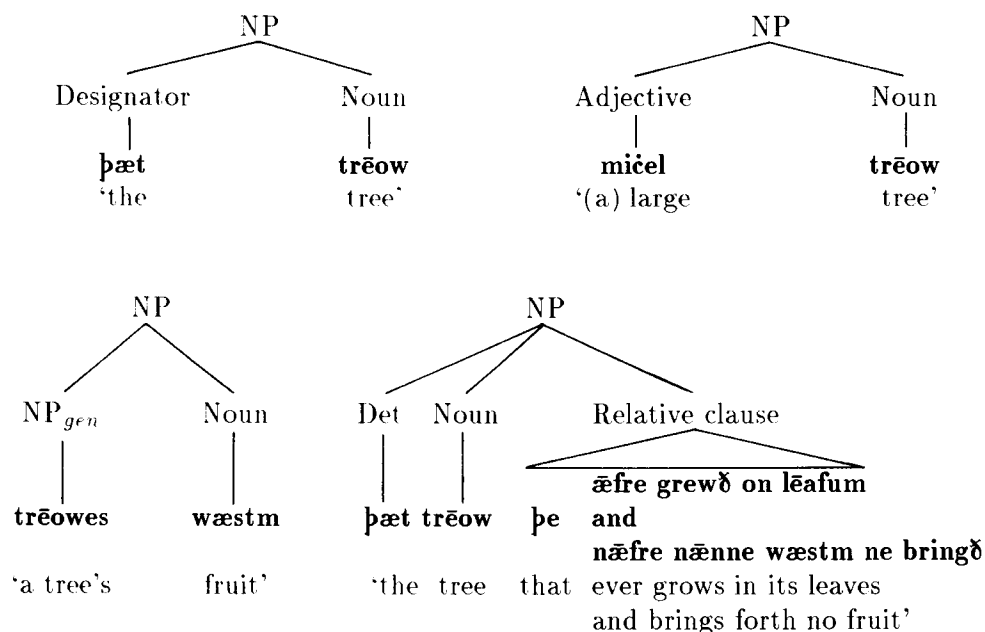
In Old English, nouns and pronouns are said to be 'inflected for number, gender, and case.' Adjectives are inflected for the same three grammatical categories, and according to two separate systems. The other principal constituents of noun-phrase constructions are said to be inflected for the same categories as well (they are called variously articles, demonstratives, designators, determiners, and the like). And so are first and second person possessive pronouns. Such formulations of the inflectional variations of nouns, pronouns, adjectives, and the rest have the value of any long-polished epitome. They also have the liabilities of in-group formulations, not to mention those of analytical obsolescence.

This appendix sets out some plain points about the morphological categories of number, gender, and case in the inflectional system for constituents of noun-phrase constructions, and explains grammatical government with each of them. The exposition of these categories is offered first in ordinary language, and then in the form of diagrammatic (two-dimensional) representation.

In conventional terms for describing this language, a noun-phrase (NP) part of any sentence (S) will be typically the subject of the sentence, the complement of a verb, or the complement of a preposition.



A noun-phrase typically has as its head a pronoun or a noun. If it is a noun, the NP may be expanded to include a designator, adjectives (and their modifiers), other NPs (as modifiers), possessive pronouns, or relative clauses—or any combinations of them.



1. **Number** is one of the categories in the morphology of NP constituents. For nouns and much of the time for personal pronouns, number is not determined by syntax. Rather, selection of singular or plural (which is obligatory) is made on the basis of reference to something outside the grammar of the sentence. In broadest terms, number selection of a grammatical inflection signifies whether the form refers to one thing, or to more than one. [SNIP]

2. **Gender** is another category in the morphology of NP constituents. For Other (3rd person) pronouns, gender selection is governed by the sex of the referent: a 'masculine' pronoun refers to a male, a 'feminine' pronoun to a female, etc. Speaker and Addressee forms are not marked morphologically for gender. (See 3.1). For nouns, however, gender is not selected, and it has no sexual reference. Rather, it is an inherent feature of any noun: **stān** 'stone,' **dæg** 'day' are *masculine*; **lufu** 'love,' **niht** 'night' are *feminine*; **trēow** 'tree,' **wif** 'woman,' **ċild** 'child' are *neuter*. [SNIP]

3. After number and gender, **case** is a third category in the morphology of NP constituents in Old English. It manifests a more elaborate system of grammatical government than do the systems for the other two categories.

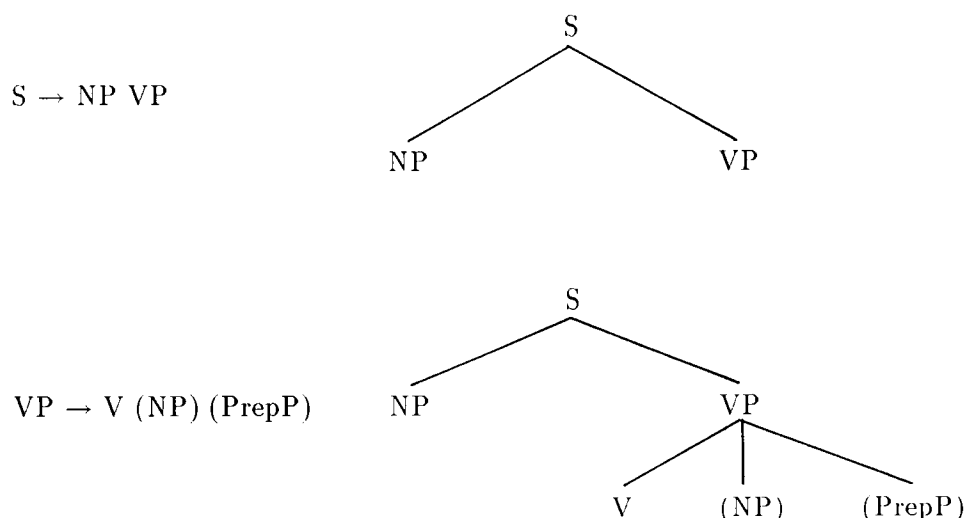
The terminology for the case categories almost universally is taken over from Latin grammar—*nominative*, *genitive*, *dative*, *accusative* cases chiefly, with *instrumental* and *vocative* often used as well. The scheme is useful, because the inflectional cases of Old English are generally limited in number to four (or rarely, to five). This terminology has such a long, extensive, and interlingual application as to be unexceptionable.

Misunderstanding often results, though, from asking ‘What is nominative?’ ‘What is accusative?’ and so on, in expectation of a simple statement of what the case *is* or what it *does*. Notional definitions, such as these two from Ælfric’s Grammar, are of little help: **Nominatiuus is nemniġendlic: mid þām casu wē nemnað ealle þing, swilce þū cweðe hic homo equitat ‘þes mann rīt’** ‘Nominative [in Latin] is “naming-like”: with that case we name all things, as when you say “this man rides.”’ **Accusatiuus is wrēgendlic: mid þām casu bið ġeswutelod hū menn sprecað be ælcum þinge. Hunc hominem acuse ‘Dysne mann ic wrēge’** ‘Accusative is “accusing”: with that case is shown how people speak concerning each thing. “This man I accuse.”’

Attempts to state what a case means, or what ‘idea(s)’ may be expressed by it, have always been partial and misleading. At best they take the form of listings: possessive, subjective, objective, partitive genitive, then genitive of measure, genitive of composition, genitive of material, and so on. But to say, for instance, that accusative case is used for the direct object of a verb is true only some of the time. **Dysne man ic wrēge** (just above) is one instance, and **Hīe ġefliemdon þone here** ‘They put to flight that army’ is another. Other verbs have single complements with genitive case inflection: **Hē āxode hine and fandode hys** ‘He asked him and tested him’; **Fandiap þises goldes and ðissera ġymstāna** ‘Test this gold and these gemstones’; **Hwæs anbīdie ic, būtan þīn, Drihten?** ‘Whom do I wait for but thee, Lord?’ Objects of verbals have inflection in the same case that is called for by the lexical valence of the corresponding finite verb forms: **Hī āxodon hwæðer ālyfð ænegum men his wīf forlætan, his þus fandiġende** ‘They asked whether it was permitted for any man to put away his wife, thus testing him.’ Still other verbs have single objects with dative case inflection: **Hē folgude ānum burh-sittendan men** ‘He followed [attached himself to] a citizen (of that land).’ Some of these seem very like direct objects. In addition, accusative case inflection occurs regularly with objects of certain prepositions (see Section B) and with the subject of an infinitive: **Ðā ġeseah hēo licgan ðone hring on ðām weġe** ‘Then she saw the ring lying on the path.’

It will be obvious from even these few examples that case, as an inflectional category, does not correlate directly with either semantic rôle or grammatical function.

A model emulating standard transformational grammar may also lead to confusion if it is based on Modern English. If it has this form—



S = Sentence

VP = verb phrase

NP = noun phrase

PrepP = prepositional phrase

—then it will not begin to be useful until further rules specify all the ways any NP on the right (a complement of the verb) is distinguished from an NP on the left (the subject) by the grammatical case of the pronoun or the noun (with its modifiers) that heads it. For learning Old English—and for understanding its structure—the best approach is through syntax and lexicon together.

Case is 'governed.' That is to say, grammatical case inflection is determined by relation of a case-inflected form to some other constituent of a sentence. For nouns and pronouns, the primary relation may be that of (a) complement of a verb, or (b) complement of a preposition. Or it may be (c) that of a noun or pronoun dependent on another noun, or (d) a noun or pronoun dependent on a quantifier. Or it may be (e) the relation of a noun to a predicate adjective. Each of these types of case government will be described next.