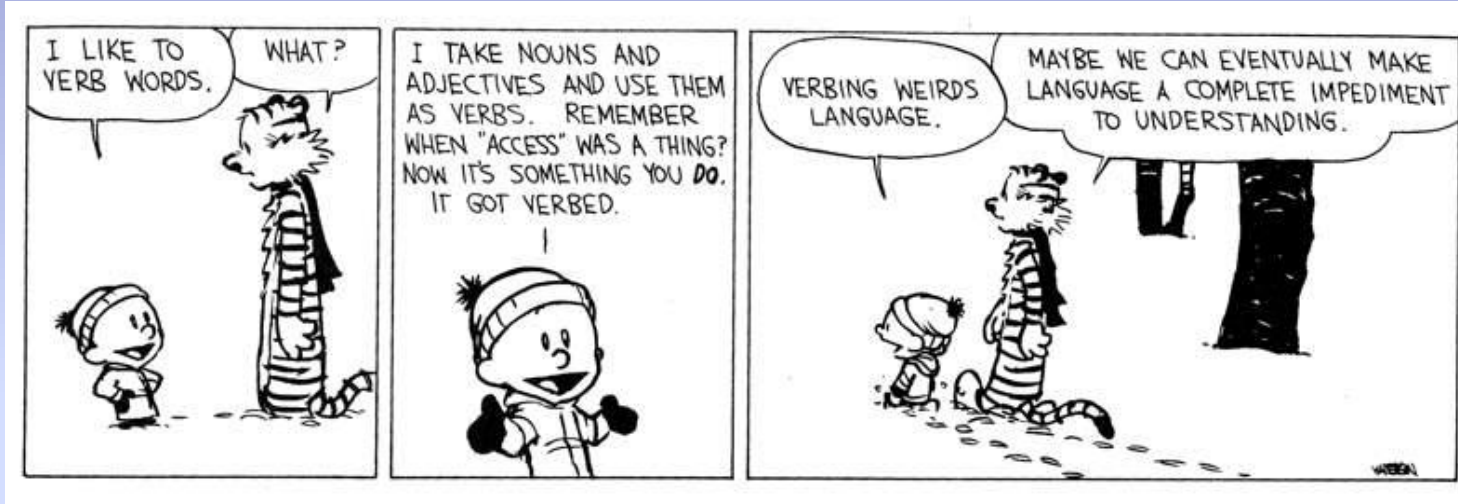


Chapter 5 Part 3: Why English Verbs Are So Screwy



<http://www.wmich.edu/medieval/resources/IOE/inflverb.html>

OE verbs

- Can have as many as 14 separate forms (if you leave out 'to be')
- Can have as many as 5 different vowels in the root depending on sound changes
- Have FOUR principal parts: infinitive, preterite singular, preterite plural, and
- But actually, it's fairly tidy—even the OCD Germans approved of it.

Weak verbs (Algeo p. 101 ff)

- “Weak” is a 19th century German term; basic meaning is that these verbs make their finite forms by adding either the morpheme [d] or [t]—they have the Germanic characteristic dental preterite (hello ch. 4?)
- Weak verbs only have **three** principal parts: infinitive, preterite singular, and past participle

Three classes of weak verbs

- Most weak verbs are *derivative*; they were created by adding a verb stem to a PIE noun, adjective, or verb
- Class I: *root + *jan: the *ja*-stems
- Class II: *root + *ōjan: the *o*-stems
- Class III: *root + *aijan: the *ai*-stems
 - All those –*jan suffixes caused the sound changes we talked about last time: gemination and i-umlaut

Note that we use Roman numerals for weak verbs

Weak verbs inflect pretty regularly (p. 101-102)

3 principal parts are cēpan, cēpte, gecēped

- I keep
- You keepest
- He/she/it keepeth
- We, you, they keepeth
- I kept
- You kept
- He/she/it kept
- They kept
- I have kept
- Ic cēpe
- Þū cēpest Corrected!
- Hē, hēo, hit cēpeþ
- Wē, gē, hī cēpaþ
- Ic cēpte
- Þū cēptest
- Hē, hēo, hit cēpt
- Wē, gē, hī cēpton
- Ic hæbbe gecēped

Strong Verbs

- Show changes in their *finite* forms (inflected forms) by changing the vowel in the root; this is called *ablaut* or *gradation* (p. 70)
- Ablaut is based on the vowel in the root in PIE; usually follows a fairly predictable pattern
- They have FOUR principal parts: infinitive, preterite singular, preterite plural, and past participle (see p. 101-102)
- Seven classes (indicated with Arabic numerals) [though Algeo uses Roman, grr....]

Conjugation of a Strong Verb

Principal parts sing, sang, sungon, sungen

- I sing
- You singest
- He/she/it singeth
- We, you, they singeth
- I sang
- You sang
- He/she/it sang
- They sang
- I have sung
- Ic singe
- þū singest Corrected!
- Hē, hēo, hit singeþ
- Wē, gē, hī singaþ
- Ic sang
- þū sange
- Hē, hēo, hit sang
- Wē, gē, hī sungon
- Ic hæbbe sungen

Modern English Irregular Verbs come from OE Strong Verbs

- There are fewer than 200 of them...but
- The 10 most frequently-used verbs in English are irregular survivals of OE strong verbs: *be, have, do, say, make, go, take, come, see, and get*
- About 70% of the time we use a verb, it is an irregular verb
- Native-speaking children pick up about 80 of these verbs before they learn to read

A lot of irregular verbs are actually **predictable** if you know their OE class because you'll know their ablaut pattern

- Class 1: *write-wrote, bide-bode, rise-rose*
- Class 3: *ring-rang, sing-sang, spring-sprang, drink-drank, shrink-shrank, sink-sank, stink-stank*
- Class 4: *swear-swore, wear-wore, bear-bore, tear-tore*
- Class 7: *blow-blew, grow-grew, know-knew, throw-threw, draw-drew, fly-flew, slay-slew*

But over time, the **patterns**
weakened...

“Next to *sing-sang* we find not *cling-clang* but *cling-clung*, not *think-thank* but *think-thought*, not *blink-blank* but *blink-blinked*. In between *blow-blew* and *grow-grew* sits *glow-glowed*. *Wear-wore* may inspire *swear-swore*, but *tear-tore* does not inspire *stare-store*.” –Steven Pinker, Harvard University

Losing Irregulars

- Modern English has **less than half as many** irregular verbs as Old English did.
- As some verbs became less common, like *cleave-clove*, *abide-abode*, *geld-gelt* and *gild-gilt*, speakers became less familiar with the irregular forms and applied the **-ed** rule instead.
- Some of the dead irregulars have left souvenirs among the English adjectives, like *cloven*, *cleft*, *shod*, *gilt*, and *pent*.

Exceptions actually have a rule

- In baseball, one says that the batter has **flied out**, not flew out.
- On a hockey team, a player has **high-sticked**, not high-stuck.
- Bill O'Reilly has **grandstanded**, but he has never grandstood.
- The stock market has **nose-dived**, not nose-dove.
- What these **suddenly-regular verbs have in common is that they are based on nouns**: to hit a fly ball that gets caught, to clobber with a high stick, to play to the grandstand, to take a dive below expectations. So they are derivative just like weak verbs are, and so they behave like them.
- The irregular form is actually a regular distinction: people use different kinds of past tense forms for plain verbs and verbs based on nouns, so they must be keeping track of the difference between the two.

New Irregulars?

- Occasionally people apply a pattern to a new verb in an attempt to be cool, funny, or distinctive. Dizzy Dean *slood* into second base, and occasionally you'll hear that people *squoze*, *shat*, or have *tooken* something.
- In the Pine Barrens (NJ) dialect of my family, I grew up hearing *boughten* as an opposite to 'home-made' or 'home-grown' (1825).
- The most recent irregular verb, *snuck*, sneaked into American English just after the Civil War (1877).

Ablaut patterns

Class	1	2	3a	3b	3c	4	5	6	7
Infinitive	ī	ēo	i	eo	e	e	e	a	different
Past singular	ā	ēa	a	ea	ea	æ	æ	ó	ē, eo, ēo
Past plural	i	u	u	u	u	ǣ *	ǣ *	ó	ē, eo, ēo
Past Participle	i	o	u	o	o	o	e	a	a, ā, ea

Root Root Root
 ends ends ends
 in in in
 nasal lateral retro-
 flex

Understand these. You don't have to memorize them.

**ǣ stands for a long æ; I can't get symbol to show in PowerPoint.*

Class 1

- Typical verbs (ModE spellings): bide, bite, rise, write
- Vowel pattern \bar{i} , \bar{a} , i , i
- Sometimes see an internal consonant change in past plural and past participle because of Verner's law: $sni\check{d}an$ (to snip), $sna\check{d}$, $snidon$, $sniden$.
- Compare $\check{d}\bar{e}on$ (to thrive): $\check{d}\bar{a}h$, $\check{d}igon$, $\check{d}igen$, which also shows breaking in the preterite vowel.

Class 2

- Typical verbs (ModE spellings): cleave, creep, bow, choose, freeze, seethe
- OE vowel pattern ēo, ēa, u, o (so we have cleave, clove, cloven after sound changes...)
- Roots ending in [z] and [θ] also go through Verner's law, so they look like this:

cēosan	cēas	curon	coren
frēosan	frēas	fruron	froren
sēoðan	sēað	sudon	soden
Lēosan	lēað	luron	loren

Class 3

- Typical verbs (ModE spellings): bind, drink, sing, swim, fight, yield, melt
- 3a: i, a, u, u; terminal consonant sound in root is a nasal followed by a consonant
- 3b: breaking takes place before a retroflex consonant in the root: eo, ea, u, o
- 3c: Diphthongization takes place after an initial palatal sound: ie or e, ea, u, o (yield)
- Many of these have shifted to weak form in modern English; only a handful of strong forms are left (yield, yell, yelp).

Class 4

- Typical ModE verb: bear, shear
- OE vowel pattern: e, æ,ǣ, o
- Also subject to Verner's law: *scieran*, *scear*, *scēaron* (initial palatal), *scoren*
- Was never a very big class, but has some impressive survivors.

Class 5

- Typical verbs (ModE spellings): speak, give, get, see, bid, lie
- OE vowel pattern: e, æ, é, e
- Typically the ablaut vowel in the root is followed by a single consonant that is not a nasal, l, or r
- Lots of diphthongization caused by initial palatals; some forms influenced by Verner's law.

Class 6

- Typical verbs (ModE spellings): bake, load, flay, heave
- OE vowel pattern is a, \bar{o} , \bar{o} , a
- Survivals include load/laden, heave/hove/heft

Class 7

- Kind of a mixed class. Typical verbs (ModE spellings): blend, fold, beat, grow, wax (meaning 'to increase in size')
- Variety of front vowels or front diphthongs in present; ē, eo, ēo; ē, eo, ēo; a, ā, ea

Preterit-Present Verbs (p. 104)

- Small, annoying class of verbs whose irregular preterit became the present tense somewhere between PIE and Germanic
- Then they developed new finite parts as a weak verb
- Nobody knows why
- About 25 of these in OE—some survive today as modal verbs (a/k/a “linking verbs”)
- Included: *agan* = to possess (‘ought’), *cunnan* = to know (‘ken’), *magan* = to be able to (‘may’), *motan* = to be allowed to (‘must’), *sculan* = must, to be obligated (‘shall’), *witan* = to know (‘God wot’)

OE Syntax

- Because of inflectional endings, word order could be fluid (and is, in poetry)
- Shows that sentence order is moving to S-V-O more clearly
- Algeo's summary on 106-107 is clear and concise, so take careful notes on it.

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