Hybrid inflection in late Middle and Early Modern English and the regularization of English strong verbs

David Fertig
University at Buffalo (SUNY)
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University of Toronto

Main hypothesis of larger project

Large-scale regularization of originally strong verbs was a historical event that took place in late Middle and Early Modern English...

NOT a manifestation of a pervasive tendency for irregular items to regularize.

Overview of this talk

- Part I: Quick crash course in historical English verb inflection

- Part II: Regularization, variation, hybridization

- Part III: Hybrid strong/weak verb classes in Middle English

- Part IV: Hybrid strong/weak verb classes in Early Modern English

Part 1:
Quick crash course in historical English verb inflection

Strong vs. weak

Many PDE irregular verbs descend from Germanic **"strong"** patterns – forming past tense with root-vowel change (**ablaut**) but no tense suffix and participle (originally always) with *-en* suffix (with or without a root vowel change): *drive–drove–driven*, etc.

-(e)d and *-t* suffixes reflect Germanic **"weak"** pattern – which originally never entailed any root-vowel change.

Irregular weak verbs

Verbs with orthographic *-t* suffix – and a few with *-d* are "weak irregulars"; some have developed root-vowel alternations:

> *keep–kept*; *mean–meant*; *leave–left...*
> *tell–told*; *say–said...*
> *teach–taught*; *seek–sought...*

In a few cases, *-t* replaces root-final *-d*:

> *send–sent*; *lend–lent...*

"No-change" verbs

Verbs whose past tense is identical to their present all end in *-t* or *-d*; historically some reflect old strong patterns:

let; *shed*; *beat–beat–beat(en)*

others old weak patterns:

set; *rid*; *put*; etc.

"Vowel-shortening" verbs

Another class with roots ending in *-t* or *-d* that also reflects a historical mix of old strong:

slide–slid; bite–bit(–bitten); shoot–shot

and weak patterns:

hide–hid(–hidden); feed–fed

Type 1 and 2 weak verbs

Early Middle English (ca. 1150-1350) maintained a pretty consistent distinction between two types of weak verbs:

Type 1: Past tense *-t(e)* or *-d(e)* suffix was attached directly to the end of the verb.

Type II: A "connecting" schwa preceded the *-t(e)* or *-d(e)* suffix.

Types 1 and 2 in the present tense

Southern and Southwestern dialects of early Middle English

maintained a type-1-vs.-2 distinction in present tense forms as well.

The present-tense forms of class-1 weak verbs were the same as those of **strong** verbs.

Part II:
Regularization, variation, hybridization

Bloomfield 1933 (1)

"Some nouns fluctuated: [feld] 'field,' plural ['felda] or ['feldas]. We do not know the origin of this fluctuation, but, once granted its existence, we can see in it a favoring condition for the spread of the [-as]-plural. A neologism like ['sunas] instead of older ['suna] 'sons' would perhaps have had no better chance of success than a modern *foots*, had it not been for the familiar fluctuation in cases like the word 'field.'" (p. 410)

Bloomfield 1933 (11)

"We must suppose that in the sixteenth century, owing to antecedent developments, there were enough alternative plural-forms (say, *eyen : eyes, shoon : shoes, brethren : brothers*) to make an innovation like *cows* relatively inconspicuous and acceptable. " (p. 409)

Morphological blocking and the "Unique Entry Principle"

"irregularly inflected forms do not coexist with their regular counterparts; if an irregular form exists in a word-specific paradigm, its regular alternative formed by the general affix paradigm is blocked" (Pinker 1996:177)

Hybridization: one type of inflectional variation

"… in some cases, overabundance amounts to hybridization of inflection classes: a group of lexemes forms a class that is a hybrid between two other inflection classes in that it simultaneously allows inflection strategies from both." (Guzmán Naranjo and Bonami 2016)

Distinguishing hybridization from other kinds of inflectional variation

Guzmán Naranjo and Bonami (2016) show that the members of hybrid inflection classes have **characteristic phonological shapes**, just like non-hybrid inflection classes (cf. Bybee and Moder 1983)

Pinker's "Unique Entry Principle" may hold true in languages (and language stages) that lack hybrid inflectional classes.

But when hybrid inflection classes emerge, inflectional variation becomes **normal** (Bloomfield: "relatively inconspicuous and acceptable") for items with certain phonological properties.

Part III:
Hybrid strong/weak verb classes in Middle English

Some hybrid classes

ou: *flow, row, sow, low, crow, grow, blow, know, mow*

eu: *rue, brew, hew, chew, (au: gnaw)*

Root final labials:

þ: *yelþ, helþ, warþ, steþ, shaþe, reaþ, (leaþ, sleeþ, weeþ, creeþ),*
((m)b: climb

v: *starve, carve, swerve, delve, shave, grave, shove, heave*

sh: *wash, thresh*

back vowel + k ??: *bake, ache, brook, 'suck', (wreak)*

th: *seethe, writhe, [mīthen, līthen, snīthen]*

Before 1375:

Weak tokens attested for only a small number of originally strong verbs.

From 1375 on:

Weak numbers increase for some, **but not all**, verbs that previously showed strong/weak variation.

Verbs phonologically similar to those that showed strong/weak variation before 1375 are attracted into the hybrid classes.

Before 1375	strong	weak
flow	8	4
row	6	3
crow	2	0
sow	29	0
grow	15	0
blow	27	0

From 1375 on	strong	weak
flow	5	19
row	2	10
crow	13	1
sow	101	13
grow	84	18
blow	94	3

Before 1375

	strong	weak
rue	17	3
brew	5	0
hew	35	1
chew	0	0
gnaw	17	0

From 1375 on

	strong	weak
rue	3	21
brew	12	7
hew	90	18
chew	0	11
gnaw	54	3

Before 1375	strong	weak
yelp	5	0
help	32	0
warp	63	1
step	27	3
shape	70	17
reap	5	0

From 1375 on	strong	weak
yelp	1	2
help	80	14
warp	17	20
step	11	10
shape	242	29
reap	26	7

Before 1375	strong	weak
starve	18	2
carve	64	0
swerve	4	0
delve	29	0
shave	7	4
grave	9	6
shove	31	0
heave	91	11
weave	5	0

From 1375 on	strong	weak
starve	30	5
carve	121	6
swerve	2	9
delve	79	12
shave	52	8
grave	86	16
shove	51	29
heave	66	20
weave	41	12

Before 1375

	strong	weak
wash	47	2
thresh	10	0
wax	85	0
seethe	25	1
writhe	11	0
mīthen	0	0

From 1375 on

	strong	weak
wash	189	40
thresh	14	9
wax	155	27
seethe	89	8
writhe	62	7
mīthen	0	5

Before 1375	strong	weak
bake	5	0
ache	5	0
brook	0	0
'suck'	15	1
wreak	28	0
swallow	13	3
[berwen]	9	1

From 1375 on	strong	weak
bake	36	3
ache	3	1
brook	0	2
'suck'	19	12
wreak	47	3
swallow	4	58
[berwen]	4	4

Part III:
Hybrid strong/weak verb classes in Early Modern English

JOHANNIS WALLIS,

SS. Theol. Doctoris, & Geometriæ
Professoris Saviliani in Celeberrima
Academia
OXONIENSI,
GRAMMATICA
LINGUAE ANGLICANAE:

Item,

Tractatus Grammatico-Physicus
de LOQUELA
sive SONORUM FORMATIONE.
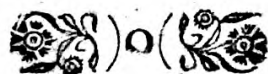
Cui subjungitur
JOHANNIS PODENSTEINER
CLAVIS
Linguæ Anglicanæ:

Juxta cum
GUILIELMI PERKINS
Tractatu Anglico
De
FUNDAMENTO RELIGIONIS CHRISTIANÆ.

)o(

fudo, *to fit* fedeo, *tō quit* libero, *to fmite* percu-
tio, *to write* fcribo, *to l'ite* mordeo, *to hit* percu-
tio, *to meet* occurro, *to fhoot* ex machina proji-
cio. Item *lent, rent, fent, girt, &c.* (pro
lend'd, fend'd &c. vel *lendt, fendt, &c.* a verbis
to lend mutuò do, *to fend* mitto, *to rend* lacero,
to gird cingo.

Verba autem hanc Anomaliam feu con-
tractionem paffa , admittunt ut plurimum
etiam formam regularem , non minùs ele-
ganter quam hanc contractam ; ut *placed,*
fifhed, beleeved , bereaved , girded &c. vel
plac'd, fifh'd &c. Nifi fortaffis cacophonia
nonnunquam impediat fyncopen paffa , (ut
gird'd) aut etiam (in Verbis frequentiffimi
ufus) celeritas pronunciandi contractiorem
formam in quibufdam ut plurimum fuadeat;
unde *kept, wept,* fere femper dicimus ; *keeped,*
weeped, rariùs.

Anomalia fecunda etiam fre-
quens eft , fed folummodò Par-
ticipium Paffivum fpectat: Nem-
pe Participium Paffivum olim
fæpiffimè formabatur in *en* : Cu-
jufmodi fatis multa adhuc reti-
nemus , præfertim ubi Præteri-
tum Imperfectum infignem ali-
quam anomaliam patitur. (Atque
                                    hæc

hæc quidem Altera Participii Formatio , potiùs quam Ano-malia , non incommodè dici po-test.)

Ut *been, taken, given, slay'n , know'n* , &c. a Verbis *to be* esse, *to take* accipio, *to give* do, *to slay* occido, *to know* cognosco.

Et quidem nonnunqum post Præteriti Imperfecti & Participii Passivi communem sive contractionem sive anomaliam , etiam hæc Participii Passivi peculiaris anomalia accedit. Scilicet tam *written* , *bitten* , *eaten*, *beaten* , *hidden* , *chidden* , *shotten* , *rotten*, *chosen*, *broken*, &c. quam *writt*, *bitt* , *eat*, *beat* , *hidd* , *chidd* , *shott* , *rott* , *chose* , *broke*, &c. in Participio Passivo (at non item in Præterito Imperfecto)promiscuè ef-feruntur; a verbis *to write* scribo, *to bite* mor-deo, *to eat* edo, *to beat* verbero, *to hide* abscon-do, *to chîde* objurgo, *to shoot* projicio, *to rot* pu-tresco, *to choose* eligo, *to break* frango ; aliá-que ejusmodi multa.

Item promiscuè formantur Participia *sow'n, shew'n, hew'n, mow'n, loaden, laden*; atque *sow'd, shew'd, hew'd, mow'd, loaded, laded* ; a Verbis *to sow* sero , *to shew* ostendo , *to hew* dolo , *to mow* meto; *to load* vel *lade* , onero. Aliáque forsan ali-quot similia.

alia, sed rarius. Quædam in Participio Passivo assumunt etiam *en*, ut *stricken*, *druneken*, *bounden*. Sed & utrobique forma analoga fere in omnibus retinetur, ut *spinned*, *wimmed*, &c.

2. *Fight*, pugno, *teach*, doceo, *reach*, extendo, *seek*, quæro, *beseech*, oro, *catch*, capio, *buy*, emo, *bring*, affero, *think*, cogito, *work*, operor: faciunt *fought*, *taught*, *raught*, *sought*, *besought*, *caught*, *bought*, *brought*, *thought*, *Wrought*. Sed & ex his non pauca analogiam retinent, ut *teached*, *reached*, *beseeched*, *catched*, *Worked*, &c.

3. *Take*, capio, *shake*, quatio, *forsake*, desero, *Wake*, (*awake*) evigilo, *stand*, (olim *stead*) sto, *break*, frango, *speak*, loquor, *bear*, fero, pario, *shear*, tondeo, *swear*, juro, *tear*, lacero, *wear*, induo, tero, *weave*, texo, *cleave*, hæreo, *cleave* (olim *clive*) findo, *strive*, contendo, *thrive*, ditesco, *drive*, pello, *shine*, splendeo, *rise*, (*arise*) surgo, *smite*, percutio, *write*, scribo, *bide*, (*abide*) maneo, *ride*, equito, *choose*, (*chuse*) eligo, *tread*, conculco, *get*, acquiro, *beget*, gigno, *forget*, obliviscor, *seethe*, coquo: faciunt utrobique *took*, *shook*, *forsook*, *Woke*, *awoke*, *stood*, *broke*, *spoke*, *bore*, *shore*, *sware*, *tore*, *wore*, *Wove*, *clove*, *strove*, *throve*, *drove*, *shone*, *rose*, *arose*, *smote*, *Wrote*, *bode*, *abode*, *rode*, *chose*, *tread*, *gott*, *begott*, *forgot*, *sod*. Sed & utrobique dicimus etiam

H 3 *throve*,

thrive, rise, smitt, writt, abidd, ridd. In Præterito Imperfecto quædam etiam formantur per *a,* ut *brake, spake, bare, share, sware, tare, ware, clave, gat, begat, forgat,* & fortasse quædam alia sed rariùs. In Participio Passivo formantur eorum non pauca etiam per *en;* ut *taken, shaken, forsaken, brôken, spôken, bôrn, (bor'n) shôr'n, swôr'n, tor'n, wôr'n, wôuen, clôuen, thriuen, driuen, rifen, smitten, written, ridden, chôfen, tradden, gotten, begotten, forgotten, fodden.* Multa etiam utrobique retinent analogiam, ut *waked, awaked, beared, sheared, weared, cleared, thrîved, abîded, chooʃed, ʃeethed, &c.*

4. *Give,* do, *bid,* iubeo, *ʃit,* ʃedeo, faciunt in Præterito Imperfecto *gave, bade, ʃate;* In Participio Paʃsivo, *given, bidden, ʃitten.* Sed & utrobique *bidd, ʃitt.* Atque huc referenda ʃunt multa ex primâ & tertiâ claʃʃe, quæ formant Præteritum Imperfectum etiam in *a.*

5. *Draw,* traho, *know* ʃcio, *ʃnow* ningo, *grow* creʃco, *throw* jacio, *blow* flo, *crow* cano, (inʃtar Galli) *fly* volare, *ʃlay* occido, *ʃee* video, *ly* jaceo, faciunt Præterita Imperfecta *drew, knew, ʃnew, grew, threw, blew, crew, flew, ʃlew, ʃaw, lay.* Participia Paʃʃiva per *en, draw'n, know'n, ʃnow'n, grow'n, throw'n, blow'n, crow'n, flyen (flow'n) ʃlay'n, ʃeen, ly'n, (lay'n).* Sed & utrobique *draw'd, ʃnow'd, throw'd, blow'd, crow'd.* At a *ʃlee* fugio fit *ʃledd.*

A *go*

Rethinking regularization

Linguists have generally understood regularization in strictly **<u>negative</u>** terms: Irregular forms are **<u>lost</u>** and replaced by default forms.

The evidence from English verbs suggests that regularization may at least sometimes entail the emergence of a new kind of non-default class: **hybrid** classes in which regular and irregular forms co-exist.

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