

Lydia A. Stanovaïa
Herzen State Pedagogical University of Russia
St Petersburg, Russian Federation

lida_stan@mail.ru

Old French nominal declension – reality or illusion?

Abstract

The article examines the Old French nominal declension theory, which, despite criticism and convincing arguments, remains a postulate of the French language history. This study aims to verify the theory based on comparison and critical analysis of arguments and facts obtained from the history of French during 200 years of empirical research. The analysis showed that the opinion about the declension reality is based on variable graphic forms with -s / without -s present in the 9–15th c. French manuscripts unreasonably identified as grammatical and treated as case forms. All deviations from the formulated by Fr. Raynouard's «s rules» are considered «errors» resulting from the progressive destruction of declension in French dialects during the 11–15th c. The illusory nature of the declension, first mentioned by Fr. Guessard and Fr. Génin, was confirmed by empirical studies of the 20–21th c. The article presents the following evidence of the absence of the Old French declension as a valid grammatical system: zero functional significance of case forms and declension in general, the absence of grammatical forms of the direct case regularly expressing the grammatical meaning of the direct case and opposed to the corresponding forms of the indirect case in language and speech, limitation and lacunarity of declension, covering a small part of nouns, adjectives, articles, etc., the absence of regular types and paradigms of declension, no clear boundaries between «declinable» and «non-declinable» names, up to 100% of «errors in declension». The variability of graphic forms with -s/without -s observed in French manuscripts is a purely graphic phenomenon associated with different scriptural standards (analogical or etymological type of graphic design of the name). The presence of manuscripts made in the same dialect zone, but differing in the type of graphic design disproves the dialect theory of declension.

Keywords: history of the French language, historical grammar, nominal system of Old French, functional value, patterns opposition

© Stanovaïa L. A. 2021

For citation: Stanovaïa, L. A. Starofrantsuzskoe imennoe sklonenie – real'nost' ili illyuziya? [Old French nominal declension – reality or illusion?]. *Teoreticheskaya i prikladnaya lingvistika* [Theoretical and Applied Linguistics], 7 (4), 112–134. https://doi.org/10.22250/2410-7190_2021_7_4_112_134