How to become an adjective when you're not strong (enough)?

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Abstract

This article attempts to put a new spin on (the development of) weakly inflected adjectives, with a particular focus on North Germanic, by recycling some traditional ideas. Point of departure is the observation that the Proto-Norse demonstrative *hinn* had ended up as a functional element in the extended adjectival projection in Old Icelandic – not as a definite article in the extended nominal projection (an otherwise well-known grammaticalization process). Following the old idea that weak inflection originally involved nominalization, it is argued that weak "adjectives" maintained their nominal status beyond Proto-Germanic. Thus the grammaticalizing article originating from the demonstrative *hinn* occurs as a determiner with a weak "adjective" that really projects a nominal phrase. At some stage prior to Old Icelandic, this constellation is reanalyzed in its entirety, at the phrasal level, from nominal phrase to adjectival phrase, a process in which the original demonstrative gets "trapped" inside the adjectival projection and is reanalyzed as adjectival article. Only after this process of *phrasal reanalysis* can we speak of weak adjectives proper.

1. Weak adjectival inflection in Germanic

One common Germanic innovation is the development of two adjectival paradigms, traditionally referred to as strong and weak inflection (after Grimm 1837). The distinction strong vs. weak as such has survived – to various degrees – into most modern Germanic languages, where they however display different synchronic functions. In modern German, for instance, the inflection of an (attributive) adjective is essentially determined by morphology/morphosyntax, whereas in Scandinavian, weakly inflected adjectives occur in contexts that can be characterized as semantically definite.

The emergence of the weak inflection has been extensively discussed since the 19th century. It is widely accepted that both weak adjectives and weak nouns originally involved a stem formation element, or rather, a derivational suffix '-n-'. One of the most prominent suggestions concerning the original function of the suffix, "individualization", essentially boils down to nominalization, morphosyntactically speaking. Indeed, the nominal character of weak adjectives has been repeatedly pointed out. In some sense, however, none of those accounts has taken the syntactic consequences insofar as the respective discussions always revolve around the opposition *strong* vs. *weak **adjective***. In this article, I will take the nominalizing aspect seriously and argue that this is a false dichotomy: weak "adjectives" are nominal in nature, that is of category N, in early Germanic, and consequently, they project some noun phrase rather than an adjectival phrase.

I will start out by discussing the situation in Old Icelandic where weak adjectives systematically co-occur with the adjectival article *(h)inn* thus constituting an adjectival phrase. Weak adjectives themselves are "defective", i.e. incomplete adjectival phrases, and *(h)inn* functions as an *adjectival complementizer*. This leads to the question of how this constellation could come about, namely, that it is the sequence *(h)inn* – a former demonstrative – plus a weak adjective that forms a weak adjectival phrase proper, rather than the weak adjective on its own. The answer that I will provide is that the same sequence, at a previous stage, constituted a nominal phrase with the weak "adjective" as its head noun. In order to advance this idea, I will start out at the other end of the diachronic spectrum and sketch the development from Proto-Indo-European (PIE) towards Old Icelandic arguing that weak "adjectives" emerged via phrasal reanalysis from nominal

phrase to adjectival phrase. The gist of the narrative is summarized in the following table:[1,2]

i. PIE	ii. Germanic	iii. Proto-Norse	iv. Viking Period – Old Icelandic	v. Modern Icelandic
$[_{xNP}$ "A" $]$	$[_{xNP}$ "A".WK $]$	$[_{xNP}$ DEM "A".WK $]$	$[_{xAP}$ ART A.WK $]$	$[_{xAP}$ A.WK $]$
	$[_{xAP}$ A.STR $]$	$[_{xAP}$ A.STR $]$	$[_{xAP}$ A.STR $]$	$[_{xAP}$ A.STR $]$

Table 1: Development of adjectives from PIE into North Germanic

The discussion is structured as follows: Sect. 2 is dedicated to establishing the relevant facts about weakly inflected adjectives and the adjectival article *(h)inn* in Old Icelandic, which constitutes the point of departure for the discussion to follow. In Sect. 3.1, I will sketch the development of adjectives from Proto-Indo-European to Germanic introducing the idea that Proto-Indo-European did not have a separate category adjective distinct from nouns, and taking a look at the two adjectival paradigms in Proto-Germanic. I will the discuss the role of the n-suffix involved in the creation of weak nominals, and argue that what are usually called weak "adjectives" are really nouns. In Sect. 4, I will take a closer look at the development from Proto-Norse to Old Icelandic. It will be shown that nominal epithets constitute the oldest (attested) context for weak "adjectives", but also the former demonstrative *hinn*. I will suggest that the demonstrative – or appositive article – gradually takes over the nominalization function originally associated with the weak inflection. During the Viking Period, the sequence *(h)inn* + weak "adjective" is reanalysed in its entirety, from nominal phrase to adjectival phrase leading to the development of an adjectival article and weak adjectives proper. Sect. 5 concludes.

2. Weak adjectival inflection in Old Icelandic

2.1. *From Proto-Norse to Old Norse*

The element *hinn* is attested as a demonstrative in Proto-Norse Runic inscriptions, (1).[3] From the Viking Period onwards *hinn*, or the reduced form *inn*, occurs as an adjectival article, systematically co-occurring with a weakly inflected adjective, (2):[4]

(1) a. **hali hino** (N KJ50 $U)   b. **a hitt land** (KJ101 $U)
         stone DEM   *on* DEM *land*

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[1]Labels for language stages are intended as a rough chronological guideline, rather than hard claims about a specific period for a specific development. On the periodization of Norse, see the next section. Modern Icelandic will not be discussed here; it is included in table 1 for the sake of completeness; see Pfaff (2019) on the development from stage iv. to v. Glosses used here: ART – freestanding adjectival article; DEF – suffixed definite article; POSS – 3. pers. reflexive possessive; DEM – demonstrative; WK – weak adjectival inflection; STR – strong adjectival inflection; UNDEC – "undecidable" (whether strong or weak; notably, this applies to adjectives in the comparative).

[2]The labels "xAP"/"xNP" designate some unspecified extended adjectival/nominal projection, e.g. AP, aP, DegP/NP, nP, DP etc. with possibly unspecified material in the functional layer, and will be used throughout when the precise status of the constituent is not at issue. Note that the notation in table 1 does not strictly speaking comply with the X-bar scheme. It is not literally suggested that an element of the category A projects a nominal phrase (hence the quotation marks "A"). I will use this notation to indicate that certain elements that are traditionally/conventionally considered adjectives are actually nominals heading an xNP. For the same reason, I will use quotation marks ("adjective") in the text when referring to those elements.

[3]All Runic examples, incl. signature, are taken from *Samnordisk Rundatabas* (http://www.nordiska.uu.se/forskn/samnord.htm). I also adopt the periodization for Proto-Norse (prior to ca. 725) and Viking Period (ca. 725-1100), but instead of *Medieval Period* (from 1100 onwards), I will specifically talk about *Old Icelandic* because the examples used for illustration are from that language – even though the relevant generalizations made will apply more widely to *Old (West) Norse* as well.

[4]For the sake of exposition, I will use this term throughout this section for the element *(h)inn*, but in Sect. 4, I will distinguish between adjectival article proper and appositive article for uses as in (2).

(2) a. **kuna harats hins kuþa** (DR55)
wife [*Haraldr* ART *good*.WK]-GEN
'wife of Haraldr the Good'

b. **abtir kara faþur sin in malsbaka** (U1146)
after Kári father POSS ART *eloquent*.WK
'in memory of Kári the Eloquent, their father'

Towards the end of the Viking period, we find suffixed forms where *(h)inn* forms one prosodic word with the preceding noun, first with a following adjective, later without:

(3) a. **mirkit mikla** (Sö 41) b. **antini** (U669†)
monument.DEF *great*.WK *soul*.DEF

This chronology of first attestations, (1): DEM >> (2): ART + A >> (3a): DEF + A >> (3b): DEF, has been taken to represent the actual development of the North Germanic definite article, from freestanding adjectival article to suffixed (nominal) article. This etymology, also known as the *homo-ille-bonus* hypothesis (cf. Graur 1967), was first proposed by Delbrück (1916), and is the basis for the analysis e.g. in Roehrs and Sapp (2004), but it is not uncontroversial. One prominent argument against this reconstruction is statistical in nature: in the oldest attestations, the postnominal adjectival article mostly occurs with proper names in an appositive function, see (2), and is thus an unlikely source for a definiteness marker that occurs on lexical nouns (as was already shown by Musinowicz 1911; see also Skrzypek 2009 for discussion).

   As an alternative, it has been suggested that it is the demonstrative itself occurring in postposition that gives rise to the suffixed article, and that is, by and large, the consensus today (e.g. Nygaard 1906, Skrzypek 2009; 2010; 2012, Stroh-Wollin 2009; 2014; 2015a;b; 2016, Perridon and Sleeman 2011, Dahl 2015, Pfaff 2019). We can thus isolate the following parallel developments:

(4)

Proto-Norse		**Old Icelandic**
	>>	demonstrative *hinn*
demonstrative *hinn*	>>	adjectival article *(h)inn* (ART)
	>>	nominal article *-inn* (DEF)

While most authors focus on the grammaticalization of the definite article and thus on the development of the suffixed article, I will take a closer look at the adjectival article and its development from a demonstrative, see Sect. 4.

2.2. *Adjectival article, "defective" adjectives, and adjectival phrases*

Contrary to first appearances, there are good reasons to assume that the adjectival article *(h)inn* is not a regular article element, i.e. a determiner, occupying an immediate position in xNP (e.g. D^0) in Old Norse (pace Roehrs and Sapp 2004, Faarlund 2004; 2007; 2009, Lohndal 2007, Laake 2007). Instead, it has long since been suggested that it actually is an element of the adjectival constituent[5] with *(h)inn* + A forming a unit to the exclusion of the noun (for instance Nygaard 1906, Lundeby 1965, Perridon 1996, Skrzypek 2009; 2010, Perridon and Sleeman 2011, Stroh-Wollin 2009; 2015a, Börjars and Payne 2016, Börjars et al. 2016; *Gelenkartikel* ("linking article") in Heinrichs 1954, Himmelmann 1997; *attributive article* in Rießler 2016; *adjectival complementizer* in Pfaff 2019). In this subsection,[6] I will summarize some arguments in

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[5]Of course, the older authors did not talk about "constituents" or "AP" etc., but they clearly express the general idea, e.g. Nygaard (1906:48): "Den foranstillede artikel er adjektivisk" – "The preposed article is adjectival".

[6]Examples presented here are taken from the online corpus MÍM (http://mim.hi.is/index.php?corpus=for) and IcePaHC (Wallenberg et al. 2011).

support of the view that it is a narrow component of the adjectival phrase, in that *(h)inn* together with a weakly inflected adjective constitutes an AP.

The first relevant observation is that there is an intimate relationship between *(h)inn* and weak adjectives. Stroh-Wollin (2009:7) notes that "*(h)inn* seems to be just a formal element preceding adjectives with so called weak inflection", and Börjars and Payne (2016:2) state that "*(h)inn* is a functional element whose role it is to allow a weak adjective to function as an ADJ". In other words, *(h)inn* only occurs when immediately followed by exactly one weakly inflected adjective, which could not act as a "proper" adjective on its own. Notice that some "bare" weak adjectives, i.e. without preceding *(h)inn*, are attested; those constitute a closed class and may be referred to as "functional" adjectives: determiner-like adjectives, ordinal numerals, and certain superlatives.[7] This is also the case at earlier stages: Perridon (1996) identifies five attestations of bare weak adjectives in the runic corpus, and they all qualify as functional under the characterization just given.[8] On the other hand, bare weak "lexical" adjectives (with descriptive content) are basically non-existent in the oldest texts. Thus the big picture that emerges if we abstract away from the "noise" is that bare weak adjectives without preceding *(h)inn* are the absolute exception. Taking Börjars and Payne (2016) one step further, Pfaff (2019) therefore suggests that weak adjectives are "defective", or "incomplete" APs, as it were, and that *(h)inn* is an "adjectival complementizer" that, by merging with a weak adjective, produces a "complete" adjectival phrase: $[_{xAP}$ *(h)inn* $[_{weakP}$ A.WK $]$ $]$.

The idea that it is the sequence *(h)inn* + weak adjective (henceforth: "weak sequence") that constitutes an adjectival phrase has ramifications. In Old Icelandic, (bare) weak adjectives are not found in several contexts where they do occur in Modern Icelandic; instead we find a weak sequence. More generally, weak sequences display the same distributional patterns as strong adjectives. Consider the following examples illustrating adjectives in possessive contexts (Pfaff 2019:26; the numbers are based on a query in MÍM):

(5) a. sinni fullkomin-ni vináttu
     POSS *perfect*-STR *friendship*
     (MÍM: Sturlunga saga)

   b. þín hin mest-a gæfa
     your ART *greatest*-WK *luck*
     (MÍM: Njáls saga)

(6)

POSSESSIVE + A.STR:	80	– 64.5%
POSSESSIVE + ART A.WK:	35	– 28.2%
POSSESSIVE + A.WK:	5	– 4.0% *(of which 3 superlatives)*
POSSESSIVE + A.UNDEC:	4	– 3.2%

As these numbers show, in the majority of cases, an adjective following a possessive is strongly inflected; in a bit more than a quarter of the cases, the possessive is followed by a weak sequence. These two constellations constitute more than 90% of the relevant cases. Bare weak adjectives following a possessive, on the other hand, are the absolute exception;[9] moreover, three of the attested five cases involve a superlative adjective, which often behave deviantly anyway (see above on functional adjectives). Note that this is not merely about possessives, but constitutes a recurrent distributional pattern: in adjectival contexts, we either find a strong adjective or a weak sequence, but negligibly rarely (or not at all) a bare weak adjective. This goes, for instance, for adjectival constituents in several adnominal positions, including noun phrases involving demonstratives, various name-like expressions, and vocatives:

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[7]E.g. *sami* "same"; *fyrsti* "first"; *þriði* "third" ; *næsti* "next" etc. Note, however, that even these usually occur with preceding *(h)inn*, e.g. (7b). Thus the generalization is not that functional adjectives are (always) "bare", but that they *can* occur without preceding *(h)inn*.

[8]Those five adjectives are: *æningi/æninga* "only-one", *bæzti* "best", *fyrsta* "first", *þriðia* "third". In addition, he mentions *ungu* (**uku**) "young". However, Stroh-Wollin (2012) argues against interpreting **uku** as weak adjective, and suggests instead that it has to be read as a name.

[9]In the modern Scandinavian languages, adjectives following a possessive must be weakly inflected. Also, in Icelandic, the only language where *hinn* has survived as adjectival article, it cannot occur between possessive and weak adjective.

(7) a. þann hinn digr-a mann
   that ART *stout*-WK *man*
   (MÍM: Heimskringla)

   c. þessi vond-ur svikari
   this evil-STR *traitor*
   (MÍM: Íslendinga þættir)

   b. þessi hin söm-u orð
   this ART *same*-WK *words*
   (MÍM: Fljótsdæla saga)

   d. þeim norræn-um manni
   that Nordic-STR *man*
   (MÍM: Fóstbræðra saga)

(8) a. heilag-ur andi
   holy-STR *spirit*
   (IcePaHC: 1150.HOMILIUBOK)

   b. hinn heilag-i andi
   ART *holy*-WK *spirit*
   (IcePaHC: 1150.HOMILIUBOK)

(9) a. Ér, góð-ar konur, bölvið eigi
   ye good-STR *women curse not* (imperative, i.e.: *"don't curse!"*)
   (IcePaHC: 1150.HOMILIUBOK)

   b. það skulu þér vita, inir vösku drengir
   that shall ye know ART *brave*-WK *lads*
   (IcePaHC: 1300.ALEXANDER)

Notice that all the above contexts can be considered definite in some sense, and even though weak sequences, or weak adjectives for that matter, tend to occur in definite contexts, definiteness cannot be the sole factor governing this distribution. After all, we also find strong adjectives in precisely those contexts. Even though tempting, it is not clear that we can establish an unambiguous correlation between adjectival inflection and adjectival semantics, either; van Gelderen and Lohndal (2008) suggest that weak adjectives are individual level predicates and strong adjectives stage level predicates. This is presumably an appropriate characterization in the broad diachronic context (to be explored in the following sections), but it cannot be applied punctually to Old Icelandic. The adjectives "evil" and "Nordic" in (7c/d) are strongly inflected and yet denote individual level predicates. Conversely, there are contexts where weak sequences – as well as strong APs – systematically denote stage level predicates, most notably, in predicative contexts:

(10) a. Gunnar var hinn reiðast-i
   Gunnar was ART *angriest*-WK
   "Gunnar was very angry"
   (MÍM: Brennu-Njáls saga)

   b. Bolli [...] var mjög reið-ur
   Bolli was very angry-STR

   (MÍM: Laxdæla saga)

A weak sequence involving a superlative usually produces a non-referential (= "indefinite" or "absolute superlative") interpretation expressing a high degree to which the property denoted by the adjective applies. Thus an example like (10a) not only illustrates that weak inflection cannot be unambiguously linked to an individual level interpretation, it also emphasizes the adjectival character of weak sequences (as stage level predicates), and it shows that weak sequences occur in environments (= predicative position) where definiteness does not apply in the first place.

While this is clearly not the whole story, I will largely ignore semantic considerations in the rest of the paper, and focus on syntactic distribution. Here the generalization that emerges is that weak sequences – not bare weak adjectives – syntactically behave like strong adjectives. This suggests that the two constitute the same syntactic object, viz. a full-fledged adjectival phrase: $[_{xAP}$ **ART A.WK** $]$ — $[_{xAP}$ **A.STR** $]$. This furthermore entails that *(h)inn* is an immediate component of xAP, not of xNP, in Old Icelandic, and I will adopt this position here.[10]

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[10]For a more detailed discussion, the reader is referred to the above authors. Pfaff (2019), for instance, also discusses observations concerning adjectival coordination, "occurrence per adjective", and the fact that nothing can intervene between *(h)inn* and A.WK.

At an abstract level, then, we can represent two stages in the development as follows:

(11) a. $[_{xNP}$ **DEM** $[_{\alpha P} [_{xAP}$ A $]$ NP $]]$ (DEM = Proto-Norse *hinn*)

     b. . . . .

     c. $[_{xNP} [_{\alpha P} [_{xAP}$ **ART** A.WK $]$ NP $]]$ (ART = Old Icelandic *(h)inn*)

Given (11), the reanalysis from demonstrative to adjectival article seems to result from a development ***into an embedded extended projection*** (from xNP into xAP)[11] from a structural point of view, whereas a purely linear perspective might suggest a re-bracketing process. Alternatively, this reanalysis can be construed as a process operative at a larger level, namely the phrasal level, involving several components: some (particular kind of) nominal projection in its entirety is reanalyzed as an adjectival projection, and in this process of phrasal reanalysis, the (former) demonstrative "gets trapped" inside the adjectival phrase, and is itself reanalyzed – as an adjectival article. A simplified model of this idea is the following:

(12) $[_{xNP}$ ***hinn*** N $]$ $>>>$ $[_{xAP}$ ***(h)inn*** A.WK $]$

Notice that this way of putting it is reminiscent of the traditional notion *analogical change*: it suggests that the demonstrative *hinn* has the same structural and functional relationship with the lexical head element (N) and the constituent at large (xNP) as the adjectival article *(h)inn* with the weak adjective and the xAP constituent. The only thing that has changed is the categorial specification. I will return to this question after discussing the development of the weak inflection in the broader Germanic context.

3. From Proto-Indo-European to (Proto-)Germanic

3.1. *Adjectives in Proto-Indo-European (PIE)*

It has been proposed that PIE did not have a separate morphosyntactic category *adjective*, but only one superordinate category *nominal* comprising what we might otherwise consider adjectives and nouns. A distinct category adjective only emerges as a result of diachronic development from PIE towards her daughter languages (e.g. Osthoff 1876b, Törnqvist 1974, Werner 1984, Bhat 1994; 2000, Gamkrelidze and Ivanov 1995, Viti 2015, Adrados et al. 2016; for a recent thorough discussion and further references, see Rehn 2018). Instead of adjectival attribution, PIE is assumed to have employed close apposition of two nominals, which has been suggested on the basis of the oldest actually attested IE languages:

> We may have reasons to assume, in the case of languages like Sanskrit, that the strategy used in the structuring of noun phrases is to juxtapose two different referring words (nouns) rather than to modify a referring word by a property word (adjective) as in the case of familiar languages like English; the use of this alternative strategy makes it unnecessary for the former type of languages to have a distinct class of adjectives [...]   (Bhat 2000:47)

Thus a modified noun phrase in PIE is essentially a sequence of two nouns: $[_{xNP}$ N$_1$ . . . N$_2$ $]$. Particular attention has been paid to morphology, or rather the lack of a morphological difference between nouns and adjectives in PIE.[12] While there are different inflectional classes, there is no difference between nominal and "adjectival" inflection, which is still reflected in languages like Latin (cf. *domin-us bon-us; domin-a bon-a; oppid-um bon-um*).

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[11] Which is different from some lowering process *within the same extended projection* such as 'Grammaticalization down the tree' (e.g. Lohndal 2007, Faarlund 2009), or 'Spec-to-Head Reanalysis' (e.g. van Gelderen 2004; 2007; 2010).

[12] It has often been pointed out that the ancient grammarians were already aware of this non-distinctness:

> It is surely no coincidence that the classical grammarians [...] did not view the adjective as an independent part of speech but only as a special usage of the noun.   (Törnqvist 1974, transl. by Rehn 2018:13)

As a point of departure, I will adopt the idea that PIE did not have a distinct morphosyntactic category *adjective*, but only one category *nominal* that subsumes (alleged) adjectives:

Indo-European	Germanic	Proto-Norse	Viking Period
$[_{xNP}$ **"A"** $]$	$[_{xNP}$ "A".WK $]$ $[_{xAP}$ A.STR $]$	$[_{xNP}$ DEM "A".WK $]$ $[_{xAP}$ A.STR $]$	$[_{xNP}$ ART "A".WK $]$ $[_{xAP}$ ART A.WK $]$ $[_{xAP}$ A.STR $]$

Table 2: Adjectives in Proto-Indo-European

3.2. Adjectives in (Proto-)Germanic

The PIE daughter language Germanic does have a separate category adjective. In fact, Germanic appears to have developed two adjectival paradigms, traditionally referred to as strong and weak, illustrated in table 3 below with Gothic, the oldest attested Germanic language:[13]

	blind					
	strong			**weak**		
	masc	*fem*	*neut*	*masc*	*fem*	*neut*
NOM.SG	blind-s	blind-a	blind-ata	blind-a	blind-ō	blind-ō
ACC.SG	blind-ana	blind-a	blind-ata	blind-an	blind-ōn	blind-ō
DAT.SG	blind-amma	blind-ai	blind-amma	blind-in	blind-ōn	blind-in
GEN.SG	blind-is	blind-aizōs	blind-is	blind-ins	blind-ōns	blind-ins
NOM.PL	blind-ai	blind-ōs	blind-a	blind-ans	blind-ōns	blind-ōna
ACC.PL	blind-ans	blind-ōs	blind-a	blind-ans	blind-ōns	blind-ōna
DAT.PL	blind-aim	blind-aim	blind-aim	blind-am	blind-ōm	blind-am
GEN.PL	blind-aizē	blind-aizō	blind-aizē	blind-anē	blind-ōnō	blind-anē

Table 3: Strong and weak adjectives in Gothic

The strong inflection is, on the one hand, a continuation of the PIE nominal (o-/a-stem) inflection, but it has furthermore adopted several endings from the pronominal paradigm.[14] Table 4 below is an illustration of both a strong adjective and a strong noun.

One effect of this development is that adjectives and nouns can be clearly distinguished morphologically. In this sense, the Germanic strong inflection is a genuine *adjectival inflection*, which underscores the fact that strong adjectives do constitute a distinct morphosyntactic category A(P) in Germanic.

3.3. The weak inflection — n-stems

The weak adjectival inflection is a Germanic innovation, which is part of a larger development that crucially produced the class of Germanic n-stem (or weak) nouns. This also involved the systematic expansion of a feminine class of n-stems, which "did not exist to any significant extent in Indo-European" (Heinrichs 1954:65). As a result, n-stems (the weak inflection) include all three genders. Since the 19th century, the -n- in question has been recognized as a *nominalizing* suffix with an individualizing function (e.g. Osthoff

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[13]Here and in the following, Gothic paradigms are taken from Krahe (1967).

[14]Similar developments can be observed elsewhere, e.g. in Latin; but while in Latin, the "pronominal adjectives" (= adjectives with endings from both the nominal and the pronominal paradigm) form a small closed class, this "mixed" inflection has been generalized to all adjectives in Germanic (→ strong inflection); see McFadden (2004) for discussion.

	ADJECTIVE (masc) *blind*	NOUN (masc) *day*
NOM.SG	blind-s	dag-s
ACC.SG	blind-**ana**	dag-Ø
DAT.SG	blind-**amma**	dag-**a**
GEN.SG	blind-is	dag-is
NOM.PL	blind-**ai**	dag-**ōs**
ACC.PL	blind-ans	dag-ans
DAT.PL	blind-**aim**	dag-**am**
GEN.PL	blind-**aizē**	dag-**ē**

Table 4: Strong adjective and (a-stem) noun in Gothic

1876a;b, Curme 1910, Heinrichs 1954, Krahe 1967, Krahe and Meid 1967; 1969, Törnqvist 1974, Kovari 1984, Rehn 2018), which seems to have been operative already at a pre-Germanic stage. For instance, Heinrichs (1954:61-65) illustrates in great detail how several IE languages use an n-suffix to derive nouns (from nouns and adjectives) denoting (nick)names, nomina agentis, persons with the respective property etc. Some illustrations are given below:

(13)

Lat.:	*catus*	"clever, wise"	→	*Cato, -onis*	"Cato" ("the shrewd one")
	mentum	"chin"	→	*mento, -onis*	"one with a long chin"
Gr.:	*platus*	"broad(-shouldered)"	→	*Platōn, -onos*	"Plato" ("broad-shoulders")
	pordē	"fart"	→	*pordōn, -onos*	"farter"

Of particular interest is the observation that there is no morphological distinction between weak adjectives and weak nouns, or, to put it slightly differently, "the weak adjectival inflection is inherently identical with the declension of the nominal n-stems" (Krahe and Meid 1967:80). This identity is illustrated, once more, with Gothic (but the same holds true e.g. for Old High German and Old Saxon; see Krahe and Meid 1967:ibd.): see table 5 below.

	masc		**fem**		**neut**	
	ADJECTIVE *blind*	NOUN *rooster*	ADJECTIVE *blind*	NOUN *tongue*	ADJECTIVE *blind*	NOUN *heart*
NOM.SG	blind-a	han-a	blind-ō	tugg-ō	blind-ō	haírt-ō
ACC.SG	blind-an	han-an	blind-ōn	tugg-ōn	blind-ō	haírt-ō
DAT.SG	blind-in	han-in	blind-ōn	tugg-ōn	blind-in	haírt-in
GEN.SG	blind-ins	han-ins	blind-ōns	tugg-ōns	blind-ins	haírt-ins
NOM.PL	blind-ans	han-ans	blind-ōns	tugg-ōns	blind-ōna	haírt-ōna
ACC.PL	blind-ans	han-ans	blind-ōns	tugg-ōns	blind-ōna	haírt-ōna
DAT.PL	blind-am	han-am	blind-ōm	tugg-ōm	blind-am	haírt-am
GEN.PL	blind-anē	han-anē	blind-ōnō	tugg-ōnō	blind-anē	haírt-anē

Table 5: Weak adjectives and weak (n-stem) nouns in Gothic

In light of this non-distinctness, it is less obvious that the weak inflection can strictly be considered an *adjectival inflection* in the same sense as the strong inflection, see table 4. For the purpose of this paper, I will adopt the null hypothesis that, originally, there was only one weak inflection. Moreover, I will follow the traditional idea that the n-suffix was a nominalizer, and elaborate on a notion that was already expressed by Osthoff (1876b:125, emphasis mine):

> The **weak adjective** [...] is an adjective that has been **elevated to the status of a noun**, thus, actually, it is **no longer a real adjective**, and only later [...] did it re-enter the sphere of adjective or quality word.

The quintessence of this idea is that an item that would traditionally be classified as a weak adjective (A) is actually a noun (N). Let us assume that the n-suffix originally spells out n^0 that merges with some root, which formally captures its nominalization property. In parallel, we can, for the sake of simplicity, assume that the strong inflection is the spellout of an adjectivalizing head a^0; we thus have:

(14) a. ROOT-***n***–INFL   (n-stem nominal)

  b. ROOT–STR   (strong adjective)

The nominalizing suffix must still have been productive in Proto-Germanic, notably, since feminine n-stems are a Germanic innovation (see above). Notice, however, that the -n- itself is not preserved as such, i.e. as a separate suffix, in the historical Germanic languages; traces are discernible in some cases where it has merged with the inflection, see table 5. Effectively, then, it would seem as though it was this merger that brought about what we actually call the weak inflection:

(15) i. ROOT-***n***-INFL (n-stem nominal) $>>$ ii. *nominal*-**WK** (weak nominal)

Let us further assume that the weak inflection takes over the function of nominalizing, for the time being, such that *nominal* in the string in (16-ii) would still be simply a root. But in the long run, that string becomes reanalyzed as (categorized) stem + inflection. This, however, also entails that, in the process, a division between strictly nominal stems and adjectival stems occurs:

$$>> \quad \text{iii-a.} \quad \text{N-\textbf{WK}} \quad \text{(weak noun)}$$

(16) ii. *nominal*-**WK** (weak nominal)

$$>> \quad \text{iii-b.} \quad \text{A-\textbf{WK}} \quad \text{(weak adjective)}$$

If we accept the idea that, originally, it is the strong inflection that instantiates the adjective category, cf. (14b), we can argue that proper adjectival stems develop over time from those roots that systematically occur with the strong inflection. In parallel, the first weak nominal stems proper presumably develop from those roots that are associated with a fixed gender value. With these, the weak inflection gradually develops from nominalizer to mere inflection. On the other hand, weak inflection remains an active nominalizer with those roots that are not associated with an inherent gender value, i.e. the emerging adjectival stems, for a longer time. This would be the first step in bringing about a division amongst the class of weak nominals that eventually leads to (16).

Apart from being speculative, this obviously is a simplification that ignores several details. Nonetheless, it seems to be one reasonable way to reformulate Osthoff's idea of "re-entering the sphere of adjective" in more current terms (for a more detailed discussion along similar lines, see Rehn 2018). I will, however, assume that the transition process sketched in (16iii-b), i.e. the development from weak *nominal* to weak *adjective*, lasted beyond the Proto-Germanic period, and, at least for North Germanic, the "only later" in the above Osthoff quote becomes "much later".

In a nutshell, I will assume there was only one class of weak nominals in Proto-Germanic, with no categorial distinction between nouns and adjectives, as in table 6. Thus the locution *strong* vs. *weak* ***adjectives*** is a false dichotomy; only the former are adjectives proper, while weak "adjectives" are actually (still) nominals.

Indo-European	Germanic	Proto-Norse	Viking Period
$[_{xNP}$ "A" $]$	$[_{xNP}$ **"A".WK** $]$	$[_{xNP}$ DEM "A".WK $]$	$[_{xNP}$ ART "A".WK $]$
			$[_{xAP}$ ART A.WK $]$
	$[_{xAP}$ **A.STR** $]$	$[_{xAP}$ A.STR $]$	$[_{xAP}$ A.STR $]$

Table 6: Adjectives in Proto-Germanic

4. Adjectives in North Germanic

In the last section, I suggested that weak "adjectives" are nominals, not adjectives proper in early Germanic; but as was shown in Sect. 2.2, we do find weak adjectival phrases (= weak sequences) in Old Icelandic. However, I also argued that a complete weak adjectival phrase involves the adjectival article *(h)inn*, not merely a (bare) weak adjective. Therefore, the status of *(h)inn*/weak sequences needs to be taken into account when examining this development. In this section, I will sketch the development from Proto-Norse where weak "adjectives" are still nominal in nature to Old Icelandic where weak sequences constitute genuine adjectival phrases.

4.1. Proto-Norse and Viking Period: Epithets and the appositive article

The oldest systematic attestations of weak sequences in North Germanic are epithets, i.e. appositive constructions that involve a proper name:

(17) a. **harats hins kuþa**   (DR55)
      Haraldr ART *good*.WK

      c. **sontulf in suarti**   (Vs15)
      Sontúlfr ART *black*.WK

      b. **kara** [...] **in malsbaka**   (U1146)
      Kári   ART *eloquent*.WK

      d. **kunburka in kuþa**   (Hs21)
      Gunnborga ART *good*.WK

Let us focus on the (obligatory) presence of the former demonstrative *(h)inn* with weak "adjectives". Rießler (2016:52-53) proposes that a particular appositive ("attributive") article, distinct from both demonstratives and regular definite articles, is involved in nominal appositions of the type "Frederick the Great". I will adopt this idea for cases like the above examples (which are obviously of the same type), which means that *(h)inn* should be construed as an appositive article, not as a demonstrative, and that the epithet is a nominal constituent of sorts. The particular appositive use illustrated above is also emphasized by Heinrichs (1954:66) (see also Rehn 2018:61), and it is tempting to see these examples as a direct continuation of the PIE mode of modification (albeit on a smaller scale): close apposition of two nominals (Sect. 3.1).

    Notice that the above examples are from the Viking Period. But we can safely assume that the use of *(h)inn* as appositive article is the result of a process that already started much earlier. Thus during Proto-Norse, the demonstrative *hinn* first sporadically and then increasingly came to be used with weak "adjectives", and at some point, it had become obligatory in that context, (17). Crucially, the appositive phrase is a nominal constituent, whether it merely involves an occasional demonstrative or an obligatory appositive article: see table 7.

Indo-European	Germanic	Proto-Norse	Viking Period
$[_{xNP}$ "A" $]$	$[_{xNP}$ "A".WK $]$	$[_{xNP}$ **DEM "A".WK** $]$	$[_{xNP}$ **ART "A".WK** $]$
			$[_{xAP}$ ART A.WK $]$
	$[_{xAP}$ A.STR $]$	$[_{xAP}$ **A.STR** $]$	$[_{xAP}$ A.STR $]$

Table 7: Adjectives in Early Norse

Grammaticalization from demonstrative to definite article has been examined independently (e.g. Greenberg 1978, Diessel 1999, Roberts and Roussou 2003, van Gelderen 2007), and it has often been claimed that the contexts in which the incipient article first occurs regularly seem to follow a particular order, e.g. Skrzypek (2012): *anaphoric contexts >> bridging contexts >> unique reference*. It is not immediately clear, though, whether and where epithets as in (17) can be placed in this chronology. The idea that n-stems (and by extension weak nominals) originally had an individualizing function (see Sect. 3.3) might be taken to suggest that they be classified as a uniqueness context. However, it can be argued that they actually instantiate some kind of local anaphora: $[_{xNP}$ kari $]_1$ . . . $[_{xNP}$ in malsbaki $]_1$. The discussion above also suggests that it is an early context.

At any rate, it would seem as though appositive uses do constitute a highly relevant context – both concerning the development of weak adjectives in Germanic and the grammaticalization of definite articles more generally.[15] A special status of the appositive article may not always be immediately obvious because it is homophonous with the eventual regular definite article in many languages (cf. "N.N. **the** Great"). In North Germanic, however, we find two parallel developments: a freestanding version of the demonstrative *hinn* first occurs as an appositive article, and then as an adjectival article (see next subsection), while simultaneously a postposed version gets cliticized to the noun and over time becomes grammaticalized as the regular (nominal) definite article, see (4).[16]

4.2. Viking period: Phrasal reanalysis

Let us now turn to the weak "adjectives" involved. In Sect. 3.3, I suggested that those maintained their nominal status beyond the Proto-Germanic period. If this is still the case around the onset of the Viking period, the epithets in (17) would simply be Det + N constituents (with N = "A".WK). A more nuanced view takes into account the diachronic dimension underlying the development sketched in (16iii-b). On this view, "A".WK – originally a full-fledged noun – gradually loses certain nominal features; more specifically, the weak inflection gradually loses its ability to nominalize, as was already hinted at in Sect. 3.3. Instead, the incipient appositive article increasingly takes over the function of nominalization, i.e. *(h)inn* gradually takes over functions originally associated with the weak inflection.[17] In the process, the two form a close relationship and eventually a narrow constituent – such as an epithet.

Epithets instantiate the oldest systematic use of a weak sequence attested from the Viking period onwards. But during that period we also find some examples that seem to indicate adjectival use in a more narrow sense: non-restrictive modification. Note, however, that those examples also mostly involve a name as head nominal and we also find strongly inflected adjectives in the same contexts:

(18) a. **in   heilhi   kristr**   (Sö 125) b. **hilakR   kristr**   (Vg 186)
     ART *holy.*WK *Christ*   *holy.*STR *Christ*

I take this to indicate the first step towards the situation in Old Icelandic as discussed in Sect. 2. Weak sequences must have gradually occured in a wider range of contexts during the Viking period, increasingly more often in those environments where we otherwise find strong adjectives, and increasingly more often with common nouns, no longer just proper names. To put it differently, they increasingly occur in genuine *adjectival* contexts.

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[15]See also examples like Lat. *Alexander magnus >> Alexander **ille** magnus* "Alexander (the) great", where the demonstrative *ille* eventually develops into the definite article in many Romance languages. For a discussion of *ille* as a "linking article", see Himmelmann (1997:184-188).

[16]Skrzypek (2009; 2010) argues that the formation of the suffixed definite article must have happened before 800, which would be in the early part of the Viking period. Insofar as the examples above illustrating the use of the attributive article are, roughly, from that period, we can really speak of a parallel development.

[17]More broadly, the idea that the emerging definite article acts as a reinforcer, one whose primary functions it is to take over functions originally associated with the weak inflection, is already discussed by Heinrichs (1954) (even though he focuses on the semantic function of *definiteness marking*).

I propose that, during that time and in those environments, the weak sequence in its entirety is categorially reanalyzed from a nominal constituent (epithet) to an adjectival constituent: see table 8 below.

Indo-European	Germanic	Proto-Norse	**Viking Period**
$[_{xNP}$ "A" $]$	$[_{xNP}$ "A".WK $]$	$[_{xNP}$ DEM "A".WK $]$	$[_{xNP}$ ART "A".WK $]$
			$[_{xAP}$ **ART A.WK** $]$
	$[_{xAP}$ A.STR $]$	$[_{xAP}$ A.STR $]$	$[_{xAP}$ A.STR $]$

Table 8: Weak and strong adjectival phrases in later Norse

This process of *phrasal reanalysis* from xNP to xAP is to be understood as a concerted effort that also affects the individual components: (i) the appositive article and former demonstrative *(h)inn*, a component of xNP, "gets trapped" inside the emerging adjectival phrase, and is itself reanalyzed as an adjectival article, a component of xAP, and (ii) and the weak *nominal* (N) is reanalyzed as a weak *adjective* (A).

As for (ii), I have proposed that weak nominals of the type "A".WK maintained their nominal status beyond Proto-Germanic, but I also suggested that the weak inflection gradually lost its ability to nominalize, a function which was increasingly being taken over by the emerging appositive article. But "less nominal" does not automatically mean "adjectival"; only after phrasal reanalysis can we speak of weak *adjectives* in some narrow sense, see (16). Strictly speaking, this view entails that "nominality" is not a discrete property and that those weakly inflected elements are, in some sense, categorially underspecified, in fact both before and after phrasal reanalysis.

This, in turn, ties in with the notion introduced in Sect. 2.2 that weak adjectives are "defective" in Old Icelandic and do not project a full adjectival phrase on their own. As suggested above, the appositive article *(h)inn* had taken over the nominalization function and is thus responsible for the categorial status of the whole constituent. After phrasal reanalysis, the categorial specification has changed, but it is still *(h)inn*, now an adjectival article, that contributes the categorial feature of the constituent. Thus the internal structural and functional relations between *(h)inn* and the lexical core, whether weak nominal or weak adjective, have remained the same. In other words, the commonality between appositive and adjectival article lies in the contribution of a categorial feature, their difference in the categorial specification.

One final observation: as already mentioned, originally, there was no (morphological) distinction between weak nouns and weak adjectives in early Germanic, a state of affairs that lasted well into the historical Old Germanic languages, see table 5. When looking at Old Norse, however, we find that a differentiation had taken place, at least in the plural: see table 9.

	masc		**fem**		**neut**	
	ADJECTIVE *wise*	NOUN *rooster*	ADJECTIVE *wise*	NOUN *story*	ADJECTIVE *wise*	NOUN *heart*
NOM.SG	spak-i	han-i	spak-a	sag-a	spak-a	hjart-a
ACC.SG	spak-a	han-a	spök-u	sög-u	spak-a	hjart-a
DAT.SG	spak-a	han-a	spök-u	sög-u	spak-a	hjart-a
GEN.SG	spak-a	han-a	spök-u	sög-u	spak-a	hjart-a
NOM.PL	spök-**u**	han-**ar**	spök-**u**	sög-**ur**	spök-u	hjört-u
ACC.PL	spök-**u**	han-**a**	spök-**u**	sög-**ur**	spök-u	hjört-u
DAT.PL	spök-um	hön-um	spök-um	sög-um	spök-um	hjört-um
GEN.PL	spök-**u**	han-**a**	spök-**u**	sag-na	spök-**u**	hjart-**na**

Table 9: Weak adjectives and weak nouns in Old Norse

Evidently, in the adjectival paradigm, the neuter nom/acc plural form started spreading, a process that

continued beyond the Old Norse period.[18] There are extremely few attestations of plural forms of weak "adjectives" in the Runic corpus, so it is hard to tell when this process started, but it would seem plausible that a morphological differentiation between nouns and adjectives occurred as a concomitant (or consequence) of phrasal reanalysis, i.e. *after* an explicit categorial division between weak nominals and weak adjectivals had taken place.

5. Conclusion – Open issues

In this article, I have discussed the development of those elements traditionally referred to as "weak adjectives" from a particular Norse point of view. I adopted the idea that weak inflection originally involved nominalization, and that weak "adjectives" are actually nominals in Proto-Germanic. I moreover suggested that they maintained their nominal categorial status beyond Proto-Germanic by virtue of the weak inflection acting as a nominalizer. However, the nominalizing function is gradually taken over by the emerging appositive article *(h)inn*. The oldest systematic use of weak sequences consisting of *(h)inn* + weak "adjective" is instantiated by epithets. During the Viking Period, weak sequences increasingly occur in a wider range of adjectival contexts, which eventually leads to a phrasal reanalysis from nominal phrase to adjectival phrase. In the process, *(h)inn* is reanalysed from appositive article to adjectival article. This explains the state of affairs found in Old Icelandic where (i) bare weak adjectives are "defective" and do not project an adjectival phrase on their own, and (ii) *(h)inn* acts as an adjectival article (or complementizer) required to project a "complete" weak adjectival phrase. The reason is that *(h)inn* maintains its core function of contributing a categorial feature, the only thing that has changed in the course of phrasal reanalysis is its categorial specification. Thus at least for North Germanic, it would seem as though the article element *(h)inn* was constitutive in facilitating the transition from weak nominal to weak adjective. More precisely, its use as an appositive article seems to have been a decisive prerequisite for its being reanalyzed as an adjectival article.

One important question that I have not addressed here is to what extent the other Old Germanic languages provide evidence for the claim that weak "adjectives" remain nominal also beyond Proto-Germanic. For instance, the particular appositive use of weak adjectives has been pointed out (e.g. Heinrichs 1954, Rehn 2018; see p. 28), but also non-predicative or individual level properties have been mentioned (e.g. Fischer 2000; 2001 on Old English; also van Gelderen and Lohndal 2008, see p. 23). More generally, most authors emphasize their *nominal **character*** one way or another, but still talk about *weak **adjectives***.

A related question is whether we can identify a designated adjectival article for West and East Germanic as we find in North Germanic. Obviously, it is not difficult to find instances of article elements occurring in epithets ("**the** Great") in those languages. However, since no separate developments into suffixed vs. freestanding article elements occurred, it is more difficult to diagnose an appositive article, not to mention an adjectival article, on purely formal grounds. But there seem to be some indications that a particular article use with weak adjectives can be identified, at least for Gothic where "the definite determiner and the adjective can perhaps be seen to form an indivisible unit" (Ratkus 2011:141).

It remains to be seen how these issues fit in with the more specific account I have developed for North Germanic. For the time being, I leave them to further research.

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[18]In Modern Icelandic, there is only one plural ending for weak adjectives, viz. -u.

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