

# A Corpus-Based Study of Adnominal Adjectives in Old English

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## I Introduction

It is well known that the position of adnominal adjectives in Old English (henceforth, OE) is rather flexible in the sense of either preceding or following the head noun; in Present-day English (henceforth, PE), by contrast, it is only some restricted types that can modify the head noun postnominally. In the adnominal adjectives in PE, there are two uses of adjectives: the attributive use modifies a noun and restricts the target of its reference, as shown in (1), while the predicative use describes the nature and state of the subject or the object as a complement, as shown in (2).

- (1) a *pretty* girl / *popular* movies
- (2) This flower is *beautiful*. / This made him *happy*.

It is often said that the difference between attributive and predicative adjectives comes from their interpretation as individual-level vs. stage-level properties, i.e. as inherent or enduring properties vs. accidental or temporary properties. Fundamentally, the attributive adjective appears before, and not after, the noun.

- (3) \*a girl *pretty* / \*movies *popular*

According to Quirk et al. (1985) and Huddleston and Pullum (2002), the adjectives appearing after the noun are limited to cases accompanying the complement or including affixes such as *a-* or *-able*.

- (4) a. an actor *suitable for the part*
- b. any man *alive* / the remedies *available*

Also, adjectives follow the noun when the noun is a compound pronoun (e.g., *something*,

*somebody, someone, anything, anybody, anyone, everything, everybody, everyone, nobody, nothing*), as illustrated in (5).

- (5) a. Something *bad* must have happened to him.  
 b. There is nothing *wrong* with your opinion.

In contrast, the position of adnominal adjectives in OE is said to be relatively free, with the adjectives appearing either before or after the noun, as illustrated in the examples (6).

- (6) a. Forhwon ne ræcst þu us þone **hwitan**<sub><wk></sub> hlaf  
 why not give you us the white loaf  
 “Why do you not give us the white loaf (of bread)?” (Bede 2, 5.112.10)
- b. Ða gemette he gebeoras **bliðe**<sub><str></sub> æt þam huse  
 then met he companions merry at the house  
 “then he met his merry companions at the house” (ÆLS (Oswald), 225)
- c. Ða easternan tungelwitegan gesawon **niwne**<sub><str></sub> steorran **beorhtne**<sub><str></sub>  
 the eastern astrologers saw new star bright  
 “the oriental astrologers saw a new bright star” (ÆCHom I, 7 (234.71))  
 (cf. Haumann (2010: 53))

The adjective *hwitan* “white” in (6a) precedes the head noun *hlaf* “loaf” and the adjectives *bliðe* “merry” and *beorhtne* “bright” follow the nouns *gebeoras* “companions” and *steorran* “star” in (6b) and (6c), respectively. Adnominal adjectives in the prenominal position inflect weak if preceded by a demonstrative or a possessive pronoun, as shown in (6a), but they inflect strong without determiners, as in (6b). Adnominal adjectives also inflect strong in the postnominal position, as illustrated in (6c).

Other types of postnominal adjectives include adjective phrases and the *and*-adjective construction.

- (7) hwilum cyle þone **grimmestan**  
 sometimes cold the grimmest  
 “sometimes the grimmest cold” (HomS 17 (BIHo 5) 136)



be maintained.

The organization of the paper is as follows. Section 2 outlines properties of adnominal adjectives in OE and PE. Section 3 briefly reviews previous studies, and Section 4 provides the data on the distribution of postnominal adjectives collected from the YCOE. Section 5 concludes this paper.

## II Properties of Adnominal Adjectives in OE and PE

This section discusses the properties of adnominal adjectives in OE and PE. We define the attributive and predicative interpretations of adnominal adjectives in Section 2.1, and provide a brief overview of the inflectional types of adnominal adjectives in OE in Section 2.2.

### 2.1 Syntactic Position and Properties

According to Bolinger (1967) and Kageyama (2009), an adjective has two distinct meanings related to its position: the adjectives in prenominal position are considered as attributive and those in postnominal position as predicative, as illustrated in (9).

- (9) a. the *responsible* man  
 b. the man *responsible*

The meaning of (9a) is unambiguously “trustworthy,” which expresses the man’s inherent, enduring nature; on the other hand, the meaning of (9b) is unambiguously “to blame,” which expresses a temporal, accidental state of the man. Kageyama (2009) argues that the distinction between attributive and predicative depends on the presence or absence of development over time. In other words, the attributive meaning does not change or develop with the lapse of time since it is an inherent, enduring property of the thing that an adjective modifies. Therefore, attributive adjectives cannot be modified by adverbial phrases such as *from 2005 to 2008* or *for some time*, as illustrated in (10).

- (10) a. \*John was intelligent from 2005 to 2008.  
 b. \*Keiko had long legs for some time. (Kageyama (2009: 47))

On the other hand, the predicative meaning changes or develops with the lapse of time since it expresses a temporal, accidental state. Kageyama (2009) also argues that the attributive adjective functions to categorize the noun into subtype or another type of

group. Thus, it is assumed in this paper that, adopting Kageyama's (2009) definition, the distinction between attributive and predicative interpretations of adjectives depends on (i) the presence or absence of development over time and (ii) the categorizing function of the noun. It is also assumed that this definition of the interpretation of adjectives is valid in OE.

## 2.2 Inflectional Types of Adnominal Adjectives in OE

Adjectives in OE agree with the noun they modify in number, gender and case, exhibiting strong or weak inflectional endings, as summarized in Table 1.

Table 1. *Declension of OE Adjectives*

		(a) <i>declension of OE strong adjectives</i>			(b) <i>declension of OE weak adjectives</i>		
		masc	neut	fem	masc	neut	fem
nom.	sg.	-	-	-/-u	-a	-e	-e
acc.	sg.	-ne	-	-e	-an	-e	-an
gen.	sg.	-es	-es	-re	-an	-an	-an
dat.	sg.	-um	-um	-re	-an	-an	-an
nom.	pl.	-e	-/-u	-a/-e	-an	-an	-an
acc.	pl.	-e	-/-u	-a/-e	-an	-an	-an
gen.	pl.	-ra	-ra	-ra	-ra/-ena	-ra/-ena	-ra/-ena
dat.	pl.	-um	-um	-um	-um	-um	-um

(Fischer (2001: 250))

Adnominal adjectives inflect weak if preceded by a demonstrative or a possessive pronoun, while they inflect strong in the absence of such determiners. Here are some examples from the YCOE.

- (11) a. *niwe*<sub><str></sub> *mona* (-*definite*)  
 new moon (colefri, Leof: 51.56)
- b. *ða ilcan*<sub><wk></sub> *wisan* (+*definite*)  
 the same manner (codocu2, Ch\_1510\_ [Rob\_6]: 14.8)

In (11a), there is no determiner, so the adjective *niwe* inflects strong; on the other hand, the adjective *ilcan* in (11b) exhibits strong inflection in co-occurrence with the demonstrative *ða*. According to Fischer (2001), the postnominal adjectives are almost invariably adjectives of the so-called strong declension, as illustrated (12).

- (12) ... þam se fæder becwæð gersuman *unateallendlice*<sub><str></sub>  
 ... to-whom the father left treasures uncountable  
 (cf. Fischer (2001: 250))

In the following section, we will review Fischer (2000, 2001) and Haumann (2010), which take a different approach to the properties of adnominal adjectives.

### III Previous Studies

Associating inflection with interpretation, Fischer (2000, 2001) claims that the strong or weak inflection of adjectives is iconically related to distinctions of definite or indefinite, attributive or predicative, given or new information and individual-level or stage-level. In other words, the weak adjective conveys given information and is individuating, whereas the strong adjective conveys new information and is generalizing. Fischer's (2000, 2001) claim is on the basis of Brunner (1962):

The weak forms are therefore individuating, in contrast to the generalizing strong forms. They are at first used to refer back to an already mentioned entity ... The weak form is therefore used attributively when a certain individual is described ... When the definite article was on the increase to characterize individual persons or things, then the weak form of the adjective continued to be used after it. This also explains why the likewise individuating comparative and superlative forms usually carry a weak inflection. (Brunner, translated in Fischer (2001: 253))

Brunner (1962) claims that the weak inflection of adjectives has a function to convey given information and is therefore attributive. Expanding Brunner's claim, Fischer (2000, 2001) argues that weak adjectives contrast with strong ones in that the latter provide new information; thus the weak/strong distinction of definite or indefinite, attributive or predicative, given or new information, and individual-level or stage-level.

Taking a different approach from Fischer (2000, 2001), Haumann (2010) argues that the distinction between prenominal and postnominal adjectives shows a strict division with respect to their properties shown in Table 2.

Table 2. *Properties of Prenominal and Postnominal Adjectives in OE*

Prenominal Adjectives	vs.	Postnominal Adjectives
strong/weak inflection		strong inflection
attributive		predicative
given information		new information
individual-level reading		stage-level reading
non-restrictive reading		restrictive reading

(Haumann (2010: 70))

According to Haumann (2010), the prenominal adjective is attributive and the postnominal is predicative. Thus, if we follow her hypothesis, a strong adjective appearing in the prenominal position must be attributive. Haumann provides the following examples as evidence for her claim.

- (13) Her cuom Port on Bretene & his ii suna Bieda & Mægla  
 here came Port into Britain and his two sons Bieda & Mægla  
 mid ii scipum on þære stowe þe is gecueden Portesmuþa  
 with two ships into the place that is called Portsmouth  
 & ofslogon anne **giongne**<sub><str></sub> Brettisc monnan, swiþe æþelne monnan  
 and killed one young British man very-much noble man  
 “In this year Port and his two sons, Bieda and Mægela, came to Britain  
 with two ships to a place that is called Portsmouth and they killed a  
 very noble young Briton.” (ChronA, 501.1)
- (14) se geara mid þone **ilcan**<sub><wk></sub> Ceaddan **iungne**<sub><str></sub> ... syndrig  
 who long-ago with that same Chad young separate  
 munuclif hæfdon  
 cloisters had  
 “who long ago, when Chad was young, had separate cloisters”  
 (LS 3 (Chad), 184)  
 (cf. Haumann (2010: 68))

According to Haumann (2010), the strong prenominal adjective *giongne* “young” in (13) does not provide additional or noteworthy information and receives individual-level interpretation, as opposed to the strong postnominal adjective *iungne* “young” in (14). Haumann (2010) argues that *giongne* in (13) expresses the inherent or characterizing properties of the nouns they modify; conversely, *iungne* in (14) does not characterize

*Ceaddan* but induces stage-level interpretation. This is because being young is not an inherent property of Chad, but it is a transient property that relates to Chad’s past.

However, if we take Kageyama’s (2009) definition above, the strong postnominal adjectives *iungne* in (14), like *giongne* in (13), must be attributive. That is, a young Chad (in his early days) exhibits man’s nature at that time, contrasting with the same Chad at the present moment. It can also be said that the adjective *young* categorizes Chad into another type of Chad. Also, as observed in the following section, there are various kinds of counterexamples to Haumann (2010) with adnominal attributive adjectives following the noun. Furthermore, Haumann (2010) does not discuss a sufficient number of examples, nor does she conduct an investigation employing a historical corpus. Her work does not, then, suffice to lead to the clear-cut distinction summarized in Table 2.

#### IV Data and Consideration

This section investigates adnominal adjectives in the postnominal position making use of the YCOE. It will be demonstrated that various kinds of attributive adjectives can occur postnominally in OE.

##### 4.1 Data from the YCOE

This section presents the data from the YCOE. I originally investigated the adjectives following the noun using the rather simple query shown in (15).

- (15) node: NP\*  
 query: (((NP\* idominates [1]N^\*)  
 AND (NP\* idominates [2]ADJ^\*))  
 AND ([1]N^\* iprecedes [2]ADJ^\*))

Due to the query in (15), I have collected only the adjectives following the noun, excluding adjective phrases or the *and*-adjective construction observed in (7) and (8). The results of the investigation are shown in Table 3.

Table 3. *Types of Adnominal Adjectives in Postnominal Position*

<i>full</i>	<i>-weard</i>	<i>self</i>	other types	exceptional	attributive or predicative	TOTAL
211	141	138	46	9	233	778

The nine examples of “exceptional” in Table 3 are the noun phrases where the genitive



nouns are followed by the adjective, which is in turn followed by the head noun, as shown in (16).

- (16) a. sumes oðeres godspelles  
           some other gospel  
           “another gospel” (cocathom2, ÆCHom\_II\_5: 47.187.999)
- b. eall þet hæðena folc  
           all the heathen people  
           “all the heathen people” (cochronE, ChronE: 1086.151.2958)

In the following subsections, we will discuss each item in Table 3 in detail.

### 1) *Full*-Type Adjective

The adjective *full* is the most frequent type of adjective except the attributive or predicative adjective; that is, 211 out of 778 examples include *full*. Most of them are followed by a genitive complement, as shown in (17).

- (17) a. bydene *fulle cealdes wætres*  
           barrel full cold water  
           “a barrel full of cold water” (colaece, Lch\_II: 41.1.11.3926)
- b. mittan *fulne huniges*  
           measuring cup full of-honey  
           “a cup full of honey” (coducu2, Ch\_1197: 9.5)

Likewise, Fischer (2001) argues that the most frequent adjective to occur postnominally with a complement is the adjective *full*. Also, Fischer claims that the use of a complement makes clear that the adjective is not attributive, and examples such as these are contrasted with examples like (18).

- (18) and besætt þone castel abutan mid swiðe mycele  
           and besieged the castle all-around with very large  
           here *full six weeks*  
           army [for] full six weeks  
           “and the castle was besieged all-around with a large army  
           for six full weeks” (Chron2.1087.54)

In (18), the adjective *full* is in the prenominal position without a complement, conveying attributive meaning as it still does today. However, I have found examples of the adjective *full* standing alone in the postnominal position as follows.

- (19) a. þreo *winter ful*  
 three winters full (cobede, Bede\_4: 11.288.3.2905)
- b. seofon *dagas fulle*  
 seven days full (cootest, Gen: 50.10.2179)

Notice that *full* in (19) has no complement and the head nouns are of the same kind as provided by Fischer in (18), namely, nominals about time, term, or period. I also found *year*, *month*, and *day* as the head nouns in 16 of the examples. Generally, the interpretation of *full* in (18) and (19) should be attributive, with the same meaning as “complete,” “entire,” or “whole.” Examples such as (18) and (19) amount to 16 out of 211 while the rest of them are the examples with complements such as those in (17).

It might be said that the 16 examples like (19) are some special case of use since the head nouns are limited to nominals about time, term, or period though they are not allowed in PE. Further, all instances of *full* in the examples above inflect strong, which presents clear counter-evidence to Fischer (2000, 2001) and Haumann (2010). Neither analyses account for a strong postnominal adjective with attributive interpretation.

## 2) *Weard*-Type Adjective

According to Fischer (2000, 2001), adjectives with *-weard* often appear in the postnominal position. Indeed, 141 examples are attested in my corpus investigation.

- (20) a. fīnoles wyrtruman *utewardra*  
 fennel root outward  
 “the outward parts of the roots of fennel” (colaece, Lch\_II\_ [2]: 14.1.1.2281)
- b. þæm lande *sudewardum*  
 the land southward  
 “the country in the south” (coorosiu, Or\_1: 1.15.31.273)

As illustrated in (20), an adjective with *-weard* exhibits a direction or a part of something; other examples of *-weard* from the corpus investigation are *innerweard* “inner,” *northweard* “northern, northward,” *upweard* “upper, upward,” etc. Following

Kageyama's (2009) definition, adjectives with *-weard* seem attributive since a direction or a part of something does not change or develop as times goes by, and the noun modified by the adjective identifies a particular referent from among a set of entities.

### 3) *Self*-Type Adjective

There are 138 examples of postnominal *self* attested in the YCOE. Some of them are provided in the followings.

- (21) a. ðone wisdom *selfne*  
the wisdom self  
“the wisdom itself” (cosolilo, Solil\_1: 44.8.560)
- b. se hælend *sylf*  
the savior himself  
“the savior himself” (coalcuin, Alc\_ [Warn\_35] : 132.105)

As is well known, this type of adjective can occur in the postnominal position in PE.

- (22) I met the manager himself.

According to Quirk et al. (1985), *himself* in (22) is used for emphasis, and is in an appositional relation to its antecedent. Likewise, it could be the case that *self* in the postnominal position was used for emphasis in OE.

### 4) Other Types of Adjective

Through the investigation using the YCOE, I found other types of postnominal adjectives which are apparent in OE, as shown in (23)-(26).

- (23) flæsc *genoh*  
flesh enough (cootest, Exod: 16.2.2992)
- (24) Fæder *ælmihþingne*  
father almighty (cobede, Bede\_2: 2.100.6.931)
- (25) þam lige *middan*  
the flame middle (coaelive, ÆLS\_ [Martin] : 877.6533)

- (26) ealle þing *fægere*  
 all things beautiful  
 “everything beautiful” (coaelhom, *ÆHom\_9*: 36.1322)

Forty-six of these examples are attested in the YCOE. It is probable that they present exceptions for some reason. They will be considered one by one in this section.

The example (23) includes the adjective *enough*, which can appear either prenominally or postnominally even in PE, as illustrated in (27).

- (27) a. I don't have *enough* apples.  
 b. I don't have apples *enough*.

It is often said that *enough* is normally put in the prenominal position, and it represents emphatic use when occurring in the postnominal position. The postnominal use of *enough* in OE is the same use as that in PE.

It seems that the adjective *almighty* in (24) often follows the head noun, co-occurring with nouns such as *God*, *Father*, and *Lord*, as shown in (28).

- (28) a. se *Ælmyhtiga* Hælend vs. *Ælmyhtig* Drihten  
 the almighty savior almighty lord  
 b. se *Ælmyhtiga* God vs. God *Ælmyhtig* (Mitchell (1985: 65-66))

It is interesting to point out that adjectives tend to appear in the postnominal position when the head noun is *demon* or *devil*, as observed in (29).

- (29) se deofol *dreorig*  
 the devil bloody (cocathom2, *ÆCHom\_II*, \_39.1: 294.237.6702)

It might be said that when the head noun represents something from outside the human realm, it may affect the positioning of adnominal adjectives.

The adjective *middle* in (25) can be of the same type as those with *-ward*; that is, they are adjectives exhibiting a direction or a part of something so that *middle* can be postnominal. I also found some interesting examples of *middle* attached by *-ward*.

- (30)      ða eaxe *middewearde*  
the ax middle  
“the middle part of the ax” (coboeth, Bo: 39.126.5.2501)

In the example (26), the head noun is a compound pronoun, which adjectives in PE obligatorily follow, as observed in (5), repeated here as (31).

- (31)      something *cold*

#### 5) Attributive and Predicative Adjectives

So far, we have discussed somewhat exceptional cases of the investigation. This section deals with genuine attributive adjectives collected from the YCOE. We now have 233 examples of either attributive or predicative postnominal adjectives. It will be shown that various kinds of attributive adjectives, which must be in the prenominal position in PE, take the postnominal position in OE.

In line with Fischer (2000, 2001) and Haumann (2010), I have found many examples of postnominal adjectives with the predicative interpretation in the corpus investigation, as illustrated in (32).

- (32) a. þone cyning *ungearone*  
the king unready (coorosiu, Or\_5: 4.118.11.2477)  
b. þysse ylcan wyrte seaw *wlæc*  
the each wort liquid tepid (coherbar, Lch\_I: 84.3.1350)

The adjective *ungearone* “unready” in (32a) and *wlæc* “tepid” in (32b) are predicative since the states described by them can easily change through the course of time. Due to limitation of space, I only provide some kinds of postnominal predicative adjectives attested in the YCOE.

- (33)      *gesewenlic* “visible” *wearm* “warm” *untrum* “sick” *gelic* “similar”

However, I also found many postnominal adjectives that must be attributive. Consider the following examples in (34).

- (34) a. *æenne heafodbeag gyldenne*  
 one crown golden (coboeth, Bo: 37.112.20.2222)
- b. *hæþenum mannum langbeardiscum*  
 heathen men Lombard (cogregdC, GDPref\_and\_3\_[C] : 27.232.9.3239)
- c. *hæwenne clað wylenne*  
 blue cloth woolen (colaece, Lch\_II¥[3] : 46.1.1.3966)
- d. *heora handa weorce dæghwamlice*  
 their hands work daily (cochdrul, ChrodR\_1: 17.22)

The adjectives *gyldenne* “golden” and *langbeardiscum* “Lombard” in (34a) and (34b) must be attributive, in accordance with Kageyama’s (2009) definition. To be more precise, *golden* expresses the inherent, enduring property of the crown, which distinguishes it from other crowns; *Lombard* also exhibits the man’s universal property, singling it out from a set of entities. The adjectives *wylenne* “woolen” and *dæghwamlice* “daily” in (34c) and (34d) must also be attributive since they are only used attributively in PE. Further, note that the adjectives in (34) show strong inflection. There exist 154 out of 233 such examples, and the number of the kind reaches 84, some of which I list here.

- (35) *þynne* “thin” *brad* “broad” *finiht* “finny” *unscilliht* “unshelled” *gimmisc* “geweled”  
*gylden* “golden” *heah* “high” *Englisc* “English” *Frencisc* “French” *willisc* “foreign”  
*yfel* “evil” *halig* “sacred” *god* “good” *geong* “young” *linen* “flaxen” *wyllen* “woolen”

The list (35) includes *thin*, *broad*, *finny*, *unshelled*, *jeweled*, etc. which exhibit the unchangeable form or shape of the nouns they modify, distinguishing them from other entities. I also found adjectives like *English* and *French*, which are used to express the entities’ affiliations, and *evil* and *good* which modify the inherent nature of the referents. Furthermore, *flaxen* and *woolen* are attested in the YCOE; they are widely considered to have only the attributive interpretation. Note that almost all adnominal adjectives in (35) and the others attested appear only in the prenominal position in PE.

Fischer (2001) argues that the adjective with the negative affix *un-* frequently occurs after the noun. Actually, 22 out of 154 examples and 14 out of 84 kinds of adjectives in my investigation include those with the affix *un-*, but there is still ample variety of adjectives. Fischer (2001) also introduces the example of the attributive adjective following the noun, as in (36).

- (36) ... heo cwæð ic eom þin þeowa *clæna*  
 ... she said I am your servant pure (Marg. 338)(cf. Fischer (2001: 266))

Fischer (2001) deals with the example (36) as idiomatic. However, if examples like (36) were idiomatic, we would have to assume that all the examples attested by the corpus research here, except those with *un-*, are idiomatic, which seems to be expecting rather too much.

In this section, we have observed that in OE the attributive adjectives can occur in the postnominal position and inflect strong. This obviously means that it is hard to make a clear-cut distinction among the syntactic position, the weak or strong inflection, and the attributive or predicative interpretation as argued by Fischer (2000, 2001) and Haumann (2010). In other words, attributive and predicative adjectives in OE indeed appear in both the prenominal and postnominal positions, which provide evidence against the claims by Fischer (2000, 2001) that adjectives inflecting strong are all predicative and by Haumann (2010) that postnominal adjectives are all predicative.

## V Conclusion

In this paper, I have investigated the adnominal adjectives using the YCOE, arguing that there are various kinds of attributive adjectives that stand alone in the postnominal position in OE. The results of the investigation here show that Fischer's (2000, 2001) and Haumann's (2010) claims that the attributive or predicative interpretation of adnominal adjectives can be associated either with the weak or strong inflection or with the prenominal or postnominal position cannot be maintained. It needs to account for why adnominal adjectives that freely appear after the noun in OE are positioned only before the noun in PE, but I leave this issue open for my future research.

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## A Corpus-Based Study of Adnominal Adjectives in Old English

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The purpose of this paper is to investigate the distribution of adnominal adjectives in Old English (OE) by using the *York-Toronto-Helsinki Parsed Corpus of Old English Prose* (the YCOE). It is widely known that the position of adnominal adjectives in OE is rather flexible in the sense of either preceding or following the head noun. In Present-day English, by contrast, it is only some restricted types that can modify the head noun postnominally.

Regarding adnominal adjectives, there are two uses of the adjectives: attributive and predicative. Fischer (2000, 2001) claims that the strong or weak inflection of adjectives is iconically related to distinctions of the attributive and predicative uses: adjectives inflecting strong are all predicative while those inflecting weak are attributive. On the other hand, Haumann (2010) argues that the distinction between prenominal and postnominal adjectives shows a strict division with respect to their properties: the prenominal adjective is attributive and the postnominal is predicative.

However, it is obvious from the investigation by the YCOE that there were various kinds of adnominal adjectives which inflect strong and have the attributive interpretation modify its head noun postnominally, which presents clear counter-evidence to Fischer (2000, 2001) and Haumann (2010). It is shown that the distribution of adnominal adjectives in OE is too complicated to make a clear-cut distinction among the syntactic position, the weak or strong inflection, and the attributive or predicative interpretation as argued by the previous studies.