The morpho-syntax of OE verbs: The role of T(ense) and the role of *v* (=stem)

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As is widely-known, generative theory (ever since the GB framework) postulates that a superordinate T(ense) head (formerly I(nflection)) is to be considered a (quasi-)universal property governing the derivation/computation of linguistic structures. And though later in the theory, the C(omplementizer) head, or the so-called left-periphery domain, has become a generalized site vertebrating discourse properties, T is arguably indispensable as regards the licensing of the morpho-syntactic properties of verbs. On the other hand, as is discussed in the historical and/or philological literature (Monteil 1992, Hewson & Bubenik 1997, Mailhammer 2007, Fulk 2018,…), the verbal system in P(roto-)I(ndo-)E(uropean) undergoes a generalized change from being aspect-based to being tense-based in the various language families, among this of course the Germanic family. In this paper I aim to account for the morpho-syntax of verbs in O(ld)E(nglish) (and the first half of M(iddle)E(nglish)).

Core assumptions from minimalist theory: **A.** The licensing of τ– and φ–features works according to *valuation* and *interpretability* (Chomsky 2000, 2001; Pesetsky & Torrego 2004/2007); more specifically, features are *valued* on *v* (aside from φ–features being valued also on the nominal). **B.** I assume a *Distributed Morphology* framework where the licensing of the cited features is a morpho-syntactic operation, which serves subsequently as the input to the morpho-phonological component. **C.** Also regarding DM: I assume that roots abide by early insertion (as in Embick 2000, 2010; Marantz 2007).

I argue the following: **(1) a.** The big differential factor in the derivation/computation of weak verbs on the one hand and strong verbs on the other (in OE and all through the first half of ME) is for T to be the (novel) functional head or Probe that *interprets* τ–features on weak verbs (which features expone as a */d/* suffix), whereas *v interprets* itself (in the form of *ablaut*) the corresponding τ–features on strong verbs, by way of reflection or continuation of the former PIE system (the difference being that it is tense features, rather than grammatical aspect, that are now the task of *v*, for the cited strong verbs). This role of *v* as a Probe of τ–features is to follow from the *Preterite 1/Preterite 2* ablaut differentiation, which happens to depend on the specific type of [person]. (Incidentally, *v* therefore does not only correspond to the *stem* as a morpho-phonological marker (see Embick & Halle 2005; recently, Siddiqi 2019) but also as a morpho-syntactic element proper, which would further be the case for all languages descending from PIE in their historical periods.) And this role of *v* as a Probe of τ further demands a specific *v*-architecture: the same as the above-cited Probe of T will have *v* as its Goal in the corresponding Agree relation for τ–features on weak verbs (as in standard analyses), so for *v* to act itself as a Probe (specifically, a Probe for τ–features on strong verbs) requires de presence of a Goal: I propose for the latter to be a v^{-0} head which would be a kind of 'stem-by-default'. In contrast to the vowel in the root (√) for weak verbs at the very start of the derivation, the vowel for strong verbs is specified on the cited v^{-0} head (rather than on the corresponding √ node).

b. In a major way, a second T head is the case, which I call *[$_T$AgrT]*, and which *interprets* τ–features that are additionally endowed with agreement or φ–interpretation (person/number). The availability of this Probe is supported by the empirical observation that the exponents indicating person and number differ in the Present Tense from the Past Tense (that is, there is co-variation between Present Tense and Past Tense on the one hand, and persons 1 through 6 in the paradigm on the other hand, despite instances of syncretism). The co-variation in question had already been highlighted in the literature (see Lahiri 2003: 100) though I argue for its specific relevance in the domain of syntactic computation: the Probe in charge of such co-variation (above-cited *[$_T$AgrT]*) is shared by all verbs in the language (both strong verbs and weak verbs) and it makes it possible for the language to be T-configurational. I argue in further research that this Probe or T head is the one involved in V-to-T movement.

(i) strong verb in the Past: *hit scān* 'it shone' **(ii)**…in the Present *hie scīnaþ* 'they shine' (substitute –past)

[$_{TP}$ AgrT: *i*+pastφ: __[$_{vP}$ [$_{v0}$scīn (*u*τ:val+pastφ)(*i*τ+past: __)[$_{v\text{-}0}$ scīn (*u*τ:val+past) [√SC V N]]]]]

(iii) weak verb in the Past: *ic hīerde* 'I heard'

[$_{TP}$ T: *i*τ+past: __ /AgrT: *i*+pastφ: __ [$_{vP}$[$_{v}$hīer (*u*τ:val+past) (*u*τ:val+pastφ) [√HĪER]]]]

(iv) weak verb in the Present: *ic hīere* 'I hear'

[$_{TP}$ AgrT: *i*–pastφ: __ [$_{vP}$[$_{v}$hīer (*u*τ:val–pastφ) [√HĪER]]]]

(For the data and description of verb paradigms, I draw on widely-known historical works like Lass (1992; 1997) or Hogg (1992).)

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