

## PhR 2019 Philological Readings

### THE DICTIONARY STUDY OF THE VARIANT PARADIGM VERBS

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#### *Abstract*

The present article deals with synchronic study of morphological variation in a group of Modern English verbs with two paradigms of principal forms, standard and non-standard (learn – learnt, learned – learnt, learned). This study is undertaken on the basis of lexicographical analysis. The types of dictionaries regarded are defining, bilingual and pronunciation ones. The existence in Modern English of 33 verbs with standard and non-standard paradigms of principal forms, termed here Variant Paradigm Verbs, or VPV, is a characteristic feature of English morphology. The conclusions made in the article include the discovered characteristics of VPV: 1) prevalent spread of one variant paradigm may be associated with either American English or British English, 2) a standard spelling paradigm may with some VPV be pronounced in both standard and non-standard way, 3) defining dictionaries let us register the growth of variation in VPV with the motion from the core to the periphery of the verbal part-of-speech semantic field, 4) dictionaries enable us to see differences in variation between historically noun-derivative VPV and those which have been root verbs from the start, 5) dictionary notes identify special spheres of usage sometimes directly associated with particular paradigms of VPV, 6) a certain idea of comparative significance and preference of paradigms may be drawn from the very order in which the variants of the paradigms are mentioned in the headings of the dictionary articles.

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## 1. Introduction

Every modern literary language is characterised not only by a certain degree of constancy in the usage of language means, but also by a certain inventory of variants which are revealed in language functioning. Variation is an enormously important and many-sided phenomenon which has always attracted attention of multitudes of individual scientists and conference discussions. Among the classics who studied and are studying linguistic variation the following names should be mentioned: N.Trubetzkoy, R. Jakobson, M. Halle, D. Jones, G. Curme, Ch. Hocket, W. Labov, P.Trudgill, R. Quirk, and our compatriots M. M. Gukhman, E. S. Kubryakova, O. V. Moskalskaya, T. A. Rastorguyeva, N. N. Semenyuk, G. S. Shchur, A. D. Shveytser, V. M. Solntsev, M. D. Stepanova, V. N. Yartseva and others. Among the latest publications on linguistic variation the following ones can be mentioned: Blommaert (2013), Khalliev (2013), Kochetova (2015), Kritzberg (2014), Rivlina (2014), the book “Profiles of the Language: sociolinguistics, national variation, translation study, contrastive stylistics” (2015), the book Variation across Languages and their Varieties (2018).

The present study of variation was undertaken on the basis of the English verbs having both standard and non-standard forms of past tense (preterite) and past participle (Participle II), which are called here variant paradigm verbs (VPV), such as learn – learned, learnt – learned, learnt. According to more complete dictionaries’ data, there are about 33 such verbs in Modern English: abide, bereave, bet, blend, bless, broadcast, burn, chide, clothe, dream, forecast, gird, hamstring, hang, heave, knit, lean, leap, learn, light, overleap, quit, rid, shrive, smell, speed, spell, spill, spoil, stave, thrive, wake, work (Table 01). The survey and study of VPV was done with the help and on the basis of dictionaries, as not all VPV could be found in texts of medium excerpting, sufficient for statistically well-grounded conclusions.

**Table 01.** The list of variant paradigm verbs

| Number | Infinitive | Past Tense             | Past Participle        |
|--------|------------|------------------------|------------------------|
| 1      | Abide      | Abode, Abided          | Abode, Abided          |
| 2      | Bereave    | Bereaved, Bereft       | Bereaved, Bereft       |
| 3      | Bet        | Bet, Betted            | Bet, Betted            |
| 4      | Blend      | Blended, Blent         | Blended, Blent         |
| 5      | Bless      | Blessed, Blest         | Blessed, Blest         |
| 6      | Broadcast  | Broadcast, Broadcasted | Broadcast, Broadcasted |
| 7      | Burn       | Burnt, Burned          | Burnt, Burned          |
| 8      | Chide      | Chided, Chid           | Chided, Chid           |
| 9      | Clothe     | Clothed, Clad          | Clothed, Clad          |
| 10     | Dream      | Dreamt, Dreamed        | Dreamt, Dreamed        |
| 11     | Forecast   | Forecast, Forecasted   | Forecast, Forecasted   |
| 12     | Gird       | Girded, Girt           | Girded, Girt           |
| 13     | Hamstring  | Hamstringed, Hamstrung | Hamstringed, Hamstrung |
| 14     | Hang       | Hung, Hanged           | Hung, Hanged           |
| 15     | Heave      | Heaved, Hove           | Heaved, Hove           |
| 16     | Knit       | Knitted, Knit          | Knitted, Knit          |
| 17     | Lean       | Leant, Leaned          | Leant, Leaned          |
| 18     | Leap       | Leapt, Leaped          | Leapt, Leaped          |
| 19     | Learn      | Learnt, Learned        | Learnt, Learned        |
| 20     | Light      | Lit, Lighted           | Lit, Lighted           |

|    |          |                       |                       |
|----|----------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| 21 | Overleap | Overleapt, Overleaped | Overleapt, Overleaped |
| 22 | Quit     | Quitted, Quit         | Quitted, Quit         |
| 23 | Rid      | Rid, Ridded           | Rid, Ridded           |
| 24 | Shrive   | Shrove, Shrived       | Shriven, Shrived      |
| 25 | Smell    | Smelt, Smelled        | Smelt, Smelled        |
| 26 | Speed    | Sped, Speeded         | Sped, Speeded         |
| 27 | Spell    | Spelt, Spelled        | Spelt, Spelled        |
| 28 | Spill    | Spilt, Spilled        | Spilt, Spilled        |
| 29 | Spoil    | Spoilt, Spoiled       | Spoilt, Spoiled       |
| 30 | Stave    | Staved, Stove         | Staved, Stove         |
| 31 | Thrive   | Throve, Thrived       | Thriven, Thrived      |
| 32 | Wake     | Woke, Waked           | Woken, Waked          |
| 33 | Work     | Worked, Wrought       | Worked, Wrought       |

## 2. Problem Statement

When such verbs are treated both theoretically and practically (in textbooks) it is generally said about their variant principal forms that they co-exist in free variation. Exceptions are very few: for instance, the form “hanged” in British English is used only with reference to capital punishment, while in American English the form “hung” is mostly used in all meanings. Yet it seemed possible that there were in many cases motives and factors that determined the choice of a particular variant in VPV usage. The problem was if there were such motives, if the variation was in any cases somehow motivated, and what these motives were, if any.

## 3. Research Questions

It was necessary to answer the two principal questions:

- In what cases is the variation in VPV motivated?
- What are the factors of differentiation of the principal forms of VPV?

## 4. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of study was to sum up all kinds of information concerning VPV presented in various types of dictionaries of the English language in order to give a possibly complete representation and analysis of morphological variation within their principal forms.

## 5. Research Methods

The two principal methods of research applied in the present study were lexicographical analysis and field (and in particular part-of-speech field) approach in investigating the verbal part-of-speech field characteristics of the VPV group of verbs.

## 6. Findings

Dictionary information is valuable because of its diversity, - we can find here vocabulary notes, variant spellings, etc. The information retrieved from authoritative English-English defining dictionaries, pronunciation dictionaries and bilingual dictionaries enables us to give the following characteristics of VPV.

Some of these verbs demonstrate prevalent spread of one of the variant paradigms of the principal forms in one of the territorial or regional variants of the English language. Thus, in American English, according to the data of authoritative dictionaries studied, see, for instance (LDOCE, 2018), the following forms are most often used in the past tense and past participle: *bet, burned, chided, dreamed, hung, quit, rid, smelled, spelled, spilled, spoiled, staved, thrived, woke – waked*, and the form *hung* is used in all meanings. The corresponding forms prevalent in British English are *betted, burnt, chid, dreamt, hanged* in the meaning of capital punishment, *quitted, rided* - especially in Active Voice, *smelt, spelt, spilt, spoilt, stove, thrive – thriven, woke – woken*. It follows from this that it would have been incorrect to speak of the prevalence of standard forms in American English and non-standard in British English.

Another peculiarity of VPV concerns pronunciation. Judging by pronunciation dictionaries, - see, for instance, (Cambridge English Pronouncing Dictionary, 2012; Wells, 1990), - VPV demonstrate variability in pronunciation in some cases when the forms of the past and past participle preserve the spelling of standard forms with “-ed”, while in their pronunciation two or more variants are fixed by these dictionaries. For instance, *leaned* may be pronounced as /lent/ and /lɜ:nd/, *leaped* - /lept/ and /li:pt/, *dreamed* - /dremt/, /dremp/ and /dri:md/. In this we may see both the stability of the variation in this peripheral group of verbs and – for the forms of the verbs *leaped* and *dreamed* – the regeneration of pronunciations historically once lost (historically the spelling “ea” once reflected the short open pronunciation of the root vowel). Thus, there exists a level of variation which cannot be revealed through written texts analysis.

The defining dictionaries give us an opportunity to regard the relative variability of the forms of past tense and past participle in the light of the field theory. As is known, the scope of formal variation grows with the growth of the distance from the core to the periphery of the part of speech field. Ogonovskaya (1988) says: “The farther off to the periphery of a grammatical system the given category is found the wider the scope of its formal variability” (pp. 50-51). On the other hand, movement towards periphery of the part-of-speech field must be accompanied by the weakening of the verbal characteristics and the strengthening of other part-of-speech qualities. This can be observed, firstly, on the material of those verbal units and/or those lexico-semantic variants of the verbs, which are to a less extent connected with the idea of action and to a greater extent with the idea of state; secondly, while comparing the principal forms: the form of the preterite with the form of Participle II, taking into consideration the fact that the participle is farther off from the core of the verb field and is situated on the borderline with the adjective field; thirdly, while comparing the participial forms proper and the adjectives formed from these participles.

Those verbs on the basis of whose meanings the notion of the grammatical meaning of the verb as a part of speech was formed – the verbs of the core of the field, the verbs denoting actions more immediately, - reveal morphological verbal qualities and characteristics more completely too. Thus, such

VPV as *burn, leap, work* are opposed to such VPV as *bereave, bless, learn* not only as the ones denoting actions more immediately to the ones denoting them more indirectly, but also in such a peculiarity of theirs that there exist fully adjectivised participles formed from them, that is to say adjectives, *bereaved, blessed, learned*, which has been fixed in many dictionaries.

Dictionaries help to differentiate these variants phonetically and sometimes graphically with the help of a special sign over “e” to show its vocalization, which is a signal of complete transition of the past participle into the adjective.

Dictionaries give us an opportunity to fix another peculiarity of the VPV: the standard paradigm is more often associated with those lexico-semantic variants of VPV which are derived from nouns or those which were at a definite period, sometimes even erroneously, perceived as derived from nouns. This becomes explicable if we remember that the standard conjugation is historically connected with derivative verbs, while the non-standard conjugation is associated with the older strong, or root, verbs. The connection of the noun origin of the VPV with the standard paradigm can be seen most clearly when such a verb loses its non-standard paradigm in those lexico-semantic variants which are formed from nouns, but preserves both paradigms for other lexico-semantic variants. Here too the dictionary information is invaluable. For instance, in some of its meanings *spell* has two paradigms *spelled, spelt – spelled, spelt*. However, in the meaning “to substitute someone at work for a short period of time” and “(austr.) to give time for rest” this verb has only standard principal forms. It is beyond doubt that these lexico-semantic variants are connected with the noun *spell* – “a short period, especially of activity”, “(austr.) period of inactivity” (Garmonsway & Simpson, 1978). The same phenomenon can be observed with the VPV *broadcast, forecast, speed, wake*.

The dictionary notes of the spheres of usage of the type of “nautical”, “motoring”, “radio” and others sometimes also prove to be directly associated with a certain morphological paradigm differentiation. For example, the dictionary (Garmonsway & Simpson, 1978) gives the form *speeded* with the note “motoring” preceding it, while *sped* – without any notes, the form *hove* is preceded by the note “nautical”, while *heaved* is given without any notes, the note “radio” sometimes accompanies in dictionaries the form *broadcasted*.

Finally, a certain idea of the comparative relevance of each of the variants can be drawn from the order in which the variants are mentioned in the dictionary articles. Some authors of the dictionaries use this characteristic intentionally and deliberately mention the usage of this means of characterization, as, for instance the authors of the dictionary (Funk and Wagnalls Standard Dictionary of the English Language, 1963) say about it in the preface to the dictionary: “When alternative forms are given, the first form indicated is usually the one preferred”.

## 7. Conclusion

The analysis of the dictionaries enabled us to make the following conclusions.

The variant paradigm verbs demonstrate a certain stability of their morphological variation which can partly be accounted for by their peripheral position within the lexico-grammatical field of the verb, as the scope of formal variability of any part of speech grows with motion to the periphery of the grammatical system.

Inside the group the variation is more stable with those verbs whose meanings are not typical of the grammatical part-of-speech meaning expressed by the core of the part of speech “verb”, and among the principal forms the variation is more stable with past participle which is farther off from the core of the verbal part of speech field than infinitive and past tense and which lies on the borderline with the part of speech field of the adjective.

The dictionary analysis has shown several types of differentiation of variant forms of the VPV, such as national-territorial (American English and British English), professional, higher frequency of one of the variants, differentiation of the forms of past tense and past participle themselves, as well as past participle proper and an adjective formed from it. Sometimes a standard spelling paradigm may with some VPV be pronounced in both standard and non-standard ways. A certain role in differentiation is played by the connection of standard forms with their being derived from nouns. There also exists in some cases differentiation according to meanings. Finally, a certain idea of comparative significance and preference of paradigms may be drawn from the very order in which the variants of the paradigms are mentioned in the headings of the dictionary articles.

Such are the results of the study of morphological variation of the VPV with the help of various dictionaries' data. It may be affirmed that dictionaries, though a little belatedly, give a rather adequate representation of the synchronic state of morphological variation at the present stage of development of English.

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