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

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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–(-)laisja–(-)laisjbs '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).

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?

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.")

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)

Part I:
Overview of the Germanic weak *j*-present verbs with no connecting vowel
### Germanic originals (1)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>'bring'</th>
<th>infinitive</th>
<th>1/3s past i.</th>
<th>ptc.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gothic</td>
<td>briggan</td>
<td>brāhta</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Old Norse</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Old English</td>
<td>bringan</td>
<td>brōhte</td>
<td>brōht</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Old Saxon</td>
<td>brengian</td>
<td>brāhta</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Old High Gm.</td>
<td>bringan</td>
<td>brāhta</td>
<td>brāht</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Germanic originals (2)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>'buy'</th>
<th>infinitive</th>
<th>1/3s past i.</th>
<th>ptc.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gothic</td>
<td>bugjan</td>
<td>bauhta</td>
<td>-bauhts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Old Norse</td>
<td>byggia</td>
<td>(bugba)</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Old English</td>
<td>bycgan</td>
<td>bohte</td>
<td>geboht</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Old Saxon</td>
<td>buggean</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>gibhoht</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Old High Gm.</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Germanic originals (3)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>'seek'</th>
<th>infinitive</th>
<th>1/3s past i.</th>
<th>ptc.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gothic</td>
<td>sōkjān</td>
<td>(sōkida)</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Old Norse</td>
<td>sōkia</td>
<td>sōtta</td>
<td>sōtr</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Old English</td>
<td>sécān</td>
<td>sōhte</td>
<td>gesōht</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Old Saxon</td>
<td>sōkian</td>
<td>sōhta</td>
<td>gisuohta (i.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Old High Gm.</td>
<td>suohhen</td>
<td>(suohta)</td>
<td>((gisuohit))</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Germanic originals (4)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>'think'</th>
<th>infinitive</th>
<th>1/3s past i.</th>
<th>ptc.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gothic</td>
<td>’agkjan</td>
<td>āhta</td>
<td>āhts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Old Norse</td>
<td>’ekkia</td>
<td>bāhta</td>
<td>bāhts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Old English</td>
<td>’encan</td>
<td>bōhte</td>
<td>gebōht</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Old Saxon</td>
<td>thenkian</td>
<td>thāhta</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Old High Gm.</td>
<td>denken</td>
<td>dāhta</td>
<td>-dāht/(i-denkiti)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Germanic originals (5)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>'seem'</th>
<th>infinitive</th>
<th>1/3s past i.</th>
<th>ptc.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gothic</td>
<td>’ugkjān</td>
<td>þūhta</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Old Norse</td>
<td>’yk(k)ja</td>
<td>þōta</td>
<td>þōtr</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Old English</td>
<td>þyncan</td>
<td>þūhte</td>
<td>gebūht</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Old Saxon</td>
<td>thunkian</td>
<td>þūhta</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Old High Gm.</td>
<td>dunken</td>
<td>dūhta</td>
<td>-dūht</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Germanic originals (6)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>'work'</th>
<th>infinitive</th>
<th>1/3s past i.</th>
<th>ptc.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gothic</td>
<td>waurkjān</td>
<td>waurhta</td>
<td>-waurhts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Old Norse</td>
<td>yrkia</td>
<td>orta</td>
<td>ortr</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Old English</td>
<td>wyncan</td>
<td>worhte</td>
<td>geworht</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Old Saxon</td>
<td>wirkian</td>
<td>war(h)ta</td>
<td>giwar(a)ht</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Old High Gm.</td>
<td>wirk’en/wurken</td>
<td>war(a)hta</td>
<td>giwar(a)ht/(giwurchit)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Germanic originals (7)

(Unambiguous in) Gothic only:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>'use'</th>
<th>infinitive</th>
<th>1/3s past i.</th>
<th>ptc.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gothic</td>
<td>brükjan</td>
<td>brühta</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Old Norse</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
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<td>Old English</td>
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<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Old Saxon</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Old High Gm.</td>
<td>brühen</td>
<td>(-brüchte)</td>
<td>((-prüchtit))</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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 hyçgon / OHG huggen / OS huggian
- OE fyrhtan / OHG furihten/forhtan / OS forhtian

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

Old English

*reĉcan* (inf.) — *reahte* (1/3s past indic.) — *reaht* (ptc.) 'narrate'

Likewise: *cweĉcan* 'shake', *drecĉan* 'afflict', *leĉcan* 'moisten', *streĉcan* 'stretch', *peccan* 'cover', *weĉcan* 'awaken'

With long vowels (at least in past tense): *tæĉcan* 'teach', *ræĉcan* 'reach', *læĉcan* 'seize', *reĉcan* 'care'

Old Saxon

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

*bi-thekkian* (no relevant forms)

(a-)wekkian:

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

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

*auekeð* (M) = *auekida* (C) (3s past indic.)

*auekida* (M) = *auukit* (C) (uninf. partic.)

*rökan* (no relevant forms)
Old Frisian

*(bi)thetsa – (bi)dekte – tacht (uninfl. partic.) ‘cover’
rešsa – rachte – racht ‘pay’ (cognate with reach)

Old Low (?) Franconian

(be-)thecken ‘cover’:
thecosa (1s past indic.)
bethecosa (3s past indic.)
bethecosa (infl. partic.)
bethadon/bethudon (=bethahton?) (3p past indic.)
ruoken (no relevant forms)

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:
dekken–dahta ‘cover’

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.

Ringe’s argument

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

Uninflected participles in OHG

The relevant verbs with root-final -ük almost invariably have -i- (or -e-) in the uninfl. past participle (e.g. -rekit rather than -raht):

- decken (18)
- lecken (0)
- recken (29), vs. 1 erraht
- strecken (2)
- wecken (6)

(The corresponding verbs in OE rarely if ever have a connecting vowel in the uninfl. past participle: rećcan – reaht, etc.)
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 söht)

Similarly: *brühhen* 'use' (all 3 tokens have -i- or -e-)

Preliminary conclusions (1)

The OHG regular sound changes that happened to make the finite past forms and the inflected participle forms of *suohhen* (and *brühhen*) 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 -vkb verbs: *decken, recken, strecken, wecken*.

Preliminary conclusions (2)

The OHG evidence is thus apparently:

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

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

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)

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.

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-dhahta*
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 /-present verbs:

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

Final, final thought

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

Selected references

References zu Althochdeutsch – <http://www.deutschdiachron.de/>.