

## The development of number strengthening in German declensional classes. A diachronic-dialectal corpus study

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The present study addresses the implementation of overt marking of number in the plural forms of German nouns belonging to declensional classes which originally lacked number distinctivity. Initially, the phonological reduction of final syllables (cf. Braune 2018: 248-249, 265) had led to a formal overlapping of singular and plural forms within several of the subclasses of the original vocalic stems, most importantly within the paradigms of the neuter *a*-stems, see OHG/MHG nom./acc.sg. *wort* – nom./acc.pl. *wort* ‘word – words’, as well as within the feminine *ō*-stems, see OHG nom./gen./acc.sg. *gēba* – nom./acc.pl. *gēba*, MHG nom.-acc.sg. *gebe* – nom./acc.pl. *gebe* ‘gift – gifts’ (cf. Braune 2018: 250, 265; Klein et al. 2018: 73; Ronneberger-Sibold 2013: 19). In addition, there was massive overlapping within the paradigms of the consonantal *n*-stems in Old and Middle High German, where the oblique cases in the singular coincided with the plural forms, all ending in *-(e)n*, see OHG gen./dat./acc.sg. *zungūn* – nom.-acc.pl. *zungūn* (cf. Braune 2018: 282), MHG gen./dat./acc.sg. *zungen* – nom.-acc.pl. *zungen* ‘tongue – tongues’ (cf. Klein et al. 2018: 73). In the following periods, an expansion of overt plural markers took place reaching its peak in Early New High German. This reinforcement of number distinctivity is generally referred to as *Numerusprofilierung*, i.e. the strengthening of number distinctions, and is one of the most significant processes in the history of German nominal morphology. It consists of various strategies aiming to create number distinctivity. Two basic kinds of strategies can be distinguished:

- 1) changes in the plural paradigm to create number distinctivity, e.g. various overt plural markers are assigned to originally indistinctive forms, sometimes accompanied by the process of *Umlaut*, as in NHG sg. *Wort* – pl. *Worte/Wörter* ‘word – words’
- 2) changes in the singular paradigm as in the case of the *n*-stems where the oblique cases of the singular were identical with the plural ones as in MHG *herze* ‘heart’, gen./dat.sg. *herzen* – nom.-acc.pl. *herzen* (cf. Klein et al. 2018: 73) and the *n*-suffix is reanalyzed as a marker of plurality and removed from the singular paradigm cf. NHG sg. *Herz* – pl. *Herzen*

On the basis of the reference corpora of the historical periods of the German language, the reference corpus for Middle High German, *Referenzkorpus Mittelhochdeutsch* (REM), covering the period from 1050 to 1350 and the reference corpus for Early New High German, *Referenzkorpus Frühneuhochdeutsch* (REF), covering the period from 1350 to 1650 (cf. Klein/Dipper 2016; Dipper/Kwekkeboom 2018), the present study explores the rich meta-annotation provided in the corpora to investigate the diachronic and dialectal spread of plural morphology within members of declensional classes that were originally number indistinct. This investigation is part of a larger study that aims to account for the precise diachronic and dialectal representation of the individual processes pertaining to the overall phenomenon of *Numerusprofilierung* in German. It also serves to explore the methods of retrieving and compiling the relevant data from the different reference corpora to generate a multidimensional map of the spread of these processes over time and space.

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## Corpora

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