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LECTURE 9

**MIDDLE ENGLISH GRAMMAR.
THE VERBAL SYSTEM.**

Plan

- 1. Development of the morphological classes of the verb in ME.**
 - 1.1. Strong verbs**
 - 1.2. Weak verbs**
 - 1.3. Preterite-Present verbs**
 - 1.4. Irregular verbs**
- 2. Development of verbal grammatical categories.**

Literature

- ▶ Расторгуева Т.А. История английского языка. – М.: Астрель, 2005. – С. 241-274.
- ▶ Ильиш Б.А. История английского языка. – Л.: Просвещение, 1972. – С. 189-204, 280-290.
- ▶ Иванова И.П., Чахоян Л.П. История английского языка. – М.: Высшая школа, 1976. – С.156-190.
- ▶ Студенець Г.І. Історія англійської мови в таблицях. - К.: КДЛУ, 1998. – Tables 78-81, 99-101

Development of the morphological classes of the verb in ME.

- ▶ Unlike the morphology of the noun and adjective, which have become much simpler. The morphology of the verb displayed 2 tendencies:
 - Simplifying changes (affected the synthetic forms);
 - The growth of new analytical forms + new grammatical categories.

Many markers of the grammatical forms of the verb were reduced, leveled and lost in ME, ENE.

The reduction, leveling and loss of endings resulted in the neutralization of formal opposition and the growth of homonymy.

ME forms of the verb are represented by numerous variants which reflect dialectal differences and tendencies of potential changes.

	OE	ME
1 st	-i (e)	- (e)
2 nd	-ast	-est
3 rd	-ap	-eth, -es
Plural	-ap	-eth, -en, -es

STRONG VERBS

The historical changes in the ways of building the basic forms of the verb transformed the morphological classification of the verbs.

The OE division into classes of strong / weak verbs was completely rearranged and broken.

Most verbs adopted the way of form-building used by the weak verbs (the dental suffix).

The strict classification of the strong verbs with their regular system of form building deteriorated.

In ME the final syllables were weakened – reduced to **-en**.

The infinitive ending **-an** → **-en**, the Past Plural **-on** → **-en** ENE 4→3

1.	OE wrī an	wrāt	writ on	writen
	ME writ en	wrote	writ en	writen
2.	OE cēos an	cēas	cur on	coren
	ME ches en	chees	chos en	chosen
3. a	OE fīnd an	fānd	fūnd on	fūnden
	ME find en	fand	found en	founden
b	OE drinc an	dranc	drunc on	druncen
	ME drink en	dranc	drunk en	drunken

The final -n was lost in the infinitive, Past Plural, but it was sometimes preserved in PII

(to distinguish the PII form from other forms)

Due to phonetic changes vowel gradation in EME was considerably modified. Lengthening of vowels before homorganic clusters of consonants split the verbs of Class 3 into 2 subgroups (3a-3b)

At the same time there was a strong tendency to make the system of forms more regular. The strong verbs were easily influenced by analogy. It was due to analogy that they lost practically all consonant interchanges in ME, ENE (OE coren – ME chosen, but was – were was preserved).

4.	OE beran	bær	báeron	beren	Classes which had many similar forms were often confused that's why OE sprecan (5) began to build their PII form like the verbs of class 4
	ME beren	bar	beren	boren	
5.	OE sp(r)ecan	sp(r)æc	sp(r)æcon	sprecen	
	ME speken	spak	speken	speken / spoken	

The most important change in the system of strong verbs was the reduction in the number of stems from 4 to 3 by removing the distinction between the two past tense stems: **wrote, rode are Past Singular forms by origin, bound, found – Past Plural, spoke, got, bore – PII forms.**

In ME, ENE many strong verbs began to form their Past and PII forms with the help of dental suffixes. Therefore the number of strong verbs decreased and the number of weak verbs increased.

There were about 300 strong verbs in OE. Some of them dropped out of use because of the changes in vocabulary, most of the remaining verbs became weak. Out of 195 verbs (OE strong verbs) preserved in the language, only 67 have retained strong verbs with root vowel interchanges.

strong > weak : lock, grip, help, wash

weak > strong : wear, thrive, ring

(Comp. Modern German helfen – half - geholfen)

OE**ME**

WEAK VERBS

I. deman → demde demed	deemen deemde deemed
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II. locian → locode locod	looken lookede loced
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The OE verbs of Class III either joined other classes of weak verbs or became irregular (e.g. habban)

The evolution of the weak verbs in ME and Early NE reveals a strong tendency to greater regularity and order.

The difference between two classes of ME weak verbs was the presence or absence of the element **-e** before the suffix in the Past form. In Late ME the vowel [e] in unstressed, final syllables became very unstable and was lost. This change eliminated the difference between the two classes and the 2nd, 3rd past forms.

PRETERITE-PRESENT VERBS

Infinitive	Pres. Sing.	Pres. Plur.	Past	Participle II	
wītan	wāt	witon	wiste	witen	to know

Preterite-present verbs combine the qualities of the strong verbs as well as the weak verbs. Their Present tense is formed according to the rules of formation of the past tense of the strong verbs (**vowel gradation**), while their Past tense has the peculiarities of the weak verbs (**a dental suffix**). 6 out of 12 preterite-present verbs survived in NE: **ought, can, may, must, shall, dear.**

Several preterite-present verbs went out of use. The surviving verbs lost some of their old forms and grammatical distinctions.

CAN (OE **cunnan – cann – cunnon –cuðe - cunnen**). The Past Tense Indefinite form appears in ME in two variants **couthe – coulde**, the only form **coude** was preserved in NE. The insertion of <l> in spelling (could) was due to the analogy (should, would). In ME the verb CAN was still used in the original meaning “to know”.

MAY (OE **maȝan – mæȝ – maȝon – meahte**).

Its infinitive and Participle I went out of use.

Some of its functions (indication of physical / mental ability) passed to the verb CAN.

SHALL (OE **sceal**) lost many old forms, retained only 2 forms **shall, should**. It was no longer used in ME as a notional verb, but as a modal verb (necessity, obligation).

ME MOT (the same meaning as CAN in NE)

(OE ***motan – mōt – mōton - mōste**) **MOST**

(the Past Tense form) has acquired the meaning of the present.

OUGHT developed from the OE **āȝan (ah, aȝon, ahte, -)** with the original meaning "to possess"

Irregular verbs

They are verbs of high text-frequency and great syntactic importance (most of them function as auxiliaries).

ME **BE(N)**. This was not really “a verb” in OE, but a collection of semantically related paradigms of various historical origins. There are 3 major stems.

OE *wesan	bēon
eom/ am	beo / biom
eart	bist / bis
is	bið
wæs	was
wære	were
wæs	was

The Past Tense forms were almost homonymous in all the dialects. The Present Tense forms were derived from different roots and displayed a great dialectal diversity. **ME am, are** came from the Midland and replaced the **West Southern eom, sint**.

OE **willan** was used in ME as a modal verb to express volition. Later it formed a system with **SHALL (shall, will – should, would)**, began to weaken their lexical meaning and became auxiliaries.

OE 3ān in OE its Past form was built from a different root and had a weak ending – **ēode**. In ME the verb got a new Past Tense form **wente** (came from a different verb - **OE wendan** – **ME wenden** – **NE wend**).

In Late OE it entered the paradigm ME goon.

Development of verbal grammatical categories

The OE finite verbs had 2 categories of concord with the subject: **Number** and **Person**, 2 verbal grammatical categories proper: **Mood**, **Tense** + **Aspect**, **Time-Correlation**, **Voice** in NE. The growth of analytical forms of the verb is a Common Germanic tendency. The changes began in OE, ME.

Mood	Tense	Aspect	Aspect	Time Correlation
OE ME	OE ME	OE ME	OE ME	OE ME
3 3	2 3	- 2	- 2	- 2

TENSE There was no Future Tense in OE (only Present and Past Tense). It was possible to express future not only with the Present Tense form + special time indicators, but also with modal phrases (**sculan, willan, magan, cunnan + infinitive**).

In these phrases the meaning of future was combined with modal meaning of volition, obligation, possibility. In ME the use of modal phrases, especially with SHALL became common. **SHALL + infinitive** developed into the principal means of indicating future actions. Shall could retain its modal meaning of necessity, but often weakened it and expressed Future Tense. In the age of Shakespeare phrases with SHALL/WILL outnumbered all other ways of indicating future.

MOOD In OE the forms of the Subjunctive mood like other forms of the verb, were very synthetic. In ME/NE a few analytical forms of the Subjunctive mood appeared.

- ▶ In ME the formal distinctions between the Subjunctive and Indicative Moods were almost neutralized. **OE Ind. Ic finde, hie findað – Subj. finde, finden**
ME Ind. I finde, they finden – Subj. finde, finden.

The increased homonymy of the forms stimulated the more extensive use of modal verbs. Later **sholde / wolde** outnumbered the other verbs.

ME sholde / wolde could weaken or lose their lexical meanings and turn into auxiliaries.

- ▶ By the age of Shakespeare the change was complete the forms **should/would** (originally Past Subjunctive of shall/will) had become formal markers of the new, analytical forms of the Subjunctive mood.
- ▶ A new function – to indicate Present and Future actions as imaginary or unreal.

VOICE OE finite verbs had no category of Voice. But there were some traces of the Germanic Medio-Passive restricted to the verb **hatan** (to call). There was no regular opposition of forms in the verb paradigm.

- ▶ In Late OE the constructions **beon, wearthan + PII of transitive verbs** were finally transformed into analytical forms of the Passive Voice.
- ▶ In ME **ben + PII** could express not only a state but also an action.
- ▶ The new Passive forms had a regular means of indicating the doer of the action/ instrument with the help of which the action was performed

OE mid, wi, bi - ME by, with

TIME CORRELATION The main source of the Perfect form was the OE “possessive” construction **habban + direct object + PII of a transitive verb**, which served as an attribute to the object E.g. **hie hine ofslæzene hæfdon** (they had them killed).

- ▶ PII (like other attributes) agreed with noun objects in Number, Gender, Case in Early OE the verb **habban** was used only with PII of transitive and later with intransitive verbs.

- ▶ In the OE phrase **beon + PII** (of intransitive verbs) the PII agreed with the Subject

OE nu is se dæȝ cumen (Now is the day come = Now has the day come)

- ▶ In Late OE the 2 phrases developed into analytical forms and made up a set of forms termed Perfect
- ▶ **The PII had lost its agreement with the noun** (the Subject in the construction with *ben*, the object – *haven*)
- ▶ The places of the object and the PII in the construction changed
- ▶ In the Perfect form the auxiliary **HAVE** had lost the meaning of possession

ASPECT There was no category of Aspect in OE.

Verbal prefixes, which could express an aspective meaning of perfectivity were word building prefixes.

OE beon + PI -ende denoted a quality or a lasting state characterizing the person/thing indicated by the subject. It was often confused with a preposition phrase **be + on + verbal noun -in3**

OE He is on huntin3e (he is hunting > he's hunting)

- ▶ The preposition **ON** became weakened and developed into **a**, later it was dropped the verbal noun developed into a Participle **huntin3e**
- ▶ **By that time the PI (-ende) and the verbal noun (-un3) had lost their formal differences.**

**THANK YOU FOR YOUR
ATTENTION!**

