

## Some examples of suppletion.

### 1. Ancient Greek.

There are about ten suppletive verbs with stable paradigms; the “present” (i.e. imperfective) stem and the “aorist” (i.e. perfective) stem are usually constructed from different lexical roots, and sometimes the future stem is as well. Typical examples include:<sup>1</sup>

	<i>aorist (nonpassive)</i>	<i>present</i>	<i>future (nonpassive)</i>
‘carry, bring’	enenkê:n	phére:n	óise:n
‘see’	idê:n	horâ:n	ópsesth <sup>ai</sup>
‘eat’	phagê:n	est <sup>h</sup> íe:n	édest <sup>h</sup> ai
‘take’	helê:n	hairê:n	hairé:se:n
‘run’	dramê:n	trék <sup>h</sup> e:n	dramê:sth <sup>ai</sup>

But there are also sets of defective verbs in partial competition, none of which has a full set of forms; in a sense they are suppletive, but they do not make a single paradigm.

The most striking case involves verbs meaning ‘say’:

<i>present</i>	<i>fut. nonpass.</i>	<i>aor. nonpass.</i>	<i>perf. active</i>
phánai	phé:se:n	(phê:sai)	—
lége:n	lékse:n	(léksai)	—
—	erê:n	—	eire:kénai
—	—	eipê:n	—

The stems in parentheses are very rarely used in Classical Attic.<sup>2</sup> The aorist passives are *lek<sup>h</sup>t<sup>h</sup>ê:nai* and *hrε:t<sup>h</sup>ê:nai*; the perfect mediopassives are *lelék<sup>h</sup>t<sup>h</sup>ai*, *eirê:sth<sup>ai</sup>*, and an isolated 3sg. imperative *peph<sup>h</sup>ást<sup>h</sup>ɔ:* ‘let it be said’. A present *agoréue:n*, appearing mostly in compounds in place of *lége:n*, is also part of this system (if that is what it should be called). By far the commonest stems are present *phánai* and aorist *eipê:n*. Several verbs meaning ‘hit, beat’ present a similar picture of partial competition and partial suppletion; so do a pair meaning ‘ask’ and another pair meaning ‘sell’. All these examples show that suppletion of the familiar kind is part of a larger phenomenon: the

<sup>1</sup> The perfect stems and the aorist passive stem (from which the future passive stem is formed by further suffixation) are typically made to one or more of the Roots exemplified by the stems listed here.

<sup>2</sup> They do not occur at all in Attic inscriptions, which in some ways reflect Classical Attic speech more closely than literary documents (see Thraette 1996:529-30, 619).

inflected forms of defective lexemes *can* dovetail neatly to form a single paradigm, but they *need not* do so.<sup>3</sup> We might therefore define suppletive lexemes as synonymous defective lexemes which are not in functional competition; such a definition would allow for a cline of intermediate situations between full competition and “clean” suppletion.

## 2. English.

Germanic is very different: there are usually at most two suppletive verbs, ‘be’ and ‘go’. The history of ‘go’ is instructive. PGmc. had a strong present \*gang-i- ~ \*gang-a- and a suppletive past beginning with a sequence \*ijj-. That is still more or less the situation in Gothic: pres. inf. *gaggan*, past 3sg. *iddja*, 3pl. *iddjedun*, past ptc. *us-gaggans*.

In Old Norse (which is attested quite late for a language with “Old” in its conventional name) a new past has been formed to the present: pres. inf. *ganga*, past 3sg. *gekk*, 3pl. *gengu*, past ptc. *gengit*.

In Old High German a new past has also been formed to the present, but there is a further complication: there is also a new present competing with the old one, so that the paradigm is pres. inf. *gangan* ~ *gān/gēn*, past 3sg. *gieng*, 3pl. *giengun*, past ptc. *gigangan*. (In some dialects the shorter present is *gān*, in others *gēn*.)

Old English preserves a suppletive past, but the new, shorter present it outcompeting the inherited one, and a new past ptc. has been formed to it: pres. inf. *gān* ~ *gangan*, past 3sg. *ēode*, 3pl. *ēodon*, past ptc. *gān* (rarely *gangen*).

There is also an Old Swedish present *gā*.

Where the new present came from it not so clear. OSwed. *gā* and OHG *gā-* reflect a preform \*gā-, while OE *gā-* and OHG *gē-* reflect a preform \*gai-. Since reflexes of both appear in OHG, it seems likely that they originally occurred in the same paradigm.

In fact \*gai- ~ \*gā- should reflect pre-Proto-Germanic \*ga-ji- ~ \*ga-ja- (Þórhallsdóttir 1993: 35–7). But it isn’t clear that it really goes back that far; it could have been modelled on \*stai- ~ \*stā- ‘stand’, which definitely does go back to pre-PGmc. \*sta-ji- ~ \*sta-ja-.

So OE preserves the original suppletion ... sort of.

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<sup>3</sup> This is an indication that paradigms are epiphenomena.

In Middle English the northern dialects have opted for present *gang*, the rest for *gōn*; the past is still suppletive *yēde*.

In the 15th century the suppletive past was replaced by *went*, the past of *wend*; the present of that verb was then lost, giving the modern suppletive paradigm *go, went*.

This development seems to show that

- (1) suppletive verbs tend to remain suppletive even when lexical replacement of stems occurs, and
- (2) over time defective verbs in partial competition tend to settle into neat suppletive paradigms.

### 3. Romance languages.

This family provides one of the few examples of suppletion whose origins can more or less be observed in the historical record.

Comparison of a partial paradigm of ‘go’ in Latin and in several of its descendants will show what has happened:

	<i>Latin</i>	<i>Spanish</i>	<i>French</i>	<i>Italian</i>
pres. indic.				
sg. 1	eō	voy	vais	vado
2	īs	vas	vas	vai
3	it	va	va	va
pl. 1	īmus	vamos	allons	andiamo
2	ītis	vais	allez	andate
3	eunt	van	vont	vanno
pres. subj.				
sg. 3	eat	vaya	aille	vada
pres. inf.	īre	ir	aller	andare
ipf. indic.				
sg. 3	ībat	iba	allait	andava
fut. indic.				
sg. 3	ībit	irá	ira	andrà
perf. indic.				
sg. 3	iit	fué	alla	andò
perf. ptc.	itum	ido	allé	andato

The Latin verb was irregular but not suppletive, with a present stem  $\bar{i}$ - ~  $e$ -, a perfect stem  $i$ -, and a “third stem”  $it$ -. In late Latin it was partly replaced by *vādere* ‘to walk’ and partly by other verbs (*ambulāre* ‘to walk’ in parts of Gaul, *ambitāre* ‘to make a circuit’ in parts of Italy, etc.). In the long run, different patterns in the frequency of use must have led native learners to acquire some forms of each competing verb and not others in each area of the former Roman Empire. The inherited verb evidently survived best in the Iberian peninsula, but the most interesting survival is the French future *ira*. The Latin future tense was everywhere replaced by a phrase consisting of the infinitive and the present indicative of *habēre* ‘to have’; that is still the situation in Sardinian and in the

Sicilian dialects of Italian, but elsewhere the phrase underwent univerbation. The French future thus contains a fossilized infinitive and shows that univerbation of the phrase preceded replacement of the inherited infinitive *īre* ‘to go’. That confirms what we would have suspected in any case, namely that the constitution of the Romance suppletive paradigms was a gradual and lengthy process.

#### References.

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