

Analogical Change in English Strong Verbs

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What are STRONG VERBS?

VOWEL ALTERNATION, Change of ROOT VOWEL, to generate past forms.

Present-Day English	Present	Preterite	Past participle
“sing”	<i>sing</i>	<i>sang</i>	<i>sung</i>
“drive”	<i>drive</i>	<i>drove</i>	<i>driven</i>

Old English	Present	Preterite Sg.	Preterite Pl.	Past participle
“sing”	<i>singan</i>	<i>sang</i>	<i>sungon</i>	<i>sungen</i>
“drive, force”	<i>drifan</i>	<i>draf</i>	<i>drifon</i>	<i>drifen</i>

- ❖ Strong verbs have remained structurally similar between Old English and Present-Day English. But note the difference in the Preterite!
- ❖ Besides vowel alternation, endings are also used to generate different forms.

Analogical Change in English Strong Verbs

English strong verbs have been affected by analogical change to an extraordinary extent.

❖ Change of Root Vowel

i.e. “speak”: ME pret. *spake* → *spoke*

❖ Acquisition of Dental Suffix

i.e. “help”: ME pret. *halp* → *helped*

Generalisation of one pret. root vowel

i.e. “drive” ME pret. sg. *drove*; pret. pl. *driven* → *droven*

Retention of the past ptc. ending –en

i.e. “drive” ME past ptc. *driv* → *driven*

And more...

What causes these analogical changes?

I employ two theories/theoretical concepts:

- ❖ Analogical change can RESTORE DISTINCTIONS (Brugmann 1885: 83-85; Manczak 1957)
- ❖ NEAR-MERGER (Labov et al. 1991; Labov 1994; Hall 2013)

When present and past forms (near-)merge, analogical change can generate new past forms to restore the distinction between present and past.

Brugmann (1885: 83f.)

“Seltner wird andererseits durch lautgesetzliche Wirkung ein Verband ins Leben gerufen, (...) indem verschiedene Wortformen in Folge der Wirksamkeit der Lautgesetze zusammenfallen.”

My translation:

“On the other hand, the effect of sound change more rarely creates an association, in that different forms merge following sound change.”

Brugmann 1885: 83-85

Middle High German	Present	Preterite Sg.	Preterite Pl.	Past participle
“ride”	/ī/ <i>riten</i>	/ei/ <i>reit</i>	/i/ <i>riten</i>	/i/ <i>geriten</i>

/ī/ > /ei/ > /ai/ /ei/ > /ai/

Modern Standard German	Present	Preterite Sg.	Preterite Pl.	Past participle
“ride”	/ai/ <i>reiten</i>	/ai/ <i>reit</i>	/i/ <i>ritten</i>	/i/ <i>geritten</i>

Pret. Sg. :
reit → *rit*

Modern Standard German	Present	Preterite	Past participle
“ride”	/ai/ <i>reiten</i>	/i/ <i>rit</i>	/i/ <i>geritten</i>

Mańczak (1957: 324)

The fourth tendency of analogy:

“Les désinences zero sont plus souvent remplacées par les désinences pleines que vice versa.”

Translation: (Hock 2021: 243)

“∅-endings are more frequently replaced by full ones than vice versa.”

Old English:

Present Day English:

Nom. Sg. *word*; Nom. Pl. *word*

Sg. *word*; Pl. *words*

Pl.: word → words

Pret. Sg. :

reit → rit

Pl.: word → words

Analogical change can **restore distinctions**, when two functionally different forms merge.

Near-merger (Labov 1994: 359)

Near-mergers occur when a “speaker produces (...) two tokens with a marked phonetic difference, but judges the vowels to be the same.”

Different production, same perception.

sauce – *source* in New York City

fool – *full* in Albuquerque

cot – *caught* in Pennsylvania

too – *toe* in Norwich, UK

meat – *mate* in Belfast

Pret. Sg. :
reit → rit

Pl.: word → words

Analogical change can **restore distinctions**, when two functionally different forms merge.

Analogical change can **restore distinctions**, when two functionally different forms **near-merge**.

Examples

Past and present forms merge

“bark”	Present	Preterite Sg.	Preterite Pl.	Past participle
early ME	<i>berken</i>	<i>bark</i>	<i>borken</i>	<i>borken</i>
late ME	<i>bark</i> /bark/	<i>bark</i> /bark/	<i>bork</i>	<i>bork</i>

/e/ > /a/

Pret. sg. *bark* → *barked*
also *starved*, *warped*, *carved*, *smarted*

“bear”	Present	Preterite Sg.	Preterite Pl.	Past participle
late ME	<i>bear</i> /bē̄r/	<i>bare</i> /bār/	<i>bore</i> , <i>bare</i>	<i>boren</i>
EModE	<i>bear</i> /bɛə/	<i>bare</i> /bɛə/	<i>bore</i>	<i>born</i>

/ē̄r, ā̄r/ > /ɛə/

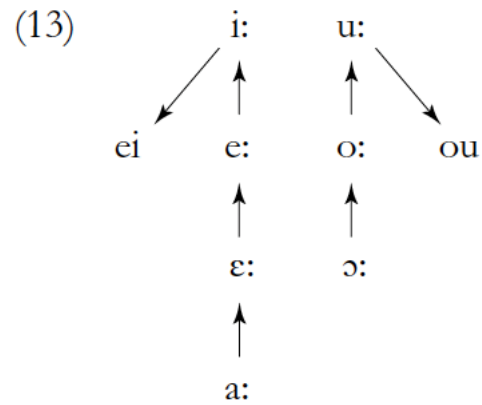
Pret. sg. *bare* → *bore*
also *tore*, *shore* (*sheared*)

Examples

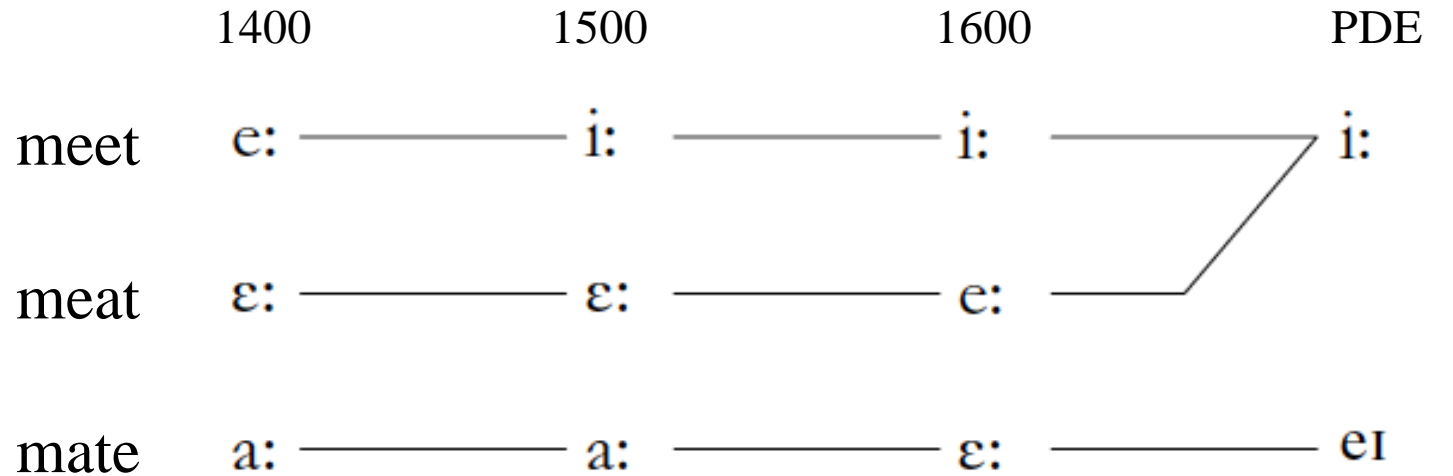
Past and present forms near-merge

The Great Vowel Shift and the meat-mate near-merger (Labov 1994: 298ff.)

The Great Vowel Shift



Lass 2000: 73



Lass 2000: 72

In PDE, *meet* and *meat* have merged. However, in the 16th century there were common reports of mergers between *meat* and *mate*. This merger left little to no trace on the further development of (Standard) English: Near-merger (Labov, 1994: 387)

Examples

Past and present forms near-merge

“bear”	Present	Preterite Sg.	Preterite Pl.	Past participle
late ME	<i>speak</i> /spēk/	<i>spake</i> /spāk/	<i>spake, spoke</i>	<i>spoken</i>
EModE	<i>speak</i> /spēk/	<i>spake</i> /spēk/	<i>spoke</i>	<i>spoken</i>

/ē/ > /ē/; /ā/ > /ē/

Pret. sg. *spake* → *spoke*
also *broke, wove, got, trod*

How are near-mergers defined in my analysis?

Different production, same perception

Difference in peripherality between two mid-vowels i.e. /ē/ and /ē/: /spēk/ and /spēk/ (Labov 1994; Janson & Schulman 1983; Ladd 2006)

“freeze”	Present	Preterite Sg.	Preterite Pl.	Past participle
OE	<i>freosan</i> /freozan/	<i>freas</i> /fræas/	<i>fruzon</i>	<i>frozen</i>
ME	<i>frezen</i> /frēz/	<i>freaz</i> /frēz/	<i>frozen</i>	<i>frozen</i>

Pret. Sg. *freaz* → *froze*
also *chose*, *crept*, *seethed* etc .

How are near-mergers defined in my analysis?

Different production, same perception

Difference in peripherality between two mid-vowels i.e. / $\bar{\epsilon}$ / and / \bar{e} /:
/sp $\bar{\epsilon}$ k/ and /sp \bar{e} k/ (Labov 1994; Janson & Schulman 1983; Ladd 2006)

Difference in length between two vowels i.e. / \bar{i} / and /i/

“ride”	Present	Preterite Sg.	Preterite Pl.	Past participle
OE	<i>ridan</i> /rīdan/	<i>rode</i>	<i>ridon</i> /ridon/	<i>riden</i> /riden/
ME	<i>riden</i> /rīdən/	<i>rode</i>	<i>riden</i> /ridən/	<i>riden</i> /ridən/

Pret. pl. *riden* → *rode(n)*

Past ptc. *riden* > *rid* → *ridden*

also *wrote*, *written*; *rose*, *risen* etc.

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