

On the Origin of Adjective Dualism in Germanic

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In this presentation I address the problem of the origin of adjective dualism in Germanic. In older Germanic languages adjectives can be ‘strong’ (indefinite) or ‘weak’ (definite), a difference in inflection justified by the adjective occurring in an indefinite or definite context.

Gothic

STRONG	Sg.Dat.Neut. god-amma waurstwa ‘good work’
WEAK	Sg.Dat.Neut. þamma god-in andahaita ‘that/the good profession’

Here the definite context involves using an obligatory definite determiner (normally a demonstrative pronoun) with the weak form of the adjective; the strong form normally occurs alone.

No satisfactory explanation has ever been proposed to explain the origin of this system. Hypothesis: in (Pre-)Proto-Germanic every attributive adjective form must have been preceded by an artroid (a kind of fake article), which has been preserved in the form of a demonstrative pronoun with definite adjectives (Gothic Sg.Dat.Neut. þamma **god-in** andahaita ‘that/the good profession’). In indefinite adjectives, the artroid has survived in the shape of a pronominal suffix (Sg.Dat.Neut. **god-amma** waurstwa ‘good work’). This is supported by both internal Germanic and comparative evidence. Thus the adjective in Germanic derives from the Indo-European nominal (no distinction having been made between adjectives and nouns in the Indo-European proto-language); the pre-posed determiner with weak adjectives is to be seen as a factor which polarised the nominal thus turning it into a modifier and so played a role in the development of the adjective as a lexical class in Germanic.