



The strong verb in Old English: an introduction to a pragmatic and semantic study

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**UNIVERSITÉ CAEN NORMANDIE
U.F.R. LANGUES VIVANTES ÉTRANGÈRES
MASTER LLCER, Parcours Linguistique multilingue**

MÉMOIRE DE MASTER 1

présenté par

Aymeric POUCHIN

**THE STRONG VERB IN OLD ENGLISH: AN INTRODUCTION TO A
PRAGMATIC AND SEMANTIC STUDY**

**LE VERBE FORT EN VIEIL ANGLAIS : UNE INTRODUCTION À UNE
ÉTUDE PRAGMATIQUE ET SÉMANTIQUE**

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RÉSUMÉ

Ce travail est une prémisse à la recherche d'une explication sémantique et pragmatique à la séparation entre verbes forts et verbes faibles en vieil anglais. Il s'agit, après avoir rappelé les caractéristiques grammaticales et morphologiques régissant cette séparation, d'établir une série de points communs dans l'expression du verbe fort, avant de chercher à associer ces points communs à des caractéristiques fondamentalement liés à l'humain, tout en essayant de faire un rapprochement avec la biolinguistique et le fonctionnement du cerveau. Il est enfin mis en avant que le verbe fort en vieil anglais pourrait être une forme verbale non-productive de la langue, ayant pour but d'assurer une continuité linguistique des caractères sociétaux jugés fondamentaux aux langues et sociétés ayant eu pour ancêtre le germanique, et l'indo-européen avant ce dernier.

ABSTRACT

This work is a premise to the search of a semantic and pragmatic explanation of the separation between strong verbs and weak verbs in Old English. After reviewing the grammatical and morphological features governing this separation, the aim is to identify a series of common points within the expression of strong verbs, before attempting to associate these common points with characteristics fundamentally linked to the human being, while trying to make connections with biolinguistics and brain functions. Finally, it is argued that the strong verb in Old English may be a non-productive verbal form of the language, intended to ensure linguistic continuity of societal traits deemed fundamental to languages and societies which had Germanic as their ancestor, and Indo-European before that.

MOTS CLÉS: vieil anglais, verbes forts, pragmatique, sémantique, biolinguistique,

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INTRODUCTION

Many languages include verbs with an irregular conjugation form. This linguistic peculiarity, although seemingly perfectly dispensable at first sight, has survived through time and has come down to us today. If there is one case that seems particularly interesting, it is that of English. Counting more than two hundred and fifty irregularly conjugated verbs (of which only a little more than a hundred are in common use), it is to our knowledge one of the contemporary languages with the most verbs of this type, after German.

As a result, verbs with irregular conjugations in English are an essential part of learning the language. As their name suggests, their various conjugation methods differ fundamentally from the way the regular conjugated verbs in English work. This is about where most English grammars stop their presentation of these verbs. Yet it is in this diversity that our interest in the subject has arisen: are there rules governing the formation and appearance of irregularly conjugated verbs? How did they appear, what were their ancestors and what was the reason for their formation?

To our knowledge, these questions remain mostly unanswered to this day. Little did we know, this curiosity would end up being like a russian doll: with every step of our research, we went further and further back to the origins of the verbal system. Despite this very interesting, but also complicated situation, we will try, through our research, to proceed in two stages in order to answer our interrogations as well as possible. It is important, in a first place, to see how the irregularly conjugated verbs were formed, their origin(s) and the reasons that other linguists have put forward to explain their formation, before taking a more detailed look at the meaning of the ancestors of these verbs, based on a pragmatic and semantic angle of study. At the same time, we will be trying to frame this study in a scientific and biolinguistic approach in order to try and connect our research with what we know about the functioning of the human body and brain.

I/ STATE OF THE ART

I/ 1/ The Irregularly conjugated verb in Contemporary English

Guided by our first set of questions, we sought at first what concept was lying behind the term "irregularly conjugated verb". We first compulsed grammar books in an attempt to establish the morphological and syntactic rules governing irregularly conjugated verbs in English. Quirk and Greenbaum (1973, 30) explain that irregularly conjugated verbs are verbs that do not follow the typical rules of conjugations in English. They mention three major points in which irregular verbs differ from regular verbs:

- 1-** Often, irregular verbs do not follow the conjugation by suffixation of -ed (and therefore the addition of a /id/, /d/ or /t/ sound at the end of the lexical verb) of regular verbs in preterite and past participle forms.
- 2-** Irregular verbs, in multiple cases, will know a vowel shift of their base vowel.
- 3-** Irregular verbs vary following a certain number of morphological "patterns" regarding their irregular conjugation in the preterite (**V-ED**) and past participle (**V-EN**) forms. These classes are at the number of seven, and are listed below:

CLASS 1: **V-ED** and **V-EN** forms are identical. The base vowel does not shift. Suffixation is used, but is adopting an alternative form to -ed, ie: burn, burnt burnt

CLASS 2: **V-ED** and **V-EN** forms are identical. The base vowel shifts, and changes the pronunciation of the stem. Suffixation is used, but is adopting an alternative form to -ed, ie: leap, lept, lept

CLASS 3: **V**, **V-ED** and **V-EN** forms are identical. There are no suffixations nor changes in the pronunciation of the base vowel. These verbs are almost systematically monosyllabic, ie: let, let, let

CLASS 4: **V-ED** and **V-EN** forms are identical. There is no suffixation. Presence of a base vowel shifting. The rest of the verb's pronunciation remains untouched, ie: strike, struck, struck

CLASS 5: **V-ED** is regular. **V-EN** can take two forms, either regular or nasal, ie: shear, sheared, shorn/sheared

CLASS 6: V-ED and V-EN are irregular. V-EN is almost always suffixed with -(e)n. There is often a vowel change (either V and V-EN are similar but V-ED differs (A, ie: blow blew blown), V-ED and V-EN are similar (B, ie: speak spoke, spoken), V-ED and V-EN are different and V-EN is regular (C, ie: dive, dove, dived) (or all three parts have different vowels (D, ie: fly, flew, flown))), but in some cases, V, V-ED and V-EN have the same vowel (E, ie: beat, beat, beaten).

CLASS 7: V-ED and V-EN are irregular, there is no suffixation, but there is always a vowel shifting (ie: begin, began, begun)

These different classes can be summed up in the following table:

Class of modern irregular verb	Present	Preterite (V-ED)	Past participle (V-EN)
Class 1	burn	burnt	burnt
Class 2	leap	lept	lept
Class 3	let	let	let
Class 4	strike	struck	struck
Class 5	shear	sheared	shorn/sheared
Class 6	(A) blow	blew	blown
	(B) speak	spoke	spoken
	(C) dive	dove	dived
	(D) fly	flew	flown
	(E) beat	beat	beaten
Class 7	begin	began	begun

Table 1: Examples of application for Quirk & Greenbaum's irregular verbs class system.

Very often, grammars will not go this far in the presentation of irregularly conjugated verbs. They are generally relegated to the appendixes, and we are only presented with a more or less exhaustive list of irregular verbs -often based on their usage- and their regular alternatives, if the said verbs know of one. This is notably the case for Larreya and Rivière (2014), Rotgé and Malavieille (2008), or Berland-Delépine (1974). Roggero (1985) strays

away a little from this approach, and offers another group system, based on the spelling of the irregular forms. In addition, his work on irregularly conjugated verbs is placed as an appendix to his chapter on verbs. We will not retain this morphological method, because it is based on a didactic approach, and not linguistic.

I/ 2/ History of the verb, from its creation to the Strong Verb

However, this unsatisfactory level of research has led us to investigate more precisely what irregularly conjugated verbs are, and in order to understand what they are, we had to search for their origins, where they come from. Perhaps it would be possible to better understand their functioning by learning more about their history. We can find some information about their whereabouts in Pyles and Algeo (1993). In this book, the authors describe irregularly conjugated verbs as a combination of Old English and Middle English weak verbs that do not follow regular conjugation patterns, but are first and foremost remnants of strong verbs, which are going to be our main point of interest. We now have to search about what strong and weak verbs were, in order to identify the origins of irregularly conjugated verbs.

The first step is to look at what we consider to be a verb. J.T. Bushnell (2021) describes a verb as a part of speech which denotes an action, physical or mental, or a state of being, and which is mainly characterised by its ability to carry tense markers. This ability is for him at the center of what a verb is: it is the expression of tense. But, where do verbs come from? What is their origin? Rocchetti (1987) dates the origin of the verbal system back to Indo-European, which is believed to be the mother language of almost all European and West-Asian Countries. His hypothesis is that Indo-European did not possess a verbal grammatical class at first. This class only appeared due to a necessity to be able to express time more precisely. For him, Indo-European verbs are derived from nouns, in order to signify the difference between a process and an object (*idem*, 22). In fact, the need to speak more precisely about temporality would be a natural evolution of language in the context of the development of a more complex society. For Rocchetti, since there are languages without verbs (like Chinese) but no language without nouns, it seems clear that the process has separated from the object, and not the other way around, in order to be more precise in the

expression of time: "*les sujets parlant ces langues auraient ainsi adapté leur instrument linguistique à la conscience qu'ils avaient d'une différence entre l'espace et le temps*" (*ibid.*). According to Fortson (2010), this expression of time came to be through the development of tenses, which were to the number of four to six.

If we compile Rocchetti's and Fortson's views, this process of "verbalization of nouns" would have been at the origin of two distinct types of verbs: on the one hand, verbs with a perfect form, and on the other hand, those without (Fortson, 2010). He explains that, in Indo-European, perfect forms were based on a reduplication of the first consonant of the stem, followed by an *-e*. The stem would then follow the accentuation patterns of Indo-European, which led to a vowel alternation of the root (also called ablaut). Perfect forms would undergo the o-grade ablaut, which he describes as being the switching of an *-e* sound into an *-o* sound for singular forms, and the absence of vowel sound for plural forms (p.78). The example he provides, which shows very well this system is **men* 'to think', becoming **memōn-* in the singular perfect form and **me-mn-* in the plural perfect form (*idem*, 103). He then writes that it is believed that at first, Indo-European perfect was more of a stative form, describing a state of being, rather than a tense. However, this stative form would have evolved as a resultative past tense (*ibid.*, 88). This step happens to be of importance, as only verbs that could accept a stative form, due to their meaning, could possess a perfect form. This point is even more important as for Fortson, this difference is the reason for the split between strong and weak verbs in Common Germanic. Strong verbs were verbs inherited from Indo-European and which possessed perfect forms, whereas weak verbs are the descendants of Indo-European verbs deprived of a perfect form. If Meillet (1926, 123-130) agrees that the differentiation between strong verbs and weak verbs is believed to have already existed in the Indo-European language, under another form, which he names "*formes radicales*" (verbs possessing a perfect form), and "*formes dérivées*" (verbs which did not have a perfect form), he then also explains: "*Ce qui est original en germanique, c'est que les verbes radicaux y ont été constitués en un type bien défini; on les appelle les verbes forts*" (p.131). He shows how, contrary to how the other languages evolved, inside the Indo-European family, Germanic appears to be the only one to have constructed its verbal system around a clear opposition between "radical" verbs (verbs showing the use of a vowel alternation of their stem vowel) and verbs using an alveolar suffixation process, keeping their stem mostly untouched. However, Meillet (*idem*, 133)

underlines the fact that this phenomenon seems to follow a peculiar logic: in addition to the verbs already following a vowel alternation pattern, some verbs that were conjugated differently were incorporated in this list of Germanic strong verbs, imitating their functioning. However, it appears to be undocumented as to why Germanic, and later, Old English, made this strict separation between verbs with vowel conjugation and verbs with consonantal conjugation. It is now necessary to look at the differences between strong and weak verbs.

I/ 3/ The Strong Verb

Bourcier (1978) explains: "*Le verbe fort construit sa morphologie à partir de la racine [indo-européenne][...] Cette dernière se définit formellement par une séquence trilitère, consonne-voyelle-consonne [...] et elle admet, à l'intérieur du squelette consonantique en particulier, la substitution d'un timbre vocalique à un autre (alternance vocalique)*". This sentence gives us the morphological explanation of what a strong verb is. He then explains how these "*alternances vocaliques*" -which we will translate using the term vowel alternation or ablaut- work. The vowel alternation process designates the shifting of the last vowel sound in a word's "*thème*", which is the combination of said word stem and what he calls a "*voyelle thématique*", which can be translated under the term "thematic vowel". Quirk and Wrenn (1955) use the terminology of "stem vowel", and it is the one we will use for this thesis. In the case of strong verbs, this process occurs in order to conjugate the verb to the different tenses of the Old English language.

The said strong verbs are classified according to the type of vowel alternation their stem vowel undergoes, and are divided into seven classes described in the following table:

C= Consonant

Classes of strong verbs	Infinitive	Present (3rd person singular)	Preterite I (1st and 3rd person singular)	Preterite II (2nd person singular and the three plural persons)	Past Participle
Class 1 'rise'	-ī+C-an <i>rīsan</i>	-ī+C-t or -ð <i>rist</i>	-ā+ C- Ø <i>rās</i>	-i+C-on <i>rison</i>	-i+C-en <i>gerisen</i>
Class 2 'break'	-ēo+C-an <i>brēotan</i>	-ȳ+C-t or -ð <i>brȳtt</i>	-ēa+C- Ø <i>brēat</i>	-u+C-on <i>bruton</i>	-o+C-en <i>gebroten</i>
Class 3 (a) 'drink'	-i+n m+C-an <i>drincan</i>	-i+n m+C-ð <i>drincō</i>	-a+ n m +C- Ø <i>dranc</i>	-u+ m n+C-on <i>druncon</i>	-u+ m n +C-en <i>gedruncen</i>
(b) 'help'	-e(o)+ l r+C-an <i>helpan</i>	-i+ l r +C-ð <i>hilpō</i>	-ea+l r+C- Ø <i>healp</i>	-u+ l r+C-on <i>hulpon</i>	-o+l r +C-en <i>geholpen</i>
Class 4 'bear'	-e+C-an <i>beran</i> (last consonant nasal or liquid)	i+C-ð <i>birð</i>	-æ+C- Ø <i>bær</i>	ǣ+C-on <i>bǣron</i>	-o+C-en <i>geboren</i>
Class 5 'speak'	-e+C-an <i>sprecan</i> (all consonant types except nasal or liquid)	i+C-t or -ð <i>spricō</i>	-æ+C- Ø <i>spræc</i>	ǣ+C-on <i>sprǣcon</i>	-i+C-en <i>gesprecen</i>
Class 6 'go'	-a+C-an <i>faran</i>	-æ+C-ð or -t <i>færð</i>	-ō+C- Ø <i>fōr</i>	ō+C-on <i>fōron</i>	-a+C-en <i>gefaren</i>
Class 7 'fall'	Vowel+C-an <i>feallan</i>	-y/ē/ǣ(+i u l r m n)+C-t or ð <i>fylð</i>	-ē/ēo+C- Ø <i>fēol</i>	ē/ēo+C-on <i>fēollon</i>	-ea/ā/ō/a/ǣ(+i u l r m n)+C-en <i>gefeallen</i>

Table 2: Classes of strong verbs in Old English, divided using 'ablaut' patterns.

In this table is first described the stem vowel, followed by the end of the "consonantal skeleton" -which Bourcier describes as being the consonant (or cluster of consonants) surrounding the thematic vowel-. At the end of this consonantal skeleton, and directly after

the end of the radical, (which Bourcier calls "*thème*"), comes the strong verbal inflection. In the past participle form, we may observe the presence of a prefix *-ge-* (which does not appear in the table, as it only shows the end of the stems, and what directly follows). For Quirk and Wrenn (*idem*), this prefix usually appears, but is sometimes missing, for unspecified reasons. In the present form, we may alternately find *-t-* and *-ð-*, mostly depending on the consonant or vowel ending the stem.

Classes 6 and 7 tend to present frequent irregularities in their vowel patterns, due to irregular vowel contractions, and consonantal alterations of the vowel sounds. These elements are shown more clearly through examples in the table below:

Strong verb class:	Infinitive	Present (3rd person singular)	Preterite I	Preterite II	Past Participle
Class 1: 'rise'	<i>rīsan</i>	<i>rist</i>	<i>rās</i>	<i>rison</i>	<i>gerisen</i>
Class 2: 'break'	<i>brēotan</i>	<i>brȳtt</i>	<i>brēat</i>	<i>bruton</i>	<i>gebroten</i>
Class 3: (a)'drink'	<i>drincan</i>	<i>drincð</i>	<i>dranc</i>	<i>druncon</i>	<i>gedruncen</i>
(b) 'help'	<i>helpan</i>	<i>hilpð</i>	<i>healp</i>	<i>hulpon</i>	<i>geholpen</i>
Class 4: 'bear'	<i>beran</i>	<i>birð</i>	<i>bær</i>	<i>bāeron</i>	<i>geboren</i>
Class 5: 'speak'	<i>sprecan</i>	<i>spricð</i>	<i>spræc</i>	<i>spræcon</i>	<i>gesprecen</i>
Class 6: 'go'	<i>faran</i>	<i>færð</i>	<i>fōr</i>	<i>fōron</i>	<i>gefaren</i>
Class 7: 'fall'	<i>feallan</i>	<i>fylð</i>	<i>fēol</i>	<i>fēollon</i>	<i>gefeallen</i>

Table 3: Examples of the vowel alternation patterns presented in Table 2.

These consonantal alterations can in fact, according to Bourcier (1978), be predicted by Grimm's law and Verner's law. Grimm's law is described by Wheeler (2018) as:

(a) A word beginning with a voiceless stop such as /p/ in most Indo-European languages has for its cognate sound an aspirant /ff/ in Germanic languages. (b) A word beginning in a voiceless stop such as /t/ in most Indo-European languages has as its cognate sound an aspirant /ð/ ("th") in Germanic languages. (c) A word beginning in a voiceless stop such as /k/ in most Indo-European languages has as its cognate sound an /h/ in Germanic languages.

This rule applies to most Germanic words, and has consistently influenced the Old English vocabulary. This law is to be completed by Verner's law, which is described by Wright & Wright (1925) as follows:

After the completion of the first sound-shifting [Grimm's law] and while the principal accent was not yet confined to the root-syllable, a uniform interchange took place between the voiceless and voiced spirants, which may be thus stated: the medial or final spirants *f, þ, χ, χw, s*, became *bh, dh, gh, ζh* [...] Verner's law manifests itself most clearly in the various parts of strong verbs.

I/ 4/ The weak verb

Bourcier (1978, 112) opposes strong verbs to weak verbs, and describes them as follows: "*Il [Le verbe faible] se définit, vis-à-vis du verbe fort, par un trait fondamental de son économie flexionnelle. Il forme son prétérit et son participe passé par l'adjonction d'un suffixe à dentale (-de ou -te; -d ou -t) à un radical invariable.*"¹ He explains that they were first formed by adding the inflection *-ja-* (in the second or third syllable) to a base, being either a verb, noun or adjective. This information is in fact very important, because it implies that strong and weak verbs do not date back to the same period. Bourcier (*idem*, 113) establishes that weak verbs -some of them at least- form their stem on an already existing strong verb, which indicates the preexistence of said strong verbs. This affirmation is correlated by Mossé (1946, 129):

A de rares exceptions près [...] tous les verbes forts sont des verbes primaires, donc tirés d'une racine [indo-européenne] sans l'intermédiaire d'un suffixe. Inversement, on peut dire qu'à part un petit nombre [...] tous les verbes faibles sont des verbes dérivés. Les suffixes de dérivation sont au nombre de trois, chacun d'eux caractérisant une classe de verbes, mais seuls les deux premiers sont productifs [...], les verbes dérivés: 1. de verbes forts, [...] 2. de substantifs et d'adjectifs.

Quirk and Wrenn (1955, 42) separate the weak verbs into two main categories. They present these two classes as follows:

¹ The underlined section is originally in italics in the original work.

Class 1: The stem of infinitives in this class almost always has a mutated vowel. We may broadly distinguish two subclasses:

- (a) a short vowel followed by a double consonant or *-ri*
- (b) a long vowel regardless of the following consonant, or a short vowel followed by a consonant cluster other than a doubling.

Class 2: This class comprises almost all verbs with infinitives in *-ian* other than those which have *-r* before the ending; the vast majority have unmutated stem vowels.

Weak verb class:	Infinitive	Present	Preterite	Past Participle
Class 1: (a) 'kill' (b)'burn up'	<i>āswēbban</i>	<i>āswefeð</i>	<i>āswefede</i>	<i>āswefed</i>
	<i>bærnan</i>	<i>bærnð</i>	<i>bærnde</i>	<i>gebærned</i>
Class 2: 'end'	<i>endian</i>	<i>endað</i>	<i>endode</i>	<i>gendod</i>

Table 4: Example of application of the alveolar suffixation of weak verbs.

Bourcier (1978, 115) writes about a third class, which initially had the specificity of possessing an athematical (external to the theme) linking vowel *-ē* at the end of the base, and which resulted in a very specific contraction. However, with time the vast majority of the verbs in the third class evolved and joined the second class. In Old English, only four verbs of the third class remain: *habban*, *libban*, *secgan* and *hycgan*.

Weak verb class 3:	Infinitive	Present	Preterite	Past Participle
<i>habban</i> 'to have'	<i>habban</i>	<i>hæfþ</i>	<i>hæfde</i>	<i>gehæfd</i>
<i>libban</i> 'to live'	<i>libban</i>	<i>leofaþ</i>	<i>lifde</i>	<i>gelifd</i>
<i>secgan</i> 'to say'	<i>secgan</i>	<i>sægþ</i>	<i>sægde</i>	<i>gesægd</i>
<i>hycgan</i> 'to think'	<i>hycgan</i>	<i>hygþ</i>	<i>hogde</i>	<i>gehogod</i>

Table 5: Weak verbs of class 3.

It is important to mention that, if these criteria of classification for strong and weak verbs are quite consensual among linguists and know only little variations, their denomination

tends to vary- an example of variation being that Quirk and Wrenn (1955) only mention a third class of weak verbs inside the irregular class, maybe because they deem that the four verbs composing it cannot justify the categorization inside an entirely separate class, and only define them as a type of irregular verbs-. Pyles and Algeo (1993) call the strong and weak verbs opposition alternatively by two names: the already mentioned "weak/strong" verbs, and the "consonantal/vocalic types" verbs. This second choice of wording does not differ from the strong/weak classification, it is only another way of naming the oppositions between them, using the essential fact that one class uses vowel alternation -which Pyles and Algeo call 'ablaut'- of its stem vowel, and the other class makes use of a voice or unvoiced alveolar suffixation process. These two ways of wording the verbs seem to coexist and authors do not limit themselves to the use of one or the other: we can find both denominations in Antoine Meillet (1936), or in Fernand Mossé (1966) for example.

André Crépin (1967) however does not use any of these two descriptions. His separation also revolves around the alveolar suffixation (-d, -t, -de, -te) on the one hand -and also, like Bourcier, defines three classes among those verbs-, and the verbs forming their preterite based on a vowel alternation -or ablaut- on the other hand. Yet, he still separates these verbs in seven classes, corresponding to those defined by other linguists.

I/ 5/ Strong verb/ Weak Verb/Irregular Verb

The last category of verbs mentioned, the irregular verbs, is mainly composed of verbs that do not follow the conjugation rules of the first two categories. Quirk and Wrenn (1955, 53) write about them: "we may consider them in three groups (I) the 'have' group (usually presented as the third class of consonantal verbs), (II) anomalous verbs, 'be', 'will' 'do', 'go', (III) preterite-present verbs, such as 'can'. With the single exception of 'be', all the verbs in these groups have consonantal preterites." We will not dwell on these verbs for now, for they are not the main point of interest for our thesis.

Another important point made by Quirk and Wrenn is the paradox between the number of weak verbs, compared to the number of strong and irregular verbs. They write that weak

verbs represent around seventy-five percent of the verbs we can find today inside Old English texts. In the remaining twenty-five percent, twenty three percent are strong verbs, and only two percent are irregular verbs. However, as they write (p.40): "Thus, in order of *numerical* importance, we have consonantal, vocalic and irregular verbs. From the point of view of *frequency*, however, these three main groups are of approximately equal importance." They explain this difference by the fact that the weak class is much more productive in Old English, and it produces a lot of verbs of rare occurrence, very specific to certain contexts and situations. However, they do not provide an explanation as to why strong verbs and irregular verbs are very commonly used (in fact, more than weak verbs in general for the latter case: "irregular verbs [...] must be learnt very carefully, since these are the commonest verbs in the language." (p.41)). Indeed, it has been argued by Roussel (2022 notes) that verbal linguistic operations involving regular forms are generated by procedural memory, and are developed first, quasi-instinctively by the child, whereas, on the contrary, irregular linguistic forms must be learnt, and are stored in the semantic part of the declarative memory (semantic memory). They are assimilated as they are, as lexicon, and do not conform to the same cognitive proceedings and memory methods followed by regular forms. It has also been stated that, unlike what we may think, there is a difference in the speed with which a verb is conjugated between a regular and irregular form. A regular form is of reflex formation, and thus does not need to be learnt. Yet the brain needs time to construct it. On the other hand, an irregular form, which has been learnt by heart, is more quickly recalled by the brain that considers it as a part of lexicon, and only has to go and seek the information stored in the area dedicated to the semantic memory.

Now that we have seen where the work on strong verbs in Old English ends, an important question remains: Why is there such a distinctive separation between strong and weak verbs in Old English? This clear divide, established in Common Germanic, is found, according to Meillet (1926, 123-131), in most of the daughter languages of the latter. This leaves us with many possibilities regarding the nature of this separation, and this question will be the main point of our corpus study.

II/ METHODOLOGY AND CORPUS CHOICES

II/ 1/ The failure of a morphological approach

By carrying out a morphological analysis as a first step, we notice that the only morphological common point really observable at first sight is the vocalic alternation (ablaut) of the stem vowel. There does not seem to be any particular pattern in the formation of the stem of the verbs, except for this gradation phenomenon. As we wrote before, this ablaut cannot be the reason for the separation between strong and weak verbs, as some verbs switched categories during the transition between Indo-European and Germanic (Meillet, 1926).

The only other observable particularity is the number of syllables of the verbs: they very often tend to have a monosyllabic stem. This is mostly due, as Bourcier (1978) explained, to the fact that strong verbs are very often constructed directly on the Indo-European stems, which are almost systematically monosyllabic. This would make this specificity more of an etymology matter, rather than a true explanation as to why these verbs are opposed as they are to weak verbs. However, even this affirmation tends to be less and less true: if at first, most strong verbs were monosyllabic, this is noticeably not the case anymore in Old English. As a matter of fact, a lot of strong verbs are composed of a prefix, added to an already existing strong verb (or Indo-European stem). The verbs created by such process can end up meaning something close to the sense of its original components, or something completely different. For example, we will consider on the one hand *ascīnan*: 'to shine forth', or *bescīnan*: 'to shine upon', which are both created from the strong verb *scīnan*: 'to shine', with which they share the same meaning, and the prefix is only used to indicate the direction to which the light is directed (or from which it is emanating). Yet, on the other hand we can find *writan*: 'to write' and *forwritan*: 'to cut asunder': here, the meaning of *forwritan* (*for-* + *writan*) is completely different to its original stem '*writan*'.

The latter case is certainly the most interesting one. Using this prefixation method, verbs like *understandan* 'understand' (*under-* + *standan* 'to stand') completely change the

meaning of their original stems. As a matter of fact, when adding the stems *under-* (from the Indo-European **ndʰér*, 'under'), and *-stand* (from the Indo-European **steh₂-*, 'to stand still') one would expect a meaning like: *to stand still under something*. Yet, *understandan* means 'to understand', which has very little in common with the stems composing it. One could argue that, in those cases, the prefixation process resulted in the establishment of a new semantism, from which we could hardly dissociate any of the original stems, and from which we are not easily able to determine the meaning of the newly created word. This would be a further argument in favour of the non-exclusivity of monosyllabic stems in the strong verb category in Old English.

This morphological study leaves us unsatisfied. If not morphological, what common point do these verbs share for them to have been put in a completely different grammatical category as other verbs ?

II/ 2/ Diachrony vs. Synchrony

In order to explain the basis for this study, we first need to position ourselves on our style of approach between diachrony and synchrony. Saussure (1916, 141) defines synchrony as: "*[La linguistique synchronique] établit les principes fondamentaux de tout système idiosynchronique, les facteurs consécutifs de tout état de langue*". According to him, synchrony focuses on a static view of language at a specific state and time. For example, general grammar can only be considered in synchrony, since the rules of grammar are bound to change over time. Synchrony is based on a state of the language (*état de langue*), during which the evolution of the language is minimal, and allows an in-depth study of its grammatical components.

On the other hand Saussure (*idem*, 193) describes diachrony as: "*la linguistique diachronique étudie, non plus les rapports entre termes coexistants d'un état de langue, mais entre termes successifs qui se substituent les uns aux autres dans le temps*". In other words, diachronic linguistics no longer relies on a single state of language, but compares several states of language at different times, in order to establish a modification, a change, in the relationship of words to each other, or in language in general.

According to Saussure, one should necessarily choose between conducting a diachronic or a synchronic study, as the two are essentially incompatible. However, over the last years, this dichotomy between synchrony and diachrony has gradually eroded. Linguists have come to realise that the two approaches actually share more than they appear to. This idea is very well summarised by Bourcier (1978, 9): "*Comment opérer en définitive ? En pratiquant des coupes synchroniques qui, pour chaque état de langue, permettront de dégager [...] des ensembles de termes organisés par des relations. [...] Là s'exerce, à proprement parler, l'activité du diachronicien.*". For him, diachrony is the pile-up of multiple synchronic studies, and conversely a synchronic study is the first step to contrasting it with other states of language on a wider time scale.

It is from this angle that we would like to approach our subject. If, due to lack of time, it will not be possible for us to carry out an exhaustive study of strong verbs from Indo-European to Contemporary English, we wish to first perform a synchronic study of Old English, while building bridges with the language states that preceded (and eventually succeeded) it, for a potential more complete diachronic study later on. We will thereby not refrain from contrasting our work with elements from states of languages that preceded Old English, such as Germanic or Indo-European.

II/ 3/ A semantic and pragmatic approach

It now remains to establish the angle from which we wish to approach our study, halfway between synchrony and diachrony. The angle that seemed most relevant to us in order to answer our questions was found into a field that has been little explored so far for this specific subject: pragmatics. Pragmatics are defined by Diller and Récanati as "*la pragmatique « étudie l'utilisation du langage dans le discours, et les marques spécifiques qui, dans la langue, attestent sa vocation discursive*"². According to Armengaud (2007), pragmatics is a relatively new discipline of linguistics, which would stop using the rigid linguistic framework present throughout the twentieth century, and which systematically opposed the semantic approach which is described as: "*[la pragmatique] traite de la relation des signes, mots et phrases aux choses et aux états de choses ; c'est l'étude conjointe du sens,*

2 Definition found in Françoise Armengaud's *La pragmatique* (2007)

de la référence et de la vérité ;" (*idem*) and the syntactic approach which is described as the following (*ibid.*):

[Elle] étudie les relations des signes entre eux, des mots dans la phrase ou des phrases dans les séquences de phrases ; on cherche à formuler des règles de bonne formation pour les expressions, et des règles de transformation des expressions en d'autres expressions ; le respect de ces règles est une condition pour que les fragments ainsi générés soient pourvus de sens, et, éventuellement, aptes à être doués d'une valeur de vérité (vrai ou faux)"

For her, pragmatic study revolves around three major points:

1- The concept of act: language is not only used to represent the world, but also to perform actions: *"Parler, c'est agir. [...] c'est agir sur autrui [...] c'est instaurer un sens, et c'est de toute façon faire 'acte de langage'"*.

2- The concept of context: it includes all the information directly linked to the act of language, and which is necessary for the correct appreciation of the words: *"On s'aperçoit combien le contexte est indispensable lorsqu'on en est privé, par exemple lorsque des propos vous sont rapportés par un tiers, à l'état isolé ; ils deviennent en général ambigus, inappréciables."*

3- The concept of performance: it is the last step, which consists in fusing the two first steps together: it is the accomplishment of the act, in context.

Armengaud also defines the framework in which the first point should be considered. For her, a pragmatic study must begin with a semantic study. Then, what is expected from a semantic observation? The website Britannica.com gives the following definition for semantics:

Semantics, also called semiotics, semology or semasiology, is the philosophical and scientific study of meaning in natural and artificial languages. [...] The word semantics has ultimately prevailed as a name for the doctrine of meaning, of linguistic meaning in particular.

However, if we wish to approach the study of our subject in the frame of semantics and pragmatics, we wish to do so in a very specific framework, by studying, as well as we

can, the link between these domains, and the potential links with the human body, and in particular with the brain.

II/ 4/ Biolinguistics

As we wrote above, we would like to put forward, within the framework of this research on strong verbs, possible links between the results we will obtain within the field of our pragmatic and semantic study, with concrete cerebral elements. This type of research is placed in the scope of biolinguistics, for which we could give as a definition "*La biolinguistique est la prise en compte d'une base cognitive des éléments mis en évidence par la pragmatique*" (Roussel, 2022). In fact, if the elements of analysis and the clues of our corpus allow us to put forward concrete clues, we would also like to see if there are possible links between these potential clues and scientific bases of what we know about the functioning of our brain, and the impact that this could have had on the development of a binary functioning of the verb in Old English, with on one side, weak verbs, and on the other side, strong verbs. We will consider anomalous verbs as a specific case, and will leave them aside for now, for practicality reasons.

II/ 5/ Corpus choices and methodology

In order to try and find keys to a potential theory, we will study the strong verbs through a corpus dedicated to them exclusively. These verbs are mainly extracted from the first class of strong verbs (86 occurrences), taken in their most used, attested form.³ We will add in this corpus a list of the most commonly used strong verbs in Old English, taken from Mitchell & Robinson (1992), from which we extracted 116 occurrences.

The interest of this corpus is that it shows a rather representative panel of strong verbs in Old English. It includes a whole class of strong verbs, in order to be able to study even the ones that are not often used or encountered in the texts. The addition of a list of the most frequently used strong verbs allows us, on the other hand, not to limit ourselves only to one

3 Forms found and taken from *Bosworth Toller's Anglo-Saxon Online Dictionary*. Link available in the references.

class of verbs, and will allow us to make observations on the most used verbs, in order to get a more precise idea of the linguistic and cultural realities of the strong verbs in Old English.

We chose to work using the Bosworth Toller's Anglo-Saxon Online Dictionary. This free access website lists, compiles and sorts a very large number of attested forms of Old English vocabulary. This vocabulary is mainly extracted from Joseph Bosworth's works, and has been compiled and digitalized on this website. Strong verbs are no exception, and the site's interface permits us not only to find a very complete set of definitions for each strong verb, but also an impressive number of texts using these verbs in context, coming from a multitude of different corpora. This dictionary also gives us the references for all the sources it lists and indicates the exact page from which the extracts used are taken (which can be found on the right side of each quote on the website; for practical reasons, we will not list all the original source texts, and will only quote the website). The main advantage of this resource is that it is completely free and accessible online. The extracts used as example are also entirely freely available, and this allows for the consultation of sources that would otherwise be very difficult to access. In contrast, it is important to mention that a certain number of the examples listed are taken from corpora that do not not always present translations into Contemporary English. Sometimes, the translations of the Old English extracts are only available in Latin or Middle English⁴ (if they are translated at all), which sometimes makes the interpretation of the examples difficult. Indeed, many of these translations come from older texts (between the twelfth and the nineteenth century for most of these cases), a period during which texts were mostly translated into Latin, initially because of the universal and stable aspect of the latter, then later because it brought a linguistic richness and a scientific aspect to translatology (Bouquet, 2020).

It is therefore necessary first to look at the meanings of the strong verbs, and their translation into contemporary English. We will begin our corpus study by trying to address these questions in the following order: What semantic aspects might these verbs share? How can they be discerned, and from what angle should they be approached? Does the context of these verbs, in texts, tell us anything? Can we find any clues, using the answers to the previous questions, about the philosophy behind the separation of strong and weak verbs? In

4 If we are to use examples only translated in latin, Middle English or not translated at all, the translations we will propose are our own, and realized with the help of the *Old English Translator*, linked in the references.

order to tackle these questions, we first studied the translations of the verbs in our corpus into Contemporary English.

Several pieces of information are striking: the first one being the number of possible translations for Old English strong verbs. In fact, more than 80 % of the verbs composing our corpus have three or more (and often more) different translations⁵. These different translations are sometimes mainly composed of synonyms **(1)**, or can be on the opposite, composed of very different meanings **(2)**:

(1) *blīcan* 'to shine, glitter, dazzle, sparkle, twinkle'

(2) *drīfan* 'to drive, force, pursue, push, rush with violence'

We clearly see with those examples that if, on the one hand, *shine, glitter, dazzle, sparkle and twinkle* are synonyms (or at least belong to the same lexical field), there is only little in common between *drive, pursue, or push*. This therefore implies that most strong verbs possess a very high degree of polysemy. In fact, the strong verbs that do not have many possible translations, are very generic, very inclusive verbs. In these cases, the Contemporary English translation of the verb is either almost perfectly matching the semantics of the Old English verb; or its modern form is directly inherited from Old English, and the meaning of the verb itself has known little to no modification. This high polysemy of strong verbs may be directly linked to Quirk&Wrenn's observations (1955) about the frequency in which strong verbs are used in Old English: if strong verbs represent around one third of the verbs encountered in Old English texts, this could mean that these verbs were commonly used in everyday life situations by the Old English speaking peoples. As a result, this high level of use may directly be linked to strong verbs' tendency to cover multiple social and cultural aspects of the time. This explanation may lead us to new questions: what can we learn from the Old English society and culture through the meanings of the strong verbs ? Can we find clues about how the peoples speaking Old English, and those speaking Germanic before them, saw the world in which they evolved through the strict separation they made between strong and weak verbs? To find potential answers, we may now look at what processes, actions or concepts strong verbs are reflecting.

5 We will only give the definitions specifically attributed by the Bosworth dictionary.

In order to answer this set of questions, it is important to look at what the verbs are about, to see if they share a common semantism of some sort. Indeed, looking if a general sense can be found among the verbs is the most logical step. However, by observing the corpus, we realise that we find verbs inside the strong verbs category that only share little in common semantically wise, except for their morphology (revolving around the ablaut). These verbs can enter transitive or intransitive constructions. Some may also be encountered in both types of construction, depending on the context. We can also find -even among the same class of strong verbs- verbs that have dramatically different meanings: e.g. *bīdan* 'to wait, stay, remain'; *bedrīfan* 'to drive, thrust on or upon, enforce, surround, pursue, follow' and *flītan* 'to argue, fight, strive, contend', which are all originating from the first class of strong verbs. If the first one is a static verb, expressing immobility and the patience of the subject, doing only one thing: waiting, the next two ones on the opposite are describing movement, and compile a process in multiple steps into the verb. Said strong verbs are not always literal -a lot of them easily incorporate metaphorical processes among some of their definitions⁶- and they seem to cover a lot of different contexts.

It is now necessary to develop on the methods of corpus analysis that we will follow. We will deal separately with the strong verbs from Class 1, and the most frequently used strong verbs in Old English (that are coming from the other classes). This two-stage study will allow us to compare the results, and to see if a particular trend emerges in one or the other of the two parts of the corpus. In this way, we may be able to deduce things that we would otherwise have missed. We will first look at the semantics of strong verbs, before looking more in depth at the contexts in which we may encounter them. This type of analysis will be done for each of the topics we will work on, but will only be detailed if the results show relevance to the question or issue we are trying to determine. The approach to these verbs will be, as mentioned earlier, related to the functioning of the brain and the body, in a biolinguistic framework.

6 We will also mention here that almost *all* the verbs in the corpus have *at least* one figurative or metaphorical meaning among the extracts provided by the Bosworth Toller's Dictionary.

III/ CORPUS RESULTS

III/ 1/ A link to the five senses and body parts and functions.

Studying our corpus, one of the first things striking us is the great number of strong verbs expressing, one way or another, a link to the five senses and the body functions. In fact, in the first part of our corpus, composed of strong verbs extracted from Class 1, we can find verbs are directly linked to the five senses, being sight, taste, touch, smell and hearing, i.e. (3-7):

(3) *sēon* 'to see (with the eyes specifically)'

(4) *bitan* 'to bite (with the teeth specifically)'

(5) *Đú his hrīnan meaht*

(from *hrinan* 'to touch') thou mayest touch it

(6) *scrēon* 'to cry out, proclaim'

(7) *smītan* 'to daub, smear, pollute, infect, to smite'

These verbs can be linked to touch (5), sight (3), taste (4), sense of smell (7) or hearing (6). This category includes verbs dealing with the subject of the body and its functioning (8-9):

(8) *witan* 'to know, to feel a certain emotion'

(9) *scītan* 'to defecate, shite'

In (8), the process of knowing and feeling emotions is quite specific to the human body, and thus can be considered a body function. It directly refers to the brain capacities. In (9), we have a more generic aspect, common to most living creatures. 'To defecate' is a natural body function, so the link to the body part associated is naturally made. If these verbs are put in the same category, it is because they often overlap: the verbs linked to a sense often refer and imply the use of the body part associated. When thinking of (3) 'to see', it is indeed hard to imagine seeing without eyes. In the same way, (5) 'to touch' directly suggests the use of a

finger, or a hand. This category, regrouping verbs linked to a sense and verbs referring to a body part in particular (in at least one of their possible definitions), is in fact very present among the strong verbs, as shown in the table below:

	Class 1 Strong verbs	Most Commonly used Strong Verbs	TOTAL
Related to sight/the eyes	13/85 (= 15 %)	5/116 (= 4.5 %)	18/201 (= 9 %)
Related to taste/the mouth	13/85 (= 15 %)	27/116 (= 23 %)	40/201 (= 20 %)
Related to touch/the fingers	13/85 (= 15 %)	21/116 (= 18 %)	34/201 (= 17 %)
Related to smell/the nose	5/85 (= 6 %)	2/116 (= 2 %)	7/201 (= 3.5 %)
Related to hearing/the ears	3/85 (= 3.5 %)	8/116 (= 7 %)	11/201 (= 5.5 %)
Related to a specific body part/the body function	14/85 (= 16.5 %)	22/116 (= 19 %)	36/201 (= 18 %)
TOTAL	46/85 (= 53.5 %)	49/116 (= 42 %)	95/201 (= 47.5 %)

Table 6: Strong verbs related to the five senses or to specific body parts or body functions.⁷

It is important to specify that we include in the verbs concerning the mouth all verbs having to do with the voice, the breath, or the respiration (when it is specifically by the mouth)

In total, one strong verb studied out of two fits in this category. Even though these verbs are this present in proportion, we are far from finding as many verbs for sight/eyes, smell/nose and hearing/ears as for touch/fingers or taste/mouth. Although not very marked, we observe some disparities between the verbs from the exhaustive list of the first class, and the verbs most frequently used in the source texts. Among the most frequently used strong verbs, there is a bigger presence of verbs related to taste/mouth, to touch/fingers, and to

⁷ A strong verb can be part of multiple categories, depending on its different meanings and figurative uses.

specific body parts/body functions. The verbs of this category are also slightly less represented in proportion (42 % vs. 53.5 %). This inequality is particularly noticeable for verbs related to sight/eyes. While they represent 15 % of Class 1 strong verbs, they represent only 4.5 % of the strong verbs most commonly found in the texts. This statistic anomaly may potentially indicate two things:

- 1: While there is a wide variety of strong verbs to describe sight/eyes, only a minority of them are present in Old English texts, meaning that a number of them were either reserved for circumstantial use (like oral expression for example), and/or dependent on a specific context, or were already almost no longer in use.
- 2: Most of the strong verbs to describe sight/eyes are found in Class 1 of Strong Verbs, slightly distorting the proportions and the results.

The important superiority of number for taste/mouth and touch/fingers verbs is also striking. Although we cannot say much from this simple observation, it clearly indicates, whether in Corpus 1 (Class 1 verbs) or Corpus 2 (most frequently used strong verbs), a certain preference in the expression of these senses. This preference may be due to a need to express actions related to these senses in a more diverse way, or it may reflect the importance of these two senses in Old English society. It is also possible that it is actually a mix of the two, and that the massive use of verbs related to these senses is the result of a need for a detailed expression of the different actions related to these senses, because of the importance they have in the society of the time.

III/ 2/ Movements and Hands gestures.

Another important point that we have noticed, is the overabundance of verbs expressing movement. Indeed, if most verbs designate actions, we are talking here about verbs expressing movement, and more specifically the movement of living beings. This expression of movement might be on different scales, it may concern movement away from (10), or towards (11) what we will call Ego. It is a concept that we define as the following: "ego is that portion of the human personality which is experienced as the “self” or “I” and is in contact with the external world through perception"⁸. It may refer to the movements of

8 Definition extracted from the *Britannica Encyclopaedia* website. Link available in references

beings or objects occurring in front of Ego (12) , and being spectated, but it may also specifically refer to the movement of Ego, in whole (13) or in part (14):

(10) *Gewíteþ on weg faran engel*

(from *gewitan* 'to depart'): The angel departeth away

(11) *Mīn folc hider hweorfeþ*

(from *hweorfan* 'to return'): My people will return here

(12) *Geseah he ða wérian gástas þurh ðæt fýr fleógende*

(from *fleōgan* 'to fly of other rapid movement'): He saw the accursed spirits flying through the fire

(13) *Weorod eall arás*

(from *arīsan* 'to arise, get up') The band all arose/got up

(14) *Ic nam ða wīnberian and wrang on ðæt fæt*

(from *wringan* 'to wring, to twist, press') I took the grapes and pressed them into a cup⁹

This idea of movement can also, conversely, be translated by an idea of non-movement. Here, we are not talking about movement as such, but about the explicit and indicated idea of not moving (15):

(15) *Heō bad þone ēcan sige*

(from *bīdan* 'to wait') He waited for an eternal crown

These verbs related to movement in space are very numerous as shown in the following table:

9 Quotes from the Bosworth Toller's Anglo-Saxon Dictionary Online website

	Corpus 1¹⁰	Corpus 2¹¹	TOTAL
Verbs Related to Movement	44/85	70/116	114/201
Percentage	52 %	60 %	57 %

Table 7: Strong verbs related to movement.

These figures show that these verbs are indeed extremely present. They represent half of class 1, and two thirds of the most frequently used strong verbs. Once again, we notice a certain disparity between the verbs from the two corpora. Here, it could be a question of an abundant use of verbs related to movement, compared to their total number. This figure (60 %) resonates with the (greater than expected) presence of verbs related to touch/fingers. Consequently we will focus our attention to those, and look at verbs specifically related to movement, but this time exclusively of the hand:

	Corpus 1	Corpus 2	TOTAL
Verbs related to the movement of the hand	24/44	36/70	60/114
Percentage	54,5 %	51.5 %	52.5 %
Overall percentage	28 %	31 %	30 %

Table 8: Strong verbs related to the movement of the hand, compared to the number of strong verbs related to movement.

We then observe that more than half of the strong verbs related to movement are specifically related to the movement of the hand. This trend is identical to both corpora, and allows us to put forward the hypothesis that the hand, and more particularly the multitude of actions performed with it, was of capital importance in the society of the time. Indeed, when observing the meanings of the verbs of movement related to the hand, all types of possible

¹⁰ Verbs of the Class 1 of Strong Verbs

¹¹ Most used Strong Verbs in Old English

contexts stand out: manual work (16), fights (17), love (18), craftsmanship or recreational activity (19), or even swimming (20).

(16) *Git [Beowulf and Breca] seofon niht swuncon*

(from *swincan* 'labour, work with effort'): They laboured/worked with effort for seven nights.

(17) *Ða litlingas fuhton on hire innoþe*

(from *feohtan* 'to fight, struggle'): the little ones in her uterus fought/struggled

(18) *Hia gehrinadon*

(from: *gehrinan* 'to touch, affect, have intercourse with'): They had intercourse (with one another)

(19) *Ic wef*

(from *wefan* 'to weave, construct, put together'): I wove [my bed]

(20) *Swamm*

(from *swimman* 'to swim') he swam¹²

This last example is particularly interesting, when we know that the ancestors of the Old English-speaking peoples were sailors, since they most probably arrived on the British Isles by boat, according to Bede (*circa* 731), and they lived on an island.

Unfortunately, it is very difficult to set up a comparative study with weak verbs in order to compare the number of occurrences related to body and hand movement. This is mainly due to the very large number of weak verbs, and the lack of data at our disposal concerning the frequency of use of these weak verbs. It would be irrelevant to compare a strong verb, used in a large number of situations, with a weak verb of which there are only a few occurrences. This lack of certainty leads us to rely on the results we obtained from this corpus, that is to say on the prevalence of the expression of manual gestures within the strong verbs.

12 Quotes from the Bosworth Toller's Anglo-Saxon Dictionary Online website

III/ 3/ A Link To Emotions

Another point that we have noted in this study is the presence of a link between a number of strong verbs and human emotions. The first questions to ask are: what are emotions? What are the main emotions and what physical and cerebral phenomena do the expression of emotions translate? Tcherkassof & Frijda (2014, §33) give us the following definition:

Dans le langage courant, le mot « émotion » est utilisé pour désigner des réponses manifestant l'excitation vigoureuse du système nerveux autonome et autres mouvements véhéments comme des grimaces faciales, gestes prononcés des mains, gesticulations des bras, courir à toute vitesse, donner des coups de poing, fracasser des plats, crier à voix haute ... Mais les cinq modalités de base peuvent se manifester de façons bien différentes.

According to them, the five main emotions that are commonly acknowledged (love, joy, sadness, fear and anger) are just a construct of impulses linked to multiple modalities that bring different degrees of emotion. These degrees are manifested in different ways, of which the most concrete (and scientifically measurable) brain effect is a stimulation of the autonomic nervous system. For the authors, the five most commonly accepted emotions could then be interpreted as a social development, specific to each individual, and sharing with others the emotions felt would be part of the typical chain of events of the emotional reaction (§35).

If in Old English the expression of emotions does not seem to be exclusive to strong verbs, a great number of them are represented by verbs coming from this verbal category. The goal is now to know whether emotions, and the expression of strong emotions, can be linked to the strong verb category in particular. Without being able to know precisely which verb triggered the most reaction in the brains of Old English speakers, we will indulge in seeing which verb seems, in our opinion, to express the highest degree of emotion for the five main emotions given to us. We will use the website *Old English Translator*, which, when given a keyword, will send us all words related to it. We will then enter the five main emotions, and

draw up a table of the main different possibilities of translation we can encounter both from weak and strong verbs¹³:

Emotion	Strong Verbs	Weak Verbs
Love	<i>ádrēogan</i> : to act, do, perform, practice one's love, bear, suffer, endure	<i>freogan</i> : to free, like, love, honour <i>lufian</i> : to love <i>dēoran</i> : to hold dear, love, glorify, endear
Joy	<i>hliellan</i> : to laugh, laugh happily, make a face and sounds expressing joy, mirth, amusement <i>áhliehhan</i> : to laugh, deride, exult, laugh at	<i>gamenian</i> : to entertain or enjoy oneself; to display happiness or joy <i>ceahhettan</i> : to laugh loud or in a cackling manner <i>cancettan</i> : to cry out, chatter, mock, deride, laugh in a cackling manner <i>gebismerian</i> : to mock, laugh at
Sadness	<i>greotan</i> : to cry, weep, shed tears, lament <i>graetan</i> : to weep, cry, bemoan, lament, bewail, deplore <i>wepan</i> : to mourn, weep, wail, lament, cry	<i>blaegettan</i> : to cry <i>gierman</i> : to cry, mourn <i>poterian</i> : to cry, howl, wail
Fear	<i>ondrēdan</i> : to dread, fear <i>begreosan</i> : to overwhelm with fear <i>draedan</i> : to dread, fear	<i>gaellan</i> : to terrify, astound, stun <i>onpracian</i> : to cause fear <i>scien</i> : to be frightened or startled <i>steartlian</i> : to react with fear
Anger	<i>abelgan</i> : to make angry, anger, vex, irritate, cause one to swell with anger, be angry with <i>gebelgan</i> : to make one angry, irritate, enrage <i>wrecan</i> : to punish, avenge, unleash one's wrath,	<i>abylgan</i> : to irritate, provoke <i>wraedan</i> : to resist violently, to get angry <i>gebylgan</i> : to anger, make angry

Table 9: The verbal expression of main emotions in Old English.

The first thing we can notice is that there are many more weak verbs describing emotions than strong verbs. This was expected however, because of the productivity of weak

¹³ This list is not exhaustive. We only took a maximum of four of the most representative verbs for each emotion.

verbs in Old English (Quirk&Wrenn, 1955). Moreover, we also notice that some strong verbs have much more diverse semantics, and have more different meanings. This feature seems to be important. Although the weak verbs express more or less the same range of emotions as the strong verbs, these expressions are spread over several different verbs (we consider *abelgan* 'to make angry, anger, vex, irritate, cause one to swell with anger, be angry with' on the one hand, and *abylgan* 'to irritate, provoke'; *wraedan* 'to resist violently, to get angry' and *gebylgan* 'to anger, make angry' on the other hand for example), which therefore only express a fraction of what the strong verbs do. On this basis, we can consider that the strong verbs -since they refer to more degrees of the emotion, which will then be hinted from the context- almost represent the very emotion, which should then be declined according to the situation. The only exception is for 'love', where there does not seem to be a particular strong verb to describe the act of loving. However, it could be argued that the expression of love in Old English would be done through terms showing affection by protection or willing to take care, as Tcherkassof and Frijda (2014) have put forward in their article¹⁴.

Indeed, among the strong verbs, we find verbs expressing this idea very clearly, such as *genesan* 'to be saved, preserved, escape from, survive' or *beorgan* 'to save, protect, shelter, defend, fortify, spare, preserve, defend, secure, guard against, avoid'. Taken together with what we have seen in relation to other emotions, this might indicate that in Old English, and probably in Germanic before that, the idea of love may have been most strongly conveyed through the idea of protection. This idea could make sense in the hypothesis that danger would be omnipresent, and making the effort to defend someone else would imply a form of love. This idea is supported by the Oxford English Dictionary within the germanic etymology of "love", which attests of a strong link with the idea of "permission", but also with the ideas of "celebration", "glorification" and "praise". These words seem to be strongly linked to concepts of military victory, or at least success in a conflict, which could be an argument in favour of a protective vision of love, in which people would be loved because they would be able to protect the people in their care.

Apart from that, as strong verbs are clearly expressing emotions in a much straightforward way, compatible with all kinds of potential contexts, while weak verbs seem more

¹⁴ In their article (2014, §13) Table 1, Tcherkassof and Frijda put forward a link between the action 'take care' to the type of relationship 'increase someone's well being' and the emotions 'love, affection, caution, tenderness'

situational, we can detect a certain tendency to express emotions through strong verbs. To illustrate this tendency, we listed the strong verbs related to one (or more) of these five emotions in our corpora, and gathered the data in the table below:

	Corpus 1	Corpus 2	Total
Number of occurrences	11/85	23/116	34/201
Percentage	13 %	20 %	17 %

Table 10: Strong verbs expressing emotions.

Again, we notice a huge disparity between our two corpora. If, in their globality, only a fraction of strong verbs seem to express emotions (13 % of corpus 1), we surprisingly find almost twice as many verbal occurrences expressing emotions in the most frequently used strong verbs (20 % of corpus 2). Through the study of our results, we can then argue that there does seem to be a link existing between the expression of strong emotions in Old English, and more particularly of major emotional aspects, and strong verbs.

III/ 4/ A link between strong verbs and human beings ?

The first results of our corpus study are very intriguing. The semantic similarities found in our corpus study show something very important: they are all in some way related to human characteristics or behaviour. While most of them are not exclusively related to humans, they are all related to one of our four previous points, namely body and hand movements, emotions, the five senses and body parts. We could argue that these points are indeed related to human beings, but are not exclusive to them. Emotions, for example, are not exclusive to human beings, as Boissy (2014) explains. However, was there any awareness of this before the recent ethological studies? There does not seem to be any documentation on this subject for Old English at the moment, so we will consider that it is difficult to affirm that this awareness could have had an impact on the language and texts of the time. The other important point to mention is that, even if a certain number of strong verbs do not seem to be

related at all to human beings, we systematically find in these cases at least a metaphorical or figurative meaning that applies only to human beings. This is the case for *scrincan*: 'to contract, shrink, (of a plant) to wither away, shrivel, metaph.¹⁵ to become weak'; *sweorcan* 'in a physical sense, to become dark, be obscured, figuratively of mental gloom, of that which causes sadness, to become grievous, troublesome, saddening'; *wefan* 'to weave a web, in a more general sense, lit.¹⁶ or metaph. to weave, construct, put together, arrange, plan, contrive' or even *seōþan* 'to seethe, boil, cook in a liquid, to subject to a fiery ordeal, with the idea of purification (metaph.) subject to a great pain'.¹⁷ As a result, all the verbs in our corpus are, in one or multiple ways, linked to the human being through one of the previous points mentioned in our study.

Another very interesting point about strong verbs is their seemingly profound relationship to metaphor. A large number of them have one or more metaphorical meanings, in addition to those that do not have a direct link to the human being, and which use this metaphorical meaning to relate to the human. Rakotomalala (2022) argues that "*la métaphore [...] porte la trace de la subjectivité du langage*". This implies that the strong verb, quick to produce metaphors, would be a subjective linguistic tool, used to support the speaker's appreciation of a situation or an action. This subjectivity would be directly linked to the other categories identified, such as emotions, hand movements, or body functions. The use of the strong verb would be expressing Ego's appreciation of a situation in which he is either directly involved, or in which another human being should be involved. The strong verb may then be a form of statement, an affirmation implying the underlying presence of human intervention in a situation. Rakotomalala (*idem*) adds that metaphors (among other tropes) are in fact a linguistic tool used in order to diversify the language and the denominations of objects and concepts without having to create new words, in order not to overload a language with new words and expressions. We also observed at multiple occasions that strong verbs possess much more different meanings than weak verbs. Here we would have a fundamental difference in linguistic creation between the strong verb and the weak verb. Because of the brain's inability to retain too many words (*ibid.*), Germanic languages could have developed around a binary system. On the one hand: the strong verb, a non-productive category, which

15 Stands for 'metaphorically'.

16 Stands for 'literally'.

17 The underlined sections correspond to our interpretation of meanings exclusive to human beings.

would produce new meanings by adding figurative forms, or new meanings semantically close to its previous meanings, and on the other hand, the weak verb, which would produce new forms derived from pre-existing forms (Bourcier, 1978) in order to allow an adaptation of the vocabulary according to the linguistic needs of the time. This would form, as Rakotomalala (2022) explains (with, on one side the very diverse and systematically different proper nouns, vs. common nouns tending to metaphorical processes on the other side), a form of paradox between two coexisting systems. Following this logic, the system of strong verbs in Germanic, then in Old English, could have been constituted with the aim of ensuring a form of linguistic continuity, a stability of the language, where, conversely, the weak verb would have been initially thought of as a temporary, momentary form, destined to evolve or be replaced. This consistent block of strong verbs would then only concern the great constants of Indo-European, Germanic and Old English societies. These great constants could be related to our four previous points: emotions, hand and body gestures, the five senses and body functions. As stated earlier, all these themes converge to one point, which would then be the centre of ancient societies, and which appears to be the human being.

These results can also be interpreted from a biolinguistic point of view. In fact Roussel (2022) presented that verbs are produced and stored in the frontal lobe of the brain. This brain region also happens to be responsible for the planification, movement (and specifically the movement of the hands), and emotional responses. We could then propose a certain compatibility between the results of our corpus, and the area of the brain related to the creation of verbs, and its other roles. Therefore, the link between these verbal features, deemed fundamental and requiring a form of stability by people living during the Indo-European, Germanic and Old-English times, could be due to a cerebral influence of what our brain considers as belonging to the domain of the verb.

III/ 5/ A mirror of Indo-European, Germanic and Old English civilizations and peoples

Keeping in mind what we have written above, strong verbs in Old English would happen to be a mirror of what was deemed fundamental in Old English societies, and Germanic and Indo-European societies before that. If our theory about the language stability

and consistency of strong verbs is true, we should find, among the Old English strong verbs, clear traces of the Indo-European and Germanic cultures and societies.

We now have to search about what the Indo-European societies would have looked like. Fortson (2010) puts forward the idea of a strict hierarchical society, governed by a system of kingship, with slaves at the bottom of the social pyramid, probably mostly made up of prisoners of war and criminals, to which we would have asked the most difficult tasks. We find this idea through the expression of the verb *dreōgan* 'to do, work, perform, pass life, fight, bear, suffer, endure, to be employed, be busy', and its etymology. Then, *dreōgan* would not simply mean to work, but implies the idea of forced work, as a penalty for a crime. The Indo-European stem **d^hrewg^h-* 'to be deceptive, damage', seems to be compatible with this kind of link between work and a form of criminality. Indo-European society is also believed to be a strong patriarchy, in which the whole social world revolved around free men. The society of free men would be divided into three major castes. The first, at the summit of the hierarchy: the rulers and the priests. This caste would have been composed of the guardians of peace and of the respect of rules based on the authority of the sovereign and of religious morality. We do find strong verbs in Old English conveying these ideas, *wealdan* 'to have power over, to rule' for example, which comes from the Indo-European stem **h₂welh₁-* 'to rule, strong, powerful'. This idea of being strong and powerful survived through the meaning 'to have power over', which indicates a clear superiority, be it literal or physical. We also find verbs related to religious practices, such as *galan* (21) 'to sing, enchant, chant', *bannan* 'to summon, to curse' or *singan* (22) 'to sing, recite, relate musically or in verse':

(21) *Se wisdóm gól gyd: wisdom sang a lay*¹⁸

(22) *Crist sylf sang Pater Noster árest: Christ himself sang Pater Noster first*

If we find, through (21) and (22), a use of these verbs in a religious context, we can in fact also find them in more casual situations, such as non-religious songs, and the expression of feasts or poetry for example. The second caste would have been composed of warriors, in charge of ensuring the security of the people, and of fighting in order to conquer new territories and to make order reign. We find in fact a lot of strong verbs related to fighting and

¹⁸ Defined as 'an epic poem' by the Cambridge Dictionary

protecting in our corpus. The fighting dimension can be encountered with verbs such as *flītan* 'to argue, fight, strive, contend' (23) or *wīgan* 'to fight, make war, do battle' (24):

(23) *Æfre gé fliton and wunnon ongedán Drihten*

(from *flītan* 'to fight'): You have always fought against the lord

(24) *Nú sceal hond and heard sweord ymb hord wigan,*

(from *wīgan* 'to fight') Come on, I shall fight with a steady hand and sword for hoards.

The protection dimension can be perceived, as we wrote before, through verbs like *beorgan* 'to save, protect, shelter, defend, fortify, spare, preserve, defend, secure, guard against, avoid' (25) and *genesan* 'to be saved, preserved, escape from, survive' (26):

(25) *Hý him hryre burgon*

(from *beorgan* 'to secure, save') They secured/saved him from fall.

(26) *Se biþ hál and genesep on ēcnesse*

(from *genesan* 'to be preserved') He shall be saved and shall be preserved to eternity.

The last caste of free men would have been composed around the notion of fertility, and would have been mainly composed of free peasants, merchants, and other craftsmen, working with their hands. This idea of 'fertility' (*idem*) is very interesting. It gathers behind it one of the fundamental aspects of a civilization: its prosperity. If we believe Fortson, this last element would be at the heart of the Indo-European social world. However, the hypothesis according to which this caste would have played a major part within the Indo-European society also implies a certain stability, mainly geographical (if we speak about farmers, it is necessary for them to remain close to their fields long enough to be able to harvest their crops for example). This idea is in fact well reflected in the strong verbs of Old English such as *grōwan* 'grow, increase, spring up, sprout' (27); *weaxan* 'to wax, grow, be produced (phys. or fig.)' (28):

(27) *Spritte seó eorðe grówende gærs*

(from *grōwan* 'to sprout') The earth sprouts green grass

(28) *Dæt land ðær ðær gold wixt*

(from *weaxan* 'to grow, be produced') That land where gold is grown/produced (meaning extracted)

On the opposite, we encounter strong verbs exposing a lack of fertility, be it for farmers: *scrincan* 'to contract, shrink, (of a plant) to wither away, shrivel, to become weak', or for merchants: *stelan* 'to steal' (29):

(29) *Peóf ne cymþ búton ðæt hé stele*

(from *stelan* 'to steal') the thief doesn't come without stealing

However, this idea of geographical stability seems to be counterbalanced by a large number of verbs expressing geographical movement or departure, such as *gewitan* 'to go, depart' (30); *hweorfan* 'to turn, change, go, return, depart, go about, wander, roam, hover about' (31); *cuman* 'to come, go, happen' (32); *hladan* 'to load, put as a burden, freight, cargo, load something on a vehicle or porter, scoop out' (33) or even expressing this geographical movement by water means with *rowan* 'to go by water, to row or sail' (34):

(30) *Heó on sīþ gewát wésten sécan*

(from *gewitan* 'to go, depart'): She, on her journey, went/departed seeking the desert

(31) *Hé hwearf æfter wegum*

(from *hweorfan* 'to go/wander') He went/wandered along the roads

(32) *Cum to ðam lande, ðe ic ðe geswutelige*

(from *cuman* 'to come') Come to the land, which I will shew thee

(33) *Wæs naca hladen herewádum, mearum and máðmum*

(from *hladan* 'to load, freight'): The boat was charged/freighted (with) mail armors, horses and treasures.

(34) *Đa óðre leorningcnihtas reówon*

(from *rowan* 'to sail') The other disciples sailed (to us)

This very present expression of geographical movement that can be found within the category of strong verbs, in contrast with the sedentary aspects presented earlier, would encourage us more to consider the possibility of semi-sedentary peoples, traveling a lot according to conflicts and conquests. As explained previously, it seems that sea travel occupies an important part of the expression of geographical movement. We find it in (34), but also through other strong verbs such as *forliþan* 'to shipwreck'. We can then assume that some of these peoples (including the ancestors of the Old English-speaking peoples, the Germanic peoples) would have been seafaring peoples, accustomed to travelling by ship. Indo-European societies would then have been composed of peoples familiar with staying only for a short time in the same place, but possessing at the same time the social, cultural and societal bases necessary for a sedentary life. Fortson (2010, 21) adds, quoting Dumézil "These functions [the three castes described above] would be less as actual divisions of society and more as composing a kind of cognitive framework, an ideology". This point is particularly interesting. It would mean that Indo-European societies are not "constructed" following a rigid caste system, but was rather organized instinctively, following what they deemed to be necessary for a well-established society. This would imply that the brain plays an important role in the organisation of Indo-European society. Now, if the strong verb reflects the organization of this society, it should necessarily reflect the functioning of the brain in a certain way, which would corroborate what we stated before in the previous part of our paper.

Within the strong verbs, it seems that we find a certain correspondence with the most prominent known points of the Indo-European culture. However, we must take a step back from this. These results could only be a reflection of the Old English society, because it appears that these criteria also apply to many different civilisations, since they are generic and common to Western European societies, and what we interpret as a potential cerebral influence on the organisation of the Indo-European society may only be the reflection of our will to perceive a result. On the other hand, almost all of Western European societies find their origins in Indo-European societies, or have been in constant contact and exchange with them

for the past millenia, which might actually support our argument, and would then happen to be corroborated by Dumézil's idea of "cognitive framework". In fact, it would not be surprising if this cognitive framework influenced the construction of all the descendents of Indo-European societies.

CONCLUSION

Through our study, halfway between synchrony and diachrony, placed in a pragmatic and semantic framework, and contrasted by a biolinguistic view, we have been able to raise a number of interesting points concerning the study of strong verbs. If some of our questions could not be addressed, they leave the field open to a broadening of this topic in the future, and to a more exhaustive study of the English verbal system, from its creation in Indo-European, to contemporary English.

Thanks to our corpus study, the hypotheses that we have been able to make concerning the important link between strong class verbs and human beings, the Indo-European society, and the idea of linguistic economy and stability that they may represent, are already a very interesting first track. The study of the verbal dimensions we have managed to put forward needs to be deepened in order to reach a complete and satisfactory answer. Some points could not be taken into account, such as the study of verbs possessing both a strong and a weak form, and others, such as the link with biolinguistics, could not be sufficiently developed.

However, this topic opens the way to a new vision of the Old-English verbal system, in duality, presenting on the one hand economic features such as metaphor and polysemitism, in order to overcome the impossibility of the brain to retain an unlimited number of forms, and on the other hand the abundant formation of new forms, made to adapt the language to the current conditions and necessities of the language (Rakotomalala, 2022). It might be relevant to observe whether this kind of conclusions can be made on other Germanic languages such as German or Dutch in the first instance, and on other Indo-European languages in order to try to perceive a more global pattern, or to show the invalidity of the hypothesis we have reached.

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ANNEX: List of Strong Verbs

Old English Strong Verbs Class 1 (on the model of *rīsan, rist, rās, rison, ġerisen*

'rise'):

- acwīnan: to dwindle, waste away, decline, become extinct
- arīsan: to arise, get up, originate
- ascīnan: to shine forth
- bedrīfan: to drive, thrust on or upon, enforce, surround, pursue, follow
- begrīpan: to chide, chasten, lay hold of, grasp
- behlīdan: to close, cover, cover over
- belīfan: to stay, remain, continue, be left
- bemīpan: to hide, conceal, lie hid
- berīdan: to ride around, surround, beset, besiege, invest
- bescīnan: to shine upon, illuminate
- bīdan: to wait, stay, remain
- bītan: to bite (metaph. of the biting or wounding by the sword): to wound, cut
- blīcan: to shine, glitter, dazzle, sparkle, twinkle
- cīnan: to burst, split into pieces, break into chinks, gape, yawn
- clīpan: to stick, cleave, adhere
- drīfan: to drive, force, pursue, push, rush with violence
- dwīnan: to waste away, languish, decline, wither
- flītan: to argue, fight, strive, contend
- fordwīnan: to disappear
- forewrītan: to proscribe, banish
- forgrīpan: to grasp, seize, destroy, assail, overwhelm
- forlīpan: to shipwreck
- forscrīhan: to resign, abdicate, give up
- forþġestīgan: to go forward, to advance, to ascend
- forþġewītan: to go forth, proceed, depart, die
- forwritan: to cut asunder

-gedritan: to defecate
-gehrinan: to touch, affect, have intercourse with
-ġeswīcan: to stop, quit, fail
-ġewitan: to depart
-glidan: to glide
-gnidan: to rub
-gripan: to seize, grasp
-grisan: to shudder, to feel horror, to dread, to quake
-hnigan: to bow
-hnitan: to clash
-hrinan: to touch, reach
-hwinan: to make a whistling or whizzing sound
-lēon: to lend, loan
-līpan: to go, pass, travel, to suffer loss
-mīgan: to urinate, piss, pee
-miswrītan: to write incorrectly, make a mistake in writing, miswrite
-mīpan: to hide, conceal, dissemble
-nīpan: to grow dark, darken
-oferbīdan: to outlive, outlast, survive, overlive
-oferdrīfan: to overcome, defeat, repel, refute
-oferflītan: to overcome, get the better of
-oferwrēon: to cover over, veil, hide, conceal, overspread
-onwrēon: to uncover, reveal, disclose, show, expose, to reveal oneself
-oþgrīpan: to snatch away, to seize and take away
-rīdan: to ride
-rīpan: to reap
-rīsan: to rise
-sċīnan: to shine
-sċītan: to defecate, shite
-sċrēon: to cry out, proclaim

-sċrīfan: to decree, appoint, pass judgement, ordain, prescribe, prescribe penance or
 absolution
 -sċrīþan: to move, glide, wander
 -sēon: to see
 -sīcan: to sigh, to yearn for
 -sīgan: to sink, fall, march, go, proceed
 -*slīcan: to slide, crawl, creep
 -slīdan: to slide
 -slīfan: to cut, slip, slice off
 -slītan: to tear, rend
 -smītan: to daub, smear, pollute, infect, to smite
 -snīcan: to creep, crawl, sneak
 -snīþan: to cut, make an incision in
 -spīwan: to vomit, spew, spit
 -stīgan: to go, to go up, ascend, climb
 -strīcan: to pass lightly over, stroke, smooth, rub
 -strīdan: to stride, straddle, mount, pillage, rob, bereave, plunder
 -swīcan: to wander, to move about, to deceive, be treacherous, be a traitor to, desert
 -swīfan: to move in a course, revolve, sweep, intervene
 -tēon: drag, draw, pull, bring, lead, put, teach, educate, draw near, go, proceed
 -tōsċrīþan: to disperse
 -tōwrītan: to describe
 -þēon: to flourish, prosper, be successful (as a person exclusively)
 -wīcan: to yield, give way
 -wīgan: to fight, make war, do battle
 -wītan: to know, to feel a certain emotion
 -wlītan: to look, behold
 -wrēon: to put a cover on something, to cover with clothes; to clothe, cover a book,
 -wrīþan: to twist, bewrap, to bind
 -wrītan : to write

TOTAL : 85 occurrences

Most Commonly used Strong verbs in Old English (Class 2 to 7) :

Class 2 (on the model of *brēotan*, *brȳtt*, *brēat*, *bruton*, *ġebroten* 'to break'):

- fleōtan: to float, swim
- beōdab: to bid, command, order, announce, proclaim, threaten, bode
- breōtan: to bruise, break, demolish, destroy
- ġeōtan: to pour, pour out, shed
- sceōtan: to shoot
- ceōsan: to choose, select, elect
- dreōsan: to fall, not remain suspended, not remain standing
- freōsan: to freeze
- hreōsan: to fall rapidly, fall down, headlong
- leōsan : to lose
- creōpan: to creep, crawl
- dreōgan: to do, work, perform, pass life, fight, bear, suffer, endure, to be employed, be busy
- fleōgan, to fly with wings, fly of other rapid movement, flee, avoid
- leōgan: to lie, telle a lie, say falsely, break one's word, play false, deceive, feign
- hreōwan, to rue, make sorry, grieve, often impers
- seōpan: to seethe, boil, cook in a liquid, to subject to a fiery ordeal, with the idea of purification (metaph.), subject to a great pain
- brūcan: to use, make use of, to pass, spend, enjoy, have enjoyment of, eat, bear, discharge
- lucan: to close, conclude, fasten, lock
- bugan, bow, bow down, bend, give way, submit, yield, turn away, turn, flee
- dufan: to dive, sink
- scufan: to shove, push, thrust

Class 3 (on the model of (a) *drincan*, *drincō*, *dranc*, *druncon*, *ġedruncen* 'to drink' or (b) *helpan*, *hilpō*, *healp*, *hulpon*, *ġeholpen* 'to help'):

- bregdan: to pluck, pull, draw, drag, move quickly to and fro; bind, knot, change
- stregdan: to strew, spread, scatter, sprinkle, lay in order

-berstan: to burst, break, fail, fall, make the noise of a bursting or breaking (metaph.), crash, dash, crack

-beorgan: to save, protect, shelter, defend, fortify, spare, preserve, defend, secure, guard against, avoid

-ceōrfan: to cut, cut down, hew, rend, tear, carve, engrave

-hweorfan: to turn, change, go, return, depart, go about, wander, roam, hover about

-sweorcan: in a physical sense, to become dark, be obscured, figuratively of mental gloom, of that which causes sadness, to become grievous, troublesome, saddening

-weorpan: to cast, throw, fling

-weorþan: to come to be, to be made, to arise, come, be, to come to pass, to be done, to happen, to take place, befall, to become

-feohtan: to fight, contend, make war, combat, struggle

-feolan: to make one's way, pass to or from a place (lit. or metaph.)

-delfan: to dig, dig out, delve

-helpan: to help, aid, assist, succour

-belgan: to cause oneself to swell with anger, to make oneself angry, irritate oneself, enrage oneself, to swell with anger, be angry, enraged (intransitive)

-swelgan: to swallow in a physical sense: to take it to the mind, accept, imbibe (wisdom, metaph.)

-meltan: to melt, become liquid, be consumed, dissolved, to digest

-sweltan: to die a natural or a violent death

-gieldan: to yield, pay, render, repay, requite

-giellan: to yell

-gielpan: to glory, boast, vaunt

-grimman: to rage, roar, make a loud noise, to run with haste, hasten

-swimman: to swim

-gelimpan: to happen, occur, befall, come to pass, take place

-bindan: to bind, fasten to, knit, put bonds on, restrain the action of

-findan: to find, invent, imagine, devise, contrive, order, dispose, arrange, determine

-grindan: to grind corn in a mill, to grind, crush, oppress, scrape or rub against something

-windan: of motion that results from a blow, swing, or other impetus, to fly, leap, start,

- drincan: to drink, imbibe
- scrincan: to contract, shrink, (of a plant) to wither away, shrivel, to become weak
- swincan: to toil, labour, work with effort
- onginnan: to begin, set about, set to work
- winnan: to labour, toil, work, strive, contend, fight, to make war
- singan: to sing, recite, relate musically or in verse, narrate
- springan: to spring, leap, bound, to to grow as a plant, to burst forth, to rise as the sun
- swingan: to swinge, flog, beat, scourge, to chastise afflict or plague (metaph.)
- þringan: to press, crowd, throng, to press round, crowd together
- wringan: to wring, to twist
- byrnan: to burn, be on fire
- irnan: to run
- frignan: to ask, inquire, interrogate
- murnan: to mourn, be sad, be anxious

Class 4 (on the model of *beran*, *birð*, *bær*, *bæron*, *geboren* 'to bear'):

- beran: to bear, carry, bring, bear or carry a sacrifice, offer, carry out, support, endure
- teran: to tear, rend, bite, lacerate (can be metaph.)
- brecan: to separate into parts, to break a solid body into pieces, to shatter, demolish, violate a law (metaph.), tame
- cwelan: to die
- helan: to hide, conceal, cover
- stelan: to steal
- sciran: to cut
- niman: to take, receive, get, keep, hold, catch, contain, carry, bring, give (to one)
- cuman: to come, go, happen

Class 5 (on the model of *sprecan*, *spricð*, *spræc*, *spræcon*, *gesprecen* 'to speak'):

- cweþan: to say, as of a general statement, to call, name

- etan: to take food, take a meal, eat food, to eat habitually, to provide food for a person, devour, consume, destroy (metaph.)
- fretan: devour (for human beings)
- metan: to mete, measure (weak, to paint)
- ġenesan: to be saved, preserved, escape from, survive
- sprecan: to speak, exercise the faculty of speech, to use words in conversation, discourse
- specan: speak, synonym to sprecan
- wrecan: to drive, press, force to move, to express, utter, recite, practise, carry out; wreak anger of, punish, avenge
- tredan: to tread upon, step upon, walk upon, trample upon (metaph.)
- wefan: to weave a web, in a more general sense, lit or metaph. to weave, construct, put together, arrange, plan, contrive
- giefan: to give, dare
- ongitan: perceive, see, perceive by hearing, perceive by feeling, to know, be of opinion, hear of, find out, recognise, know

Class 6 (on the model of *faran*, *færð*, *fōr*, *fōron*, *ġefaren* 'to go'):¹⁹

- dragan: to draw, drag, to draw oneself
- faran: to travel, journey, to march (military), to go, depart, move
- galan: to sing, enchant, call
- hladan: to load, put as a burden, freight, cargo, load smthg on a vehicle or porter, scoop out
- wadan: to go, pass, proceed
- sacan: to fight, quarrel, blame, accuse, strive, contend
- scacan: to shake, shake off, brandish
- standan: to stand
- hlihhan: to laugh, laugh at, deride, scorn

¹⁹ Because Class 6 and 7 tend to present a great number of irregularities, all verbs will not exactly follow the pattern indicated by the model verb.

Class 7 (on the model of *feallan*, *fylō fēol*, *fēollon*, *ġefeallen* 'to fall'):

- bannan : to summon
- spannan: to span, clasp, join one thing to another, attach, fasten
- blawan: to blow, breathe, make a sound with a trumpet, blaze
- cnawan: to know
- mawan: mow
- sawan: to sow
- flowan: to flow, issue
- growan: grow, increase, spring up, sprout
- rowan: to go by water, to row or sail
- spowan: to succeed (a person excl)
- fealdan: fold, fold up, wrap
- healdan: to keep watch over, keep in charge, govern, rule, hold, preserve
- wealdan: to have power over, to rule
- feallan: to fall, fall down, fail
- weallan: to well, flow, spring out, issuing from a source, to go with the flow, flow with, well with (metaph.)
- weaxan: to wax, grow, be produced (phys. or fig.)
- beatan: to beat, lash, strike, dash, hurt
- hleapan: to run, rush, leap on to a mount, to mount, jump about
- hatan: to be called, or named, have for a name
- ondrædan: to dread, fear
- rædan: to counsel, give advice, advise
- lætan: to let, allow, permit, suffer, let alone, let go, give up, dismiss, forsake
- slæpan: to sleep (human excl.²⁰), lie with a person
- wepan : to weep mourn wail, lament

TOTAL: 116 occurrences

²⁰ Stands for 'exclusively'.