

## Exercises on verb classes

(1) The ancestor of the verb *climb* was OE *climban clamb clumbon clumben*.

- How would you classify this verb in earlier English? and now?
- How would you classify the variant preterite and past participle forms found in different manuscripts in the ME period?

a1400 (► a1325) *Cursor Mundi* (Gött.) l. 6361 He clymed on mont synay.

a1400 (► a1325) *Cursor Mundi* (Vesp.) l. 6361 He clamb mont synai.

c1275 (► ?a1200) *LAȜAMON Brut* (Calig.) (1978) l. 10694 Þu were i-clumben [c1300 *Otho iclemde*] haȝe. 'you have climbed high'

Note: the *i-* prefix in *i-clumben* and *iclemde* is the reflex of the OE prefix *ge-*, which attached to past participles. It disappeared in ME under weak stress.

The OE verb marks grammatical categories by means of word internal change (vocalic alternation due to Ablaut) and suffixation (-an, inflection of the infinitive; -on inflection of the plural preterite indicative; -en past participle).

In OE it is a strong verb, since it shows Ablaut and marks its past participle with the suffix -en.

In PDE, however, it is a weak verb (and regular): climb / climbed / climbed. Therefore it shows a transfer to the weak class. This is explained by analogical extension (that is, a pattern, in this case that of weak verbs, is extended to a verb which originally belonged to a different class). However, as a side effect of extension, the verb also shows levelling, because the new preterite and participle forms are formed from the present stem *climb* + -ed.

Transfer to the weak class is gradual. In the ME period there is competition between strong forms (preterite *clamb* and participle *i-clumben*) and weak forms (*clymed* and *iclemde*, both of them showing the dental suffix of the weak conjugation).

(2) The ancestor of *freeze* was OE *frēosan frēas fruron froren*,

- Classify this verb morphologically in Old and in Present-day English.
- Which analogical processes affected this verb in its development?
- How would you explain the following real example?

Ma said the other photo was when it got specially cold and the rain **frozed** and failed like soft ice. (COCA, 2015; FIC)

The verb *freeze* is a strong verb both in Old and in Present-day English. It shows word internal change due to Ablaut and the past participle form shows the typical ending -en.

In OE the verb has four different Ablaut vowels and consonantal alternation /s/ vs. /r/. Over time it was subject to levelling (complete or partial elimination of irregularities in the paradigm): the number of Ablaut vowels is reduced to two, with the vowel of the past participle levelled to the preterite. Likewise, the consonantal alternation is eliminated.

In PDE (especially non standard varieties) we may come across forms such as *frozed*, which shows extension to the weak pattern.

(3) The ancestor of *melt* was *meltan mealt multon molten*,

- Classify this verb morphologically in Old and in Present-day English.
- Which analogical processes affected this verb in its development?
- In which way is the adjective *molten* related to the verb *melt*?

In PDE the verb is *melt* /*melted* /*melted* (weak and regular), while in OE it was a strong verb showing Ablaut and a past pple in *-en*. The verb has undergone analogical extension (with levelling as a side effect, since weak verbs are formed from the present stem + dental suffix). The adjective *molten* is the original strong past participle of the verb, which is no longer apprehended as part of the verb paradigm.

Past pples of strong verbs are usually the last ones to be affected by analogy (cf. PDE *mow* /*mowed* /*mown* or *mowed*).

- (4) The verb *tell* (< OE *tellan*) is etymologically related to the noun *tale* (< OE *talū*).
- How would you explain the different vowel in the noun and the verb?
  - Classify the verb morphologically in Present-day English.
  - How would you account for the non-standard preterite form *telled*?

The verb *tell* / *told* / *told* is an irregular weak verb, as it shows the dental suffix -d. Weak verbs are Germanic in origin and they derive from nouns, adjectives, verbs. In this case, the verb is derived from the corresponding noun.

The derivational pattern was as follows:

*\*tal-j-an* (\*-j- was the derivational affix; -an is the ending for the infinitive) > OE *tellan* (the derivational affix causes i-mutation and in this case also the gemination of the preceding consonant. In OE we can only see the effects of i-mutation, since the sound that caused it disappeared). The preterite system of this verb was not affected by i-mutation.

In non-standard varieties of English we sometimes come across the form *telled*, in which the vowel of the present system is levelled to the preterite thus eliminating allomorphy in the paradigm.

For all of you:

- Explain how the infinitive form of the verb developed phonologically over time OE *climban* > PDE *climb*.

OE *climban* /'klimban/ > ME /'kli:mbən/ > late ME /kli:mb/ > ModE /klaɪm/

The stressed vowel is lengthened in contact with a homorganic consonant cluster (homorganic lengthening). In the transition from OE to ME the unstressed vowel is weakened to schwa.

Later on, in the ME period, the final nasal is lost, leaving schwa unprotected. The final schwa is lost in the 15<sup>th</sup> century. The lengthened vowel is subject to the GVS (diphthongization). Finally, the consonant cluster /mb/ is simplified to /m/.

- Provide a phonetic transcription of the OE infinitive and first preterite *frēosan* *frēas*.

[ˈfrɛ:ozan] vs. [fræ:əs]. In OE /s/ has two allophones: it is realized as voiced in medial position, while it is voiceless in initial and final positions. The pronunciation of *freeze* in PDE shows the voiced element /z/, which is now a distinct phoneme.