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THE IRREGULARITY OF WEAK VERBS
WITHOUT VOWEL ALTERNATIONS IN MODERN ENGLISH

Weak verbs in Modern English are sometimes mistakenly identified with regular verbs. Although most weak verbs are indeed regular, there remain some which belong to the irregular group, for example *spend*, *put*, *make*, *burn*. Apart from drawing a clearer distinction between strong and weak verbs in relation to the regular and irregular division, the aim of this paper is to explain where the irregularity of these irregular weak verbs comes from and to gather possible relics still present in Modern English. The paper discusses 56 such irregular weak verbs without vowel alternations and 9 archaisms preserving traces of such inflection. The 56 irregular weak verbs are divided into groups according to the patterns they display and they are additionally marked depending on whether: (1) they have less common irregular preterite and past participle forms, which can be labelled as "literary" or "poetic," (2) they are literary themselves, (3) they have irregular preterite and past participle forms chiefly in North American English, (4) they have regular variants. The initial plan included all irregular verbs but the extent of the problem coupled with the editorial limitations as to the size of the paper led to the following decisions: first, to exclude the irregular strong verbs and save them for later analyses, and then, in the remaining irregular weak ones, to remove all those with vowel alternations (like *keep*, *seek*, *lose*, *say*) and to concentrate on the verbs without vowel alternations (investigated in the present paper). It is hoped that the aims of this paper as well as their realization can serve to make the content of the historical grammar course more meaningful to students by linking it to the problems present in Modern English and to the why-questions related to the subject of their studies.

1. Introduction

The present paper is a continuation of the proposal put forward in Rychło (2015), where some ideas for a new course have been presented. It aimed at providing an opportunity for students of English philology to apply theoretical knowledge of descriptive and historical grammar so as to better understand the language of their specialization. This paper focuses on the potential of dia-

chronic approach to language for understanding one aspect of English grammar, namely the so-called irregular verbs, the origins of their irregularity and, what is inextricably intertwined with this aim, their relation to the division between strong and weak verbs. It is worth remembering that this division is characteristic of all Germanic languages with the exceptions of Yiddish[1] and Afrikaans.[2]

In order to define the distinction between strong and weak verbs, it can be generalized that strong verbs form the preterite (henceforth PRT) and the past participle (henceforth PP) by means of vowel alternations known as apophony (or ablaut), whereas weak verbs utilize the dental suffix for the same purpose. Clear cases of strong verbs are illustrated in (1) and weak verbs are exemplified in (2).

(1)   (2)
ride – rode – ridden   dance – dance**d** – dance**d** /t/
shine – shone – shone   walk – walk**ed** – walk**ed** /t/
shake – shook – shaken   gain – gain**ed** – gain**ed** /d/
swim – swam – swum   end – end**ed** – end**ed** /ɪd/

At this point, one might jump to the conclusion that weak verbs are the regular ones and strong verbs are the irregular ones. Indeed, weak verbs are sometimes mistakenly identified with regular verbs, even in dictionaries of linguistics, for example: "A regular verb which forms the past tense and past participle by adding -*ed* is known as a weak verb (e.g. *open-opened*)" (Richards and Schmidt 2002: 518). While it cannot be denied that all regular verbs are weak, the opposite generalization is not valid because there are many weak verbs which belong to the irregular group and they are the focus of the present paper.

To begin with, some clarification is in order with regard to the so-called dental suffix, which lies in the definition of weak verbs. The dental suffix can be defined as a PRT and PP marker, which contains /t/ or /d/. It is a Germanic innovation which must have evolved in Proto-Germanic. In Icelandic, the dental suffix may also contain the interdental fricative, e.g. *baka* 'I bake' – *bakaði* 'I baked'. As one can see, the concept of the dental suffix should be broad enough not only to ignore the voiced/voiceless distinction, but also to include adjacent places of articulation: e.g. the interdental fricative. (Note that Modern English /d/ and /t/ are not dental sensu stricto but alveolar). Consequently, as a rule of thumb for students, whenever there is /d/ or /t/ in word final position in English PRT or PP, especially if it is absent from the present form, we can interpret it as a strong argument that the verb is weak. The following verbs are a case in point:

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[1] According to Jacobs, Prince and van der Auwera (1994: 406), Yiddish has lost the distinction between strong and weak verbs.
[2] There are only vestiges of the PRT in Afrikaans. Apart from several auxiliary verbs (*kan – kon* 'be able', *sal – sol* 'will', *will – wou* 'want' and *wees – was* 'be'), there are only a few verbs that have retained their strong PRT forms, which exist in free variation with the regular forms, e.g. *dink* 'to think' – *dag/dog* and *het gedink* (also *het gedag/gedog*); for details cf. Donaldson (1994: 495).

(3)

a.   b.

burn – burnt – burnt   think – thought – thought
have – had – had   keep – kept – kept
make – made – made   leave – left – left
smell – smelt – smelt   lose – lost – lost

Of course, /d/ or /t/ does not have to be absent from the present form, as it may be the case that /d/ or /t/ is accidentally the last segment of the root. In such verbs, we either have /d/ in the present and /t/ in the PRT and the PP (illustrated in 4) or it is often the case that the dental suffix has merged with the final consonant of the root leading to three identical forms, exemplified in (5).

(4)   (5)

bend – bent – bent   cut – cut – cut
build – built – built   hurt – hurt – hurt
lend – lent – lent   rid – rid – rid

To sum up, the /t/ in *kept* or *smelt* is the manifestation of the dental suffix and is identical in this respect with the /t/ of *-ed* in *walked* /wɔːkt/ or in *kissed* /kɪst/. All the verbs presented in (2), (3), (4) and (5) exemplify weak verbs, but some of them additionally display vowel alternations, illustrated in (3b), which result from various sound changes and should not be confused with apophony, exemplified in (1). In the later part of the paper, an attempt will be made to explain the irregularity within the group of irregular weak verbs without vowel alternations, illustrated in (3a), (4) and (5).

2. Sources

All the forms of the analysed verbs, especially the Old English (OE) ones, are taken from the Oxford English Dictionary (henceforth OED) and the Oxford Dictionary of English (henceforth ODE), unless otherwise indicated. With all its advantages (inter alia historical and alternative spellings), the OED occasionally turned out to have some drawbacks. While looking up the verb *rid*, for example, one may find the following information: PRT 5– *rid*; 7– *ridded* (suggesting of course that the PRT form *rid* has been in use since the 15th century, while the form *ridded* goes back to the 17th century). The trouble is that one does not find any labels signalling which of the forms is more common or old-fashioned – the information which is very useful to non-native speakers, especially non-native teachers of English. For this reason, the ODE and the Oxford Learners' Dictionary (henceforth OLD) have also been consulted. In this example, the ODE provides the following information: past and past participle *rid* or archaic *ridded*.

Another advantage of the ODE over the OED is that it distinguishes the forms preferred in American English from the ones only used in British English. While the OED supplies undiscriminating variants, e.g.: PRT and PP *spelled*, *spelt*, the ODE notes: PRT and PP *spelled* or chiefly Brit. *spelt*. Also the Shorter Oxford English Dictionary (henceforth SOED) proved useful as it includes many archaisms, which are not marked as archaisms in the OED and are omitted in other dictionaries, e.g. archaic *shred* as the PRT and PP of *shred*, or obs. *splitted*. Occasionally, the British National Corpus (Davies 2004–) has been consulted, for example to determine the extent of *blent* and *ridded* as the PRT and PP of *blend* and *rid*. Several excellent diachronic grammar books deal with irregular verbs from various angles, such as Jespersen (1942), Wełna (1996), Hogg (2011).

3. Explaining the irregularity

One of the reasons why certain weak verbs are listed by teaching grammars and learner dictionaries as irregular lies in the application of the orthographic criterion. In the present research, the irregular verbs are distinguished on the basis of the phonological criterion. As a result, when we consider the sound structure, there is nothing irregular in verbs like *pay – paid* or *lay – laid*. They form the PRT and PP by adding /d/ in the same way as *play – played*. Similarly, the PRT and PP of *bless* and *strip*, even when spelled *blesst* and *stript*, do not differ in pronunciation from *blessed* and *stripped*. If one follows orthographic criterion, one might also consider the verb *mimic* irregular because the PRT and PP are spelled *mimicked*. Likewise, the verbs *worship* and *handicap* display *worshipped* and *handicapped* in the PRT and PP even though the stress falls on the first syllable (regularly, we double the final consonant letter when the stress falls on the last syllable, as in *occurred*, *regretted*, and in monosyllabic *stopped*, *rubbed*, and *planned*, but not in *developed*, and *visited*). All in all, we exclude such verbs from the group of irregular verbs and from the count in the conclusion. On the other hand, the verb *earn* is included, because if *earned* is pronounced /ɜːnt/, it is as irregular as *learnt*.

The first group of irregular weak verbs exhibits irregularity which lies in the spelling and pronunciation of the dental suffix as <-t> /t/. These verbs can also be spelled with <-ed>. The forms with <-t> are usually[3] labelled as "chiefly British."

(6)
spoil – spoilt/spoiled – spoilt/spoiled
burn – burnt/burned – burnt/burned
learn – learnt/learned – learnt/learned

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[3] For example, by the ODE. The OLD lists both possibilities without labels except for *smelt* and *spoilt*, which are preceded with "British English also."

We may add to this group the following four, which differ only in the loss of <l> in the spelling and in that both variants are listed without any labels, except for *spelt*, which is marked by the ODE as "chiefly British."

(7)
dwell – dwelt/dwelled – dwelt/dwelled
smell – smelt/smelled – smelt/smelled
spell – spelt/spelled – spelt/spelled
spill – spilt/spilled – spilt/spilled

In order to find out which of the two forms is more common for each verb, the British National Corpus (Davies 2004–) has been consulted and the frequencies for both forms have been compared. The results are presented below.

(8)
spoilt – 353, spoiled – 389
burnt – 1246, burned – 1408
learnt – 2137, learned – 5200
dwelt – 142, dwelled – 14
smelt – 447, smelled – 315
spelt – 436, spelled – 252
spilt – 213, spilled – 419

Most of these verbs are native and were already recorded in OE: *leornian*, *dwellan* 'lead astray, hinder, delay', *spillan*; *burn* is the result of two verbs running together: *birnan* 'be on fire' and *bærnan* 'consume by fire'[4] (cf. ODE); *smell*[5] is of unknown origin (cf. ODE). Loanwords include *spell* and *spoil*[6] (both from Old French). It should, however, be added that Old French *espeller* (modern French *épeler*) comes from the Germanic stem *spell*-, which is still found in the English noun *spell*[7] and an obsolete or dial. verb *spell* (OE *spellian*) 'to dis-

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[4] According to the OED, "The modern verb represents two earlier verbs, viz. (1) the intransitive strong vb., Goth. *brinnan*, (*brann*, *brunnum*; *brunnans*), ON. *brinnan* (later *brennan*), OS., OHG., MHG. *brinnan*, OE. *brinnan*, by metathesis *birnan*, *bernan*, *beornan*, (*bran*, *barn*, *born*, *bearn*; *burnon*, *bornen*) 'ardere'; and (2) the derived factitive weak vb., Goth. *brannjan* (*brannida*, *branniþs*), ON. *brenna*, OS., OHG. *brenn(i)an*, (MHG. and Ger. *brennen*), OE. *bærnan* (by metathesis for *brennan*), *bærnde*, 'urere'. *Beornan* and *bærnan* were still distinct in OE., but ran together early in the ME. period."

[5] According to the OED, "Early ME. *smellen* and *smüllen*, no doubt of OE. origin, but not recorded, and not represented in any of the cognate languages." A similar statement can be found in Onions (1966: 838). Klein (1966: 1462), by contrast, lists the following cognates: LG *smelen* and Du. *smeulen* 'to smolder'.

[6] On the basis of the information in Klein (1966: 1493-94), one may deduce that the same root as in *spoil* can also be found in the Polish *pleć*, *plewić* 'to weed'.

[7] According to the OED, the modern meaning of the noun *spell* 'a set of words, a formula or verse, supposed to possess occult or magical powers; a charm or incantation; a means of accomplishing

course or preach; to talk, converse, or speak', and also: 'to utter, declare, relate, tell'. Apparently in the Middle English bilingual world a new sense was taken from Anglo-Norman French, which gradually began to dominate and finally the original Old English meaning was lost.[8] According to Klein (1966: 1485), the roots of *spell* are to be sought in Frankish **spellon* 'to tell', which is related to OHG *spellōn* and German *Beispiel* 'example'.

When we focus on the pronunciation, what is actually irregular about the verbs in (6) and (7) is not the voiceless /t/ alone (it is found in many regular verbs after voiceless obstruents except for /t/, like *asked*, *helped*, *liked*), but the fact that the voiceless /t/ follows sounds believed to be voiced. What the verbs in (6) and (7) have in common is the lateral /l/ or the alveolar nasal /n/ directly before the dental suffix. Both /l/ and /n/ belong to sonorants, which are homorganic with the place of articulation of the dental suffix. It is also interesting to note that an investigation of the transcription recorded in pronunciation dictionaries (Wells 2008, Jones 2011) reveals that there is at least one more verb that could be added to Group 1. If we are to classify irregular verbs on the basis of their pronunciation, we can add *earn* – *earned* /ɜːnd/ or /ɜːnt/ in RP. Other verbs which have similar sound structure, like *returned*, *yearned*, *warned*, *turned* are recorded only with /d/.

The voiceless dental suffix following sonorants is also found in another group, which is characterized by /d/ as the last segment of the present, but absent from the PRT and PP forms. For the sake of brevity and clarity, only two forms are given below (the first for the present and the second for the PRT and PP):

(9) GROUP 2
bend – bent (bended)[9]
blend – blended (blent)[10]
build – built (arch. & poet. builded, cf. SOED)
gild – gilded (gilt)[11]
gird – girded/girt
lend – lent
rend – rent (obs. rended, cf. SOED)

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enchantment or exorcism' has been attested since 1579. Earlier, in Old and Middle English, the noun meant 'discourse, narration, speech', and also '*a* discourse or sermon; a narrative or tale'.

[8] The author wishes to thank the anonymous reviewer for this observation.

[9] *Bended* is not found in the ODE, but in the SOED, it is marked: arch. exc. *in bended knee*(*s*) 'kneeling, esp. in reverence, supplication, or submission'.

[10] The verb is treated like a regular verb by the ODE but the dictionary includes a separate entry for *blent* labelled as "literary" and defined as "past and past participle of *blend*." The OED lists *blent* as an inflected form of *blend* as well as lists it as the PRT and PP still in use. The SOED labels *blent* as "poet. & rhet." The BNC provides 4 attestations of *blent* and 272 of *blended*.

[11] The verb is treated like a regular verb by the ODE but it includes a separate entry for the adjective *gilt* 'covered thinly with gold leaf or gold paint'. The OED lists *gilt* as an inflected form of *gild* as well as lists it as the PRT and PP still in use. The SOED labels *gilt* as "now chiefly in lit. sense."

send – sent
spend – spent
wend – wended (went)[12]

In order to understand the origin of the irregularity in both groups, first, it should be observed that the /t/ in the PRT and PP of the verbs above (after sonorants) is not found in OE. Instead, the verbs exhibited the regular voiced /d/ (OE *dwealde*, *gyrde*, *leornode*, *bende*, *sende*, *spilde*). The inspection of the PRT and PP forms in the OED reveals that the /t/ in these verbs generally appears from the 13th century onward, only *went* (spelled *wænte* or *wante*) is attested as early as the 12th century. Eliason (1967: 215), who also takes into account earlier research conducted by Marckwardt (1935), argues that the origin of the irregular dental suffix *-t* is to be sought in a phonological change in the PRT of verbs like *send*, which was probably first extended to verbs resembling *send* in the PRT and then to others unlike *send*. What should also be noted is two characteristics shared by the majority of the verbs above, namely: a short vowel of the root and one of the sonorants: /l/, /n/ or /r/ directly before the dental suffix. The apparent exceptions in Group 1, listed in (6) above, did not have long vowels until recently.

Our third group contains verbs with invariant present, PRT and PP forms.

(10) GROUP 3

bet	cut	put	[shred]	(sweat)
bid*	(fit)	quit	shut	thrust
burst	hit	rid	slit	wed
bust	hurt	set	spit	wet
cast	knit	shed	split	
cost	let	shit	spread	

* Etymologically, there are two verbs *bid*. One verb *bid* 'offer (a certain price) for something, especially at an auction' (OE *bēodan* 'to offer, command'), related to Dutch *bieden* and German *bieten* has identical infinitive, PRT and PP forms. The other verb *bid*, related to German *bitten* has two PRT forms: *bade* or *bid* with the following senses: (1) utter (a greeting or farewell) to e.g.: *James bade a tearful farewell to his parents*, and (2) *archaic or literary* command or order (someone) to do something: *I did as he bade me*. (cf. ODE). The OED, by contrast, presents both verbs under one entry, probably because "the sense 'command' had been developed in both verbs already in OE. The past tenses were further confused in form in ME. The result was the frequent substitution of the forms of one verb for the other, in other senses also, and their total confusion after 1400–1500."

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[12] Etymologically we can consider *went* as the PRT and PP of *wend*. *Went* has become semantically related to a different verb, i.e. *go*, which is a classic example of suppletion.

The verbs *fit*,[13] *knit*,[14] *quit*, *shred*,[15] *sweat*,[16] and *wed* are mainly used as regular verbs in British English. *Bet*, *burst*,[17] *bust*, *cost*,[18] *set*,[19] *shed*,[20] *shit*, *slit*,[21] *split*,[22] *spread*,[23] *rid*,[24] and *wet* can also be used as regular verbs, though this is sometimes very rare (see the footnotes). The verb *spit*, apart from *spat*, has also *spit* for the PRT and PP, which is sometimes marked as "especially in North American English."[25] The verb *shit*, apart from PRT and PP *shit* and *shitted*, has also PRT *shat* and rare or obs. PP *shitten* (cf. SOED).

Of these verbs, the native ones, which originate from weak verbs, are *cut*, *knit*, *put*, *set*, *shit*, *shut*, *slit*, *wed*, *wet*, *shred*, *spread*, and *sweat*. Most of them go back to OE: **cyttan*,[26] *cnyttan*, **putian*, *settan*, *shyttan*, *weddian*, *wētan* and *scrēadian*, *-sprǣdan*, *swǣtan*. The last three used to have long vowels. The verb *slit* as a weak verb appears slightly later (at the turn of the 13th century – ME. *slitte*. The OED notes "obscurely related to OE. *slītan*: see *slite*.") The verb *bet* is first attested in late 16th century. Several originally strong verbs have later been attracted into

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[13] The verb is regular in British English. In North American English, the PRT and PP is usually *fit* (cf. the ODE and the OLD, which additionally specifies that *fit* is not used in NAmE as the PP in the passive).

[14] The verb is usually regular, but in some senses *knit* is often used for the PRT and PP: *a closely knit family*, or *Society is knit together by certain commonly held beliefs*. The examples come from the ODE and the OLD respectively. According to the OED, the strong past tense of *knit* in the north is *knat*. The search in the BNC has not yielded any results.

[15] The ODE treats the verb as regular, the SOED provides two PRT and PP forms: *shredded*, and *shred* (arch.).

[16] The verb is mostly regular (no irregular forms listed in the OLD). The irregular PRT and PP *sweat* is labelled as "N.Amer" by the ODE. The SOED marks the PRT as "now US & dial." and the PP as "obsolete."

[17] The SOED marks *bursted* as "dial.," the OED as "incorrect," while the ODE and the OLD do not mention it.

[18] In the sense 'estimate the price of' the verb is regular, e.g. *The project needs to be costed in detail* or *Their accountants have costed the project at $8.1 million*.

[19] *Set* is regular in the sense: group (pupils or students) into sets for instruction on a particular subject (cf. SOED), e.g. *subjects which we aren't even setted for* (from BNC). Admittedly, it is a denominal verb, from *sect* 'a group or collection of people or things', which originally came from Old French *sette* from Latin *secta* 'sect', but it was influenced by the deverbal noun *set* merging with it (cf. SOED).

[20] Apart from (now arch. rare) *shedded* (cf. SOED), there is also a denominal verb *shed*[2] 'place (sheep etc.) in a shed' (SOED) and 'park (a vehicle) in a depot': *the buses were temporarily shedded in that depot* (ODE), but it is a homonym (app. from var. of *shade* noun).

[21] The SOED mentions: (rare) *slitted*.

[22] PRT and PP *splitted* is treated as still in use by the OED (with no labels), ignored by the ODE, and marked with a dagger by the SOED. The BNC does not provide any occurrences.

[23] The SOED mentions (arch. & poet.) *spreaded*, the OED has a separate entry. The ODE ignores it.

[24] The verb *rid* has also the regular *ridded* marked by the ODE as "archaic." The BNC does not provide any occurrences.

[25] The label is found for example in the OLD. The ODE just lists the two possibilities with no labels.

[26] According to the OED, attested since the late 13th century, according to the ODE, "probably existing, although not recorded, in OE."

this group, such as *bid* (two OE verbs: *bēodan* 'to offer, command', PRT *bēad* – *budon*, PP *boden* and *biddan* 'ask pressingly', PRT *bæd* – *bǣdon*, PP *beden*); *burst* (OE *berstan* – *bærst* – *burston* – *borsten*); *let* – a Common Germanic reduplicating verb: OE *lǣtan* (Northumb. *léta*), PRT *lét*, *leort* (chiefly Anglian and poet.), PP *gelǽten*; and *shed* (OE *sc(e)ádan*, *scēadan*, PRT *sc(e)ád*, *scēad*, PP *sc(e)áden*, ?*scēaden*). The verb *shit* (also now dial. *shite*), according to the SOED, existed probably already in Old English (cf. *bescítan* 'daub with excrement') and is reconstructed by the OED as OE **scítan*, PRT **scát*, PP *-sciten* (cognate with mod. G. *scheissen*), so apparently belonging to class 1 of the strong verbs. The now more common form *shit* is influenced by the PP or the related noun.

Loanwords from Old Norse include: *cast*, *hit*, *rid* and *thrust* and from Old French: *cost*, *hurt* and *quit*. Most of them were borrowed in Middle English, only the verb *hit* was borrowed in OE (cf. OED and Onions 1966: 442). There is also one loanword from Middle Dutch: *split*.

What these verbs have in common is not only /d/ or /t/ in word-final position but also a short vowel (the long vowels in *burst*, *cast* and *hurt* are relatively recent arrivals)[27] and a tendency to a low number of segments. As many as 14 (including *hurt*) are made up of 3 segments and 5 consist of 4 phonemes.

The explanation for the irregularity in this group lies in two processes: syncope and degemination. Before syncope, the /d/ or /t/ of the dental suffix was preceded by a vowel, e.g. *lofode* 'loved', *nerede* 'saved'. According to Hogg (2011: 267), "in all dialects syncope applies in the preterite of stems ending in /t/ or /d/ even when the stem is light, e.g. *sette* 'set' (not **setede)." Some of the other verbs affected in this way mentioned by Hogg include: *bendan* 'bend', *byldan* 'build', *cnyttan* 'bind', *fēdan* 'feed', *gyldan* 'gild', *gyrdan* 'gird', *hlystan* 'listen', *hȳdan* 'hide', *mētan* 'meet', *rǣdan* 'advise, read', *sprǣdan* 'spread', *swǣtan* 'sweat', and *wǣtan* 'moisten'. As far as the degemination is concerned, the /d/ or /t/ of the dental suffix must have merged with the final /d/ or /t/ of the root. According to Wełna (1978: 167), who also refers readers to Kökeritz (1954: 10) and Fisiak (1968: 59), "in the 14th century the final stage of simplification of long consonants was reached when they became single units, both phonemically and phonetically, in the dialects spoken south of the Humber." The verbs like *cut*, *hit*, for instance, are attested by the OED in Old and Middle English in the PRT as *cutt*(*e*), *kytte*, *kitty* and *hytte*, *hutte*, *hitte*, *hitt* respectively. Although it is not easy to demonstrate this for all the verbs which have the same forms in Modern English, it is remarkable that virtually all irregular verbs which have the invariable forms in the PRT and PP end in /d/ or /t/.

As the fourth group, we can distinguish irregular weak verbs which have the PP in *-n*. Some authors describe these verbs as having strong PPs. Although it is

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[27] The long vowel in *burst* and in *hurt* developed from Late Middle English short /u/ followed by /r/ and the long vowel in *cast* goes back to Late Middle English short /a/ which was lengthened, among others, before fricatives /f, θ, s/ where word-final or in clusters with other consonants – cf. Wełna (1978: 211 and 216).

true that *-n* is typical of strong verbs, what really lies in the definition of strong verbs is apophony. For this reason, in this classification, we would assume that only verbs like *swell* (PRT *swelled*, PP *swollen*) have strong PP forms but not verbs like *show* (PRT *showed*, PP *shown/showed*). On the other hand, we should bear in mind that the dental suffix, which lies in the definition of weak verbs, appears in Group 4 only in the PRT form. It might be far-fetched to consider *-n* as a dental suffix, even if /n/ exhibits the same, alveolar place of articulation as /d/ and /t/. All in all, verbs in (12) will be treated as irregular weak. They do not reveal any trace of apophony in the form of vowel alternation, so they cannot be considered strong in Modern English, but they display the dental suffix, if only in the PRT form. The *-n* in the PP will be treated as a sign of irregularity. As the paper deals with irregular weak verbs without vowel alternations in Modern English, the following verbs, in (11), have been excluded from the count. Group 4 contains verbs listed in (12).

(11)
melt – melted – melted (molten arch.)   shear – sheared – shorn/sheared
rive – rived – riven (from ON) (arch.)   swell – swelled – swollen/swelled

(12)
GROUP 4 A – ORIGINALLY STRONG
beat – beat – beaten
grave – graved – graven/graved (arch. or literary)
hew – hewed – hewn/hewed[28]
mow – mowed – mowed/mown
sow – sowed – sown/sowed

GROUP 4 B – ORIGINALLY WEAK
prove – proved – proved/(esp. N. Amer.) proven
saw – sawed – sawn (chiefly Brit.) or sawed (chiefly N. Amer.)
sew – sewed – sewn/sewed
show – showed – shown/showed
strew – strewed – strewn/strewed (also arch. and dial. strow – strowed – strowed/strown)

    The historical origin of the irregularity in this group is twofold and, consequently, we can divide Group 4 into two subgroups: (A) verbs that used to be strong and became regularized but some traces of the originally strong inflection remain (usually the *-n* in the PP, but, outside Group 4, cf. also a distinct vowel in the PP: *swell – swollen*, *rive – riven*), and (B) originally weak verbs which have acquired their *-n* by analogy with verbs from the previous subgroup. Actually analogy was

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[28] It may be inferred from the Old Church Slavonic forms provided by the OED and Onions (1966: 439) that the verb must be cognate with Polish *kuć* 'forge' (the same root is also found in *kowal* 'smith').

involved in both subgroups, but while in (A) the regular -*ed* forms are the result of analogy (except for *beat*), in (B), analogy is responsible for the PPs with -*n*.

There are also two adjectives in English: *laden* and *shaven*, which can be considered relics of the 4A conjugation: *lade – laded – laden*[29] and *shave – shaved – shaved/shaven*. Similarly, there are participial adjectives from some of the verbs in (11), viz. *riven*, *shaven*. The OLD does not have entries for *lade* or *rive* but it lists *laden* and *riven* labelled as adjectives. The ODE has separate entries for *lade* and *rive* (marked as "archaic" and "archaic" or "literary" respectively) with forms: *laden* and *riven* subsumed as PPs, but *molten* and *shaven* are listed separately as adjectives and are not mentioned at the corresponding verb entries (i.e. *melt* and *shave*).

Finally, there are two irregular weak verbs which lost the final consonant of the root in the PRT and PP, but not in the present, namely:

(13) GROUP 5
have – had – had
make – made – made

The investigation of the spellings in the OED reveals that the PRT and PP forms lose the consonants in Middle English (*hæfde* and *makede* are still attested in the 13th century, when *hadde*, *had* and *made* start to appear; as usual there is a time of overlap and numerous spelling variants). Taking into consideration the high number of occurrences in the BNC (415 007 for *had* and 90 504 for *made*), the explanation for the irregularity most probably lies in the irregular phonetic change caused by frequency, which was described by Witold Mańczak (e.g. 2012 with numerous further references inside). As far as the etymology is concerned, it might be tempting to relate E *have* with Lat. *habēre*. Onions (1966: 431) considers this doubtful and Klein (1966: 708) bluntly says that they are not cognates. Bearing in mind Grimm's Law, however, it would be much easier to compare E *have* with Lat. *capere* 'to take, seize' (cf. E loanword *captive*). E *make* in turn can be compared to German *machen* and Polish *mazać* (cf. Onions 1966: 547).

4. Conclusion

One of the conclusions is that the overwhelming majority of the irregular weak verbs is not as irregular as it appears prima facie. Not only do they display the dental suffix (which sometimes merged with the final consonant of the root), but they also conform to certain patterns. All 56 verbs are monosyllabic and they share other phonological characteristics within groups (e.g. the constraints as to the con-

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[29] On the basis of the Old Church Slavonic forms provided by the OED and Onions (1966: 511), it may be concluded that the verb *lade* (OE *hladan*) must be cognate with Polish *kłaść* 'lay, place' (1sg. *kładę*).

sonants in word-final positions: /l/ or /n/ in Group 1, /d/ preceded by /l/, /n/ or /r/ in Group 2, /d/ or /t/ in Group 3; moreover, the overwhelming majority in Groups 1-3 exhibits short vowels and the infrequent long vowels are of recent origin).

In order to approach the aim of ascertaining the traces of earlier stages of language development, the remnants of the strong conjugations should be emphasized, i.e. *beaten*, *graven* (arch.), *hewn*, *laden* (arch.), *mown*, *shaven*, *sown*. These relics should be distinguished from the *-n* PPs which do not preserve remnants of the earlier strong forms, but result from analogy (e.g. *proven*, *sawn*, *sewn*, *shown*, *strewn*). Because these verbs either used to be strong (Group 4A) or resembled some of the phonological features of the strong verbs (Group 4B), they do not conform to the patterns described in the previous paragraph.

Let us collect members of all groups together in (14), distinguishing relicts of the irregular weak PRTs and PPs in (15). The underlined verbs have less common irregular PRT and PP forms, which can be labelled as "literary" or "poetic," the verbs in outline font are literary themselves, and the verbs in brackets have irregular PRT and PP forms chiefly in North American English. The verbs which do not have regular variants are marked in bold. Using this convention, the regular variants which are obsolete have been ignored here, e.g. *splitted*, but the archaic and poetic forms have not, e.g. arch. & poet. *builded*, or *spreaded*, cf. SOED).

(14)

Group 1	Group 2	Group 3				Group 4 A	Group 5
1. dwell	9. bend	18. bet	28. knit	38. spit		**45. beat**	**55. have**
2. smell	10. <u>blend</u>	**19. bid**	**29. let**	**39. split** (but see fn.22)		46. ᵍrave	**56. make**
3. spell	11. build	20. burst (see fn.17)	**30. put**[*]	40. spread		47. hew	
4. spill	12. <u>gild</u>	21. bust	31. quit	41. (sweat)		48. mow	
5. spoil	13. ᵍird	**22. cast**	32. rid	**42. thrust**		49. sow	
6. burn	**14. lend**	23. cost	33. set	43. ʷed		**Group 4 B**	
7. learn	15. ʳend	**24. cut**	34. shed	44. wet		50. prove	
8. earn	**16. send**	25. (fit)	35. shit			51. saw	
	17. spend	**26. hit**	**36. shut**			52. sew	
		27. hurt[**]	37. slit			53. show	
						54. strew	

[*] Admittedly, the SOED includes obsolete exc. Scot *putted*, but the OED specifies that the regular forms belong to *putt*, which originates from *put* "used in particular senses differentiated by pronunciation and by the use of the regular weak conjugation."

[**] Admittedly, the SOED includes (dial.) *hurted*, but the OED specifies that the forms with /d/ were in use between the 14th and the 19th centuries.

Of course, there are also many prefixed derivatives or compounds, like *forecast*, *broadcast*,[30] which usually show the same PRT and PP as the verbal base (though these two can also be regular[31]). Some examples include: *beset*, *handset*, *inset*, *misset*, *offset*, *overset*, *preset*, *reset*, *upset*, *misspend*, *overspend*, *outspend*, *rebuild*, *overbuild*, *misspell*, *sunburn*, *mislearn*, *overlearn*, *relearn*, *unlearn*, etc.

In the course of the research, the following relics have been found:

(15)
a. *dread* as an adjective (e.g. *the dread moment*, *that dread word religion again* – from BNC) is an archaic PP,
b. *hoist* as a verb, according to the OED "orig. a corruption of *hoiss*, *hoise* v.; perh. through taking the pa. tense and pple. as the stem", cf. *be hoist with (or by) one's own petard* – from Shakespeare's *Hamlet* (iii. iv. 207); *hoist* is a PP in the sense 'lifted and removed',
c. *kempt* '(of a person or a place) maintained in a neat and clean condition; well cared for', and the commoner *unkempt* 'having an untidy or dishevelled appearance' of the obs. except dial. *kemb* (now displaced by the denominal verb *to comb*) cf. OED. The vowel in *kemb – kempt* is a remarkable relict of i-umlaut (cf. *blood – bleed*, *brood – breed*, *doom – deem*, *food – feed*),
d. *pent*, also *pent-up* '(of emotions, energy, etc.) unable to be expressed or released', according to the OED, "In form, PP of †*pend* v.2 var. of *pen* v.1, and so primarily = †*pended*, *penned*; but in its sense-development somewhat independent of the vb,"
e. *roast* as in *roast beef*, *roast meat* is an archaic PP,
f. *shend – shent – shent*, absent from the ODE, labelled by the OED and by the SOED as "now dial. and arch." from OE *sćendan* 'put to shame',
g. *shred*, PRT and PP of *shred* – cf. SOED,
h. *went*, which is now used as the PRT of *go*, is the obsolete PRT and PP of *wend*, which is mainly used in the expression *wend one's way* 'go in a specified direction, typically slowly or by an indirect route',
i. *wont* '(of a person) in the habit of doing something; accustomed', an archaic (or literary) PP of *won*, *wone*, labelled by the OED as "obs. exc. Sc. and north., and arch.," (OE *gewunod*, PP of *ġewunian*, cognate with German *wohnen* 'live'), the OED and the ODE also list the secondary verb *wont* 'make or be or become accustomed', labelled as "archaic," with past and past participle *wont* or *wonted* and 3rd sing. present *wonts* or *wont*.

What these relicts share is the final sound /t/ or /d/, which can be considered the trace of the dental suffix, though it is difficult to show this for *roast*, which may be explained better as a case of analogy.

    In addition, there are two archaisms in class 4A, which should be kept apart from the ones above, because what is actually irregular about them is the *-n* in PP forms, which cannot be considered a relict of the weak conjugation:

(16)
a.   *laden* as an adjective is an archaic PP of the archaic verb *lade*,[32]
b.   *shaven* as an adjective is an archaic PP of the verb *shave*.

    Examples of the verbs which have been excluded from this overview because they are phonologically regular include:

(17)
a.   lay – laid – laid
b.   pay – paid – paid
c.   bless – blessed/(arch.) blesst
d.   strip – stripped/(arch.) stript
e.   mimic – mimicked – mimicked
f.   worship – worshipped – worshipped

    Apart from the verbs discussed above, there remain many other irregular weak verbs, which differ from these analysed in this paper in that they exhibit vowel alternations, e.g. *keep – kept*, *seek – sought*, *sell – sold*. It is often a challenge for students of English to distinguish these verbs from the strong verbs, in which the vowel alternation results from apophony. This task may be undertaken in another paper dealing with historical sources of the irregularities in English grammar.

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[32] Marked "arch." by the ODE, but not by the SOED.

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