The history of Old English and its development.

In 409 AD the last Roman legion left British shores, and in fifty years the Islands became a victim of invaders. Germanic tribes from Southern Scandinavia and Northern Germany, pushed from their densely populated homelands, looked for a new land to settle. At that time the British Isles were inhabited by the Celts and remaining Roman colonists, who failed to organize any resistance against Germanic intruders, and so had to let them settle here. This is how the Old English language was born.

Celtic tribes crossed the Channel and starting to settle in Britain already in the 7th century BC. The very word "Britain" seems to be the name given by the pre-Celtic inhabitants of the island, accepted by first Indo-Europeans. The Celts quickly spread over the island, and only in the north still existed non-Indo-European peoples which are sometimes called "Picts" (the name given by Romans). Picts lived in Scotland and on Shetland Islands and represented the most ancient population of the Isles, the origin of which is unknown. Picts do not seem to leave any features of their language to Indo-European population of Britain - the famous Irish and Welsh initial mutations of consonants can be the only sign of the substratum left by unknown nations of Britain. At the time the Celts reached Britain they spoke the common language, close to Gaulish in France. But later, when Celtic tribes occupied Ireland, Northern England, Wales, their tongues were divided according to tribal divisions. These languages will later become Welsh, Irish Gaelic, Cornish, but from that time no signs remained, because the Celts did not invent writing yet. Not much is left from Celtic languages in English. Though many place names and names for rivers are surely Celtic (like Usk - from Celtic \*usce "water", or Avon - from \*awin "river"), the morphology and phonetics are untouched by the Celtic influence. Some linguists state that the word down comes from Celtic \*dún "down"; other examples of Celtic influence in place names are tne following:

cothair (a fortress) - Carnarvon   
uisge (water) - Exe, Usk, Esk   
dun, dum (a hill) - Dumbarton, Dumfries, Dunedin   
llan (church) - Llandaff, Llandovery, Llandudno   
coil (forest) - Kilbrook, Killiemore   
kil (church) - Kilbride, Kilmacolm   
ceann (cape) - Kebadre, Kingussie   
inis (island) - Innisfail   
inver (mountain) - Inverness, Inverurie   
bail (house) - Ballantrae, Ballyshannon,   
and, certainly, the word whiskey which means the same as Irish uisge "water". But this borrowing took place much later.

In the 1st century AD first Roman colonists begin to penetrate in Britain; Roman legions built roads, camps, founded towns and castles. But still they did not manage to assimilate the Celts, maybe because they lived apart from each other and did not mix. Tens of Latin words in Britain together with many towns, places and hills named by Romans make up the Roman heritage in the Old English. Such cities as Dorchester, Winchester, Lancaster, words like camp, castra, many terms of the Christian religion and several words denoting armaments were borrowed at that time by Britons, and automatically were transferred into the Old English, or Anglo-Saxon language already when there was no Romans in the country.

In 449 the legendary leaders of two Germanic tribes, Hengist and Horsa, achieved British shores on their ships. The Anglo-Saxon conquest, however, lasted for several centuries, and all this period Celtic aborigines moved farther and farther to the west of the island until they manage to fortify in mountainous Wales, in Corwall, and preserved their kingdoms in Scotland. Germanic tribes killed Celtic population, destroyed Celtic and former Roman towns and roads. In the 5th century such cities as Durovern in Kent, Virocon, Trimontii, Camulodunum, were abandoned by the population.

Angles settled around the present-day Noridge, and in Northern England; Saxons, the most numerous of the tribes, occupied all Central England, the south of the island and settled in London (Londinii at that time). Jutes and Frises, who probably came to Britain a bit later, settled on the island of White and in what is now Kent - the word Kent derives from the name of the Celtic tribe Cantii. Soon all these tribes founded their separate kingdoms, which was united after centuries of struggle only in 878 by Alfred, king of Wessex. Before that each of the tribes spoke its language, they were similar to each other but had differences which later became the dialectal peculiarities of Old English.

Now a little bit about the foreign influence in Old English. From the 6th century Christianity start activities in Britain, the Bible is translated into Old English, and quite a lot of terms are borrowed from Latin at that time: many bishops, missionaries and Pope's officials come from Rome. The next group of foreign loanwords were taken from Scandinavian dialects, after the Vikings occupied much of the country in the 9th - 11th centuries. Scandinavian languages were close relatives with Old English, so the mutual influence was strong enough to develop also the Old English morphology, strengthening its analytic processes. Many words in the language were either changed to sound more Scandinavian, or borrowed.

The Old English language, which has quite a lot of literature monuments, came to the end after the Norman conquest in 1066. The new period was called Middle English.

The Old English Substantive.

The substantive in Indo-European has always three main categories which change its forms: the number, the case, the gender. It ias known that the general trend of the Indo-European family is to decrease the number of numbers, cases and genders from the Proto-Indo-European stage to modern languages. Some groups are more conservative and therefore keep many forms, preserving archaic language traits; some are more progressive and lose forms or transform them very quickly. The Old English language, as well as practically all Germanic tongues, is not conservative at all: it generated quite a lot of analytic forms instead of older inflections, and lost many other of them.

Of eight Proto-Indo-European cases, Old English keeps just four which were inherited from the Common Germanic language. In fact, several of original Indo-European noun cases were weak enough to be lost practically in all branches of the family, coinciding with other, stronger cases. The ablative case often was assimilated by the genitive (in Greek, Slavic, Baltic, and Germanic), locative usually merged with dative (Italic, Celtic, Greek), and so did the instrumental case. That is how four cases appeared in Germanic and later in Old English - nominative, genitive, accusative and dative. These four were the most ancient and therefore stable in the system of the Indo-European morphology.

The problem of the Old English instrumental case is rather strange - this case arises quite all of a sudden among Germanic tongues and in some forms is used quite regularly (like in demonstrative pronouns). In Gothic the traces of instrumental and locative though can be found, but are considered as not more than relics. But the Old English must have "recalled" this archaic instrumental, which existed, however, not for too long and disappeared already in the 10th century, even before the Norman conquest and transformation of the English language into its Middle stage.

As for other cases, here is a little pattern of their usage in the Old English syntax.

  1. Genitive - expresses the possessive menaing: whose? of what?

Also after the expression meaning full of , free of , worthy of , guilty of,  etc.

2. Dative - expresses the object towards which the action is directed.

After the after the verbs like "say to smb", "send smb", "give to smb"; "known to smb", "necessary for smth / smb", "close to smb", "peculiar for smth".

Also in the expressions like  from the enemy, against the wind, on the shore.

3. Accusative - expresses the object immediately affected by the action (what?), the direct object.

Three genders were strong enough, and only northern dialects could sometimes lose their distinction. But in fact the lose of genders in Middle English happened due to the drop of the case inflections, when words could no longer be distinguished by its endings. As for the numbers, the Old English noun completely lost the dual, which was preserved only in personal pronouns (see later).

All Old English nouns were divided into strong and weak ones, the same as verbs in Germanic. While the first had a branched declension, special endings for different numbers and cases, the weak declension was represented by nouns which were already starting to lose their declension system. The majority of noun stems in Old English should be referred to the strong type. Here are the tables for each stems with some comments - the best way of explaining the grammar.

***a-***stems   
                   Singular   
Nom. stán (stone)  scip (ship)  bán (bone)  reced (house)  níeten (ox)   
Gen.  stánes           scipes       bánes           recedes           níetenes   
Dat.   stáne            scipe         báne            recede             níetene   
Acc.  stán              scip           bán              reced               níeten   
                  Plural   
Nom.  stánas         scipu         bán              reced                níetenu   
Gen.    stána          scipa         bána            receda             níetena   
Dat.    stánum        scipum      bánum          recedum          níetenum   
Acc.   stánas         scipu         bán              reced               níetenu

This type of stems derived from masculine and neuter noun ***o-***stems in Proto-Indo-European. First when I started studying Old English I was irritated all the time because I couldn't get why normal Indo-European ***o-***stems are called ***a-***stems in all books on Old English. I found it a silly and unforgivable mistake until I understood that in Germanic the Indo-European short ***o*** became ***a***, and therefore the stem marker was also changed the same way. So the first word here, ***stán***, is masculine, the rest are neuter. The only difference in declension is the plural nominative-accusative, where neuter words lost their endings or have ***-u***, while masculine preserved ***-as***.

A little peculiarity of those words who have the sound [æ] in the stem and say farewell to it in the plural:   
          Masculine                         Neuter   
     Sing.              Pl.             Sing.               Pl.   
N  dæg (day) dagas     fæt (vessel)  fatu   
G  dæges       daga       fætes           fata   
D  dæge         dagum    fæte            fatum   
A  dæg           dagas     fæt              fatu

Examples of ***a***-stems: ***earm*** (an arm), ***eorl***, ***helm*** (a helmet), ***hring*** (a ring), ***múþ*** (a mouth); neuter ones - ***dor*** (a gate), ***hof*** (a courtyard), ***geoc*** (a yoke), ***word***, ***déor*** (an animal), ***bearn*** (a child), ***géar*** (a year).

***ja***-stems   
                         Singular   
               Masculine                             Neuter   
N  hrycg (back)   here (army) ende (end)  cynn (kind)  ríce (realm)   
G  hrycges           heriges        endes          cynnes        ríces   
D  hrycge            herige          ende           cynne          ríce   
A  hrycg              here            ende           cynn            ríce   
                         Plural   
N  hrycgeas        herigeas       endas         cynn            ríciu   
G  hrycgea          herigea        enda           cynna          rícea   
D  hrycgium        herigum       endum        cynnum       rícium   
A  hrycgeas        herigeas       endas         cynn            ríciu

Again the descendant of Indo-European ***jo-***stem type, known only in masculine and neuter. In fact it is a subbranch of ***o-***stems, complicated by the ***i*** before the ending: like Latin ***lupus*** and ***filius***. Examples of this type: masculine - ***wecg*** (a wedge), ***bócere*** (a scholar), ***fiscere*** (a fisher); neuter - ***net, bed, wíte*** (a punishment).

***wa-***stems   
               Singular                                Plural   
      Masc.        Neut.                    Masc.         Neut.   
N  bearu (wood)  bealu (evil)   bearwas      bealu (-o)   
G  bearwes           bealwes      bearwa        bealwa   
D  bearwe            bealwe        bearwum     bealwum   
A  bearu (-o)        bealu (-o)    bearwas      bealu (-o)

Just to mention. This is one more peculiarity of good old ***a***-stems with the touch of ***w*** in declension. Interesting that the majority of this kind of stems make abstract nouns. Examples: masculine - ***snáw*** (snow), ***þéaw*** (a custom); neuter - ***searu*** (armour), ***tréow*** (a tree), ***cnéw*** (a knee)

***ó***-stems   
                         Sg.   
N  swaþu (trace) fór (journey)  tigol (brick)   
G  swaþe            fóre               tigole   
D  swaþe            fóre               tigole   
A  swaþe            fóre               tigole   
                        Pl.   
N  swaþa           fóra               tigola   
G  swaþa           fóra               tigola   
D  swaþum        fórum             tigolum   
A  swaþa           fóra               tigola

Another major group of Old English nouns consists only of feminine nouns. Funny but in Indo-European they are called ***a-***stems. But Germanic turned vowels sometimes upside down, and this long ***a*** became long ***o***. However, practically no word of this type ends in -***o***, which was lost or transformed. The special variants of ***ó***-stems are ***jo-*** and ***wo-***stems which have practically the same declension but with the corresponding sounds between the root and the ending.

Examples of ***ó***-stems: ***caru*** (care), ***sceamu*** (shame), ***onswaru*** (worry), ***lufu*** (love), ***lár*** (an instruction), ***sorg*** (sorrow), ***þrág*** (a season), ***ides*** (a woman).   
Examples of ***jó***-stems: ***sibb*** (peace), ***ecg*** (a blade), ***secg*** (a sword), ***hild*** (a fight), ***æx*** (an axe).   
Examples of ***wó***-stems: ***beadu*** (a battle)***, nearu*** (need)***, læs*** (a beam).

***i-***stems   
        Masc.                          Neut.   
                    Sg.   
N  sige (victory) hyll (hill)  sife (sieve)   
G  siges              hylles     sifes   
D  sige               hylle       sife   
A  sige               hyll         sife   
                    Pl.   
N  sigeas           hyllas      sifu   
G  sigea            hylla        sifa   
D  sigum           hyllum     sifum   
A  sigeas          hyllas       sifu

The tribes and nations were usually of this very type, and were used always in plural: ***Engle*** (the Angles), ***Seaxe*** (the Saxons), ***Mierce*** (the Mercians), ***Norþymbre*** (the Northumbrians), ***Dene*** (the Danish)

N Dene   
G Dena (Miercna, Seaxna)   
D Denum   
A Dene

                Fem.   
        Sg.            Pl.   
N  hyd (hide)   hýde, hýda   
G  hýde           hýda   
D  hýde           hýdum   
A  hýd             hýde, hýda

This kind of stems included all three genders and derived from the same type of Indo-European stems, frequent also in other branches and languages of the family.

Examples: masculine - ***mere*** (a sea), ***mete*** (food), ***dæl*** (a part), ***giest*** (a guest), ***drync*** (a drink); neuter - ***spere*** (a spear); feminine - ***cwén*** (a woman), ***wiht*** (a thing).

***u***-stems   
          Masc.                       Fem.   
                        Sg.   
N  sunu (son)feld (field)  duru (door) hand (hand)   
G  suna         felda          dura           handa   
D  suna         felda          dura           handa   
A  sunu         feld            duru           hand   
                        Pl.   
N  suna         felda          dura           handa   
G  suna         felda          dura           handa   
D  sunum      feldum       durum         handum   
A  suna         felda          dura           handa

They can be either masculine or feminine. Here it is seen clearly how Old English lost its final ***-s*** in endings: Gothic had ***sunus*** and ***handus***, while Old English has already ***sunu*** and ***hand*** respectively. Interesting that dropping final consonants is also a general trend of almost all Indo-European languages. Ancient tongues still keep them everywhere - Greek, Latin, Gothic, Old Prussian, Sanskrit, Old Irish; but later, no matter where a language is situated and what processes it undergoes, final consonants (namely ***-s, -t,*** often ***-m, -n***) disappear, remaining nowadays only in the two Baltic languages and in New Greek.

Examples:  masculine - ***wudu*** (wood), ***medu*** (honey), ***weald*** (forest), ***sumor*** (a summer); fem. - ***nosu*** (a nose), ***flór*** (a floor).

The other type of nouns according to their declension was the group of Weak nouns, derived from ***n-***nouns is Common Germanic. Their declension is simple and stable, having special endings:

      Masc.            Fem.                  Neut.   
                    Sg.   
N  nama (name) cwene (woman)  éage (eye)   
G  naman           cwenan               éagan   
D  naman           cwenan               éagan   
A  naman           cwenan               éage   
                    Pl.   
N  naman          cwenan               éagan   
G  namena        cwenena             éagena   
D  namum         cwenum              éagum   
A  naman          cwenan               éagan

Examples: masc. - ***guma*** (a man), ***wita*** (a wizard), ***steorra*** (a star), móna (the Moon), ***déma*** (a judge); fem. - ***eorþe*** (Earth), ***heorte*** (a heart), ***sunne*** (Sun); neut. - ***éare*** (an ear).

And now the last one which is interesting due to its special Germanic structure. I am speaking about the root-stems which according to Germanic laws of Ablaut, change the root vowel during the declension. In Modern English such words still exist, and we all know them: *goose - geese, tooth - teeth, foot - feet, mouse - mice* etc. At school they were a nightmare for me, now they are an Old English grammar. Besides, in Old English time they were far more numerous in the language.

           Masc.                                           Fem.   
                          Sg.   
N  mann      fót (foot) tóþ (tooth)  | hnutu (nut)  bóc (book)  gós (goose)  mús (mouse) burg (burg)   
G  mannes   fótes       tóþes          | hnute          bóce            góse             múse            burge   
D  menn      fét           téþ             | hnyte          béc              gés               mýs              byrig   
A  mann      fót          tóþ             | hnutu          bók              gós               mús              burg   
                          Pl.   
N  menn      fét          téþ              | hnyte          béc             gés               mýs              byrig   
G  manna    fóta        tóþa            | hnuta          bóca            gósa            músa             burga   
D  mannum fótum     tóþum          | hnutum       bócum         gósum          músum          burgum   
A  menn      fét          téþ              | hnyte          béc             gés               mýs               byrig

The general rule is the so-called *i*-mutation, which changes the vowel. The conversion table looks as follows and never fails - it is universally right both for verbs and nouns. The table of *i*-mutation changes remains above.   
    
Examples: fem. - ***wífman*** (a woman), ***ác*** (an oak), ***gát*** (a goat), ***bróc*** (breeches), ***wlóh*** (seam), ***dung*** (a dungeon), ***furh*** (a furrow), ***sulh*** (a plough), ***grut*** (gruel), ***lús*** (a louse), ***þrul*** (a basket), ***éa*** (water), ***niht*** (a night),  ***mæ'gþ*** (a girl), ***scrúd*** (clothes).

There are still some other types of declension, but not too important fro understanding the general image. For example, ***r-***stems denoted the family relatives (***dohtor*** 'a daughter', ***módor*** 'a mother' and several others), ***es***-stems usually meant children and cubs (***cild*** 'a child', ***cealf*** 'a calf'). The most intriguing question that arises from the picture of the Old English declension is "How to define which words is which kind of stems?". I am sure you are always thinking of this question, the same as I thought myself when first studying Old English. The answer is "I don't know"; because of the loss of many endings all genders, all stems and therefore all nouns mixed in the language, and one has just to learn how to decline this or that word. This mixture was the decisive step of the following transfer of English to the analytic language - when endings are not used, people forget genders and cases. In any solid dictionary you will be given a noun with its gender and kind of stem. But in general, the declension is similar for all stems. One of the most stable differences of masculine and feminine is the ***-es*** (masc.) or ***-e*** in genitive singular of the Strong declension.

Now I am giving another table, the general declension system of Old English nouns. Here '-' means a zero ending.

Strong declension (***a, ja, wa, у, jу, wу, i*** -stems).

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Masculine | | Neutral | | Feminine | |
|  | Singular | Plural | Singular | Plural | Singular | Plural |
| Nominative | - | -as | - | -u (-) | - | -a |
| Genitive | -es | -a | -es | -a | -e | -a |
| Dative | -e | -um | -e | -um | -e | -um |
| Accustive | - | -as | - | -u (-) | -e | -a |

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Weak declension | | ***u***-stems | |
|  | Singular | Plural | Singular | Plural |
| Nominative | - | -an | - | -a |
| Genitive | -an | -ena | -a | -a |
| Dative | -an | -um | -a | -um |
| Accustive | -an | -an | - | -a |

The Old English Adjective.

In all historical Indo-European languages adjectives possess practically the same morphological features as the nouns, the the sequence of these two parts of speech is an ordinary thing in Indo-European. However, the Nostratic theory (the one which unites Altaic, Uralic, Semitic, Dravidian and Indo-European language families into one Nostratic super-family, once speaking a common Proto-Nostratic language) represented by Illych-Svitych and many other famous linguists, states that adjectives in this Proto-Nostratic tongue were morphologically closer to the verbs than to the nouns.

This theory is quite interesting, because even in Proto-Indo-European, a language which was spoken much later than Proto-Nostratic, there are some proofs of the former predicative function of the adjectives. In other families of the super-family this function is even more clear. In Altaic languages, and also in Korean and Japanese, which are originally Altaic, the adjective plays the part of the predicate, and in Korean, for example, the majority of adjectives are predicative. It means that though they always denote the quality of the noun, they act the same way as verbs which denote action. Adjective "red" is actually translated from Japanese as "to be red", and the sentence *Bara-wa utsukusii* will mean "the rose is beautiful", while *bara* is "a rose", *-wa* is the nominative marker, and *utsukusii* is "to be beautiful". So no verb here, and the adjective is a predicate. This structure is typical for many Altaic languages, and probably was normal for Proto-Nostratic as well.

The Proto-Indo-European language gives us some stems which are hard to denote whether they used to mean an adjective or a verb. Some later branches reflect such stems as verbs, but other made them adjectives. So it was the Proto-Indo-European epoch where adjectives as the part of speech began to transform from a verbal one to a nominal one. And all Indo-European branches already show the close similarity of the structure of adjectives and nouns in the language. So does the Old English language, where adjective is one of the nominal parts of speech.

As well as the noun, the adjective can be declined in case, gender and number. Moreover, the instrumental case which was discussed before was preserved in adjectives much stronger than in nouns. Adjectives must follow sequence with nouns which they define - thet is why the same adjective can be masculine, neuter and feminine and therefore be declined in two different types: one for masculine and neuter, the other for feminine nouns. The declension is more or less simple, it looks much like the nominal system of declension, though there are several important differences. Interesting to know that one-syllable adjectives ("monosyllabic") have different declension than two-syllable ones ("disyllabic"). See for yourselves:

Strong Declension   
 ***a, ó***-stems   
     Monosyllabic   
                   Sg.   
        Masc.     Neut.         Fem.   
N blæc (black) blæc        blacu   
G blaces          blaces      blæcre   
D blacum        blacum      blæcre   
A blæcne        blæc         blace   
I  blace           blace         -   
                   Pl.   
N  blace         blacu         blaca   
G  blacra        blacra        blacra   
D  blacum      blacum      blacum   
A  blace         blacu         blaca

Here "I" means that very instrumental case, answering the question (by what? with whom? with the help of what?).

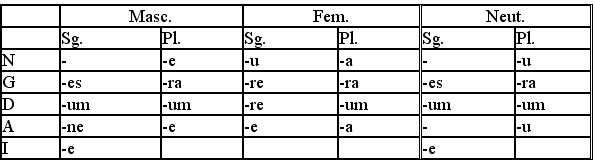
Disyllabic   
        Masc.     Neut.                Fem.   
                   Sg.   
N  éadig (happy) éadig        éadigu   
G  éadiges           éadiges     éadigre   
D  éadigum          éadigum   éadigre   
A  éadigne           éadig        éadige   
I   éadige             éadige   
                   Pl.   
N  éadige            éadigu      éadiga   
G  éadigra           éadigra     éadigra   
D  éadigum          éadigum   éadigum   
A  éadige            éadigu       éadigu

So not many new endings: for accusative singular we have ***-ne***, and for genitive plural ***-ra***, which cannot be met in the declension of nouns. The difference between monosyllabic and disyllabic is the accusative plural feminine ending ***-a / -u***. That's all.

***ja, jó***-stems (***swéte*** - sweet)   
                 Sg.                                                Pl.   
      Masc.      Neut.        Fem.      Masc.     Neut.         Fem.   
N  swéte       swéte      swétu     swéte     swétu      swéta   
G  swétes      swétes    swétre    swétra    swétra    swétra   
D  swétum     swétum   swétre   swétum   swétum  swétum   
A  swétne      swéte     swéte     swéte     swétu      swéta   
I    swéte       swéte        -

***wa, wó***-stems   
                Sg.   
        Masc.         Neut.              Fem.   
N  nearu (narrow) nearu           nearu   
G  nearwes           nearwes       nearore   
D  nearwum          nearwum      nearore   
A  nearone            nearu           nearwe   
I  nearwe              nearwe   
                Pl.   
N  nearwe           nearu            nearwa   
G  nearora           nearora        nearora   
D  nearwum         nearwum     nearwum   
A  nearwe            nearu           nearwa

Actually, some can just omit all those examples - the adjectival declension is the same as a whole for all stems, as concerns the strong type. In general, the endings look the following way, with very few varieties (note that "-" means the null ending):



As for weak adjectives, they also exist in the language. The thing is that one need not learn by heart which adjective is which type - strong or weak, as you should do with the nouns. If you have a weak noun as a subject, its attributive adjective will be weak as well. So - a strong adjective for a strong noun, a weak adjective for a weak noun, the rule is as simple as that.

Thus if you say "a black tree" that will be ***blæc tréow*** (strong), and "a black eye" will sound ***blace éage***. Here is the weak declension example (***blaca -*** black):

         Sg.                                            Pl.   
     Masc.       Neut.        Fem.   
N  blaca        blace         blace         blacan   
G  blacan       blacan       blacan       blæcra   
D  blacan       blacan       blacan       blacum   
A  blacan       blace         blacan       blacan

Weak declension has a single plural for all genders, which is pleasant for those who don't want to remeber too many forms. In general, the weak declension is much easier.

The last thing to be said about the adjectives is the degrees of comparison. Again, the traditional Indo-European structure is preserved here: three degrees (absolutive, comparative, superlative) - though some languages also had the so-called "equalitative" grade; the special suffices for forming comparatives and absolutives; suppletive stems for several certain adjectives.

The suffices we are used to see in Modern English, those ***-er*** and ***-est*** in *weak, weaker, the weakest*, are the direct descendants of the Old English ones. At that time they sounded as ***-ra*** and ***-est***. See the examples:

***earm*** (poor) ***- earmra - earmost***   
***blæc*** (black) ***- blæcra - blacost***

Many adjectives changed the root vowel - another example of the Germanic ablaut:

***eald*** (old) ***- ieldra - ieldest***   
***strong - strengra - strengest***   
***long - lengra - lengest***   
***geong*** (young) ***- gingra - gingest***

The most widespread and widely used adjectives always had their degrees formed from another stem, which is called "suppletive" in linguistics. Many of them are still seen in today's English:

***gód*** (good) ***- betera - betst*** (or ***sélra - sélest***)   
***yfel*** (bad) ***- wiersa - wierest***   
***micel*** (much) ***- mára - máést***   
***lýtel*** (little) ***- læ'ssa - læ'st***   
***fear*** (far) ***- fierra - fierrest, fyrrest***   
***néah*** (near) ***- néarra - níehst, nýhst***   
***æ'r*** (early) ***- æ'rra - æ'rest***   
***fore*** (before) ***- furþra - fyrest*** (first)

Now you see what the word "first" means - just the superlative degree from the adjective "before, forward". The same is with ***níehst*** from ***néah*** (near) which is now "next".

Old English affixation for adjectives:

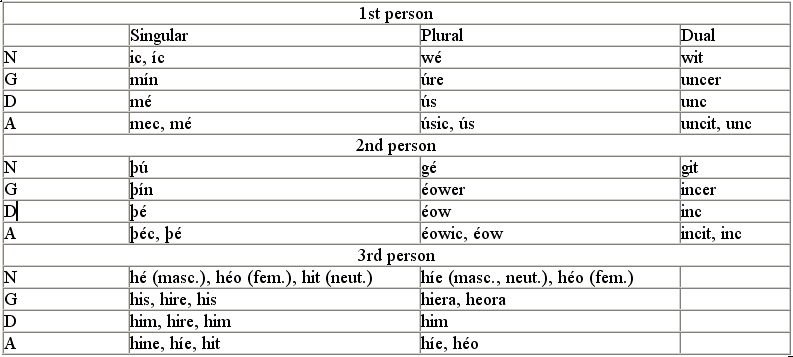
  1. -***ede*** (group "adjective stem + substantive stem") - ***micelhéafdede*** (large-headed)   
  2. -***ihte*** (from substantives with mutation) - ***þirnihte*** (thorny)   
  3. -***ig*** (from substantives with mutation) - ***hálig*** (holy), ***mistig*** (misty)   
  4. -***en, -in*** (with mutation) - ***gylden*** (golden), ***wyllen*** (wóllen)   
  5. -***isc*** (nationality) - ***Englisc, Welisc, mennisc*** (human)   
  6. -***sum*** (from stems of verbs, adjectives, substantives) - ***sibbsum*** (peaceful), ***híersum*** (obedient)   
  7. -***feald*** (from stems of numerals, adjectives) - ***þríefeald*** (threefold)   
  8. -***full*** (from abstract substantive stems) - ***sorgfull*** (sorrowful)   
  9. -***léás*** (from verbal and nominal stems) - ***slæpléás*** (sleepless)   
  10. -***líc*** (from substantive and adjective stems) - ***eorþlíc*** (earthly)   
  11. -***weard*** (from adjective, substantive, adverb stems) - ***inneweard*** (internal), ***hámweard*** (homeward)

The Old English Pronoun.

Pronouns were the only part of speech in Old English which preserved the dual number in declension, but only this makes them more archaic than the rest parts of speech. Most of pronouns are declined in numnber, case and gender, in plural the majority have only one form for all genders.

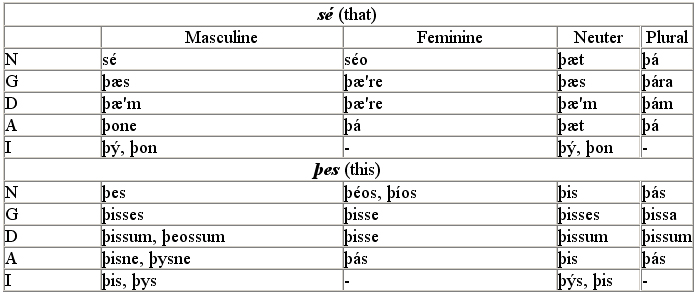
We will touch each group of Old English pronouns and comment on them.

1.Personal pronouns



Through the last 1500 years ***mín*** became *mine*, ***gé*** turned into *you* (*ye* as a colloquial variant). But changes are still significant: the 2nd person singular pronouns disappeared from the language, remaining only in poetic speech and in some dialects in the north of England. This is really a strange feature - I can hardly recall any other Indo-European language which lacks the special pronoun for the 2nd person singular (French ***tu***, German ***du***, Russian ***ty*** etc.). The polite form replaced the colloquial one, maybe due to the English traditional "ladies and gentlemen" customs. Another extreme exists in Irish Gaelic, which has no polite form of personal pronoun, and you turn to your close friend the same way as you spoke with a prime minister - the familiar word, translated into French as ***tu***. It can sound normal for English, but really funny for Slavic, Baltic, German people who make a thorough distinction between speaking to a friend and to a stranger

2. Demonstrative pronouns ('I' means the instrumental case)



3. Interrogative pronouns

N  hwá      hwæt   
G  hwæs    hwæs   
D  hwæ'm  hwæ'm   
A  hwone   hwæt   
I    -           hwý, hwí

These pronouns, which actually mean the masculine and the neuter varieties of the same pronoun, derive from Proto-Indo-European ***\*kwis***, with ***\*kw*** becoming ***hw***in Germanic languages. In Gothic the combination ***hw*** was considered as one sound which is another proof that the Indo-European the labiovelar sound ***kw*** was a single sound with some specific articulation.

Later Germanic languages changed the sound in a different way: in Norwegian it remained as ***hv***, in German turned into ***w*** (as in ***wer*** 'who', ***was*** 'what'), in English finally changed into ***wh*** pronounced in most cases [w], but somewhere also like [h] or [hw].

Interesting that the instrumental of the word ***hwæt***, once being a pronoun form, later became the word *why* in English. So 'why?' is originally an instrumental case of the interrogative pronoun.

Other interrogative pronouns, or adverbs, as they are sometimes called, include the following, all beginning with ***hw***:

***hwilc*** 'which?' - is declined as the strong adjective (see [adjectives](#4) above)   
***hwonne*** 'when?' - this and following are not declined, naturally   
***hwæ'r*** 'where?'   
***hwider*** 'whither?'   
***hwonan*** 'whence?'

4. Other kinds of pronouns

They include definite, indefinite, negative and relative, all typical for Indo-European languages. All of them still exist in Modern English, and all of them are given here:

a) definite   
  ***gehwá*** (every) - declined the same way as ***hwá***   
  ***gehwilc*** (each),   
  ***ægþer*** (either),   
  ***æ'lc*** (each),   
  ***swilc*** (such) - all declined like strong adjectives   
  ***sé ylca*** (the same) - declined like a weak adjective

b) indefinite   
  ***sum*** (some),   
  ***æ'nig*** (any) - both behave the same way as strong adjectives

c) negative   
  ***nán, næ'nig*** (no, none) - declined like strong adjectives

d) relative   
  ***þe*** (which, that)   
  ***séþe*** (which, that) - they are not declined

In Proto-Indo-European and in many ancient Indo-European languages there was a special kind of declension calleed pronominal, using only by pronouns and opposed to the one used by nouns, adjectives and numerals. Old English lost it, and its pronouns use all the same endings as the nouns and adjectives. Maybe the only inflection which remembers the Proto-language times, is the neuter nominative ***-t*** in ***hwæt*** and ***þæt***, the ancient ending for inanimate (inactive) nouns and pronouns.

The Old English Numeral.

It is obvious that all Indo-European languages have the general trend of transformation

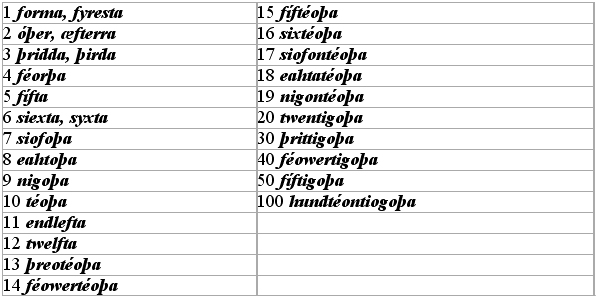
from the synthetic (or inflectional) stage to the analytic one. At least for the latest 1,000 years this trend could be observed in all branches of the family. The level of this analitization process in each single language can be estimated by several features, their presence or absence in the language. One of them is for sure the declension of the numerals. In Proto-Indo-European all numerals, both cardinal and ordinal, were declined, as they derived on a very ancient stage from nouns or adjectives, originally being a declined part of speech. There are still language groups within the family with decline their numerals: among them, Slavic and Baltic are the most typical samples. They practically did not suffer any influence of the analytic processes. But all other groups seem to have been influenced somehow. Ancient Italic and Hellenic languages left the declension only for the first four cardinal pronouns (from 1 to 4), the same with ancient Celtic.

The Old English language preserves this system of declension only for three numerals. It is therefore much easier to learn, though not for English speakers I guess - Modern English lacks declension at all.

Here is the list of the cardinal numerals:



Ordinal numerals  use the suffix ***-ta*** or ***-þa***, etymologically a common Indo-European one (***\*-to-***).



The Old English Adverb.

Adverbs can be either primary (original adverbs) or derive from the adjectives. In fact, adverbs appeared in the language rather late, and eraly Proto-Indo-European did not use them, but later some auxiliary nouns and pronouns losing their declension started to play the role of adverbial modifiers. That's how thew primary adverbs emerged.

In Old English the basic primary adverbs were the following ones:

***þa*** (then)   
***þonne*** (then)   
***þæ'r*** (there)   
***þider*** (thither)   
***nú*** (now)   
***hér*** (here)   
***hider*** (hither)   
***heonan*** (hence)   
***sóna*** (soon)   
***oft*** (often)   
***eft*** (again)   
***swá*** (so)   
***hwílum*** (sometimes).

Secondary adverbs originated from the instrumental singular of the neuter adjectives of strong declension. They all add the suffix ***-e***: ***wide*** (widely), ***déope*** (deeply), ***fæste*** (fast), ***hearde*** (hard). Another major sugroup of them used the suffixes ***-líc, -líce*** from more complexed adjectives: ***bealdlíce*** (boldly), ***freondlíce*** (in a friendly way).

Adverbs, as well as adjectives, had their degrees of comparison:

***wíde - wídor - wídost*** (widely - more widely - most widely)   
***long - leng*** (long - longer)   
***feorr*** (far) - ***fierr***   
***sófte*** (softly) - ***séft***   
***éaþe*** (easily) - ***íeþ***   
***wel*** (well) ***- betre - best***   
***yfele*** (badly) ***- wiers, wyrs - wierst***   
***micele*** (much) ***- máre - mæ'st***

The Old English Verb.

Old English system had strong and weak verbs: the ones which used the ancient Germanic type of conjugation (the Ablaut), and the ones which just added endings to their past and participle forms. Strong verbs make the clear majority. According to the traditional division, which is taken form Gothic and is accepted by modern linguistics, all strong verbs are distinguished between seven classes, each having its peculiarities in conjugation and in the stem structure. It is easy to define which verb is which class, so you will not swear trying to identify the type of conjugation of this or that verb (unlike the situation with the substantives).

Here is the table which is composed for you to see the root vowels of all strong verb classes. Except the VII class, they all have exact stem vowels for all four main forms:



Now let us see what Old English strong verbs of all those seven classes looked like and what were their main four forms. I should mention that besides the vowel changes in the stem, verbal forms also changed stem consonants very often. The rule of such changes is not mentioned practically in any books on the Old English language, though there is some. See for yourselves this little chart where the samples of strong verb classes are given with their four forms:

Infinitive, Past singular, Past plural, Participle II (or Past Participle)   
                        Class I   
***wrítan*** (to write), ***wrát, writon, writen***   
***snípan*** (to cut), ***snáþ, snidon, sniden***   
    Other examples: ***belífan*** (stay), ***clífan*** (cling), ***ygrípan*** (clutch), ***bítan*** (bite), ***slítan*** (slit), ***besmítan*** (dirty), ***gewítan*** (go), ***blícan*** (glitter), ***sícan*** (sigh), ***stígan*** (mount), ***scínan*** (shine), ***árísan*** (arise), ***líþan*** (go).

                         Class II   
***béodan*** (to offer), ***béad, budon, boden***   
***céosan*** (to choose), ***céas, curon, coren***   
    Other examples: ***créopan*** (creep), ***cléofan*** (cleave), ***fléotan*** (fleet), ***géotan*** (pour), ***gréotan*** (weep), ***néotan*** (enjoy), ***scéotan*** (shoot), ***léogan*** (lie), ***bréowan*** (brew), ***dréosan*** (fall), ***fréosan*** (freeze), ***forléosan*** (lose).

                         Class III   
                  III a) a nasal consonant   
***drincan*** (to drink), ***dranc, druncon, druncen***   
    Other: ***swindan*** (vanish), ***onginnan*** (begin), ***sinnan*** (reflect), ***winnan*** (work), ***gelimpan*** (happen), ***swimman*** (swim).   
                  III b) ***l*** + a consonant   
***helpan*** (to help), ***healp, hulpon, holpen***   
    Other: ***delfan*** (delve), ***swelgan*** (swallow), ***sweltan*** (die), ***bellan*** (bark), ***melcan*** (milk).   
                  III c) ***r, h*** + a consonant   
***steorfan*** (to die), ***stearf, sturfon, storfen***   
***weorþan*** (to become), ***wearþ, wurdon, worden***   
***feohtan*** (to fight), ***feaht, fuhton, fohten***   
    More: ***ceorfan*** (carve), ***hweorfan*** (turn), ***weorpan*** (throw), ***beorgan*** (conceal), ***beorcan*** (bark).

                         Class IV   
***stelan*** (to steal), ***stæ'l, stæ'lon, stolen***   
***beran*** (to bear), ***bæ'r, bæ'ron, boren***   
    More: ***cwelan*** (die), ***helan*** (conceal), ***teran*** (tear), ***brecan*** (break).

                         Class V   
***tredan*** (to tread), ***træ'd,  træ'don, treden***   
***cweþan*** (to say), ***cwæ'þ,  cwæ'don, cweden***   
    More: ***metan*** (measure), ***swefan*** (sleep), ***wefan*** (weave), ***sprecan*** (to speak), ***wrecan*** (persecute), ***lesan*** (gather), ***etan*** (eat), ***wesan*** (be).

                         Class VI   
***faran*** (to go), ***fór, fóron, faren***   
    More: ***galan*** (sing), ***grafan*** (dig), ***hladan*** (lade), ***wadan*** (walk), ***dragan*** (drag), ***gnagan*** (gnaw), ***bacan*** (bake), ***scacan*** (shake), ***wascan*** (wash).

                         Class VII   
***hátan*** (to call), ***hét, héton, háten***   
***feallan*** (to fall), ***feoll, feollon, feallen***   
***cnéawan*** (to know), ***cnéow, cnéowon, cnáwen***   
    More: ***blondan*** (blend), ***ondræ'dan*** (fear), ***lácan*** (jump), ***scadan*** (divide), ***fealdan*** (fold), ***healdan*** (hold), ***sponnan*** (span), ***béatan*** (beat), ***blówan*** (flourish), ***hlówan*** (low), ***spówan*** (flourish), ***máwan*** (mow), ***sáwan*** (sow), ***ráwan*** (turn).

So the rule from the table above is observed carefully. The VII class was made especially for those verbs which did not fit into any of the six classes. In fact the verbs of the VII class are irregular and cannot be explained by a certain exact rule, though they are quite numerous in the language.

Examining verbs of Old English comparing to those of Modern English it is easy to catch the point of transformation. Not only the ending ***-an*** in the infinitive has dropped, but the stems were subject to many changes some of which are not hard to find. For example, the long ***í*** in the stem gives ***i*** with an open syllable in the modern language (***wrítan > write, scínan > shine***). The same can be said about ***a,*** which nowadays is ***a*** in open syllables pronounced [æ] (***hladan > lade***). The initial combination ***sc*** turns to ***sh***; the open ***e*** was transformed into ***ea*** practically everywhere (***sprecan > speak, tredan > tread***, etc.). Such laws of transformation which you can gather into a small table help to recreate the Old word from a Modern English one in case you do not have a dictionary in hand, and therefore are important for reconstruction of the languages.

Weak verbs in Old English (today's English regular verbs) were conjugated in a simpler way than the strong ones, and did not use the ablaut interchanges of the vowel stems. Weak verbs are divided into three classes which had only slight differences though. They did have the three forms - the infinitive, the past tense, the participle II. Here is the table.

                         Class I   
                          Regular verbs   
      Inf.            Past             PP   
***déman*** (to judge), ***démde, démed***   
***híeran*** (to hear), ***híerde, híered***   
***nerian*** (to save), ***nerede, nered***   
***styrian*** (to stir), ***styrede, styred***   
***fremman*** (to commit), ***fremede, fremed***   
***cnyssan*** (to push), ***cnysede, cnysed***

  When the suffix is preceded by a voiceless consonant the ending changes a little bit:   
***cépan*** (to keep), ***cépte, cépt / céped***   
***grétan*** (to greet), ***grétte, grét / gréted***

  If the verb stem ends in consonant plus d or t:   
***sendan*** (to send), ***sende, send / sended***   
***restan*** (to rest), ***reste, rest / rested***

                          Irregular   
***sellan*** (to give), ***sealde, seald***   
***tellan*** (to tell), ***tealde, teald***   
***cwellan*** (to kill), ***cwealde, cweald***   
***tæ'can*** (to teach), ***táhte, táht***   
***ræ'can*** (to reach), ***ráhte, ráht***   
***bycgan*** (to buy), ***bohte, boht***   
***sécan*** (to seek), ***sóhte, sóht***   
***wyrcan*** (to work), ***worhte, worht***   
***þencan*** (to think), ***þóhte, þóht***   
***bringan*** (to bring), ***bróhte, bróht***

Other examples of the I class weak verbs just for your interest: ***berian*** (beat), ***derian*** (harm), ***erian*** (plough), ***ferian*** (go), ***herian*** (praise), ***gremman*** (be angry), ***wennan*** (accustom), ***clynnan*** (sound), ***dynnan*** (resound), ***hlynnan*** (roar), ***hrissan*** (tremble), ***sceþþan*** (harm), ***wecgean*** (move), ***féran*** (go), ***læ'ran*** (teach), ***dræfan*** (drive), ***fýsan*** (hurry), ***drýgean*** (dry), ***híepan*** (heap), ***métan*** (to meet), ***wýscean*** (wish), ***byldan*** (build), ***wendan*** (turn), ***efstan*** (hurry). All these are regular.

                           Class II   
***macian*** (to make), ***macode, macod***   
***lufian*** (to love), ***lufode, lufod***   
***hopian*** (to hope), ***hopode, hopod***

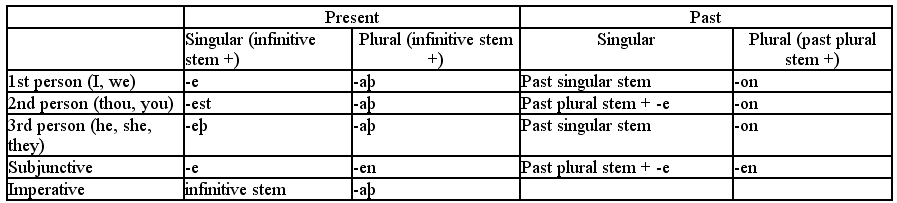
Tis class makes quite a small group of verbs, all of them having ***-o-*** before the past endings. Other samples: ***lofian*** (praise), ***stician*** (pierce), ***eardian*** (dwell), ***scéawian*** (look), ***weorþian*** (honour), ***wundrian*** (wonder), ***fæstnian*** (fasten), ***mærsian*** (glorify).

                           Class III   
***habban*** (to have), ***hæfde, hæfd***   
***libban*** (to live), ***lifde, lifd***   
***secgan*** (to say), ***sægde, sægd***   
***hycgan*** (to think), ***hogde, hogod***   
***þréagan*** (to threaten), ***þréade, þréad***   
***sméagan*** (to think), ***sméade, sméad***   
***fréogan*** (to free), ***fréode, fréod***   
***féogan*** (to hate), ***féode, féod***

Old English verbs are conjugated having two tenses - the Present tense and the Past tense, and three moods - indicative, subjunctive, and imperative. Of these, only the subjunctive mood has disappeared in the English language, acquiring an analytic construction instead of inflections; and the imperative mood has coincided with the infinitive form (*to write - write!*). In the Old English period they all looked different.

The common table of the verb conjugation is given below. Here you should notice that the Present tense has the conjugation for all three moods, while the Past tense - for only two moods (no imperative in the Past tense, naturally). Some more explanation should be given about the stem types.

In fact all verbal forms were generated in Old English from three verb stems, and each verb had its own three ones: the Infinitive stem, the Past Singular stem, the Past Plural stem. For the verb ***wrítan***, for example, those three stems are: ***wrít-*** (infinitive without the ending ***-an***), ***wrát-*** (the Past singular), ***writ-*** (the Past plural without the ending ***-on***). The table below explains where to use this or that stem.



Additionally, the participles (Participle I and Participle II) are formed by the suffix ***-ende*** to the Infinitive stem (participle I), or the prefix ***ge-*** + the Past Plural stem + the ending ***-en*** (Participle II).

Tired of the theory? Here is the preactice. We give several examples of the typical verbs - first strong, then weak, then irregular.

     Class I strong - ***wrítan*** (to write)   
       Pres.                                     Past   
       Ind.       Subj.      Imper.   ¦   Ind.          Subj.   
Sg. 1 wríte                  -           ¦  wrát   
     2 wrítest  wríte    wrít         ¦  write         } wríte   
     3 wríteþ               -             ¦  wrát   
Pl.  wrítaþ   wríten  2 wrítaþ     ¦  writon        writen

        Infinitive               Participle   
   wrítan                   I wrítende   II gewriten

     Class II weak - ***lufian*** (to love)   
         Pres.                                Past   
    Ind.         Subj.       Imp.         Ind.        Subj.   
Sg. 1 lufie                  -             lufode   
      2 lufast }lufie       lufa          lufodest } lufode   
      3 lufaþ                 -             lufode   
Pl.   lufiaþ    lufien    2 lufiaþ      lufodon    lufoden   
        Part.   
   I lufiende  II gelufod

     Class III strong - ***bindan*** (to bind)   
       Pres.                                           Past   
      Ind.          Subj.      Imp.         Ind.              Subj.   
Sg. 1 binde                      -        ¦  band, bond   
      2 bindest } binde     bind      ¦  bunde        } bunde   
     3 bindeþ                     -        ¦  band, bond   
Pl.    bindaþ   binden     bindaþ   ¦  bundon         bunden

            Inf.            Part.   
  bindan               I bindende  II gebunden

     Class V strong - ***séon*** (to see)   
         Pres.                                        Past   
    Ind.         Subj.       Imp.         Ind.          Subj.   
Sg.1 séo                    -              seah   
    2 síehst   } séo      seoh         sáwe      } sáwe,   
    3 síehþ                  -               seah           sæge   
Pl.   séoþ     séon    2 séoþ        sawon       sáwen   
      Participle   
  I séonde  II gesewen, gesegen

     Class VII strong - ***fón*** (to catch)   
         Pres.                                Past   
    Ind.         Subj.       Imp.      Ind.         Subj.   
Sg. 1 fó                     -            feng   
     2 féhst  } fó         fóh         fenge     } fenge   
     3 féhþ                  -            feng   
Pl.   fóþ       fón      2 fóþ        fengon      fengen   
       Participle   
  I fónde  II gefangen, gefongen

     Class III weak - ***secgan*** (to say)   
         Pres.                                      Past   
       Ind.         Subj.       Imp.         Ind.        Subj.   
Sg.1 secge                   -              sægde   
     2 sægst  }secge      sæge        sægdest  }sægde   
     3 sægþ                  -               sægde   
Pl.  secgaþ    secgen   2 secgaþ   sægdon     sægden   
      Part.   
   I secgende  II gesægd

     Class III weak - ***libban*** (to live)   
         Pres.                                Past   
    Ind.          Subj.       Imp.         Ind.        Subj.   
Sg.1 libbe                   -             lifde   
     2 liofast  }libbe     liofa         lifdest    } lifde   
     3 liofaþ                 -              lifde   
Pl.   libbaþ    libben    2 libbaþ   lifdon       lifden   
      Part.   
   I libbende  II gelifd

    A special group is made by the so-called Present-Preterite verbs, which are conjugated combining two varieties of the usual verb conjugation: strong and weak. These verbs, at all not more than seven, are nowadays called modal verbs in English.

Present-Preterite verbs have their Present tense forms generated from the Strong Past, and the Past tense, instead, looks like the Present Tense of the Weak verbs. The verbs we present here are the following: ***witan*** (to know), ***cunnan*** (can), ***þurfan*** (to need), ***dearan*** (to dare), ***munan*** (to remember), ***sculan*** (shall), ***magan*** (may).

              Present  of ***witan*** (= strong Past)   
        Ind.        Subj.       Imp.   
Sg.  1 wát                      -   
     2 wast      } wite        wite   
     3 wát                         -   
Pl.    witon     2 witen      witaþ   
              Past (= Weak)   
        Ind.                         Subj.   
Sg.1 wisse, wiste   
     2 wissest, wistest  } wisse, wiste   
     3 wisse, wiste   
Pl.    wisson, wiston      wissen, wisten   
    Participles: I witende, II witen, gewiten

***cunnan*** (can)   
             Pres.                     Past   
    Ind.             Subj.        Ind.         Subj.   
Sg. 1 cann                     cúþe   
      2 canst    } cunne     cúþest   } cúþe   
      3 cann                     cúþe   
Pl.   cunnon     cunnen    cúþon      cúþen

***þurfan*** (need)   
Sg. 1 þearf                    þorfte   
      2 þearft  } þurfe      þorftest   } þorfte   
      3 þearf                    þorfte   
Pl.    þurfon    þurfen     þorfton      þorften

***magan*** (may)   
Sg. 1 mæg                    meahte       mihte, mihten   
      2 meaht    } mæge  meahtest   
      3 mæg                    meahte   
Pl.   magon       mægen  meahton   
    
The main difference of verbs of this type in modern English is their expressing modality, i.e. possibility, obligation, necessity. They do not require the particle *to* before the infinitive which follows them. In Old English in general no verb requires this particle before the infinitive. In fact, this *to* before the infinitive form meant the preposition of direction.

And now finally a few irregular verbs, which used several different stems for their tenses. These verbs are very important in Old English and are met very often in the texts: ***wesan*** (to be), ***béon*** (to be), ***gán*** (to go), ***dón*** (to do), ***willan*** (will). Mind that there was no Future tense in the Old English language, and the future action was expressed by the Present forms, just sometimes using verbs of modality, ***willan*** (lit. "to wish to do") or ***sculan*** (lit. "to have to do").

***wesan*** (to be) - has got only the Present tense forms, uses the verb ***béon*** in the Past   
    Present   
        Ind.      Subj.      Imp.   
Sg.1 eom     -   
     2 eart  }  síe, sý     wes   
     3 is          -   
Pl. sind       síen, sýn  2 wesaþ

***béon*** (to be)   
                      Present   
        Ind.      Subj.    Imp.   
Sg. 1 béo                  -   
      2 bist    }béo      béo   
      3 biþ                   -   
Pl.   béoþ     béon    2 béoþ   
                      Past   
    Ind.              Subj.   
Sg. 1 wæs   
      2 wære    } wære   
      3 wæs   
Pl.   wæron     wæren   
    Participle I is ***béonde*** (being).

***gán*** (to go)   
      Pres.                                 Past   
     Ind.         Subj.    Imp.        Ind.           Subj.   
Sg.1 gá                      -           éode   
     2 gæ'st  } gá         gá         éodest     } éode   
     3 gæ'þ                  -           éode   
Pl.   gáþ      2 gán      gáþ       éodon       éoden   
       Participles:   
  I gánde, gangende    II gegán

So there were in fact two verbs meaning 'to be', and both were colloquial. In Middle English, however, the verb ***wesan*** replaced fully the forms of ***béon***, and the words ***béo*** (I am), ***bist*** (thou art) fell out of use. The Past tense forms *was* and *were* are also derivatives from ***wesan***.

Syntactically, the language had only two main tenses - the Present and the Past. No progressive (or Continuous) tenses were used, they were invented only in the Early Middle English period. Such complex tenses as modern Future in the Past, Future Perfect Continuous did not exist either. However, some analytic construction were in use, and first of all the perfective constructions. The example ***Hie geweorc geworhten hæfdon*** '*they have build a fortress'* shows the exact Perfect tense, but at that time it was not the tense really, just a participle construction showing that the action has been done. Seldom you can also find such Past constructions, which later became the Past Perfect Tense.

Verb syntax includes a number of suffices and prefixes which can be met in Old English texts and especially in poetry:

        Suffices:   
  1. ***-s-*** (from substantive or adjective stems) - ***mæ'rsian*** (to announce; from ***mæ're*** - famous)   
  2. ***-læc- - néálæcan*** (to approach)   
  3. ***-ett- - bliccettan*** (to sparkle)   
    
        Prefixes   
  1. ***á-*** = out of, from - ***árísan*** (arise)***, áwakan*** (awake)***, áberan*** (sustain)   
  2. ***be-*** = over, around, by - ***begán*** (go around), ***beþencan*** (think over), ***behéafdian*** (behead)   
  3. ***for***- = destruction or loss - ***fordón*** (destroy), ***forweorþan*** (perish)   
  4. ***mis***- = negation or bad quality - ***mislícian*** (displease)   
  5. ***of***- = reinfors - ***ofsléan*** (kill), ***oftéon*** (take away)   
  6. ***on***- = change or separation - ***onbindan*** (unbind), ***onlúcan*** (unlock)   
  7. ***tó***- = destruction - ***tóbrecan*** (break)

The Old English Auxiliary Words.

These traditionally include prepositions, conjunctions, different particles and

interjections. All Indo-European languages have this system of auxiliary parts of speech, though there are languages which lack some of them. Japanese, for example, has no prepositions, and the service function in the sentence belongs to postpositive words which have cases, the same as nouns. Korean does not use any conjunctions, replacing them by about 50 different kinds of verbal adverbs. As for Chinese, it simply does not make any distinction in the sentence between basic and auxiliary words.

Most of Old English prepositions are easily recognizable:

Primary: ***of*** (of, out of), ***æt*** (to), ***fram*** (from), ***tó*** (to), ***wiþ*** (against), ***in, of, mid*** (with), ***on*** (on, at)***, be*** (by, near, to, because of, about), ***þurh*** (through), ***under***, ***ofer*** (over), ***æfter*** (after), ***bufan*** (above), ***út*** (out).

Secondary: ***beforan*** (before), ***bútan*** (without), ***benorþan*** (north of), etc.

***æt*** means '*to*' and ***wiþ*** means '*against'*. In Germanic all prepositions divided into those who used nouns in dative, accusative or genitive. But in the Old English period this distinction begins to disappear, and only some of the prepositions use dative (***mid, bútan,*** sometimes ***on, in***) or genitive (***fram, út, æfter***).

Conjunctions included the following:

Primary: ***and / ond*** (and) , ***ac*** (but), ***gif*** (if), ***or***.   
Secondary: ***ægþer ge... ge*** (both... and..., either ... or...), ***hwonne*** (when), ***þa*** (when), ***þonne*** (when),  ***þéáh*** (though), ***þætte*** (that), ***ær*** (before), ***swá... swá...*** (so... as...).

And a few interjections: ***iá*** (yes), ***wá*** (woe!, wow!), ***hwæt*** (there! what!).