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German Adjective Declension in the First Half of the 18th Century

In language history the 18th century is traditionally depicted as the period in which the New High German written language was standardised and codified. The end of the Early New High German linguistic age is accompanied by the abandonment of doublet forms or variations, a process which asserted itself in the 18th century and is fixed by such grammarians as Gottsched and Adelung. Traditional history of language more or less explicitly adopts the point of view that language developed as a continuum with its origins in the east-central High German variety as embellished and consolidated by the Reformation, the spread of book printing, officialese and the influence of belles lettres as well as grammatical description. Even if in the last 20 years traditions pertaining to standard language and particular types of text, the role of the various literary landscapes as well as socio-pragmatic factors have been focused upon, the traditional assumption of a development, profilation or functionalisation of linguistic means based on the idea of progress still continues unabated. Thus, one speaks generally of an increasing systematisation, of descriptonal adequacy, of greater accuracy or of an increase in efficiency. Such statements have been made by Soviet philologists of German, authors of the 'Akademie der Wissenschaften' of the former GDR as well as in recent studies, e.g. in the grammar of Early New High German published by MOSER, STOPP and BESCH or in the second volume of von POLENZ's history of the German Language.

I would like to take adjective declension in the first half of the 18th century as an example in order to demonstrate that the transition from the Early New High German to the New High German periods involved processes of substitution and reduction which are in no way motivated on the description-functional level. I start from the hypothesis that it is not possible to assume an "older more diffuse state", as von POLENZ (1994:259) puts it, for the Early New High German period but rather a tolerance of variations which is characterised by a co-existence of various possibilities for inflection, indication and determination. My hypothesis is that, since the 17th century, functional means have been restricted rather than extended. In line with REICHMANN 1988 and 1990, I wish to describe these restrictive or substituting processes as "verticalisation of the variation spectrum". The term verticalisation should be interpreted as follows:

"Vertikal organisiertes Sprechen und Schreiben ist [...] im Grenzwert unizentrisch, d.h. gerichtet auf eine einzige, von allen anerkannte und in allen Bildungsinstanzen gelehre, über einen sprachnationalen Textkanon allen Sprachangehörigen vermittelte Norm [...]. Vertikal organisiertes sprachliches Handeln [läßt] kaum Platz für graphische, flexions- und wortbildungsmorphologische, lexikalische und syntaktische Varianz. Es erhöht demgegenüber das Gewicht von Regeln, von Analogien, von wortbildungsmorphologischer Durchsichtigkeit. Seine vornehmste Realisationsform ist der schriftliche Text, der von Rezipienten gelesen (nicht nur vorgelesen) wird, auf keinen Fall die Mündlichkeit im üblichen, die Einmaligkeit der Einzelsituation betonenden Sinne." (REICHMANN 1990:153)¹

Added to this is the fact that with the codification of the norm the variations not accepted as norm for the first time become discriminable. They become dialectically or socially labelled variations. KNOOP 1987 also points out:

"Mit der Kodifikation der Norm werden zum erstenmal alle von ihr nun abweichenden Rede- und auch Schreibweisen diskriminierbar in des Wortes zweifacher Bedeutung: man kann sie unterscheiden, abtrennen und man kann sie (dann) ablehnen. Dialekte und andere Sprechweisen werden so zum erstenmal in ihrer Gänze überhaupt greifbar. Man kann beinahe sagen, daß mit der Kodifikation der Norm der Dialekt überhaupt erst spezifisch wahrnehmbar wird, nämlich als die durchaus vorhandene Sprechweise, die man nicht verwenden soll [...]." (KNOOP 1987:29)²

This process of verticalisation is carried along by the upwardly oriented bourgeois classes, which due to the feudalistic status quo, had no possibility of achieving any share in economic or political power. In his social history of 1987 WEHLER describes the emergence of a new social type which arose particularly in the Protestant north and in the eastern German states during the 18th century: "Das ist der akademisch geschulte, überwiegend an Karrieren im Staats- und Schuldienst gebundene Bildungsbürger [...]." (WEHLER 1987:210)³

¹ ≈ "Vertically organised speech and writing is [...] unizentric in the border value, i.e. aimed at a single, universally recognised norm taught in all educational instances, transmitted to all speakers of the language via a language-national canon of texts [...]. Vertically organised linguistic activity hardly [leaves] room for graphic, inflective, or word-formation morphological, lexical and syntactic variation. On the contrary, it increases the importance of rules, analogies, word-formation morphological transparency. It's most noble form is the written text, which is read (not only aloud) by recipients, as opposed to the oral language in the usual sense as emphasising the uniqueness of the particular situation."

² ≈ "With the codification of the norm all deviating oral and written forms for the first time become discriminable in both meanings of the word: one can distinguish them, separate them and (then) reject them. Dialects and other forms of speech thus become for the first time tangible in their entirety. It can almost be said that only with the codification of the norm does the dialect become specifically perceptible, namely as the form of speech which, although existent, ought not to be used [...]."

³ ≈ "It is the academically educated citizen, tied for the most part to careers in civil and educational service [...]."

This new educated citizenry aspired to distance itself from both French in its role as the accepted language of the nobility as well as from the language of the "mob", above all from dialect which, up to this time, had borne solely the tag of being regional but which now bore the extra tag of being social. Besides self-representation in art, literature and religion, the educated citizenry's aspiration to compensate for their social inferiority led also to the use of language becoming a means of indicating social status and thus an instrument for social discrimination. Here it is the disciplinary nature of this development that should be emphasised.

Again I quote REICHMANN:

"[...] es sind nicht die Sachbezüge, die zu einem zunehmend kalkülartigen Sprachhandeln führen, sondern es ist die soziale Notwendigkeit richtigen Sprechens und vor allem Schreibens, das Gewicht kultivierter Handhabung der Sprache nach allen Regeln der Kunst, das dahinter steht. Der gesellschaftliche Zwang, durch die Art seines Sprechens seine Bildung [zu] erkennen zu geben, kann im Extremfall wichtiger werden, als sich klar auszudrücken." (REICHMANN 1990:154)⁴

Assuming, however, that the verticalisation of the spectrum of variations which marks the transition to the New High German period led to the selection of one single variation accepted as norm as opposed to the negatively labelled competitors, from now on referred to as "incorrect", it is essential to be able to prove two theses:

1. that all other variations which did not assert themselves were just as functional and not at all "diffuse", which implies that there are no functional reasons for the acceptance of the New High German variation as norm, and
2. that there has to be a hierarchical evaluation of the variations in contemporary linguistic-theoretical writings and grammars which refer to several variations, i.e. at least a negative labelling of the variations not accepted as norm as diatopically or diastratically labelled units.

My aim in the following is to provide such evidence taking as example the adjective declension in the first half of the 18th century. Starting with thesis 1:

I have undertaken an exemplary study of literary texts, i.e. novels, weekly journals and non-fictional prose texts from those linguistic landscapes in which it is generally agreed that the

⁴ ≈ "[...] it is not only the contexts which lead increasingly to calculated linguistic activity, it is the social necessity to speak and, above all, to write correctly, the importance of using the language in a cultivated fashion while and to the greatest possible extent that underlies it. In extreme cases, the social pressure to display one's level of education in one's manner of speaking can become more important than expressing oneself clearly."

New High German standard language developed, i.e. the east-central and northern German linguistic regions. Studies by WIESINGER and REIFFENSTEIN suggest that such texts point to a development with which other linguistic landscapes later aligned themselves. The texts were chosen according to their circulation figures and distribution in order to guarantee that, on the basis of their reception, they themselves played a pioneering model role. The study covered 2802 attributive adjectives in 16 texts. Although the status of research would suggest that in exactly these types of text and in exactly these linguistic regions no, or at most isolated, variations would occur, the analysis showed that over the whole period from 1700 to 1750 the following variations could be expected, and to no small extent:

I.

1. Strong declension after a determining unit, particularly after possessive pronouns and after *kein-* before substantives in nominative/accusative plural, e.g.:

die äusserliche Sinne
diese so beherzte und barbarische Männer
meine brünstige Seuffzer
keine sichere Kennzeichen

2. Strong declension in *-(e)s* in genitive singular masculine/neuter, e.g.:

heutiges Tages
gutes Muthes

3. Weak declension after preposition/no article before substantives in dative singular masculine/neuter, e.g.:

in guten Wohlstande
mit gehorsamsten Respecte
von teutschen Geblüthe

4. Nominal (weak or mixed) declension after preceding genitive attribute, e.g.:

zwischen meinem Bruder und des Gouverneurs ältesten Tochter
bey deren nähern Ankunfft
in deren einmahl gefassten störrischen Meynung
ich erwarte Dero beyderseitigen Versicherungen

5. Alternating declension strong–weak with two or more adjective attributes following preposition/no article before substantives in dative singular (mostly masculine/neuter) or genitive plural, e.g.:

in vollkommenem Segelfertigen Stande
von geringerer äusserlichen Würde
gedachter grammatischen Regeln
einiger chymischen Geheimnisse
voller sonderlicher etymologischen Entdeckungen

6. The use of the uninflected form in nominative/accusative singular neuter in mixed declension to be expected in New High German, e.g.:

sein eigen Leben
ein frostig Compliment
vor ein wichtiger Gerichte

For brevity, I wish to make only fleeting reference to the grammatical functionality of the variant examples.

First, it can be seen that the variations shown tend to occur either in fixed paradigmatic positions, e.g. nominative/accusative plural or in typical morphosyntactic situations, e.g. following preceding genitive attribute or following preceding genitive pronoun of address.

To point 1:

Case group differentiation is responsible for the use of the variations given in point 1 which, incidentally, according to the literature, should not occur at all in east central German. Here nominative and accusative are separated from genitive and dative. A separation of the case groups by different inflection endings thus consistently occurs in all types of declension, and therefore also here in the plural of the weak and mixed declensions.

To point 2:

The old strong declension in the genitive singular masculine/neuter ending in *-(e)s* after no article/preposition, which persists today in the case of most pronouns and *ein(-es)*, competes throughout the whole of the 18th century with the weak *-en* ending. The case continues to be indicated if the weak ending is used since the substantives of the strong declension, masculine and neuter, have the genitive inflection. Due to the monoflection of a group-inflecting nominal,

the redundancy of a double genitive marking is apparently removed in New High German and the forms of the nominal become unequivocal. If the principle of monoflection asserts itself here within a group-inflecting nominal, the issue arises of why certain pronouns and the indefinite article are omitted from this process of change.

To point 3:

The weak declension in the dative singular masculine/neuter is interpreted in the literature as either use of the accusative or as assimilation following an unstressed vowel. Since the accusative in the neuter is indicated by *-es* and not by *-en*, an accusative could only occur in the masculine. Besides, it has also to be considered that the weak dative ending, for which there is evidence dating back as far as the 12th century, suddenly becomes productive towards the end of the 17th century. My view is that we are also concerned here with case group differentiation. A similar phenomenon to that of the genitive singular, which moves from the strong to the weak ending, can be seen in the case of the dative singular. While in the case of the genitive, however, the *-(e)s* inflection of the substantive, a clear case-marker, has asserted itself as obligatory since the 16th century, the dative *-e* was never consistently used, not even in the dialects in which the apokope never took place.

To point 4:

The frequent occurrence of the weak declension following genitive attributes is an example for the influence of the morphosyntactic environment on the selection of declension type. The trigger for the weak declension can be a semantic equation of genitive attribute and possessive pronoun but also the fact that a definite article is intended, thus demanding the weak declension (e.g.: *zwischen meinem Bruder und der des Gouverneurs ältesten Tochter* in the sense of *der ältesten Tochter des Gouverneurs*). Thus AICHINGER in his *Versuch einer teutschen Sprachlehre* of 1753 expressly states that, given a preceding genitive attribute, the article of the following substantive is omitted.

To point 5:

The evidence for alternating strong–weak declension shows that the declension change occurs mainly in the dative singular and genitive plural following no article/preposition, i.e. remains limited to particular cases. The adjectives are declined according to the strong-weak pattern, while the weak-strong pattern, on the other hand, is not to be expected in the texts studied. The 19th century offers the explanation that the second adjective in such cases forms a 'comprehensive term' with the substantive, and is therefore a case of non-equation or subordination of the first adjective to the second. The indication of syntactical properties such

as the reasoning that an *and* could not be placed between the two adjectives or the sequence of the adjectives could not be changed without changing the meaning ultimately also has recourse to semantic characteristics. However, this neither explains the fact the alternation only occurs in particular cases nor the occurrence of equal adjectives with alternating declension as in *von geistlichem oder weltlichen Inhalt*. Here it is much more likely that a preceding first adjective in the dative singular masculine/neuter or in the genitive plural replaces the grammatical determinant of the nominal brace construction. The endings *-em* in the singular and *-er* in the plural represent 'remarkable' forms in the inventory of inflections which lead to a strong indication of the case and therefore do not have to be repeated with the second adjective. In this case a monoflection triggered by strong case indication is to be assumed, whereby the determining prepositive marking of the first adjective with subsequent weakly inflected adjective is structured similarly to the series of a nominal brace construction with definite article, weakly declined adjective and reference substantive.

To point 6:

The use of the uninflected form is restricted to the nominative and accusative singular neuter with expected mixed declension during the period studied. The uninflected form occurs in those positions in which only the strong ending *-es* appears in later New High German following uninflected indefinite article, possessive pronoun or negative article. The uninflected form in such cases thus assumes a systematically determining function in the neuter. It can therefore be concluded that the thesis to be found in PIIRAINEN (1980:601) that uninflected adjectives were still "often" used in the 18th century is to be restricted and specified with regard to the morphosyntactic environment and the choice of case.

There is a further argument besides the grammatical functionality already stated: it is still possible to find evidence today of many of these variations which, in my opinion, can be justified by precisely their functionality:

II.

Strong declension after a determining unit, particularly after possessive pronouns and after *kein-* before substantives in nominative/accusative plural, still occurs today, especially when spatially separated:

"Bis zur Jahrhundertmitte, als an den Universitäten zwar schon die Deutschsprachigkeit und der Rationalismus dominierten, sich aber noch keine auf

Emanzipation drängende Impulse bemerkbar machten, wurde das Feld des <Deutschen>, um es bewußt allgemein zu formulieren, weitherhin von Stilistik und Regelpoetik bestimmt." (HERMAND 1994:21)

2. DARSKI (1979) and MEINERT (1989) place strong declension in *-(e)s* in genitive singular masculine/neuter in the strong declension paradigm if weak masculines and neuters follow, i.e. for example, in the case of *Ahnen, Boten, Fürsten, Menschen* and *Guten*. They believe that the old strong ending of the adjective here should assume the determination in number, case and genus.
4. Nominal declension following preceding genitive attribute occurs today particularly after *dessen* and *deren*:
"Schließlich, dies ergibt sich aus dem Vorhergehenden, geht der Kulturpatriotismus eine enge Verbindung mit der Puritas ein, mit deren unterschiedlichen Gewichtung in den einzelnen Disziplinen und Texten auch sein Stellenwert bestimmt ist [...]" (HUBER 1984:242)
5. Alternating declension strong–weak in the case of two or more adjective attributes following preposition/no article before substantives in dative singular or genitive plural:
"Anders als in schriftsprachlichen Zeugnissen der Gegenwart, in denen der Gebrauch einer einheitlichen Standardsprache nach allgemeinverbindlichen Regeln selbstverständlich ist, findet man im 18. Jahrhundert häufig doublette Formen von gleichem funktionalen Wert." (SCHMIDT-WILPERT 1980:411)
"Trotz mancher aufklärerischen Tendenzen war daher bis kurz nach 1800 die Situation im Hinblick auf den universitären Unterricht deutscher Literatur weiterhin recht desolat." (HERMAND 1994:26)

The evidence for the second thesis, which is meant to support my assumption of verticalisation, is the hierarchical evaluation of the variations in the linguistic-theoretical writings of the period under study, i.e. the negative labelling of the variations not accepted as norm as diatopically or diastratically labelled units. For this purpose, I have studied the statements of 23 language theorists made between 1641 and 1754.

In most cases the grammarians make use of traditional evaluation criteria, the origins of which lie in rhetoric. The typical arguments refer to euphony, analogy, *consuetudo* (i.e. to common use) or to the *auctoritas* or *vetustas* (that is, the language as used by established writers). Other labels such as "unrechter" (incorrect), or "sehr unrechter Gebrauch" (very incorrect use),

"Unachtsamkeit" (negligence), "Fehler" (mistake), "Hauptfehler" (main mistake), "noch schlimmerer Fehler" (even worse mistake), "falsch" (wrong) as well as the dialectical indication in GOTTSCHED "in gewissen Landschaften, die man daran erkennen kann" (in certain landscapes which can thus be recognised) or in TSCHERNING the reproof of BUCHNER's statement that a variation is "plebejisch" (plebeian) i.e. "pöbelhaft" (vulgar) are however also to be found, in most cases without any further justification. Such judgements grow in number over the period studied. Descriptive depictions shift further and further into the background of normative regulations. The statements of language theorists thus support the process of verticalisation while not, however, as one might expect, giving any information regarding the selection criteria of the variation hierarchisation. Nor are the language theorists, therefore, able to give any functional reasons as to why a particular variation was preferred over others. In most cases patterns of argumentation suggest an evaluation a posteriori, which leads to the assumption that, although grammarians accept the verticalisation process with their codification, they do not trigger it themselves. This is also supported by the fact that it was not possible to make any statement concerning point 3. On the other hand, however, an extensive discussion was held on the strong declension following definite article of the type *der roter Adler* for which I was no longer able to find any evidence in the texts studied. Interestingly, the most pejorative statements to be found concern precisely those variations which were no longer common in the period studied, e.g. it is "hartlautend" (sounds hard), "unangenehm" (unpleasant), "unrecht" (incorrect), "geflikkt" (patched up) and it "beleidige die Ohren" (offends the ear), it is "niedersächsisch" (lower Saxon), "märkisch" (from the March) and "schlesisch" (Silesian), it is "absurd", "gegen die Regel" (contrary to the rule), "gegen die Vorschrift" (contrary to regulation) and one grants "selbst den Poeten dergleichen Freyheit nicht mehr" (not even the poets such licence any more).

If it is now possible to assume, as my evidence shows, a reduction of functional variations from the Early New High German period onwards, it can be concluded that in order to make adequate use of diachronic grammar, it is not possible to employ a synchronic grammar model of the contemporary language. On the contrary, we have to develop a synchronic grammar model of a historical language step which also takes into consideration the functional possibilities no longer available in New High German. First, however, we need the support of far more comprehensive empirical studies than those performed to date.

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