The Reanalysis of Old French Nouns' Declension by Taking Classical Latin Nouns' Declension as a Pattern

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Abstract: In some flexional languages, the nouns' declension is a very important and difficult part to study. The noun's root and the flexional endings are the two most essential elements in declension. By these two elements, all forms of nouns in declension can be known. In classical Latin, the singular nominative and the singular genitive of nouns are written together in the dictionary to let the learners know the information about the two elements of declension. Nevertheless, in an old French dictionary, these two elements can not be known. This paper will reanalyse the old French nouns' declension by taking the classical Latin nouns' declension as a pattern to find out the regularity of declension and these two elements of declension in old French. This research will be helpful to grasp the old French nouns' declension and will help the learners understand better old French morphologically. Further, sufficiently understanding the declension of the old French nouns is helpful to read the manuscripts in old French. Moreover, this paper offers a new idea and thinking about compiling the old French dictionary in the part of noun.

Keywords: classical Latin, old French, declension, root of nouns, flexional ending

1. Introduction

The declension of nouns in classical Latin is considered as a very important part of learning classical Latin. For the reason that classical Latin is an extremely flexional language, the relationships between words are decided by the different cases rather than the orders of words [1]. The nouns of classical Latin possess the extremely complex flexional endings; thus, the nouns' declension of classical Latin is pretty difficult to acquire.

In the dictionary of classical Latin, the nouns are shown as this pattern (*rex regis, n.m. king*). The first part *rex* is singular nominative, the second part *regis* is singular genitive. The third part n.m. represent the gender, masculine noun. The fourth part is the meaning of the word. When a learner studies the nouns, all these four parts must be remembered. Only memorizing the singular nominative is not enough, because the root of the noun is in the singular genitive, and merely the ending of the singular genitive marks a noun belonging to which group of declension (The different groups of declension possess their own flexional endings). Only when the roots of the nouns and the declension's groups of the nouns are known, the other forms of cases can be known.

French evaluated from vulgar Latin, nevertheless, just like other contemporary Romance languages, the declension of nouns has completely disappeared in contemporary French. Although

the nouns' declension has already not existed in contemporary French, the disparition of nouns' declension is a gradual process. The declension of nouns still exists in old French.

Comparing with the nouns' declension of classical Latin, even vulgar Latin, the nouns' declension of old French has been much more simplified, however, the roots of nouns and the groups of declension in old French cannot be directly found by the dictionary just like classical Latin. It seems that the declension of nouns in old French is more chaotic than classical Latin, because old French can be considered as the middle status from Latin to contemporary French. This chaos of nouns' declension in old French causes some difficulties during the process of studying old French and reading some medieval documents in old French.

In order to directly obtain the information about the nouns' roots and the groups of declension when a new old French noun is learnt, this paper will research the nouns' declension of old French by taking the nouns' declension of classical Latin as a pattern to find out the regularities of old French nouns' declension.

2.   Literature Review

2.1.   The Classical Latin Nouns' Declension

The grammatical regularities of classical Latin nouns' declension were firstly summarized by the ancient Grecs. The classical Latin nouns possess three genders: masculine, feminine, neutral. The classical Latin nouns have seven cases: nominative, accusative, genitive, dative, ablative, vocative, locative (The locative is not frequently used, and the form of vocative is the same as the form of nominative except in the second declension group of masculine singular nouns, thus merely the endings of six cases must be remembered). The classical Latin nouns are classified into five groups according to the endings of singular genitive [2-4]. Each group possesses their own endings of declension.

2.1.1. The First Group of Declension

The first group of declension can be considered as the easiest declension in classical Latin. Most of the nouns in this group are feminine. The ending of the singular genitive is -ae, thus all the nouns of which the singular genitive ending is -ae belong to the first declension. (see Table 1.)

e.g. rosa rosae, n.f. rose.

Table 1: The first declension.

	S	P
N	ros-a	ros-ae
Acc	ros-am	ros-ās
G	ros-ae	ros-ārum
D	ros-ae	ros-īs
Abl	ros-ā	ros-īs

Note: 1. S: singular. P: plural. N: nominative. Acc: accusative. G: genitive. D: dative. Abl: ablative.
2. A line on the vowel represents a long vowel.

2.1.2. The Second Group of Declension

The nouns in this group are masculine and neutral. The ending of the singular genitive is -ī. (see Table 2.)

e.g. amicus amicī, n.m. friend.
puer puerī, n.m. boy.
ager agrī, n.m. field.
bellum bellī, n.n. war.

Table 2: The second declension.

	Masculine		Neutral	
	S	P	S	P
N	amic-us puer ager	amic-ī puer-ī agr-ī	bell-um	bell-a
Acc	amic-um puer-um agr-um	amic-ōs puer-ōs agr-ōs	bell-um	bell-a
G	amic-ī puer-ī agr-ī	amic-ōrum puer-ōrum agr-ōrum	bell-ī	bell-ōrum
D	amic-ō puer-ō agr-ō	amic-īs puer-īs agr-īs	bell-ō	bell-īs
Abl	amic-ō puer-ō agr-ō	amic-īs puer-īs agr-īs	bell-ō	bell-īs

2.1.3. The Third Group of Declension

The third group of declension is the most complex declension in classical Latin. This group possesses all the genders: masculine, feminine, neutral. The ending of the singular genitive is -is. (see Table 3.)

e.g. rex regis, n.m. king.
soror sororis, n.f. sister.
flumen fluminis n.n. river.

Table 3: The third declension.

	Masculine, Feminine		Neutral	
	S	P	S	P
N	rex soror	reg-ēs soror-ēs	flumen	flumin-a
Acc	reg-em soror-em	reg-ēs soror-ēs	flumen	flumin-a
G	reg-is soror-is	reg-um soror-um	flumin-is	flumin-um
D	reg-ī soror-ī	reg-ibus soror-ibus	flumin-ī	flumin-ibus
Abl	reg-e soror-e	reg-ibus soror-ibus	flumin-e	flumin-ibus

Note: This table does not show the declension of the words with -i- stem.

2.1.4. The Fourth Group of Declension

This group also possesses all the genders. The ending of the singular genitive is -ūs. (see Table 4.)
 e.g. adventus adventūs, n.m. arrival.
 manus manūs, n.f. hand.
 cornū cornūs, n.n. cor.

Table 4: The fourth declension.

	Masculine, Feminine		Neutral	
	S	P	S	P
N	advent-us man-us	advent-ūs man-ūs	corn-ū	corn-ua
Acc	advent-um man-um	advent-ūs man-ūs	corn-ū	corn-ua
G	advent-ūs man-ūs	advent-uum man-uum	corn-ūs	corn-uum
D	advent-uī man-uī	advent-ibus man-ibus	corn-ū	corn-ibus
Abl	advent-ū man-ū	advent-ibus man-ibus	corn-ū	corn-ibus

2.1.5. The Fifth Group of Declension

All the nouns in this group are feminine except two words: *diēs diēī, n.m. day. meridiēs meridiēī, n.m. noon.* The ending of the singular genitive is *-eī (ēī).* (see Table 5.)
    e.g. diēs diēī, n.m. day.

Table 5: The fifth declension.

	S	P
N	di-ēs	di-ēs
Acc	di-em	di-ēs
G	di-ēī	di-ērum
D	di-ēī	di-ēbus
Abl	di-ē	di-ēbus

2.2. The Old French Nouns' Declension

From Latin to old French, all the neutral nouns became masculine nouns or feminine nouns and all the functions of genitive, dative, ablative were replaced by the accusative or other prepositions, thus in the nouns of old French, two genders have been conserved: masculine and feminine, two cases have been conserved [5,6]. These two cases in French traditional terms are cas sujet (subject case) and cas régime (governed case). Some English-writing authors often use the nominative and oblique, some prefer to use the subject case and object case to describe these two cases of old French [7,8]. As for the groups of declension, each gender possesses three kinds of declension.

2.2.1. Masculine Nouns

a). The first declension (see Table 6.)
    e.g. murs, n.m. wall.

Table 6: The first declension.

	S	P
CS	mur-s	mur-ø
CR	mur-ø	mur-s

Note: CS: cas sujet. CR: cas régime.

b) The second declension (see Table 7.)
e.g. pere, n.m. father.

Table 7: The second declension.

	S	P
CS	pere-ø	pere-ø
CR	pere-ø	pere-s

c). The third declension (see Table 8.)
e.g. ber, n.m. baron.

Table 8: The third declension.

	S	P
CS	ber-ø	baron-ø
CR	baron-ø	baron-s

2.2.2. Feminine Nouns

a). The first declension (see Table 9.)
e.g. rose, n.f. rose

Table 9: The first declension.

	S	P
CS	rose-ø	rose-s
CR	rose-ø	rose-s

b). The second declension (see Table 10.)
e.g. flors, n.f. flower

Table 10: The second declension.

	S	P
CS	flor-s	flor-s
CR	flor-ø	flor-s

c) The third declension (see Table 11.)
e.g. suer, n.f. sister.

Table 11: The third declension.

	S	P
CS	suer-ø	soror-s
CR	soror-ø	soror-s

3. Analysis

This paper will reanalyze the old French nouns' declension by taking the classical Latin nouns' declension as a pattern. The old French masculine nouns possess three declension groups: group 1 (M1), group 2 (M2), group 3 (M3). The feminine nouns also possess three declension groups: group 1 (F1), group 2 (F2), group 3 (F3) [9,10].

During the evolution from classical Latin to old French, all the flexional endings disappeared except the -s in the endings. Thus the -s became the unique flexional ending in old French nouns [11,12]. (1. The -x is just like the -s in some nouns. 2. If the root of noun is ended by -t-, when the flexional ending -s is added, the -t- and the -s will be combinated as -z.)

In old French nouns' declension, merely the nouns of M3 and F3 possess two roots, the root (R0) in singular nominative, and the root (R) in other cases.

For the masculine nouns, -s exist in all plural CR, only exist in singular CS in the first declension. For the feminine nouns, -s exist in all plural CS and CR, merely exist in singular CS in the second declension. (see Table 12.)

Table 12: The roots and endings.

		S	P			S	P
M1	CS	R-s	R-ø	F1	CS	R-ø	R-s
	CR	R-ø	R-s		CR	R-ø	R-s
M2	CS	R-ø	R-ø	F2	CS	R-s	R-s
	CR	R-ø	R-s		CR	R-ø	R-s
M3	CS	R0-ø	R-ø	F3	CS	R0-ø	R-s
	CR	R-ø	R-s		CR	R-ø	R-s

In classical Latin, the flexional endings of the genitive marks that the nouns belong to which declension groups. Nevertheless, none of the four forms (CS, CR in singular and plural) of old French nouns can mark the declension groups.

Classical Latin and old French, both of them possess two roots of noun (one root in singular nominative, one root in other cases) in some declension groups.

The root of noun and the declension group (different groups possess their own flexional endings) are the two most important parts of the nouns' declension. Therefore, the singular nominative and the singular genitive are shown together in the classical Latin dictionary. By remembering together these two cases, the whole forms of noun can be known. The old French dictionary can imitate the classical Latin dictionary. By memorizing the singular CS (CSS) and the singular CR (CRS), the root of noun and the declension group can be known.

Pattern of classical Latin: singular nominative, singular genitive, gender, meaning.

Pattern of old French: CSS, CRS, gender, meaning.

3.1. Masculine Nouns

R-s, R

e.g. murs, mur, n.m. wall.

If the ending of CSS is s, and the CRS has no ending, this noun belongs to the first declension group. The CRS is the noun's root.

R, R

e.g. pere, pere, n.m. father.

If both of the CSS and the CRS have no endings, this noun belongs to the second declension group. The CRS is the noun's root.

R0, R

e.g. ber, baron, n.m. baron.

If both of the CSS and the CRS have no endings, and the forms of the CSS and the CRS are different, this noun belongs to the third declension group. The CRS is the noun's root.

3.2. Feminine Nouns

R, R

e.g. rose, rose, n.f. rose.

If both of the CSS and the CRS have no endings, this noun belongs to the first declension group. The CRS is the noun's root.

R-s, R

e.g. flors, flor, n.f. flower.

If the ending of CSS is s, and the CRS has no ending, this noun belongs to the second declension group. The CRS is the noun's root.

R0, R

e.g. suer, seror, n.f. sister.

If both of the CSS and the CRS have no endings, and the forms of the CSS and the CRS are different, this noun belongs to the third declension group. The CRS is the noun's root.

3.3. Summary

a.   Whatever in masculine nouns or in feminine nouns, if CSS and CRS have no endings, and their forms are different, this noun belongs to the third declension.

b. If CSS and CRS have no endings, for the masculine nouns, it is the second declension, but for the feminine nouns, it is the first declension.

c. If CSS has ending s, however, CRS has no ending, for the masculine nouns, it is the first declension, but for the feminine nouns, it is the second declension.

d. CRS is always the noun's root.

4. Conclusion

Old French can be considered as a language in the evolution process from Latin to contemporary French, thus old French conserved and meanwhile lost some flexional characteristics of Latin. For the nouns' declension, the nouns' root and the flexional endings are the two most important elements. Different declension groups possess their own flexional endings; therefore, the nouns' root and the declension group are two essential information about declension. When a learner studies classical Latin nouns, remembering the singular nominative form is not enough, because the information about the nouns' root and the declension group cannot be known in the singular nominative. Only by memorizing together the singular nominative and the singular genitive, can the nouns' root and the declension group be known, further, all forms of nouns in declension be known. As for old French, the information about the nouns' root and declension group can also not be known in the singular nominative. By imitating classical Latin, the nouns' root and the declension group can be known in the singular nominative and the singular accusative. Consequently, by remembering together the singular nominative and the singular accusative, all forms of old French nouns can be known. However, just like classical Latin, there also exist some irregular nouns' declension in old French. These irregular nouns should be remembered one by one.

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