

# INFLECTIONAL VARIATION IN THE OLD ENGLISH PARTICIPLE. A CORPUS-BASED ANALYSIS

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**ABSTRACT.** *This article deals with the coexistence of verbal and adjectival inflection in the Old English past participle. Its aim is to assess the degree of variation in the inflection of the participle so as to determine whether or not the change starts in the Old English period. The analysis is based on two corpora, the York Corpus of Old English and the Dictionary of Old English Corpus. With these corpora the following variants of the inflection of the participle are analysed: genre (prose and verse), tense (present and past), morphological class (weak vs. strong) and case (nominative, accusative, genitive, dative and instrumental). The main conclusion of the article is that the quantitative evidence from the corpora indicates that the degree of variation presented by the participle in Old English shows that diachronic change is underway. Overall, the past participle and poetic texts clearly reflect the loss of inflection, while the adjectival inflection of the participle co-occurs with its adjectival function.*

**Keywords;** corpus analysis, Old English, inflection, participle

**RESUMEN.** *Este artículo trata de la coexistencia de la flexión verbal y adjetival del participio pasado en inglés antiguo. Su objetivo es evaluar el grado de variación existente en la flexión del participio para determinar si el cambio empieza o no durante el período del inglés antiguo. El análisis está basado en dos corpora: el York Corpus of Old English y el Dictionary of Old English Corpus. Con estos corpora, se han analizado las siguientes variables en la flexión del participio: género (prosa y verso), tiempo (presente y pasado), clase morfológica (fuerte y débil) y caso (nominativo, acusativo, genitivo, dativo e instrumental). La conclusión principal de este artículo es que la evidencia cuantitativa de los indica que el grado de variación del participio en inglés antiguo muestra que el cambio diacrónico está teniendo lugar. En general, el participio pasado y los textos de poesía reflejan claramente la pérdida de la flexión, mientras que la flexión adjetival del participio se corresponde con su función adjetival.*

**Palabras clave;** análisis de corpus, inglés antiguo, flexión, participio

## 1. AIMS AND SCOPE

As Lass (1992: 144) remarks, Present-Day English verbs have four non-finite forms, of which the present participle and the gerund “are formally identical but functionally distinct”: the infinitive (*write*), past participle (*written*), present participle (*writing*) and gerund (*writing*). The corresponding forms in Old English are the uninflected infinitive (*writan*), past participle (*gewritten*), present participle (*writende*) and verbal noun (*writing*). To these, the inflected infinitive (*to writanne*) must be added, in such a way that in Old English the infinitive and the participle can be inflected or not. Throughout linguistic evolution, the adjectival part of the inflection of the participle disappeared as a consequence of the generalised loss of inflectional endings, whereas the verbal part was kept. Put in other words, nominal inflections were drastically simplified whereas the inflectional morphology of verbs remained more distinctive and the inflectional morphology of adjectives was even more simplified than the one of nouns, which has kept explicit inflections for the genitive and the plural. Against this background, the disappearance of the adjectival inflection of the participle and the pervivence of its verbal inflection were to a certain extent predictable. Moreover, the adjectival inflection was attached after the verbal inflection, which made the adjectival ending more prone to simplification.

Apart from these relatively well-known facts (Traugott 1992; Denison 1993), the evolution of the inflection of the Old English past participle poses many questions, of which the present research focuses on the loss of adjectival inflection. The aim of this

article is to determine how widespread the inflection of the Old English participles is, and whether the present and the past participle of Old English show the same degree of variation as to inflection. The relevance of this work lies in the fact that, as Mitchell (1985: 409) puts it, “there is no work which gives a complete treatment of the Old English participles”. In general, the non-finite verbal forms of Old English have been studied in connection with Present-Day English and the *-ing* forms. Its study has mainly been geared to syntax and related to the development of the periphrastic tenses and the passive construction. Most works are concerned with the individual uses of the participle throughout time, as well as with the different uses and functions conveyed by the participle (Toyota 2008) and whether they are properly Germanic or derived from Latin influence (Kilpiö 1989; Timoofoeva 2010). Recent studies in the evolution of the participle in English deal with the changes in copular and passive verb constructions in Old and Middle English, like Petré (2014); or with the development of morphology, thus Wojtyś (2016), which focuses on prefixal inflection. These works are reviewed in the next section.

An article filling the gap just described may contribute to the research programme in the linguistic analysis of Old English carried out by García García (2012, 2013), González Torres (2010a, 2010b, 2011), Martín Arista (2012a, 2012b, 2013, 2014, 2017a, 2017b), Mateo Mendaza (2013, 2014, 2015a, 2015b, 2016), Novo Urraca (2015, 2016a, 2016b), Torre Alonso (2011a, 2011b) and Vea Escarza (2012, 2013, 2014, 2016a, 2016b).

With the aims and scope presented above, the remainder of this article is organised as follows. Section 2 reviews previous research and stresses the lack of a corpus-based approach to the question of the variation in the inflection of the participle. Section 3 presents the method of analysis of this research, while section 4 discusses the results. To conclude, section 5 summarises the main conclusions of the work.

## 2. REVIEW OF PREVIOUS RESEARCH

It is generally accepted in historical linguistics (thus, for instance, Milroy 1992: 1; Pintzuk 2003: 509) that variation on the synchronic axis indicates linguistic change in progress on the diachronic axis. On the basis of this principle, the scope of this article is restricted to the Old English period. A full account of the loss of the adjectival inflection of the English participle would require to include data from Middle English, the period in which the simplification of inflections takes place. In Lass’s (1992: 145) words, “the Middle English developments include loss of the infinitive ending, so that the infinitive comes to be the same as the bare stem; merger of the original *-ende* present participle with the *-ing* noun; and loss of *ge-* prefix. All of these are virtually complete by about 1500 [...] as in most major changes there was a long period of complex variation”. Given this evolution, focusing on the Old English period offers a new perspective on the question of the development of the participle because this historical stage of the English language is often characterised as displaying full inflection. In this respect, the degree of variation shown in Old English by the adjectival inflection of the present and the past participle is not matched by the declension of the adjective, which remains stable throughout the period. Therefore, while it is worth the while to look at the variation of the participle in Old English, the outcome of the evolution as attested by Present-Day English demonstrates that variation has resulted in a morphological change that can be described as the partial *deflexion* (Norde 2001; Allen 2003) of the participle involving the loss of adjectival morphology.

In general, the variation between the uninflected and the inflected participle can be illustrated with instances like those in (1).

- (1) (from Wedel 1978: 395-396)
- a. Uninflected present participle  
Apol. (2, 8)  
*Pa gyrnde hyre maenig maere man micle maerða beodende.*  
Then, many a famous man desired her, offering many wonderful things.
  - b. Inflected present participle  
Apol. (10, 16)  
*Swa hwilc man swa me Apollonium lifigendne to gebringð...*  
Whoever brings Apollonius to me alive...
  - c. Uninflected past participle  
Apol. (8, 4-5)  
*...se waes Thaliarcus gebaten.*  
...who was called Thaliarcus.
  - d. Inflected past participle  
Apol. (18,6)  
*Gemiltsa me, þu ealda man, sy þaet þu sy; gemildsa me nacodum, forlidenum, naes na of earmlicum birdum geborennum.*  
Have pity on me, old man, whoever you may be; have pity on me, naked, shipwrecked, and not born from poor origins.

As can be seen in (1), the participle receives both verbal and adjectival inflection in instances like *lifigendne* ‘living’ and *geborennum* ‘born’, so that the participle agrees in case, number and gender with the noun in apposition (*Apollonium lifigendne* ‘Apollonius alive’) or with the antecedent (*man micle maerða beodende* ‘men who offered many wonderful things’). On the other hand, the participle presents verbal inflection only in instances like *beodende* ‘offering’ and *gebaten* ‘was called’.

Some authors attribute the increase of the uses of participles during the Old English period to the Latin influence (Callaway 1901; Wedel 1978; Mitchell 1985; Ogura 2009). Callaway (1901) focuses on the appositive participle, which he defines as “the participle that is equivalent to an adjectival clause as well as that which is equal to an adverbial clause. The uses of the appositive participle correspond closely to those of the subordinate adverbial clause” (1901: 149). A similar line is taken by Mitchell (1985), who deals with the functions of the participle and draws a distinction between its adjectival and verbal uses, which he attributes to syntactic behaviour. Visser (1966) is concerned with the different uses and functions of the participle throughout time (Old English, Middle English and Modern English). According to this author, “in Old English the past participle appears with flexional endings; these gradually disappear in Middle English, so that subsequently the zero form is the normal one” (Visser 1966: 1280). Traugott (1992: 190) concurs in this respect and remarks that “the number of inflected constructions became less frequent during the Old English period”. Lass (1992) takes issue with the evolution of the morphology of the participle and its relation with its contemporary form, thus focusing on the changes which took place in the Middle English period. Fischer (1992) analyses the development of the periphrastic constructions and remarks that by the Late Old English and Early Middle English period, the inflectional endings of some forms, including the present participle, began to be confused, which also led to syntactic confusion. In this respect, Ogura (2009) deals with the endings *-ende* and *-enne* of the present participle and the inflected infinitive respectively. She holds that, due to their phonemic resemblance, these endings became interchangeable as variant forms in late Old English (11th century). Wojtyś (2009) dates the loss of the past participle suffixes *-n* and *-d* in the 13th century and remarks that “the suffixal marking in Old English need to be regarded as regular” (2009: 48).

Two recent works on the evolution of the passive and the participle call for a more detailed review. Petré (2014) undertakes a study in the changes in the distribution of the intransitive verbs found in copular and passive constructions in Old English and Middle English. Petré (2014: 2) shows that, in Old English, this distribution depends on two different systems. The first is the Old English bounded system, which organises narrative sequences. The bounded system is named after bounded clauses, used in such a way that they express an event and include the logical endpoint or goal that is inherent to the internal aspect of the verb (Petré 2010). In the bound system, *weorðan* ‘to become’ expresses change of state whereas *bēon* ‘to be’ does not. The second system is the double paradigm *is-bið*, which distinguishes the future from the present, on the one hand, and the generic from the specific, on the other. This system comprises the verbs *bēon* and *wesan* ‘to be’, which merge in Old English and Middle English. For Petré (2014: 3), by the time of Old English *wesan* “had already lost most of its distinctive semantic properties (...) and had been reduced to a suppletive verb providing the past tense forms for *IS-BIÐ*”. The forms *is-bið* were in complementary distribution in Old English. While *is* appears in specific statements, *bið* can be found in the expression of generic statements and future situations. This distinction is lost from late Old English onward (Petré 2014: 4). With respect to the participle, Petré (2014: 5), differentiates the passive participial construction, as in *He was kidnapped*, including the adjectival function of the participle (process property) and the verbal function (passive event); from the perfect participial construction, as in *She was come*. This distinction applies exclusively to past participles, present participles constituting instances of Petré’s (2014) adjectival copular constructions. These aspects are taken into account in the functional part of the analysis carried out in this article.

Wojtyś (2016) concentrates on the inflection of the past participle and takes issue with the diachronic and dialectal conditioning of the loss of the prefixation of the past participle and the relation between prefixation and suffixation. It must be borne in mind in this respect that this author refers to the verbal part of the suffixal inflectional morphology of the past participle. The texts examined by Wojtyś (2016) indicate that the occurrence of the prefixally unmarked past participle is not higher in Northumbrian than in other dialects, while this author attributes the beginning of the process of loss of the prefixal marking of the past participle in Old English to the Mercian dialect. With respect to suffixal marking, Wojtyś (2016) claims that suffixal marking is very regular in Old English, with the exception of poetical texts, which contain a higher number of forms without a suffix. According to Wojtyś (2016: 197), the loss of marking “reaches its peak in the fourteenth century, when one third of the past participles lack suffixes”. Regarding other factors, the prefixless past participles are recurrently found in passive constructions already in Old English, whereas in Middle English the participle as modifier can also lack prefixal marking. This distinction between the participle in passives and the participle as modifier is also considered in the functional analysis presented in Section 4.

Overall, there is agreement on the loss of the inflection and the dating of the change, while there is coincidence in some of the explanations for the change. Ultimately, the verb undergoes the same loss of the inflectional endings as the adjective. The works reviewed in this section also point to a decrease in the inflection of the participle in Old English, although this aspect is not quantified, neither is it related to form (tense, case and type of declension) or function (modifier in noun phrases and lexical verb in participial constructions). The remainder of this article addresses these questions.

### 3. METHOD

As has been said above, the aim of this article is to assess the degree of variation in the inflection of the participle so as to determine whether or not the change starts in the Old English period. This aim entails the analysis of formal and functional aspects of the participle.

A corpus-based study in the inflectional morphology of the participle is likely to draw conclusions on the variation within and across the tense (present, past) as well as the case (nominative, accusative, genitive, dative) of the Old English participle. The *Dictionary of Old English Corpus* (Healey et al. 2004; henceforth DOEC), which comprises around three million words and about three thousand texts and represents the most authoritative corpus in the field of Anglo-Saxon studies, has been searched for the present and past participles of strong verbs, in all the inflections. The strong classes have been chosen because they constitute a representative subset of the verbal category (about one fourth of verbs) consisting of approximately one thousand and five hundred verbs that can be broken down by class as follows: strong I (263), strong II (226), strong III (338), strong IV (93), strong V (150), strong VI (156), and strong VII (272). Strong verbs have also been selected because their inflectional paradigm is more transparent than the one of weak verbs, which make use of the same dental suffix for the preterite and the past participle and, above all, do not exhibit ablaut, as in *scīnan-scān-scīnon-(ge)scīnen* ‘to shine’. As regards the inflections, the analysis is restricted to the canonical inflectional endings of the present and past participle as well as the weak and the strong declension of the adjective, as described in Campbell (1987) and Hogg and Fulk (2011).

This said, the method of this undertaking consists of four steps.<sup>1</sup> First of all, the list of strong-verb lemmas has been retrieved from the lexical database of Old English *Nerthus* (Martín Arista et al. 2016; consulted in May 2017). Secondly, the DOEC has been searched for all the inflections of the present and past participles of strong verbs. The following verbal endings have been considered: *-end* (pres. part), *-en* (past part.). Regarding the adjectival part of the inflection of the participle, the following adjectival case endings have been taken into account: *-a* (nom. sg. wk.), *-ne* (acc. sg. str.), *-u* (nom. sg. str.), *-es* (gen. sg. str.), *-ra* (gen. pl. wk.; gen. pl. str.; comp.), *-um* (dat. pl. wk.; dat. sg. pl. str.), *-an* (acc., gen., dat., instr. sg. wk.; nom., acc., pl. wk.), *-re* (gen., dat. sg. str.), *-e* (nom., acc., sg. wk.; nom. sg. str.; nom., acc. pl. str.). As for the adjectival gradation of the participle, these endings have been included into the analysis: *-ra*, *-er*, *-r*, *ra-a/-an/-ra/-um/-e*, *er-a/-an/-ra/-um/-e*, *r-a/-an/-ra/-um/-e* (comparative); *-ost*, *-est*, *-ost-a/-an/-ra/-um/-e*, *-est-a/-an/-ra/-um/-e* (superlative). With these endings, it turns out that certain inflections are distinctive, thus *-end-a*, *-end-an*, *-en-a*, *-en-an* (weak declension) and *-end-ne*, *-end-es*, *-end-u*, *-end-re*, *-en-ne*, *-en-es*, *-en-u*, *-en-re* (strong declension); whereas others are ambiguous between the strong and the weak declension (*-end-ra*, *-end-um*, *-end-e*, *-en-ra*, *-en-um*, *-en-e*). This aspect has been taken into account in the analysis.

The analysis is based on type, rather than token. For instance, the set of types corresponding to the verb *cuman* ‘to come’ includes the inflectional forms *cumen*, *cumena*, *cumenan*, *cumendan*, *cumende*, *cumendne*, *cumendra*, *cumendre*, *cumendum*, *cumene*, *cumenne*, *cumenum*. The other forms in the paradigm are not attested in the corpus, at least in the canonical forms corresponding to the endings listed above.

Once the data have been gathered, the third step of the analysis consists of a quantification of the present and past participles with the endings under analysis, based on inflectional ending as well as declension and case. Finally, the morphology aspects are

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<sup>1</sup> The following categories are abbreviated in this article as follows: present participle (pres. part.), past participle (past part.), nominative (nom.), accusative (acc.), genitive (gen.), dative (dat.), instrumental (instr.), strong declension (str.), weak declension (wk.).

considered from the angle of functional aspects. The functional analysis between the verbal and the adjectival function of the participle is carried out with the data gathered from the York Corpus of Old English (YCOE) or, to be more precise, *The York-Toronto-Helsinki Parsed Corpus of Old English Prose* and *The York-Helsinki Parsed Corpus of Old English Poetry*.<sup>2</sup>

The rate of explicit adjectival inflection of the participle is checked against its function as a noun modifier, thus a constituent of a noun phrase, or a verbal form inside a verb phrase. For instance, in (2a) the past participle *genemnod* ‘named’ belongs, along with the copulative verb, in the verb phrase *wæs genemnod* ‘was called’. On the other hand, there is no explicit copula either with *geboren* ‘born’ in (2a) or *cumene* ‘come’ in (2b).

(2)

a. [ApT 024100 (48.12)]

*Ic fram cildbade wæs Apollonius genemnod, on Tirum geboren.*

I was called Apollonius from my childhood, born in Tirum.

b. [Beo 051300 (1817)]

*Beowulf mapelode, bearn Ecgþeowes: Nu we sæliðend secgan nyllað, feorran cumene, þæt we fundiaþ Higelac secan.*

Beowulf, the son of Ecgthow, spoke: ‘Now we seafarers, come from far away, will say that we are eager to seek Higelac’.

In these cases, the YCOE parsing is based on a coordinate construction in which the second copula is omitted, and, therefore, ambiguity is resolved by considering them participles with a verbal function. Otherwise, the relevant function is the adjectival one.<sup>3</sup> The results are given in the next section.

#### 4. RESULTS OF THE ANALYSIS

A total of 4,783 participles have been found in the DOEC, of which 2,208 are inflectional forms (types) of the present participle and the others (2,575) are past participles. Beginning with the present participle, 1,496 out of 2,208 are inflected, that is to say, 67.75%. This figure can be broken down as shown in Table 1 (positive grade) and Table 4 (comparative and superlative grade). In the weak declension, the ending *end-an* clearly stands out because it corresponds to most cases in the inflectional paradigm. In the strong declension, the endings for the accusative, genitive and dative (*-ne*, *-es* and *-re*, respectively) outnumber the nominative-accusative neuter ending *-u*. The ending *-e*, ambiguous between the nominative, the accusative and the instrumental, is the most frequently inflected. In the comparative, the inflected for both grade and case ending is far more frequent than the participle inflected for just grade (71 vs. 118 instances). The figure of participles in the superlative grade is negligible. This is presented in Table 2.

Weak declension	Number of instances
-end-a	29
-end-an	108
Total	137

<sup>2</sup> I would like to thank Susan Pintzuk (University of York) for her kind support and guidance with the searches necessary to obtain the results presented in this article. Any errors or misconceptions remain exclusively mine.

<sup>3</sup> The text short names and numbers have been taken from Mitchell et al. (1975, 1979).

<b>Strong declension</b>	
-end-ne	34
-end-es	54
-end-u	9
-end-re	46
Total	143

<b>Ambiguous strong / weak</b>	<b>Number of instances</b>
-end-ra	71
-end-um	172
-end-e	712
Total	955

Table 1. The inflection of the present participle. Positive grade.

<b>Comparatives</b>	<b>Number of instances</b>
-end-ra	71
-end-er	0
-end-r	0
-end-ra-a/an/ra/um/e	0
-end-er-a/an/ra/um/e	0
-end-r-a/an/ra/um/e	118 (-a: 71; -an: 1; -e: 46)
Total	118

<b>Superlatives</b>	<b>Number of instances</b>
-end-ost	0
-end-est	1
-end-ost-a/an/ra/um/e	0
-end-est-a/an/ra/um/e	0
Total	1

Table 2. The inflection of the present participle. Comparative and superlative grade.

Turning to the past participle, 1,238 out of 2,575 are inflected. This corresponds to 48.11% of the past participles found in the corpus. In the weak declension, there is no significant difference between the ending *-a* and *-an* (73 vs. 88 instances respectively). In the strong declension, the accusative ending outnumbers the occurrences of the other cases (nearly three quarters of the inflected weak past participles are in the accusative case). This is shown in Table 3. As is the case with the present participle, the ambiguous *-e* ending of the present participle is the most frequent among the inflected participles, although the *-um* ending, ambiguous between the dative singular and plural, is also worth considering, given its 123 occurrences. As tabulated in Table 4, the comparative endings *en-r-a/an/ra/um/e* are the most frequent with the inflected past participle.

<b>Weak declension</b>	<b>Number of instances</b>
-en-a	73
-en-an	88
Total	161

<b>Strong declension</b>	
-en-ne	294
-en-es	36
-en-u	17
-en-re	53
Total	400

<b>Ambiguous strong / weak</b>	
-en-ra	32
-en-um	123
-en-e	400
Total	555

Table 3. The inflection of the past participle. Positive grade.

<b>Comparatives</b>	<b>Number of instances</b>
-en-ra	32
-en +er	0
-en +r	0
-en-ra-a/an/ra/um/e	0
-en-er-a/an/ra/um/e	0
-en-r-a/an/ra/um/e	89 (-a: 32; -e: 53; -an: 4)
Total	121

<b>Superlatives</b>	<b>Number of instances</b>
-en-ost	0
-en-est	0
-en-ost-a/an/ra/um/e	0
-en-est-a/an/ra/um/e	1 (-e)
Total	1

Table 4. The inflection of the past participle. Comparative and superlative grade.

Overall, the present participle reaches 34.75% of the uninflected forms (712 out of 1,337), while the past participle amounts to 65.25% (1,337 out of 2,049). Considering the inflected forms, the present participle shows 1,496 (out of a total of 2,208), that is to say, 54.71% of all the instances, whereas the past participle evinces a total of 1,238 instances, 45.28%. By tense, the inflected instances reach 67.75% of present participles (1,496 out of 2,208), and 48.11% of past participles (1,238 out of 2,575). By case, ambiguous endings are, as a general rule, far more frequent, thus the endings *-e* (nom., acc., sg. wk.; nom. sg. str.; nom., acc. pl. str.), *-um* (dat. pl. wk.; dat. sg. pl. str.) and *-an* (acc., gen., dat., instr. sg. wk.; nom., acc., pl. wk.). Nevertheless, the accusative ending *-ne* also stands out as very frequent.

As has been remarked in the description of the research method, after the analysis of form and analysis of function would be carried out with data retrieved from the YCOE. Considering the prose and the poetry segments of the YCOE together, a total of 6,175 present participles and 21,882 past participles have been found, 26,426 in prose and 1,231 in poetry. This makes a total of 27,657 participles. Of these, 23,589 function as a verb and the remaining 4,068 perform the adjectival function of modifier. Four variables have been

taken into account: text type (prose vs. poetry), tense (present vs. past participle), morphological marking (inflected vs. uninflected as adjective) and function (noun modifier vs. non-finite form following a copulative verb). The noun modifier function in the fourth variable may partly coincide with Petré's (2014: 5) adjectival copular constructions, on the condition that they take a participle; while the non-finite form following a copulative verb wholly coincides with Petré's (2014: 5), passive participial construction, as in *He was kidnapped*, and the perfect participial construction, like *She was come*.

Nearly all participles in adjectival function, both present and past, are case-marked, whereas slightly over one third of past participles with verbal function are explicitly inflected as adjectives. In verbal constructions, the present participle is inflected in prose texts in about two thirds of the instances, while in poetry nearly one half of the present participles in verbal constructions show explicit adjectival inflection. Also in verbal constructions, the past participle is inflected for case in approximately one third of the prose instances, whereas the verbal constructions in poetry with the past participle show an inflected verbal form in nearly one half of the cases. In adjectival constructions, approximately ninety-five percent of the instances are inflected.

As a general assessment, the adjectival inflection coincides with the adjectival function. Only 38.3% of participles in verbal function are marked for adjectival inflection, as compared with 95.1% of adjectivally marked participles performing the adjectival function. An interesting contrast arises, though, between the present and the past participle in this respect. Focusing on the verbal function, the number of marked present participles practically doubles the unmarked ones; in contradistinction, the number of marked past participles is less than one half of unmarked past participles. In other words, the results of the analysis of the data of the DOEC and the YCOE coincide as regards the point of departure of the process of deflexion, which can be found in the past participle.

Overall, the prose data are more consistent than the poetry data as to the results of the variables that have been considered. This is probably due to the amount of participles from each text type and does not blur the general tendency. These results are tabulated in Table 5.

	verbal function		adjectival function		total
	marked	unmarked	marked	unmarked	
prose					
present part.	2,609	1,524	1,422	40	5,595
past part.	5,935	12,486	2,353	57	20,831
poetry					
present part.	73	8	28	71	180
past part.	426	528	66	31	1,051
total	9,043	14,546	3,869	199	27,657

Table 5. The function of the participle. Verbal and adjectival function in prose and verse.

## 5. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

This article has addressed two questions, namely how widespread the inflection of the Old English participles is and whether or not the present and the past participle show the same degree of variation in their inflection. The data indicate that the loss of the inflection of the participle is well underway in Old English. Consequently, it can be held that the long period of complex variation identified by Lass (1992: 145) starts in Old English, at least from a morphological point of view. The analysis of the participles of strong verbs as

rendered by the DOEC allows us to draw the conclusion that the inflection of the participle is far from regular and generalized. As is predictable in a situation of change, there is morphological variation in the inflection in the participle. The evidence suggests that the process of deflexion must have begun in the past participle, which evinces around one half of uninflected forms. Concerning the relation between grammatical case and inflection rates, some case endings seem to be disappearing faster than others. Of the inflectional morphemes that are distinctive of case (disregarding number, gender and declension) *-ne* (acc.; 328 instances) and *-um* (dat.; 295 instances) show the highest frequencies; whereas *-u* (nom.; 26 instances) and *-es* (gen.; 90 instances) show the lowest. As for the relation between inflection and the function of the participle, the analysis of the data gathered from the YCOE has shown that nearly all participles in adjectival function are case-marked, whereas approximately one third only of past participles performing the verbal function are explicitly inflected as adjectives. Adjectival inflection of the participle, therefore, co-occurs with its adjectival function, although it must be remarked that the number of marked present participles functioning as verbs is around the double of unmarked ones. This is consistent with the past participle representing the point of departure of the process of deflexion.

To conclude, it is a pending task for future research to enlarge the data of analysis in order to include non canonical inflectional endings and spelling variants. It will also be necessary to disambiguate the instances of ambiguity of case, inflection and gradation by considering the syntagmatic context, provided that it is distinctive; and, finally, to deal with the question of variation from the textual point of view, so as to determine whether variation in the inflection of the participles in Old English can, at least partially, be attributed to different texts or authors.

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