

Exceptional past and participle forms of *j*-present weak verbs in West Germanic: A reassessment of the Old High German evidence

David Fertig
University at Buffalo (SUNY)
fertig@buffalo.edu
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1

Intro (1): The phenomenon

Most *j*-present weak verbs in the older Germanic languages have a "connecting" *-i-* between root and suffix in the past tense and participle, e.g.:
Gothic (-)*laisjan*-(*-*)*laisida*-(*-*)*laisips* 'teach'

A minority have no connecting vowel – the suffix is added directly to the root, e.g.:

Gothic: *waurkjan* – *waurhta* – *-waurhts* 'work'

This can result in certain alternations in the root-final consonant (and later in the root vowel).

2

Intro (2): The question

Old English – and to a lesser extent (or less clearly) other West Germanic languages – have quite a few more of these *i*-less forms than Gothic.

Question 1: How old are these OE (OS, OFrisian) forms?

Question 2: What, if any, light can the largely ambiguous Old High German evidence shed on question 1?

3

One popular answer...

...to question 1:

"in proto-Gmc. a significant number of past-tense and participle forms with no vowel existed alongside those with a connecting vowel. [...] Gothic is – here again, as in so many cases – furthest of all from the original situation in that it was the earliest to sacrifice a significant portion of the ancient anomalies to uniformity of the system. North and West Germanic, by contrast, were more conservative." (Paul 1880:142, my trans.)

(According to Prokosch (1927:331), Paul's "view has been fairly generally accepted.")

4

Ringe's position

Based on Old High German evidence, Ringe argues that some of the past/participles without *-i-* – specifically those with root-final *k* – do not go back to proto-West Gmc. (let alone proto-Gmc.) but are a later analogical innovation in the northern West Gmc. dialects (Ringe and Taylor 2014:75, 98).

(details on Ringe's argument to follow later in the talk)

5

Part I: Overview of the Germanic weak *j*-present verbs with no connecting vowel

6

Germanic originals (1)

'bring'	infinitive	1/3s past i.	ptc.
Gothic	briggan	brāhta	—
Old Norse	—	—	—
Old English	bringan	brōhte	brōht
Old Saxon	brengian	brāhta	—
Old High Gm.	bringan	brāhta	brāht

7

Germanic originals (2)

'buy'	infinitive	1/3s past i.	ptc.
Gothic	bugjan	bauhta	-bauhts
Old Norse	byggja	(bugpa)	—
Old English	bycgan	bohte	geboht
Old Saxon	buggean	—	giboht
Old High Gm.	—	—	—

8

Germanic originals (3)

'seek'	infinitive	1/3s past i.	ptc.
Gothic	sōkjan	(sōkida)	—
Old Norse	søkja	sōtta	sōttr
Old English	sēcan	sōhte	gesōht
Old Saxon	sōkian	sōhta	gisuohta (i.)
Old High Gm.	suohhen	(suohta)	((gisuohit))

9

Germanic originals (4)

'think'	infinitive	1/3s past i.	ptc.
Gothic	þagkjan	þāhta	þāhts
Old Norse	þekja	þätta	(þekþr/þektr)
Old English	þencan	þōhte	geþōht
Old Saxon	thenkian	thāhta	—
Old High Gm.	denken	dāhta	-dāht/((-denkit))

10

Germanic originals (5)

'seem'	infinitive	1/3s past i.	ptc.
Gothic	þugkjan	þūhta	—
Old Norse	þyk(k)ja	þōtta	þōttr
Old English	þyncan	þūhte	geþūht
Old Saxon	thunkian	thūhta	—
Old High Gm.	dunken	dūhta	-dūht

11

Germanic originals (6)

'work'	infinitive	1/3s past i.	ptc.
Gothic	waurkjan	waurhta	-waurhts
Old Norse	yrkia	orta	ortr
Old English	wyrcan	worhte	geworht
Old Saxon	wirkian	war(a)hta	giwar(a)ht
Old High Gm.	wirken/wurken	wor(a)hta	giwor(a)ht/(giwurchit)

12

Germanic originals (7)

(Unambiguous in) Gothic only:

'use'	infinitive	1/3s past i.	ptc.
Gothic	brūkjan	brūhta	—
Old Norse	—	—	—
Old English	—	—	—
Old Saxon	—	—	—
Old High Gm.	brūhhen	(-brūchte)	((-prūhchit))

13

West Germanic (?) additions (other than root-final *-k* verbs)

- * verbs with root-final *-t/d*: e.g. OE *settan*–*sette*–*geset(t)*
- * verbs with root-final *-l*: e.g. OE *tellan*–*tealde*–(*ge*)*teald*
- * OE *hycġan* / OHG *huggen* / OS *huggian*
- * OE *fyrhtan* / OHG *furihten/forahtan* / OS *forhtian*

14

Non-*j*-present weak pasts with no connecting vowel
Preterite-presents:

1/3s pres i.	1/3s past i.	past ptc.	gloss
wait	wissa	wiss	'know' (Go.)
áih	áihta	áigans	'own' (Go.)
dēag	dohte	—	'suffice' (OE)
kann	kunþa	kunþs	'know' (Go.)
an	onda	(-unnen OE)	'grant' (OHG)
þarf	þaurfta	þaurfts	'need' (Go.)
(ga-)dars	(ga-)daursta	—	'dare' (Go.)
skal	skulda	skulds	'owe' (Go.)
man	munda	munds	'believe' (Go.)
ge-neah	genohte	(binaúhts Go.)	'be enough' (OE)
mag	mahta	mahts	'be able' (OE)
mōt	mōste	—	'must' (OE)

15

Part II: *j*-present weak verbs with root-final *-ŷk* in West Germanic

16

Old English

reċċan (inf.) – *reahhte* (1/3s past indic.) – *reahht* (ptc.) 'narrate'

Likewise: *cweċċan* 'shake', *dreċċan* 'afflict', *leċċan* 'moisten',
streċċan 'stretch', *þeċċan* 'cover', *weċċan* 'awaken'

With long vowels (at least in past tense): *tæċċan* 'teach',
ræċċan 'reach', *læċċan* 'seize', *reċċan* 'care'

17

Old Saxon

rekkian – *rekidun* (C only) (3p past indic.)

bi-thekkian (no relevant forms)

(a-)wekkian:

uuahte (M) = *uuekida* (C) (3s past indic.)

uuekidun (C only) (3p past indic.)

auuekide (M) = *auuekida* (C) (3s past indic.)

auuekid (M) = *auuekit* (C) (uninfl. partic.)

rōkian (no relevant forms)

18

Old Frisian

*(*bi*)*thetsa* – (*bi*)*dekte* – **tacht** (uninfl. partic.) 'cover'

rētsa – **rachte** – **racht** 'pay' (cognate with *reach*)

19

Old Low (?) Franconian

(*be-*)*thecken* 'cover':

thecoda (1s past indic.)

bethecodā (3s past indic.)

bethecodā (infl. partic.)

bethadon/bethudon (= **bethahton** ?) (3p past indic.)

ruoken (no relevant forms)

20

Old High German (1)

Regular sound changes make *j*-present weak verbs with root-final *k* (largely?) **ambiguous** as to whether they previously had a connecting *-i-* in the past tense and ptc, e.g:

decken–*dahta* 'cover'

21

Old High German (2)

- postvocalic *k* > *hh* in the HG consonant shift
- stems with new *hh* < *k* are long, thus subject to "regular" syncope of medial *-i-*
- in syll. coda, new *hh* merges with reflex of Gmc. *h* ([x])
- syncope in long stems preceded umlaut in OHG, so all class-1 wk. vbs. w/o *-i-* have Rückumlaut (unlike OE).
- regular *d* > *t* in HG eliminates difference between regular past suffix *-d(-)* and the *-t(-)* in *sought*, *wrought*, etc.

22

Ringe's argument

"Regular" OHG syncope only affected *-i-* in medial syllables, so the uninflected past participle should still give us unambiguous evidence of whether an OHG verb had had *-i-* before syncope (2014:75, 98).

23

Uninflected participles in OHG

The relevant verbs with root-final *-ŷk* almost invariably have *-i-* (or *-e-*) in the uninflected past participle (e.g. *-reckit* rather than *-raht*):

-decken (18)

-lecken (0)

-recken (29), vs. 1 **errah**t

-strecken (2)

-wecken (6)

(The corresponding verbs in OE rarely if ever have a connecting vowel in the uninflected past participle: *reccan* – *reaht*, etc.)

24

But...

...things look very similar in OHG for the uninflected participle of *suohhen* 'seek':

suohhen (26 tokens with *-i-* (or *-e-*) vs. 1 *kisuht*)

(Compare OE *sōht*)

Similarly:

brūhhen 'use' (all 3 tokens have *-i-* or *-e-*)

25

Preliminary conclusions (1)

The OHG regular sound changes that happened to make the finite past forms and the inflected participle forms of *suohhen* (and *brūhhen*) look perfectly regular...

...apparently led speakers/learners to assume that these verbs were perfectly regular, and thus regularize the one remaining irregularity: lack of *-i-* in the uninflected ptc.

Coincidental-partial-regularization-by-sound-change leading to analogical elimination of remaining irregularities would account equally well for all attested forms of the *-ŷk* verbs: *decken*, *recken*, *strecken*, *wecken*.

26

Preliminary conclusions (2)

The OHG evidence is thus apparently:

completely ambiguous with respect to whether the past/participle forms of the *ŷk*-verbs reflect earlier *-kid-* or *-ht-*;

entirely compatible with the possibility that the *-ht-* forms go back – at least – to West Germanic.

27

More from Paul 1880:

"The early [West Gmc.] generalization [within the present tense] of the consonant lengthening [=gemination] in the short-stems with *k* and *t* is certainly partly conditioned by the fact that the most common – if perhaps not the majority – of the verbs belonging to this group had preterites without [connecting] vowels, and the others naturally adapted to this pattern." (144)

28

Interaction of sound change and analogy

The familiar story:
Sound change disrupts morphological regularity;
analogical change restores it.

This masks a much more complex and interesting reality (cf. Schuchardt 1885):

In addition to many well-known cases where sound change coincidentally restores complete regularity, the present study illustrates two additional types of interaction.

29

Interaction type 1

Sound change coincidentally makes a paradigm look mostly regular...

...leaving speakers/learners with limited evidence of irregularity...

...thus prompting further regularization through analogy.

Note: The relevant sound change **does not necessarily affect the forms that come to look regular**:
recall OHG: *decken*–*dahta*

30

Interaction type 2

A phonological constraint related to the effects of an earlier sound change can affect the course of an analogical change.

In our case – according to Paul: the constraint against geminates in syllable coda accounts for differences in the direction of leveling of simplex–geminate alternations in the present tense of weak *j*-present verbs:

in favor of simplex where there is a connecting *-i-* in the past tense;
in favor of geminate where there is no connecting vowel.

31

Final, final thought

Our understanding of the interactions between sound change and analogy informs our reconstructions in important ways.

32

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33