# Lecture № 15 Grammatical Categories of the Verbals

# Morphological Classification of Verbs

1. Strong verbs
2. Weak verbs
3. Minor Groups of Verbs

In OE there were two non-finite forms of the verb: the Infinitive and the Participle. In many respects they were closer to the nouns and adjectives than to the finite verb; their nominal features were far more obvious than their verbal features, especially at the morphological level. The verbal nature of the Infinitive and the Participle was revealed in some of their functions and in their syntactic "combinability": like finite forms they could take direct objects and be modified by adverbs.

The forms of the two participles were strictly differentiated. P I was formed from the Present tense stem (the Infinitive without the endings -*an*, -*ian*) with the help of the suffix -*ende*. P II had a stem of its own — in strong verbs it was marked by a certain grade of the root-vowel interchange and by the suffix -*en*; with weak verbs it ended in -*d*/-*t*. P II was commonly marked by the prefix *ge*-, though it could also occur without it, especially if the verb had other word-building prefixes.

Infinitive Participle I Participle II (NE *bindan bindende gebunden* bind)

# Morphological Classification of Verbs

The conjugation of verbs shows the means of form-building used in the OE verb system. Most forms were distinguished with the help of inflectional endings or grammatical suffixes; one form — P II — was sometimes marked by a prefix; many verbs made use of vowel interchanges in the root; some verbs used consonant interchanges and a few had suppletive forms. The OE verb is remarkable for its complicated morphological classification which determined the application of form-building means in various groups of verbs. The majority of OE verbs fell into two great divisions: the strong verbs and the weak verbs. Besides these two main groups there were a few verbs which could be put together as "minor" groups. The main difference between the strong and weak verbs lay in the means of forming the principal parts, or the "stems" of the verb. There were also a few other differences in the conjugations.

All the forms of the verb, finite as well as non-finite, were derived from a set of "stems" or principal parts of the verb: the Present tense stem was used in all the Present tense forms, Indicative, Imperative and Subjunctive, and also in the Present Participle and the Infinitive; it is usually shown as the form of the Infinitive; all the forms of the Past tense were derived from the Past tense stems; the Past Participle had a separate stem.

The strong verbs formed their stems by means of vowel gradation (ablaut) and by adding certain suffixes; in some verbs vowel gradation was accompanied by consonant interchanges. The strong verbs had four stems, as they distinguished two stems in the Past Tense – one for the 1 st and 3rd p. Ind. Mood, the other — for the other Past tense forms, Ind. and Subj.

The weak verbs derived their Past tense stem and the stem of Participle II from the Present tense stem with the help of the dental suffix *-d-* or *-t-* normally they did not change their root vowel, but in some verbs suffixation was accompanied by a vowel interchange.

The Past tense stem of the weak verbs is the form of the 1st and 3rd p. sg; the pl *locodon* is formed from the same stem with the help of the plural ending *-on).* The same ending marks the Past pl of strong verbs.

Both the strong and the weak verbs are further subdivided into a number of morphological classes with some modifications in the main form-building devices.

Minor groups of verbs differed from the weak and strong verbs but were not homogeneous either. Some of them combined certain features of the strong and weak verbs in a peculiar way ("preterite-present" verbs); others were suppletive or altogether anomalous. The following chart gives a general idea of the morphological classification of OE verbs.

#### Strong Verbs

There were about three hundred strong verbs in OE. They were native words descending from PG with parallels in other OG languages; many of them had a high frequency of occurrence and were basic items of the vocabulary widely used in word derivation and word compounding. The strong verbs in OE (as well as in other OG languages) are usually divided into seven classes.

Classes from 1 to 6 use vowel gradation which goes back to the IE ablaut-series modified in different phonetic conditions in accordance with PG and Early OE sound changes. Class 7 includes reduplicating verbs, which originally built their past forms by means of repeating the root-morpheme; this doubled root gave rise to a specific kind of root-vowel interchange.

The principal forms of all the strong verbs have the same endings irrespective of class: *-an* for the Infinitive, no ending in the Past sg stem, *-on* in the form of Past pl, *-en* for Participle II. Two of these markers – the zero-ending in the second stem and *-en* in Participle II – are found only in strong verbs and should be noted as their specific characteristics. The classes differ in the series of root-vowels used to distinguish the four stems. Only several classes and subclasses make a distinction between four vowels as marker of the four stems – see Class 2, 3b and c, 4 and 5b; some classes distinguish only three grades of ablaut and consequently have the same root vowel in two stems out of four (Class 1, 3a, 5a); two classes, 6 and 7, use only two vowels in their gradation series.

In addition to vowel gradation some verbs with the root ending in -*s*, -*þ* or -*r* employed an interchange of consonants: [s-z-r]; [0-ð-d] and [f-v]. These interchanges were either instances of positional variation of fricative consonants in OE or relics of earlier positional sound changes; they were of no significance as grammatical markers and disappeared due to levelling by analogy towards the end of OE.

The classes of strong verbs – like the morphological classes of nouns – differed in the number of verbs and, consequently, in their role and weight in the language. Classes 1 and 3 were the most numerous of all: about 60 and 80 verbs, respectively; within Class 3 the first group – with a nasal or nasal plus a plosive in the root *(findan, rinnan* – NE *find*, *run)* included almost 40 verbs, which was about as much as the number of verbs in Class 2; the rest of the classes had from 10 to 15 verbs each. In view of the subsequent interinfluence and mixture of classes it is also noteworthy that some classes in OE had similar forms; thus Classes 4 and 5 differed in one form only – the stems of P II; Classes 2, 3b and c and Class 4 had identical vowels in the stem of P II.

The history of the strong verbs traced back through Early OE to PG will reveal the origins of the sound interchanges and of the division into classes; it will also show some features which may help to identify the classes.

The gradation series used in Class 1 through 5 go back to the PIE qualitative ablaut [e–o] and some instances of quantitative ablaut. The grades [e–o] reflected in Germanic as [e/i–a] were used in the first and second stems; they represented the normal grade (a short vowel) and were contrasted to the zero-grade (loss of the gradation vowel) or to the prolonged grade (a long vowel) in the third and fourth stem. The original gradation series split into several series because the gradation vowel was inserted in the root and was combined there with the sounds of the root. Together with them, it was then subjected to regular phonetic changes. Each class of verbs offered a peculiar phonetic environment for the gradation vowels and accordingly transformed the original series into a new gradation series.

In Classes 1 and 2 the root of the verb originally contained [i] and [u] (hence the names i-class and u-class); combination of the gradation vowels with these sounds produced long vowels and diphthongs in the first and second stems. Classes 3, 4 and 5 had no vowels, consequently the first and second forms contain the gradation vowels descending directly from the short [e] and [o]; Class 3 split into subclasses as some of the vowels could be diphthongised under the Early OE breaking. In the third and fourth stems we find the zero-grade or the prolonged grade of ablaut; therefore Class 1 – i-class – has [i]. Class 2— [u] or [o]; in Classes 4 and 5 the Past pl stem has a long vowel [æ]. Class 5 (b) contained [j] following the root in the Inf.; hence the mutated vowel [i] and the lengthening of the consonant: *sittan.*

In the verbs of Class 6 the original IE gradation was purely quantitative; in PG it was transformed into a quantitative-qualitative series.

Class 7 had acquired its vowel interchange from a different source: originally this was a class of reduplicating verbs, which built their past tense by repeating the root. In OE the roots in the Past tense stems had been contracted and appeared as a single morpheme with a long vowel. The vowels were different with different verbs, as they resulted from the fusion of various root-morphemes, so that Class 7 had no single series of vowel interchanges.

Direct traces of reduplication in OE are rare; they are sometimes found in the Anglian dialects and in poetry as extra consonants appearing in the Past tense forms: Past tense *ofhatan — heht* alongside *het* ('call'). Past tense of ondrædan– *ondred* and *ondreord* (NE *dread).*

To account for the interchanges of consonants in the strong verbs one should recall the voicing by Verner's Law and some subsequent changes of voiced and voiceless fricatives. The interchange [s–z] which arose under Verner's Law was transformed into [s–r] due to rhotacism and acquired another interchange [s–z] after the Early OE voicing of fricatives. Consequently, the verbs whose root ended in [s] or [z] could have the following interchange:

*ceosan* [z] *ceos* [s] *curon*[r] *coren* [r] *(NE choose)*

Verbs with an interdental fricative have similar variant with voiced and voiceless [0, ð] and the consonant [d], which had developed from [ð] in the process of hardening:

*sniþan* [ð] *snaþ* [0] *snidon* *sniden* *(NE cut)* *Class* *1*

Verbs with the root ending in [f/v] displayed the usual OE interchange of the voiced and voiceless positional variants of fricatives:

*ceorfan* [v] *cearf* [f] *curfon* [v] *corfen* [v] *(NE carve) Class 3*

Verbs with consonant interchanges could belong to any class, provided that they contained a fricative consonant. That does not mean, however, that every verb with a fricative used consonant interchange, for instance *risan,* a strong verb of Class 1, alternated [s] with [z] but not with [r]: *risan – ras – rison – risen* (NE *rise).* Towards the end of the OE period the consonant interchanges disappeared.

**Weak Verbs**

The number of weak verbs in OE by far exceeded that of strong verbs. In fact, all the verbs, with the exception of the strong verbs and the minor groups (which make a total of about 320 verbs) were weak. Their number was constantly growing since all new verbs derived from other stems were conjugated weak (except derivatives of strong verbs with prefixes). Among the weak verbs there were many derivatives of OE noun and adjective stems and also derivatives of strong verbs built from one of their stems (usually the second stem — Past sg)

*talu* n – *tellan* v (NE *tale, tell*) *full* adj – *fyllan* v (NE *full, fill*)

Weak verbs formed their Past and Participle II by means of the dental suffix *-d-* or *-t-* (a specifically Germanic trait). In OE the weak verbs are subdivided into three classes differing in the ending of the Infinitive, the sonority of the suffix, and the sounds preceding the suffix. The main differences between the classes were as follows: in Class I the Infinitive ended in *-an,* seldom *-ian (-ian* occurs after [r]); the Past form had *-de, -ede* or *-te;* Participle II was marked by *–d, -ed* or *-t.* Some verbs of Class I had a double consonant in the Infinitive, others had a vowel interchange in the root, used together with suffixation.

Class II had no subdivisions. In Class II the Infinitive ended in *-ian* and the Past tense stem and P II had [o] before the dental suffix. This was the most numerous and regular of all the classes.

The verbs of Class III had an Infinitive in *-an* and no vowel before the dental suffix; it included only four verbs with a full conjugation and a few isolated forms of other verbs. Genetically, the division into classes goes back to the differences between the derivational stem-suffixes used to build the verbs or the nominal stems from which they were derived, and all the persons of the sg Subj. (cf. *restan—reste, wendan— wende,* (NE *rest, wend*)*.*

Participle II of most verbs preserved *-e-* before the dental suffix, though in some groups it was lost.

##### Minor Groups of Verbs

Several minor groups of verbs can be referred neither to strong nor to weak verbs. The most important group of these verbs were the so-called "preterite-presents" or "past-present" verbs. Originally the Present tense forms of these verbs were Past tense forms (or, more precisely, IE perfect forms, denoting past actions relevant for the "present). Later these forms acquired a present meaning but preserved many formal features of the Past tense. Most of these verbs had new Past Tense forms built with the help of the dental suffix. Some of them also acquired the forms of the verbals: Participles and Infinitives; most verbs did not have a full paradigm and were in this sense "defective".

The verbs were inflected in the Present like the Past tense of strong verbs: the forms of the 1st and 3rd p. sg were identical and had no ending – yet, unlike strong verbs, they had the same root-vowel in all the persons; the pl had a different grade of ablaut similarly with strong verbs (which had two distinct stems for the Past: sg and pl). In the Past the preterite-presents were inflected like weak verbs: the dental suffix plus the endings *-e, -est, -e.* The new Infinitives *sculan, cunnan* were derived from the pl form. The interchanges of root-vowels in the sg and pl of the Present tense of preterite-present verbs can be traced to the same gradation series as were used in the strong verbs. Before the shift of meaning and time-reference the would-be preterite-presents were strong verbs. The prototype *of can* may be referred to Class 3 (with the grades [a–u] in the two Past tense stems); the prototype of *sculan —* to Class 4, *magan —* to Class 5, *witan, wat* 'know' – to Class 1.

In OE there were twelve preterite-present verbs. Six of them have survived in Mod E: OE *ag*; *cunnan, cann; dear(r), sculan, sceal; magan,* mæg*, mot* (NE *owe, ought; can; dare; shall; may; must).* Most of the preterite-presents did not indicate actions, but expressed a kind of attitude to an action denoted by another verb, an Infinitive, which followed the preterite-present. In other words, they were used like modal verbs, and eventually developed into modem modal verbs. (In OE some of them could also be used as notional verbs:

þe him aht *sceoldon* 'what they owed him'.)

Among the verbs of the minor groups there were several anomalous verbs with irregular forms. OE *willan* was an irregular verb with the meaning of volition and desire; it resembled the preterite-presents in meaning and function, as it indicated an attitude to an action and was often followed by an Infinitive.

þa ðe *willað* mines forsiðes fægnian 'those who wish to rejoice in my death'

hyt *moten* habban eall 'all could have it'.

*Willan* had a Past tense form *wolde,* built like *sceolde,* the Past tense of the preterite-present *sculan, sceal.* Eventually *willan* became a modal verb, like the surviving preterite-presents, and, together with *sculan* developed into an auxiliary (NE *shall, will, should, would).*

Some verbs combined the features of weak and strong verbs. OE *don* formed a weak Past tense with a vowel interchange: and a Participle in *-n: don — dyde – gedon* (NE *do).* OE *buan* 'live' had a weak Past – *bude* and P II, ending in *-n, gebun* like a strong verb.

Two OE verbs were suppletive. OE *gan,* whose Past tense was built from a different root *gan – eode – gegan* (NE *go)*; and *beon* (NE *be).*

*Beon* is an ancient (IE) suppletive verb. In many languages – Germanic and non-Germanic – its paradigm is made up of several roots. In OE the Present tense forms were different modifications of the roots *\*wes-* and *\*bhu-,* 1st p. sg *eom, beo,* 2nd p. *eart, bist.* The Past tense was built from the root *\*wes-on* the pattern of strong verbs of Class 5. Though the Infinitive and Participle II do not occur in the texts, the set of forms can be reconstructed as: \*wesan — wæs — wæron — \*weren*.*