A Morphological Conflation Approach to the Historical Development of Preterite-Present Verbs: Old English, Proto-Germanic, and Proto-Indo-European

Toshiya Tanaka

Linguistic Information

Research output Book/Report › Book

Original language English
Place of Publication Fukuoka, Japan
Publisher Hana Shoin, Fukuoka, Japan
Number of pages 320
ISBN (Print) 978-4-903554-91-4
Publication status Published - Mar 20 2011

Abstract

This monograph attempts a new historical and comparative analysis of Old English (OE) preterite-present verbs. Preterite-present verbs show morphological peculiarities: their present singular typically exhibits the o-grade radical vocalism, to conform with the preterite singular of a strong verb, whilst their preterite is augmented with a dental suffix, which accords with the preterite formation of a weak verb. Traditionally, English and Germanic philologists have construed these characteristics as the result of an original o-grade perfect having been reinterpreted as the new present, along with the suppression of the original e-grade present, and of the Germanic (Gmc.) dental or weak preterite having been newly adopted for the preterite formation; this standpoint may be labelled the 'strong verb origin' theory. The present work calls this view into question by focusing on the difficulties inherent in this conventional approach.

Authentic Indo-European comparative linguistic studies have considered that (the present tense formations of) the OE or Gmc. preterite-present verbs are reflexes of the archaic Proto-Indo-European (PIE) stative perfects, though the dental preterites are an independently Germanic innovation. Whilst this understanding, which may be dubbed the 'stative perfect origin' theory, seems to provide a far better explanation than the 'strong verb origin' theory, there also remain several significant issues to be resolved. First, how did the Gmc. preterite-present verbs lose their original reduplication if they go back to the PIE perfect? Second, does the Indo-European comparative evidence guarantee that all the preterite-present verbs unequivocally refer back to a PIE stative perfect alone? Third, how can the third person plural ending *-un in the present tense formation of the Gmc. preterite-present verb be explained, given that the third person plural termination of the PIE perfect should develop into *-ur in Germanic? Fourth, which PIE formation should the peculiar morphology of the infinitive of a Gmc. preterite-present verb reflect? This monograph claims that these important problems are not resolved if we merely assume that the PIE stative perfect continued into the Gmc. preterite-present by losing its original reduplication due to morphological haplology. These matters are interconnected to a remarkable extent, and a systematic account can be offered only if we recognize that the OE or Gmc. preterite-present verbs are in essence a historical product within the Germanic branch, resulting from the morphological conflation of the PIE stative perfect active and a PIE athematic present tense middle formation which can convey a present stative meaning; this perspective may be tagged as the 'morphological conflation' theory.

This monograph adopts the 'h2e-conjugation theory' advocated recently by Jay H. Jasanoff and demonstrates that the same theory, remarkable in the very high level of explanatory power it achieves in treating the origin of the Anatolian hi-conjugation verbs, is also effective when attempting to give a historical account of the present tense formation of the OE or Gmc. preterite-present verbs. The core members of the preterite-present group have arisen from what is called a PIE stative-intransitive system within the framework of the h2e-conjugation theory, whilst there are also other preterite-present members which to some extent deviate from this pattern. In this way, the present work focuses on the historical and comparative analysis of the present tense formation of the preterite-present verb; accordingly, the origin and development of the Germanic dental preterite, another important issue concerning preterite-present morphology, is left open for future research.

Fingerprint

Access to Document

https://kyushu-u.academia.edu/httpswwwflckyushuuacptoshiyatenglishhtml

Licence: Unspecified

Tanaka, T. (2011). A Morphological Conflation Approach to the Historical Development of Preterite-Present Verbs: Old English, Proto-Germanic, and Proto-Indo-European. Fukuoka, Japan: Hana Shoin, ISBN: 978-4-903554-91-4 © Toshiya Tanaka 2011. Download. ADDENDA AND CORRIGENDA to A Morphological Conflation Approach to the Historical Development of Preterite-Present Verbs: Old English, Proto-Germanic, and Proto-Indo-European (The Faculty of Languages and Cultures Library II) Fukuoka: Hana Shoin ISBN: 978-4-903554-91-4 © Toshiya Tanaka 2011. P.vii, line 21, for Language and Culture read Languages and Cultures — P.viii, lines 11-12, for. All Indo-European verbs that passed into Germanic as functioning verbs were strong, apart from the small group of irregular verbs discussed below. Examples in Old English: fallan – feoll – feollon – (ge)fallen. hātan – hēt – hēton – (ge)hāten. The West Germanic languages outside of Old High German preserved this conjugation best, but in these languages the conjugation had become vestigial and had only four verbs in it. In modern English, preterite-present verbs are identifiable by the absence of an -s suffix on the 3rd person singular present tense form. Compare, for instance, he can with he sings (pret. he sang); the present paradigm of can is thus parallel with the past tense of a strong verb. (See English modal verb.)