

## **A variationist solution to an old historical problem**

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The origin of the Gothic genitive plural ending *-e:*, which has no straightforward etymological source and no clear cognates in any other language, is a longstanding puzzle of Germanic historical linguistics; numerous solutions have been proposed, but none is plausible. I hope to show that a plausible origin can be suggested in the context of a Proto-Germanic sound change in progress. Much of the current paper will necessarily be devoted to the details of this proposed solution. Future research will need to focus especially on finding *observable* sociolinguistic parallels for the mechanism of change that I propose. This case also illustrates some general points about the relation between sociolinguistics and Neogrammarian historical linguistics.