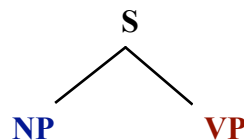


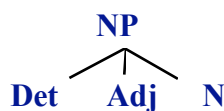
Inflected languages are so-called because they inflect word roots for case. The same root in Old English can take up to nine endings—these endings are called inflected morphemes or simply inflections. The inflections indicate to speakers of Old English the grammatical function of each word in a sentence.

Like all human languages, Old English names something (an object, idea, emotion—anything with a name), then describes its state of being or activity. Each sentence in Old English, like each sentence in English, divides into these two functions: the naming function and the action function. For naming, we use the Latin word for name, nomen, and call words that name nouns. The portion of the sentence that names is called the noun phrase, or **NP**. For action or being we use the Latin for word, verbum, and call words that describe activity verbs. The portion of the sentence that describes activity is called the verb phrase, or **VP**. Basically, English speakers (and OE speakers) first name what they want to talk about, then say what it is or what it is doing.

All Old English sentences therefore break down as follows (S stands for “sentence”):



This is called a tree chart. It may seem absurdly simple, but it will help immensely in translating Old English. **NP**’s break down further. Any given **NP** can contain determiners (also called articles), **Det**, as well as adjectives, **Adj**, and of course, nouns, **N** (naturally, this includes pronouns, **Pron**, which stand in for, Latin pro, the noun). Noun phrases therefore break down as follows:



Now consider the fact that inflected languages inflect for case and you can see that a **NP** will usually contain only one case: the nominative. Both the **Det** and the **Adj** will be in the same case, since in Old English, adjectives agree with the nouns they modify in case, number, and gender. In this respect, **Det**’s are treated like adjectives, and they also agree.

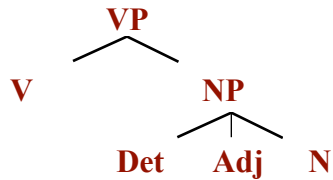
For example, if you see man and se in the same **S**, in whichever order, you know that they are both in the nominative case—they both function in a name—and therefore belong in the **NP**. If there’s an **Adj** in the sentence which modifies man, it will have a nominative inflection as well.

STEP ONE. Look for a nominative **Det** or **Pron**. Find similarly inflected **N**, **Adj**.



VP's break down as well. Any given **VP** will contain a verb, **V**. It may also contain a **NP**, but this noun phrase will be the object of the verb—that is, it will name the thing that the action is being done to, or on behalf of. If a thing is being acted upon by the subject (e.g., “Joe paints the house,” where the house is the thing acted upon by the subject, Joe), the verbal **NP** is in the accusative case. It is the direct object of the action. All the components of the verbal noun phrase which names the direct object of the action will therefore be in the accusative case: **Det**, **N**, **Adj**.

Verb phrases therefore break down as follows:



STEP TWO. Look for the verb. Find **NP** inflected in the accusative.

The **VP** may also contain a **NP** which names the indirect object of the action. This case is also known as the dative. It will appear only if there is also an accusative NP (the exceptions are rare). The dative case also includes the instrumental case, which was distinct in earlier forms of Old English (in fact, traces can still be seen in the demonstrative singular þý). This means that some dative inflections need to be translated in the instrumental (the instrument by means of which the action is done).

Finally, a **VP** can contain an adverb, **Adv**. These are usually fairly easy to recognize.



Two language clusters remain: prepositional phrases, **PP**, and the genitive case. Both can appear in either the **VP** or the **NP**—there is no way to distinguish which grammatically.

PP's consist of a preposition, **Prep**, and a **NP**. The inflection of the prepositional **NP** is usually dative, but it is always governed by the demands of the **Prep**: some **Prep**'s take the accusative, some the dative. You will simply have to memorize which. Err on the side of the dative.

STEP THREE. Look for prepositional phrases.

Finally, the genitive. The inflection is easily recognizable, so your best bet is simply to mark a word or phrase as genitive. There are a number of uses of the genitive case, which means that it can express several distinct relationships. The commonest is possession. But there is also the genitive of time (“a day’s ride”), the genitive of material (“a bar of gold”), the partitive genitive (“a piece of pie”), descriptive genitive (“a man of wisdom”), and others. Most can be translated with “of.”

STEP FOUR. Look for the genitive inflection.

