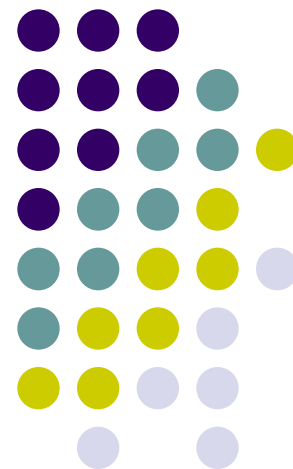


# CHANGES IN THE VERBAL SYSTEM IN MIDDLE ENGLISH AND NEW ENGLISH



# *List of principal questions*



1. **Non-finite forms (verbals)**
2. **Morphological classification of verbs in Middle English and New English**
  - 2.1. Strong verbs
    - 2.1.1. Classes of the strong verbs
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  - 2.4. Minor groups of verbs
3. **Grammatical categories of the English verb**
  - 3.1. The category of **perfectivity** (time-correlation, order)
  - 3.2. The category of **voice**
  - 3.3. The category of **tense**
  - 3.4. The category of **mood**
  - 3.5. Interrogative and negative forms with **do**

## **Summary**



The morphology of the verb: 2 distinct tendencies of development:

- **considerable simplifying changes** > affected the synthetic forms
- far **more complicated** > the growth of new, analytical forms and new grammatical categories

# 1. Non-finite forms (verbals)



The main trends of the evolution of verbals in ME and NE:

- gradual loss of most nominal features (except syntactical functions) < The simplifying changes in the verb paradigm, and the decay of the OE inflectional system > loss of case distinctions in the infinitive and of forms of agreement in the Participles
- growth of verbal features



- Verbals are gradually shifting from the system of declension into the system of conjugation: OE infinitive and the ***could be declined*** → Infinitive (at the end of the OE period) and the Participle (in ME) lost their declension.
- At the end of the ME-NE > acquired elements of conjugation - the grammatical categories of **perfectivity** (time-correlation, order), **voice** and **aspect (the infinitive)** and the grammatical categories of **perfectivity** (time-correlation, order) and voice (**the participle** and **the gerund**).
- The OE preposition **to** (Dative case of the infinitive) → a grammatical particle showing that the Verbal is an Infinitive.



- ModE: contexts where the form of the verbal is **active**, though the meaning is **passive**:

The book is worth reading. The coat needs ironing.

- non-perfect form expresses time-correlation, i.e. is used to express events that took place **prior** to the **action** of the finite form of the verbs:

I remember doing...

I thanked him for bringing the happy tidings.

- Such phenomena < reflect the previous stage - verbals were **indifferent to voice and order**



- OE: less verbals: **Participle** and **Infinitive**
- At the end of ME + a new verbal developed - the **Gerund**
- The **Gerund** < a result of a blend between the OE **Present Participle** ending in **-ende** and the Old English **Verbal noun** ending in **-inge**.
  - Verbal noun > the Gerund the form (the ending **-ing(e)**)
  - Influence of the Participle > more “verbal” in meaning.



- The nominal features of the **gerund** < verbal noun:
  - its syntactic functions
  - ability to be modified by a possessive pronoun or a noun in the Gen. case.
  - the sphere of the usage of the Gerund grew:  
it replaced the Infinitive and the Participle in many adverbial functions;  
its great advantage: could be used with various prepositions



## 2. Morphological classification of verbs in ME and NE.



### 2.1. Strong verbs

#### 2.1.1. Classes of the strong verbs

- OE original regularity in the group of strong verbs and partly in ME > longer felt
- 1. Splitting of original classes into subclasses, for example:

*Old English*

*New English*

*First class* rīsan — rās — rison — risen

bītan — bāt — biton — biten

rise — rose — ~~risen~~

bite — bit — bitten



2. Some strong verbs of one class entering another class.

- OE verb of the 5th class:

**sprecan - spræc - spræcon - sprece** passed into the 5th class in Middle English with the forms **speken - spak - speken - spoken**

- on analogy with such verbs as **stelen - stal - stelen - stolen**



### 3. Passing of some strong verbs into the group of weak verbs and (rarely) vice versa

	<i>Old English</i>	<i>New English</i>
<i>I class</i>	gripan glidan	to grip to glide
<i>II class</i>	crēopan lēoƿan	to creep to lie
<i>III class</i>	climban helpan	to climb to help
<i>VI class</i>	bacan wæcnan	to bake to wake



- Charles C. Fries: there remain only 66 of those originally strong verbs in ModE (others – 195 OE strong verbs → 67 NE, 128 verbs acquired weak forms).
- The contrary process - quite rare:

***Old English***

***New English***

hȳdan to hide **hide – hid - hidden**

wærian to wear **wear – wore – worn**

(**dig – dug – dug; stick – stuck – stuck**)



- 4. Some weak verbs > some **features** of the strong verbs > weak forms along with strong forms

OE weak verb **scēawian** - ModE **show**,  
**showed**, but **shown**.

wake – waked – waked, wake – woke – woken;  
shave – shaved – shaved (shaven)

## 2.1.2. Principal forms of the strong verbs



- OE: 4 forms

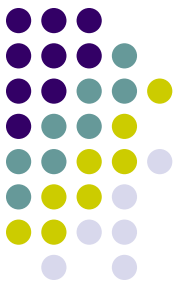
**writan - wrāt - writon - writen** (*to write*)

**bindan - band - bundon - bunden** (*to shake*)

- ME → NE 3 forms

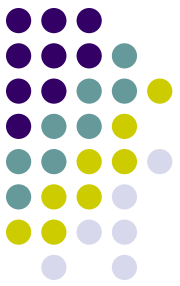
**write — wrote — written**

- ModE preterite comes either the second or from the third basic form



- The vowel in the Past tense < the vowel of OE past tense singular

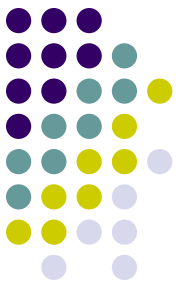
	<i>Old English</i>	<i>Middle English</i>	<i>New English</i>
<i>I class</i>	wrāt	wrōt	wrote ( <i>to write</i> )
<i>II class</i>	scōc	shōk	shook ( <i>to shake</i> )



- sometimes it is the vowel of the original past tense plural

<i>Old English</i>	bitan	—	bāt	—	biton	—	biten
<i>Middle English</i>	biten	—	bot	—	biten	—	biten
<i>New English</i>	bite	—	bit	—	bitten		





- Sometimes the vowel of the past tense form was borrowed from the form of the past participle

<i>Old English</i>	stelan — stæġ — stæġlon — stolen
<i>Middle English</i>	stelen — stal — stelen — stolen
<i>New English</i>	steal — stole — stolen



## 2.2. Weak verbs

- Weak verbs > more and more numerous: preserved in ME and NE almost all the verbs in Old English+ the majority of borrowed verbs + about seventy verbs originally strong + such verbs as:

**to call**

**to want**      **Scandinavian borrowings**

**to guess**

**to pierce**

**to punish**      **French borrowings**

**to finish**

**to contribute**

**to create**      **Latin borrowings**

**to distribute**



- Alike strong verbs many weak verbs > irregular, especially weak verbs of the 1<sup>st</sup> class < qualitative and quantitative changes in ME and NE:

**OE**      **cēpan - cēpte - cēpt**

**ME**      **kēpen - kepte - kept**

**NE**      **keep - kept - kept**

- OE weak verb of the first class > irregular < quantitative change - shortening of the vowel in the second and third forms in ME (before two consonants - **pt**) = quantitative vowel interchange → qualitative in NE after the Great vowel shift: only the long vowel of the first form underwent, the short vowel of the second and third forms retaining their quality



### 2.2.1. *Classes of the weak verbs*

- OE: two principal classes of the weak verbs.
- ME: one class, mainly weak verbs of the 2<sup>nd</sup> class:

#### ***Old English II class***

**lufian – lufode - lufod** (*to love*)

#### ***Middle English***

**loven - lov(e)de - luv(e)d**



- In NE < different phonetic processes and changes on analogy → two principal groups of verbs OE **strong** and **weak** > two principal groups of ModE verbs: **regular** and **irregular** ≠ ≈ OE strong and weak verbs.

## 2.3. *Origin of modern irregular verbs*



- OE: most verbs regular + a number of irregular ones
- ME: the few OE irregular verbs preserved + new irregular verbs < disappearance of the division of verbs into strong and weak, most strong verbs losing their regular pattern of conjugation and thus becoming irregular

# *Origin of modern irregular verbs*



- Another source of irregular verbs < the 1st class of weak verbs
- Three groups of verbs originally belonging to the 1st class of weak verbs, which later became irregular:

# Origin of modern irregular verbs



- a) verbs with a long root vowel, the root ending in **-t** or **-d**:

**OE**            **mētan - mētte - mētt**

**ME**            **meten — mette — mett**

**NE**            **meet - met - met**

- ME: the root vowel of the second and third forms is shortened < ***the shortening of all vowels*** if followed by two consonants. The vowel interchange in ME is quantitative only.
- NE: the long root vowel in the first form < the Great Vowel Shift = qualitative > now quantitative + qualitative vowel interchange in the verb.



# Origin of modern irregular verbs



- b) verbs with a long root vowel, the root ending in a consonant other than **-t** or **-d**:

**OE**        **cēpan - cēpte - cēpt** (*to keep*)

**ME**        **kepen — kepte — kept**

**NE**        **keep - kept - kept**

- ME: the dental suffixation of the 2nd and 3d forms + a quantitative vowel interchange
- NE: vowel interchange (quantitative and qualitative) + suffixation as form-building means

## Origin of modern irregular verbs



- c) verbs with a short root vowel, the root ending in **-t** or **-d**:  
**OE** **settan** - **sette** - **sett** **ME** **setten** - **sette** - **sett** **NE** **set** - **set** - **set**
- No changes in the root vowel + the ending disappeared < final reduction of unstressed vowels > verb forms without any material manifestation
- Phonetic development > a number of unchangeable verbs that originally had the final root consonant **-t** or **-d**:  
from ME weak verbs > **cut**, **hurt**, **put**;  
from ME strong verbs > **burst**, **let**;  
from Scandinavian > **cast**, **hit**;  
from French > **cost**.
- Even in the 2nd class of weak verbs: examples of irregularity **to make**  
**OE** **macian** - **macode** - **macod** **ME** **maken** - **made** - **made**  
**NE** **make** - **made** - **made**
- The middle syllable of the 2nd and 3rd forms was lost > the verb irregular.

## Origin of modern irregular verbs



- Still another source of irregular verbs: some loan words borrowed in ME and NE (most borrowed verbs formed their forms in accordance with the weak verbs of the 2nd class)
- Scandinavian strong verb borrowings: preserve their original vowel interchange > irregular:

**give - gave - given**

**take - took - taken**

**get - got - gotten**

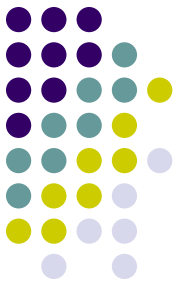
- French borrowing **to catch** (caught, caught): irregular > analogy with the verb **to teach** (*taught, taught*)

## *Origin of modern irregular verbs*



- The number of non-standard (irregular) verbs in ModE is not large  $\approx$  200 items
- They constitute an important feature of the language.
- Most of them belong to the **basic layer of the vocabulary**, have a **high frequency of occurrence** and are widely used in **word-formation** and **phraseological units**.
- The significance for the grammatical system: preserved 3 principal forms > modern grammarians recognize 3 items in all English verbs despite the formal identity of the Past and Participle II

## 2.4. Minor Groups of Verbs



- Several minor groups of verbs: neither to strong nor to weak verbs.
- The most important group: **preterite-present** verbs. In OE: 12 preterite-present verbs > 6 survived in ModE: **āȝ** (owe, ought), **cunnan**, **cann** (can), **dear** (dare), **scullan**, **sceal** (shall), **maȝan**, **mæȝ** (may), **mōt** (must).
- The surviving verbs lost some of their old forms and grammatical distinctions but retained many specific peculiarities.
- In NE their paradigms have been reduced to two forms or even one.



## 2.4. *Minor Groups of Verbs*

- Several anomalous verbs with irregular forms (**willan**, **dōn**)
- 2 suppletive verbs **3ān** (go) and **bēon** (be)
- **will** and **shall** weakened their lexical meanings and changed into auxiliaries
- **go** remained a suppletive verb
- ME **ben** (NE be) inherited its suppletive forms from the OE and more remote periods of history

### *3. Grammatical categories of the English verb*



- OE: verb had **4** categories: **person, number, tense and mood.**
- ME and NE + **3 more** grammatical categories – **perfectivity (order, time-correlation), voice and aspect.**

## *Grammatical categories of the English verb*



- These grammatical categories= a new grammatical means for the formation: analytical forms.
- These analytical forms < free word combinations of the OE verbs **habban**, **beon/wesan** + **an infinitive** (or **participle**).
- The way of the formation of those analytical forms was the following:

In the free word combination ***habban***, ***beon/wesan*** + **an infinitive** (or **participle**): the first element was gradually losing its lexical meaning, and the second - its grammatical one > notionally and grammatically inseparable, idiomatic.



### 3.1. The category of perfectivity (time-correlation, order)



- the oldest, formed already in ME < OE free combination ***habban* + past participle**

Hīe **hæfdon** hīera cyning **āworþenne**

*(They had already overthrown their king)*

The younge sonne **hath** in the Ram his halve  
course **y-runne**

*(The young sun has run its half-course in the Ram)*

... Whan the sonne was to reste,

So **hadde I spoked** with hem everichon...

*(When the sun was about to rest,*

*So I had spoken with every one of them)*

## The category of perfectivity (time-correlation, order)



- The same idea of perfectivity (time-correlation, order): still expressed ***to be + participle 2 < OE beon + past participle:***

This gentleman **is** happily **arrived**.

Now he **is gone**.



## 3.2. The category of voice

- appeared out of the free combination of ***weorpan (beon) + past participle:***

***OE***      he **wēarþ ofslæzen**

(he **was slain**)

***ME***      **engendered is the flour**

(the flower **is generated** [born])



## The category of *aspect*

- formed in ME < free combination ***ben*** (***beon***) + ***present participle***:

**Singing** hē was ... al the dai  
(he **was singing** all the day).

# The sources of the Perfect and Passive Forms in NE



OE compound nominal predicate <i>bēon</i> + Participle II	ME and NE forms	OE verb phrases
of intransitive verbs	Perf. forms ( <i>have</i> → gradually replacing ← <i>be</i> )	Poss. construction: <i>habban</i> + object + Part. II of transitive verbs
of transitive verbs	→ Pass. forms (later—of other objective verbs)	



## New categorial forms of the categories of tense

- OE: present and past **tense** forms + ME: future tense < free combination OE modal verbs **sculan** and **willan** + infinitive.
- This free combination of words → into two groups:  
1<sup>st</sup> free (modal meaning is preserved):

You **shall do** it - necessity

I **will do** it - volition

- 2<sup>nd</sup> - independent meaning is lost and the fixed word combination > future tense form:

I **shall go** there.

You **will go** there.

## New categorial forms of the category of mood



- OE: 3 mood forms (**indicative, subjunctive and imperative**).
- The subjunctive in OE: did not show whether the events were probable or contrary to fact, but it had two tense forms - past and present, which in the course of history **developed into two subjunctive moods**:
- -I/he **be** present < OE **present tense form of the subjunctive mood**
- -I/he **were** present < OE **past tense form of the subjunctive mood**.
- The difference:
  - 1 - **shade of probability, and not in the tense**
  - 2 - **denoting events which are contrary to fact**

## New categorial forms of the category of mood



- end of ME and the beginning of NE + 2 more subjunctive mood forms (analytical form building means):

I/he **should be** present - to show events which are probable, though problematic

I **should be** present

he **would be** present - to show imaginary events, contrary to fact

Here **should** and **would** are the subjunctive mood forms of OE **sculan** and **willan**



# The Sources of the NE forms of the Subjunctive Mood



Grammatical forms of the verb	Early NE forms of the Subj. Mood	Verb phrases with modal verbs (in the Past tense of the Subj. Mood)
OE Subj. Pres. tense → BE, KNOW		
OE Subj. Past tense → WERE, KNEW		
	SHOULD/WOULD ← — ME	<i>sholde/wolde</i> + simple Inf.
	KNOW	
ME Past Perf. →	HAD BEEN/KNOWN ← — ME	<i>sholde/wolde</i> + Perf. Inf.
	SHOULD/WOULD HAVE KNOWN	



### 3.5. Interrogative and negative forms with do

- Early NE: development of a new set of analytical forms (Pres. and Past Tense, Ind. Mood (and - to a lesser extent - of the Subj. Mood):  
interrogative and negative forms with the auxiliary verb **do**

# Summary



## Development of Verbal Grammatical Categories in Middle English and Early New English

	Grammatical categories									
	Mood		Tense		Voice		Time correlation		Aspect	
	OE	Late ME or NE	OE	Late ME or NE	OE	Late ME or NE	OE	Late ME or NE	OE	Late ME or NE
Finite verb	3	3 <sup>1</sup>	2	3	—	2	—	2	—	2
Non-Finite verb:										
Infinitive	—		—		—	2	—	2	—	2
-ing-Form	—		—		—	2	—	2	—	

<sup>1</sup> Most modern grammars distinguish several oblique moods; therefore the number of moods in the category of Mood ranges from 3 to 6.

# Summary



The system of conjugation in Middle English and New English is becoming more and more complicated:

1. New non-finite forms appear (the gerund).
2. Conjugation of verbals and disappearance of their nominal categories.
3. New grammatical categories are formed.
4. The already existing grammatical categories acquire new forms.
5. The predominant regularity of the verbs and their conjugation in Old English gives way to many diverse irregularities.