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## **PRETERITE-PRESENT VERBS IN DIACHRONIC VIEW**

The history of any language is an exceptional space for research: laws and phenomena, phonetic modulations, morphological and syntactic structures – all demand thorough attention of a linguist. The English language is not an exception, especially considering the historical destiny of parts of speech.

*In the focus of the present research* is a particular group, which has been surviving since the Proto-Germanic times, not without definite changes, but still preserving their unique character – the Preterite-present verbs. *The aim* is to trace historical development of this group, paying attention to the structure and semantics – the components, which allow us to approach the *contemporary modal verbs* nature understanding.

In Old English there were twelve preterite-present verbs: *agan* = to possess, *cunnan* = to know, *dugan* = to achieve, *durran* = to dare, *magan* = to be able to, *motan* = to be allowed to, *munan* = to remember, *nugan* = to suffice, *sculan* = must, to be obligated, *unnan* = to grant, *þurfan* = to need, *witan* = to know.

Gothic preterite-present verbs: *aigan*, *kunnan*, *gadaursan*, *magan*, *gamotan*, *skulan*, *gamunan*, *thaurban*, *witan*.

The preterite-present verbs were not so numerous, but they were widely used in Germanic daughter dialects. The verbs of this group

combine the features of strong and weak verbs. They formed their present tense from the PIE perfect, and their past tense was formed from weak verbs.

The present singular is formed from the original singular preterite stem and the present plural from the original plural preterite stem. As a result, the first-person singular and third-person singular are the same in the present.

The Old English meanings of the majority of the verbs are totally different from their modern descendants; in fact, the verbs *can*, *may*, *must* appear to have resemblance in meaning.

In Gothic and Old English, the first and third person singular of the present indicative lacked inflections.

The preterite indicative forms «developed a past tense with a dental formative element in Gmc.» [Campbell 1959: §726].

The elements of ancient inflections were found in the oldest written records of Old English (in glosses the Lindisfarne Gospels dated to the 10<sup>th</sup> century, in Cynewulf, and on the gold ring from Lancashire (dated to ca. 800(?)), whose inscription is a very old artefact.

Preterite-present verbs had so various semantics. They denoted different states and processes that had a bit of productive connotation. In this way, these verbs express the result of the preceding experience and various tones of modal meanings of necessity and possibility. Thus, these verbs express the result of preceding action which is understood to be in present.

Till the end of the Early New English there was a number of preterite-present verbs which either disappeared or were limitedly used. For instance, the OE verb *unnan* disappeared, and the verb *witan* was substituted by the verb «to know». The other verbs lost their modal meanings. In spite of it, the similarity of preterite-present verb formation is not visible due to numerous phonetical alterations. In this way, during the Early New English period, the main trait was the commonality in semantics. Owing to this characteristic, the morphological class of preterite-present verbs is considered to be a lexical class of modal verbs. Among them is the verb *will* (would), which is actually irregular.

During the Middle-English period, preterite-present verbs changed their sounds owing to the common changes in the phonetic system of the

language. In this way, the verb *wāt* (I know) became *wot* as a result of conversion of long [a:] into long [o:] in the 12<sup>th</sup> century AD. As a result, some verbs changed their meaning. For example, the verb *can* that had the meaning «to know» got the meaning «to be able» which had been expressed with the verb «*may*».

Preterite-present verbs were «classified under the classes of strong verbs according to the form of their present (in form a strong past)» [Campbell 1959: 343]. In this way, these verbs were divided into six groups according to the type of ablaut.

There are four vocalisms in Gothic and six in Old English when talking about present indicative forms. Their correspondences are similar to ones in singular preterite indicative forms of strong verbs: Goth. *ái* – OE *ā*, Goth. *áu* – OE *ēa*, Goth. *a* – OE *a*, *ea*, and *æ*, Goth. *ō* – OE *ō*.

The infinitives of preterite-present verbs do not preserve the root-vowels normally associated with the present tense stem in classes of strong verbs, which in Old English have the following root-vowels: class I – *ī*, class II – *ēo*, class III – *i* or *e*, class IV – *e*, class V – *e*, class VI – *a*, see Wright – Wright [Old English Grammar. (3rd edition). London: Oxford University Press. 1925: §224].

There were two preterite stems in Old English and Gothic strong verbs, but there was a difference in these languages. In Old English there were 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> pret., but Gothic differentiated between singular and the plural preterite indicative.

Preterite-present (in the present indicative) and strong verbs (in the preterite indicative) in the first and the third persons singular had no inflection, but in plural there was a marker *-on*. In the second person singular (in the preterite indicative) there was a marker *-t* that preserved only in the preterite-present verbs of West-Germanic languages.

The attested second person singular present indicative forms of preterite-present verbs, i.e. Goth. *kant*, *magt*, *skalt*, *þarft*, *wáist*, correspond to OE *canst*, *miht*, *scealt*, *þearft*, and *wāst*, respectively. Besides that, the inflection *-st* in *canst*, *āhst*, *dearst* and *gemanst* shows levelling that took place in Old English. In addition, in Old English in the 2<sup>nd</sup> person singular (in the present indicative) the ending *-st* marked the preterite by means of a dental suffix in strong and weak verbs and in the

preterite indicative of weak verbs. Although, the inflection -st in the 2<sup>nd</sup> person singular was irregular in Goth. wáist, OE wāst, most.

The preterite indicative of preterite-present verbs is formed without ablaut but with attaching a dental suffix. In both Old English and Gothic, preterite stems of preterite-present verbs were athematic, unlike the stems of weak verbs. In Gothic, the regular plural preterite indicative endings, i.e. -dedum, -deduþ, -dedun, either remain unchanged in preterite-present verbs, e.g. skul-d-edum, \*skul-d-eduþ, \*skul-d-edun, or have þ, s or t as the suffix-initial dental, cf. kun-þ-edum, \*kun-þ-eduþ, kun-þ-edun, \*wissedum, wisseduþ, wissedun, mah-t-edum, \*mah-t-eduþ, mah-t-edun.

In Old English verbs there is a «dental marker», according to which four consonantal types exist:

- 1) -ð in OE cūðe, ūðe
- 2) -s in wisse
- 3) -d in scolde, gemunde
- 4) -t elsewhere.

In conclusion, nowadays preterite-present verbs are very different from their ancestors of Old English and Gothic. During the development of the language, some of the verbs changed, another ones disappeared. There were several classes of preterite-present verbs, but the main common feature of this group consists in combining the features of formation strong and weak verbs.