The Syntax of Prenominal and Postnominal Adjectives in Old English
The Syntax of Prenominal and Postnominal Adjectives in Old English

By

Agnieszka Pysz
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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This book is based on my doctoral dissertation, which would not have come to fruition without the help of many people. Although listing them here borders on the impossible, I would like to say ‘thank you’ (at least) to those who come to my mind at this very moment. Needless to say, none of the persons mentioned is responsible for any errors and imperfections on the pages to follow.

First and foremost, I owe a debt of gratitude to both my supervisors, Professor Marcin Krygier and Professor Jacek Witkoś. I wish to thank them for unfaltering support, encouragement and understanding throughout the period in which this monograph was taking shape. Equally, I am indebted to them for giving me the freedom to pursue my own (at times, risky) ideas.

I kindly acknowledge the generous sponsorship granted by The Research Council of Norway (Norges Forskningsråd; project number 172809, STP 0506), which enabled me to pay a research visit at the Center for Advanced Study in Theoretical Linguistics (CASTL) in Tromsø in May 2006. I thank the whole CASTL team for their incredible hospitality and for making my stay unforgettable in numerous respects.

I extend sincere words of gratitude to all the people whom I was lucky to meet on my life-long educational path. Let me mention here Professor Jacek Fisiak, my MA supervisor and a supportive mentor in the post-MA years, as well as Gosia Fabiszak and Ania Hebda, my first teachers of syntax and the history of English. Thanks are also due to the teachers and participants at the two linguistic summer schools, i.e. the 11th Central European Summer School in Generative Grammar in Cluj-Napoca (2004) and the DGfS & GLOW Summer School in Micro- and Macrovariation in Stuttgart (2006).

I am grateful to my friends and colleagues, both in Poland and abroad. My most heartfelt thanks go (alphabetically) to Agata (for the spiritual presence despite the geographical distance), Bartek (for keeping my eyes open), Benia (for Something Precious), Kasia and Piotr (for technical help with the YCOE and not only), Magda and Jarek (for Being), Paulina (for dispelling doubts about norsk), and Ula (for trying to make it seem more bearable).

Last but not least, I dedicate this work to My Parents, to whom I owe most of what I have and who I am.
INTRODUCTION

“The analysis of attributive adjectives is a controversial issue in current linguistic theory. […] From the point of view of syntactic theory it is perhaps slightly worrying that the theory […] allows for so many distinct analyses of one and the same phenomenon” (Holmberg 1993)

“The widespread popularity in recent work of the DP hypothesis contrasts strikingly with the lack of a consensus about the structural location of the attributive adjective” (Svenonius 1994)

“We still have no good phrase structure theory of such simple matters as attributive adjectives” (Chomsky 1995)

The aim of this monograph is to suggest a syntactic analysis, couched in the framework of Chomsky’s generative grammar, which would best grasp the syntax of prenominal and postnominal adjectives in Old English (henceforth, OE). Taking into account that, as the three quotations above indicate, there is little consensus among generative scholars as to the status of adnominal adjectives in the syntax as well as that, heretofore, there have been hardly any attempts at handling OE adjectives by means of generative methodology, the aim to which this work aspires seems fairly wide-ranging. To make it more concrete, the scope of the investigation has been limited to four selected aspects of OE adnominal adjectives which, ideally, should all be captured by the prospective analysis. It is hoped that the limited scope of the inquiry will contribute to a qualitatively better insight into the nature of problems involved.

With the above in mind, the book has been divided into three major parts. The initial part (Chapter One and Chapter Two) is descriptive in nature and provides the characterisation of adnominal adjectives in OE, based on a selection of four specific aspects. The middle part (Chapter Three) lays out a theoretical groundwork for the analysis to be developed further. The final part (Chapter Four and Chapter Five) contains an actual analysis which is intended to cope with the four aspects of OE adjectives reviewed in the initial part.

As mentioned, Chapter One and Chapter Two provide the descriptive characterisation of adnominal adjectives in OE.

Chapter One describes as thoroughly as possible the first two properties
of OE adjectives, i.e. inflectional patterning and stacking potential. As regards the former, the discussion differentiates the inflection of adjectives in preposition to the noun (specifically, the patterns of concord and disconcord) from that of adjectives in postposition to the noun (specifically, the so-called ‘true postposition’ and ‘false postposition’). A claim is made that the different inflectional behaviour which prenominal and postnominal adjectives exhibit argues against treating them on an equal footing. As regards the latter, the discussion focuses on the stacking potential of adjectives in preposition to the noun, viewed through the prism of previous research. Two traditional approaches towards adjective stacking in OE are considered: one which treats some adjectives as recursive, whereas others as non-recursive, and one which treats all adjectives as non-recursive. It is asserted that both of these approaches are somewhat problematic and must therefore be reconsidered.

Two further properties of OE adjectives, i.e. their placement with respect to the noun, as well as with respect to complements, constitute the focus of Chapter Two. As regards the former, a diachronic overview of prenominal and postnominal adjectives is offered, taking into account three periods in the history of English and paying special attention to the OE period. In addition to providing some empirical evidence from OE, the discussion points out that the issue of prenominal and postnominal adjectives cannot be reduced to the superficial difference in their surface placement. As regards the placement of adnominal adjectives with respect to their complements, an attempt is made to see what patterns are encountered in OE, specifically whether prenominal and postnominal adjectives tend to be placed before or after their complements.

As pointed out earlier, Chapter Three provides a theoretical groundwork for the analysis of OE adjectives suggested in further parts. At the outset, an outline of the generative research into the syntactic status of nominal phrases is offered. The remainder of the discussion reviews the research into the syntactic status of adnominal adjectives. Four major approaches towards the structural location of adjectives are presented. Each approach is subsequently evaluated and a conclusion is made that none of them can be straightforwardly applied to adnominal adjectives in OE. Thus, it is suggested that OE adjectives are best handled by a mixed account, according to which not all of them are ascribed the same status in the syntax.

Chapter Four and Chapter Five make an attempt at offering a syntactic account of OE adjectives which would best capture their properties described in Chapter One and Chapter Two.

Chapter Four suggests a way of dealing with the two aspects presented
in Chapter One. Regarding inflection, it is contended that since the inflectional behaviour of prenominal adjectives and that of postnominal adjectives cannot be reduced to one single pattern, there seems to be no easy way in which a single mechanism could account for both of them. Given this, two mechanisms are posited: one responsible for prenominal adjectives (in terms of concord by selection) and one responsible for postnominal adjectives (in terms of agreement by Spec-head). Regarding stacking, it is shown that the traditional claims suggesting that OE adjectives are partly or fully precluded from stacking do not stand up to scrutiny and must be abandoned. An alternative account of stacking, which differentiates between the stacking potential of prenominal adjectives and that of postnominal adjectives, is proposed instead.

Chapter Five suggests a way of dealing with the two aspects presented in Chapter Two. Regarding the placement of adjectives with respect to the noun, a proposal is made whereby both the prenominal and the postnominal placement of adjectives on the surface follow from their different base-generation sites in the syntax. The major innovation of the suggested proposal is that some adjectives which are traditionally viewed as postnominal, i.e. those in ‘CONJ+Adj’ and ‘N+Dem+Adj’ constructions, are subsumed here under the so-called ‘false postposition’. Regarding the placement of adjectives with respect to their complements, it is proposed that the relevant surface patterns in which prenominal and postnominal adjectives are preceded or followed by their complements may be readily derived by means of (at most) two movements inside the extended projection of nominals.

Two remarks are in order with regard to the basic terminology used throughout this book. Firstly, the term ‘nominal phrase’ is used in a theory-neutral (or pretheoretical) sense. At relevant points, when the syntactic status of nominal phrases is relevant to the discussion, a distinction is made between DP and NP: the label DP is used with reference to the determiner phrase, a maximal projection of the functional head Dº, whereas the label NP is used with reference to the noun phrase, a maximal projection of the lexical head Nº. Secondly, the term ‘adnominal adjective’ is used to refer to any adjective which appears within the boundaries of a nominal phrase, with no regard to its surface placement (prenominal or postnominal) or its relation with respect to the noun (attributive or predicative).
## List of Abbreviations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ACC</td>
<td>Accusative (case)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adj</td>
<td>Adjective</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>Common (gender)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ComplAdJ</td>
<td>Complement of an adjective</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DAT</td>
<td>Dative (case)</td>
</tr>
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<td>DEF</td>
<td>Definite</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dem</td>
<td>Demonstrative (pronoun)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DIM</td>
<td>Diminutive (form of a noun)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DS</td>
<td>Deep Structure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>Feminine (gender)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GEN</td>
<td>Genitive (case)</td>
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<tr>
<td>GEND</td>
<td>Gender</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INDEF</td>
<td>Indefinite</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INSTR</td>
<td>Instrumental (case)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LF</td>
<td>Long Form (of an adjective)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M</td>
<td>Masculine (gender)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ME</td>
<td>Middle English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ModE</td>
<td>Modern English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>Neuter (gender)</td>
</tr>
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<td>NOM</td>
<td>Nominative (case)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NUM</td>
<td>Number</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>oAdj</td>
<td>Adjective with ambiguous (weak/strong) inflection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OE</td>
<td>Old English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PDE</td>
<td>Present Day English</td>
</tr>
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<td>Plural (number)</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>sAdj</td>
<td>Adjective with 'strong' inflection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SF</td>
<td>Short Form (of an adjective)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SG</td>
<td>Singular (number)</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<td>Description</td>
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<td>--------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>U</td>
<td>Unmarked (inflection)</td>
</tr>
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<td>UG</td>
<td>Universal Grammar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>wAdj</td>
<td>Adjective with ‘weak’ inflection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WK</td>
<td>Weak (adjectival inflection)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER ONE
ADNOMINAL ADJECTIVES IN OE: INFLECTION AND STACKING

1.1. Introductory remarks
The current Chapter discusses the inflection of adnominal adjectives in OE, as well as their stacking potential. The Chapter comprises two parts (i.e. section 1.2. and section 1.3.) and is organised as follows.

Section 1.2. reviews the inflectional patterning of OE adjectives: adjectives in preposition to an overt noun, adjectives in the postcopular position and adjectives in postposition to an overt noun. Section 1.3. is devoted to the phenomenon of adjective stacking in OE. It offers some discussion of adjective stacking from a cross-linguistic perspective. It subsequently discusses adjective stacking in OE, with a focus on two traditional approaches towards stacking in OE. Section 1.4. summarises the contents of Chapter One.

1.2. Inflection of adjectives in OE
The current section discusses the inflection of OE adjectives, both prenominal and postnominal, as well as those which occur in constructions with a copula. The discussion falls into three parts (section 1.2.1., section 1.2.2. and section 1.2.3.).

Section 1.2.1. reviews the inflection of adjectives preposed to an overt noun (prenominal adjectives). It focuses on the major patterns of concord between adjectives and nouns and is supplemented by an analogous discussion of the so-called ‘disconcord’. Section 1.2.2. reviews the inflection of adjectives in the postcopular position. Section 1.2.3. reviews the inflection of adjectives postposed to an overt noun. Two types of postposition are considered, i.e. ‘true postposition’ and ‘false postposition’. They are kept apart because adjectives which occur in these two positions behave differently in terms of inflection.
Generally, adjectives in OE inflect according to two inflectional patterns, i.e. weak (or definite) and strong (or indefinite). The relevant paradigms are presented in Table 1-1 and Table 1-2. Table 1-1 includes a standardised set of weak adjectival endings, whereas Table 1-2 includes a standardised set of strong adjectival endings.

### Table 1-1. Weak inflectional endings of adjectives in OE.

<table>
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<tr>
<td>NOM.SG</td>
<td>-a</td>
<td>-e</td>
<td>-e</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GEN.SG</td>
<td>-an</td>
<td>-an</td>
<td>-an</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DAT.SG</td>
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<td>-an</td>
</tr>
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<td>ACC.SG</td>
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### Table 1-2. Strong inflectional endings of adjectives in OE.

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<tbody>
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<td>-u/-Ø</td>
<td>-Ø</td>
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<tr>
<td>GEN.SG</td>
<td>-es</td>
<td>-re</td>
<td>-es</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DAT.SG</td>
<td>-um</td>
<td>-re</td>
<td>-um</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACC.SG</td>
<td>-ne</td>
<td>-e</td>
<td>-Ø</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NOM.PL</td>
<td>-e</td>
<td>-a</td>
<td>-u/-Ø</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GEN.PL</td>
<td>-a</td>
<td>-a</td>
<td>-ra</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1 Quirk & Wrenn (1957: 31) distinguish the definite and indefinite adjectival inflection, rather than weak and strong.
2 Following a common practice, the inflectional paradigms of OE adjectives in Table 1-1 and Table 1-2 are based on the ‘standard’ West Saxon dialect of OE. A usual caveat in connection with this is that any such paradigms must be treated to a large extent as idealised.
3 The difference between the strong inflectional endings associated with NOM.SG.F is that <-u> attaches to adjectives with light stems, whereas <-Ø> attaches to adjectives with heavy stems.
4 In some grammars of OE, the strong inflectional endings associated with NOM.PL.F and ACC.PL.F include <-e>, in addition to <-a>.
5 The difference between the strong inflectional endings associated with NOM.PL.N and ACC.PL.N is that <-u> attaches to adjectives with light stems, whereas <-Ø> attaches to adjectives with heavy stems.
1.2.1. Inflection of adjectives in preposition to an overt noun

The discussion in this section focuses on the inflection of OE adjectives which appear in preposition to an overt noun. According to traditional views, OE adjectives agree with the noun which they precede in three morphosyntactic categories: case, number and gender (the phenomenon referred to as adjective-noun ‘concord’). The major patterns of adjective-noun concord in OE are outlined in section 1.2.1.1. The patterns of an opposite phenomenon, i.e. the so-called ‘disconcord’, are accordingly presented in section 1.2.1.2.

1.2.1.1. Concord between a prenominal adjective and a noun

The discussion of concord in this section splits into two parts. Concord involving prenominal adjectives with weak inflection is discussed first (1.2.1.1.1.). It is followed by an analogous discussion of concord involving prenominal adjectives with strong inflection (1.2.1.1.2.).

1.2.1.1.1. Weak adjectival inflection (concord)

OE prenominal adjectives inflect weak when they appear in one of the following contexts (1-9).

(1) when an adjective is preceded by a proximal demonstrative
   a. þisne iungan man
      this young.WK man.ACC.SG.M
      (colsigewZ,ÆLet_4_[SigeweardZ]:1054.475)
   b. þis wreclice lif
      this wretched.WK life.NOM/ACC.SG.N
      (cowulf,WHom_6:48.274)

(2) when an adjective is preceded by a distal demonstrative
   a. þam soðan Gode
      the true.WK God.DAT.SG.M (coeust,LS_8_[Eust]:411.435)
   b. (þurh) þone halgan Swiþun
      (through) the holy.WK Swithin.ACC.SG.M (Spamer 1979: 241)

(3) when an adjective is preceded by a possessive pronoun
a. (for) his goodan willan
(for) his good.WK will.DAT.SG.M (Haumann 2003: 59)
b. hys yfelan dæda
his evil.WK deeds.NOM/ACC.PL.F
(coaelhom.,ÆHom_6:196.974)

(4) when an adjective is preceded by a nominal phrase in the
genitive case
a. þæs fæder dyrstigan aðsware
the.GEN father.GEN bold.WK oath.ACC.SG.F
(cocathom1,ÆCHom_I,_32:454.87.6424)
b. (to) þæs cyninges untruman bearne
(to) the.GEN king.GEN sick.WK child.DAT.SG.N
(Mitchell 1985: 56, §113)

(5) in the vocative case, i.e. in direct address6
a. Eala þu leofa cyning7
alas you.SG dear.WK king (Haumann 2003, fn. 4)
b. leofan men
beloved.WK people
(Fischer 2001: 265, Quirk & Wrenn 1957: 69)

(6) in the comparative degree, preceded by a demonstrative
a. (mid) ðære lufan ðæs beteran lifes
(with) the.DAT desire the.GEN better.WK life.GEN.SG.N
(Mitchell 1985: 80)
b. þæt ærre folc
the earlier.WK folk.NOM.SG.N
(coblick,HomS_21_[BlHom_6]:81.279.1018)

(7) in the comparative degree, not preceded by a demonstrative
a. (mid) ryhtlicran lufan
(with) more-right.WK love.DAT.SG.F
(Haumann 2003: 59, fn. 4)

6 Strikingly, weak inflection seems to be obligatory in the vocative case in
general because even postnominal adjectives, which otherwise take
exclusively strong inflection, assume weak inflection when they appear in
the vocative case.

7 See also the following example in (i).
(i) snottra fengel
wise.WK king (Fischer 2001: 265, Quirk & Wrenn 1957: 69)
b. (on) beteran hade
   (on) better.WK rank.DAT.SG.M (Mitchell 1985: 80, §181)

(8) in the superlative degree, preceded by a demonstrative
a. ðes wyrresta cyning
   the worst.WK king.NOM.SG.M (Mitchell 1985: 80, §181)
b. þone maestan dæl
   the largest.WK part.ACC.SG.M (Quirk & Wrenn 1957: 69)

(9) in the superlative degree, preceded by a possessive pronoun
a. his leofestan freond
   his dearest.WK friend.ACC.SG.M
   (coaelive,ELS[Peter's Chair]:126.2361)
b. min sweteste bearn
   my sweetest.WK child.NOM.SG.N
   (coeuphr,LS_7_[Euphr]:305.324)

1.2.1.1.2. Strong adjectival inflection (concord)

In general, OE prenominal adjectives inflect strong when they appear in
contexts other than those enumerated in (1-9) in section 1.2.1.1.1. In
concrete terms, strong adjectival inflection is used in the following

(10) when an adjective is the first element in a nominal phrase
   a. gastlicne wæstm
      spiritual.ST growth.ACC.SG.M
      (coblick,HomS_17_[BIHom_5]:557.688)
   b. (of) yðigendre sæ ðyssere worulde
      (of) stormy.ST sea.DAT.SG.F this.GEN world.GEN
      (Mitchell 1985: 56)

(11) when an adjective is preceded by an indefinite an (Mitchell
    1985: 65, §136)
   a. an stunt wif
      a foolish.ST woman.NOM/ACC.SG.N (Mitchell 1985: 60)

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8 Mitchell (1985: 80, §181) claims that superlatives inflect weak or strong (cf.
comparatives can be only weak). See also Brunner (1962: 62), Quirk &
b. ðenne bealdne ðeof
   a bold.ST thief.ACC.SG.M (Mitchell 1985: 60)

(12) when an adjective is preceded by an indefinite sum (Mitchell 1985: 65, §136)
a. sum earm wif
   some poor.ST woman.NOM/ACC.SG.N (Mitchell 1985: 60)
b. sum wælhreow casere
   some cruel.ST emperor.NOM.SG.M (Mitchell 1985: 60)

(13) when an adjective is preceded by an adjective of quantity or number, e.g. ægðer, ælc, ænig, eall, (ge)hwilc, manig, genog (Mitchell 1985: 61, §125)
a. gehwilce wise lareowas
   all wise.ST teachers.NOM/ACC.PL.M (Mitchell 1985: 61)
b. manege lease Cristas
   many false.ST Christs.NOM/ACC.PL.M (Mitchell 1985: 61)

1.2.1.2. Disconcord between a prenominal adjective and a noun

This section focuses on the phenomenon of ‘disconcord’ between OE prenominal adjectives and nouns, i.e. on instances in which the standardised rules of adjective-noun concord (for which see section 1.2.1.1.) are not obeyed. Two general patterns of disconcord are taken into account. Section 1.2.1.2.1. discusses instances in which adjectives inflect weak, although they appear in contexts associated with strong inflection. Section 1.2.1.2.2. discusses instances in which adjectives inflect strong, although they appear in contexts associated with weak inflection.

Two important provisos should be borne in mind. Firstly, the discussion below is by no means intended to set out the reason(s) for the existence of adjective-noun disconcord in OE. That is, instead of taking an explanatory stance, the discussion adopts a purely descriptive approach. Adjectival inflection is thus taken at face value, i.e. a given inflectional ending is treated as unambiguously weak if it is formally different from an ending in the corresponding slot of the strong paradigm. Similarly, a given ending is treated as unambiguously strong if it is formally different from an ending in the corresponding slot of the weak paradigm.

9 Compare the corresponding example in (i).
(i) ðenne leofostne sunu
   one dearest.ST son.ACC.SG.M (Mitchell 1985: 84, fn. 68)
Secondly, no attempt is made below to provide any statistical data concerning the prevalence of adjective-noun disconcord in OE. Although it is often claimed that the scale of this phenomenon is different in poetry and prose, the question of whether there is in fact any crucial difference in this respect is not addressed here. All the examples cited in the main text in sections 1.2.1.2.1. and 1.2.1.2.2. are taken from prose. Whenever appropriate, the relevant comments, qualifications and references to the previous work on the subject are provided in footnotes.

1.2.1.2.1. Weak adjectival inflection (disconcord)

This section contains a selection of examples in which adjectives preposed to an overt noun inflect weak, although they appear in contexts typically associated with strong adjectival inflection.

Examples (14a-14d) involve prenominal adjectives which inflect weak, although they are the first elements in a nominal phrase. For some qualifications see, e.g., Mitchell (1985: 56ff., §§114-117).11 12

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10 This issue is a matter of some controversy. According to some scholars, e.g., Closs (1964: 116) (cited by Mitchell 1985: 67, §141), the distinction between weak and strong adjectival inflection is not rigidly obeyed in many OE texts, whether prosaic or poetic (the existence of disconcord in prose is confirmed by Fischer 2001: 253). Other scholars, e.g., Campbell (1969: §638) (cited by Mitchell 1985: 56, §114), claim that prose and poetry differ in this respect, specifically, that disconcord is more widespread in poetry than in prose. In this connection see, e.g., Lichtenheld (1873), who suggests that a number of weak adjectival forms in non-weak contexts may help determine the date of a given poetic text, i.e. that the high incidence of such forms is indicative of its earliness, whereas the low incidence testifies to its lateness. For a critical discussion of this approach see, e.g., Amos (1980: 124), Funke (1949: 151), Mitchell (1985: 56-57; 67, §141).

11 Constructions in which prenominal adjectives inflect weak, although they are the first elements in nominal phrases, are also found in poetry. Some examples are adduced in (i-iv) (Mitchell 1985: 56, §114, Quirk & Wrenn 1957: 69).

(i) gamel-a Scylding 
old.WK Scylding.NOM.SG.M
(ii) deor-an sweorde
violent.WK sword.DAT.SG.N
(iii) geong-a garwiga
young.WK warrior.NOM.SG.M
(iv) wis-a fengel
wise.WK king.NOM.SG.M

12 Mitchell (1985: 56, fn. 37) cites an example from Ælfric’s Catholic Homilies, i.e. se Halgan Gast ‘the Holy Ghost’ (where se represents the nominative case, whereas halgan appears with a weak ending which does not represent the nominative case), and claims that it can be regarded as
Examples (15a-15b) involve prenominal adjectives which inflect weak, although they are preceded by an indefinite, either an ‘one, a’, as in (15a), or sum ‘some, a’, as in (15b).13

(15) a. an blinda mann
   a blind.WK man.NOM.SG.M (Fischer 2001: 268, 23b)
   b.  sum wælhreowa dema
       some cruel.WK judge.NOM.SG.M (Fischer 2001: 267, 22c)

1.2.1.2.2. Strong adjectival inflection (disconcord)

This section contains a selection of examples in which adjectives preposed to an overt noun inflect strong, although they appear in contexts typically associated with weak adjectival inflection.

Examples (16-17) involve prenominal adjectives which inflect strong, although they are preceded by a demonstrative, either proximal, as in (16), or distal, as in (17). For some qualifications see, e.g., Mitchell (1985: 58-59, §§118-120).14

13 Fischer (2001: 253, 267-268; also 274, fn. 11) hypothesises that adjectives in (14a-14d) inflect weak because they express inherent, rather than temporary, qualities. She draws an analogy to Dutch, where a similar tendency may be observed. For some relevant discussion concerning Dutch see also Kester (1996: 99-104, §2.5.1.3.).

14 In this context, consider example (i) from Old Norse, where a prenominal adjective inflects strong, although it is preceded by a definite article.

(i) sá góðr maðr ...
the good.ST man (Cooper 1986: 38)

According to Cooper (1986: 38), patterns such as (i) are possible in Old Norse when a nominal phrase is followed by a restrictive relative clause.

15 It is often claimed that instances of disconcord such as (16-17), which involve masculine or neuter nouns, represent the confusion of the dative
Examples (18a-18h) involve prenominal adjectives which inflect strong, although they are preceded by a possessive pronoun. For some qualifications see, e.g., Mitchell (1985: 59-60, §§121-122).16 17

(i) His ful leof fæder
his very dear.ST father (Fischer 2000: 169, her 14; see also her fn. 12)

17  In connection with constructions in which a strong adjective is preceded by a possessive pronoun see, e.g., Christophersen (1939: 91-92) and Mitchell (1985: 60, §122).
The discussion in this section focuses on the inflection of OE adjectives which appear in the postcopular position, notably after a copula *wesan* ‘to be’ or *weorþan* ‘to become’. For the sake of perspicuity, only the most typical patterns of inflection are taken into account. For fuller discussions see, e.g., Mitchell (1985: 16-20, §§33-38, 62-63, §§128-129), Tōyama (1989).

According to the view advocated here, postcopular adjectives in OE assume the endings of the strong inflectional paradigm (see Table 1-2). It must be admitted that such a view is not based on any statistical examination and that, as shown below, postcopular adjectives sometimes fail to follow the strong inflectional pattern. Nevertheless, the null hypothesis which finds support cross-linguistically and, moreover, may be accounted for structurally is that for OE postcopular adjectives (for predicative adjectives, in general) there is one type of inflection available, i.e. strong.

Some representative examples of OE adjectives which appear after a copula and which inflect strong are provided in (19-20). Examples (19a-19c) involve strong adjectives which agree with the singular subject, of masculine, feminine and neuter gender, respectively.
(19) a. Crist is good-Ø
    Christ.NOM.SG.M is good.ST (Mitchell 1985: 16)
b. heo ... wæs swiþe geswencedu
    she.NOM.SG.F was very distressed.ST (Mitchell 1985: 16)
c. þæt land is bradost-Ø
    the land.NOM.SG.N is widest.ST (Quirk & Wrenn 1957: 69)

Examples (20a-20c) involve strong adjectives which agree with the plural subject, of masculine, feminine and neuter gender, respectively.

(20) a. ealle þa consulas wæron deade buton twæm
    all the consuls.NOM.PL.M were dead.ST except two
    (Tōyama 1989: 32)
b. þonne wæron ealle þa dura betyneda
    then were all the doors.NOM/ACC.PL.F shut.ST
    (Mitchell 1985: 17)
c. fela þinga, Petrus, beoð god gesegnu
    many things.NOM/ACC.PL.N Peter are God.DAT blessed.ST
    (Mitchell 1985: 17)

Apart from the above canonical patterns, there are a number of other patterns available. Two of them are mentioned and accordingly illustrated below.

It is claimed that OE postcopular adjectives which agree with the plural subject sometimes take a generalised <-e> ending, irrespective of the gender of the subject. Whereas the use of <-e> in the case of adjectives which agree with plural subjects of the masculine gender is expected, as it follows the strong paradigm, it is unexpected in the case of adjectives which agree with plural subjects of the feminine gender. Although adjectives which agree with plural subjects of the neuter gender are not expected to appear with <-e>, there are occasional examples in OE which show that the use of <-e> is possible in these cases as well.

18 Compare the following example in (i).
(i) se ... wearð fyrmest-Ø on ðrowunge
    he.NOM.SG.M was first.ST in suffering (Mitchell 1985: 62)
19 Compare the following example in (i).
(i) ne weorðeð sio mægburg gemicledu
    not become the nation.NOM.SG.F increased.ST
20 Compare the following example in (i) (with a participle).
(i) þas gymstanas synd tocwysede
    the jewels.NOM.PL.M are crushed.ST
21 Compare the following example in (i).
(i) his weorc syndon deofolicu
    his works.NOM.PL.N are devilish.ST (Mitchell 1985: 17)
    Mitchell (1985: 18) claims that neuter plurals in <-u> are exceptional, in prose, as well as in poetry.
which agree with plural subjects of the feminine and neuter gender, i.e. they should take <-a> and <-u>, respectively. Examples (21a-21c) show that <-e> can be used with postcopular adjectives which agree with the plural subject of any gender. 

(21) a. ealle þa consulas wæron deade buton twæm
    all the consuls.NOM.PL.M were dead except two
    (Tōyama 1989: 32)
b. sio bieldo 7 sio monnðwærmes bioð swiðe anlice
    the courage.F and the courtesy.F are very unique
    (Tōyama 1989: 32)
c. ealle þa ðing … sint eorðlice
    all the things.NOM.PL.N are earthly

The other claim, which is made with regard to OE postcopular adjectives which agree with the singular subject, is that they sometimes take a generalised <-Ø> ending (i.e. zero inflection), irrespective of the gender of the subject. The relevant examples are given in (22a-22c).

(22) a. Crist is good-Ø
    Christ.NOM.SG.M is good (Mitchell 1985: 16)
b. þeos sealf is god-Ø
    this medicament.NOM.SG.F is good (Tōyama 1989: 33)
c. þæt land is bradost-Ø
    the land.NOM.SG.N is widest (Quirk & Wrenn 1957: 69)

1.2.3. Inflection of adjectives in postposition to an overt noun

The discussion in this section focuses on the inflection of OE adjectives which appear in postposition to an overt noun. According to the mainstream view advocated in traditional OE grammars, the inflection of postnominal adjectives does not crucially differ from that of prenominal

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22  Postcopular adjectives often take <-e> in the plural in all the three genders in later OE texts (Mitchell 1985: 20, §37). The question of whether this is due to the generalisation of <-e> from the masculine gender is disregarded here because it has no direct bearing on the discussion.

23  Postcopular adjectives take zero inflection in the plural in all the three genders in Ælfric’s Catholic Homilies (Mitchell 1985: 17, §33).

24  Compare the corresponding example with a participle.

(i) heo swiðe wæs gedreht-Ø
    she.F very was oppressed (Mitchell 1985: 17)