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A Study on the History of Classifications of Germanic Strong Verbs*

Fumiya FUJIWARA

1. Introduction

Two hundred years have passed since Jacob Grimm introduced the distinction between strong and weak verbs in the second edition of *Deutsche Grammatik I* in 1822. Although we still use the same terms to classify verbal conjugations today, the classification ideas have evolved. For example, the strong verbs were initially divided into 12 classes, but later reduced to seven. This shift is clearly reflected in the revisions of Sweet's *Anglo-Saxon Primer*, one of the most well-known elementary books on Old English (cf. Sweet: 1952). After the ninth edition, it adopted the classification as we recognize today, whereas earlier editions followed a system similar to Grimm's (1822).

Despite these changes, the literature on the development of Germanic strong verbs has not sufficiently addressed this evolution. This paper aims to explore the early stages in the study of strong verbs and investigate the background behind the development of the classifications we use today. Specifically, it seeks to answer the question: "Who changed the classification of strong verbs and for what purpose?" The paper argues that these changes can be attributed to the developments in Indo-European comparative linguistics in the late 19th century.

This paper is organised as follows: First, an overview of the current classification of strong verbs is provided, followed by an explanation of ablaut, the common method of morphological derivation in Indo-European languages, which underpins the classification of Germanic strong verbs. In Section 3, the development of ablaut theory, which influenced the change in strong verb classification, is discussed. Finally, the background for the development of the classifications used today is examined.¹

2. Strong Verbs and Ablaut

Verbs in ancient Germanic languages, including Old English, are divided into two fundamental categories:

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¹ The main content of this paper is based on the writer's presentation at Geibun Gakkai on June 26th, 2024.

- (a) **Strong verbs:** Verbs which conjugate through ablaut, a gradation of the root vowel, as seen in ModE. *drive – drove – driven*. Notably, only Class VII verbs use reduplication and prefixation of the stem’s initial sound to create preterite forms. (e.g. Goth. *haldan* “to hold” – *he-hald* “held”)
- (b) **Weak verbs:** verbs which make preterite forms and past participle forms with the dental suffix *-d-* or *-t-*, such as ModE. *kick – kicked*, *bring – brought*.

Strong verb conjugation is the precursor to some irregular verbs in Modern English, while regular verbs and other irregular verbs descend from Old English weak verbs. This illustrates that studying Old English conjugations can inform the development of the Modern English verbal system.

2.1. The Classification of the Germanic Strong Verbs Today

Strong verbs are divided into seven subclasses, six of which are classified according to their respective ablaut patterns. The Class VII verb forms its preterite through reduplication.² The inflectional pattern of each class is represented by four stems (inf. – pt. sg. – pt. pl. – past part.) as follows:

(1) Paradigm of strong verb conjugation (cf. Sweet 1952: 27ff.)

	inf.	pt. sg.	pt. pl.	past part.
Class I	<i>drīfan</i> “drive”	<i>drāf</i>	<i>drifon</i>	<i>drifen</i>
Class II	<i>cēosan</i> “choose”	<i>cēas</i>	<i>curon</i>	<i>coren</i>
Class III	<i>bindan</i> “bind”	<i>band</i>	<i>bundon</i>	<i>bunden</i>
Class IV	<i>beran</i> “bear”	<i>bær</i>	<i>bæron</i>	<i>boren</i>
Class V	<i>giefan</i> “give”	<i>geaf</i>	<i>gēafon</i>	<i>giefen</i>
Class VI	<i>scacan</i> “shake”	<i>scōc</i>	<i>scōcon</i>	<i>scacen</i>
Class VII	<i>feallan</i> “fall”	<i>fēoll</i>	<i>fēollon</i>	<i>feallen</i>

² In these verbs, the reduplication was retained only in Gothic. eg. Goth. *haldan* – *he-hald* vs. OE. *healdan* – *hēold*.

This classification is based on the findings of comparative linguistics. While weak verbs are the secondary, the conjugation system of strong verbs can be traced back to Proto-Indo-European verbs, which utilized the e/o/zero-root vowel gradation for morphological derivation.

The ablaut can be clearly seen in the conjugation of Greek verbs as Gk. *λείπω* – *έέλοιπα* – *έλιπον*. Each stage of the ablaut is called a “grade”. In the present form *λείπω* (“I leave”), the root vowel *e* represents full-grade form, which alternates with *o* in the perfect form *έέλοιπα* (“I have left”), known as the o-grade. Additionally, the original root vowel disappears in the aorist form *έλιπον* (“I left”), which is the zero-grade.³

For the Class I verb *drīfan*, shown in Table (1), the stem undergoes vowel gradation of *ī-ā-i-i*. These vowels trace back to *ei-oi-i-i*, indicating that while the infinitive stem has a full grade, the o-grade appears in the past singular and the zero-grade in the past plural and past participle. This is because the past tense of Germanic strong verbs descends from the PIE perfect, which takes the o-grade in the singular and zero-grade in the plural.

Based on the PIE ablaut described above, the seven classes of strong verbs are classified as follows: Classes I to V, which are explained by the PIE vowel gradation *e/o/zero*, are classified according to the element(s) following the root vowel *e*, as shown in Table (2). For example, in *drīfan*, the elements following the basic vowel *e* is “*i* + consonant”, classifying it as Class I. In addition to these classes, Class VI is characterized by vowel gradation not derived from *e/o/zero*, while Class VII retains remnants of reduplication. These are the classifications of the strong verbs used today.

³ The relationship between ablaut and morphological derivation in PIE is discussed in detail in Beekes (1995).

(2) Phonetic environments of Class I – V verbs (cf. Mailhammer 2011)

		inf.	pt. sg.	pt. pl.	past part.
Class I	PIE	* <i>CeiC-</i>	* <i>CoiC-</i>	* <i>CiC-</i>	* <i>CiC-</i>
	OE	<i>CīC-</i>	<i>CāC-</i>	<i>CiC-</i>	<i>CiC-</i>
Class II	PIE	* <i>CeuC-</i>	* <i>CouC-</i>	* <i>CuC-</i>	* <i>CuC-</i>
	OE	<i>CēoC-</i>	<i>CēaC-</i>	<i>CuC-</i>	<i>CuC-</i>
Class III	PIE	* <i>CeRC-</i> ⁴	* <i>CoRC-</i>	* <i>C_̥RC-</i>	* <i>C_̥RC-</i>
	OE	<i>Ci(+N)/e(+L) C-</i>	<i>Ca/eaRC-</i>	<i>CuRC-</i>	<i>Cu/oRC-</i>
Class IV	PIE	* <i>CeR-</i>	* <i>CoR-</i>	* <i>CēR-?</i> ⁵	* <i>C_̥R-</i>
	OE	<i>CeR-</i>	<i>CæR-</i>	<i>CāR-</i>	<i>CoR-</i>
Class V	PIE	* <i>CeT-</i>	* <i>CoT-</i>	* <i>CēT-?</i>	?
	OE	<i>CeT-</i>	<i>Cæt-</i>	<i>CāT-</i>	<i>CeT-</i>

2.2. Grimm's Classification and *Anglo-Saxon Primer*

In contrast, Grimm, who first named and classified strong verbs, used a different system of 12 classes from the one used today. Table (3) shows the conjugation of strong verbs in Gothic, an East Germanic language thought to preserve older forms compared to other Germanic languages, according to Grimm's classification. He divided these verbs into three series: (i) – (iv), which conjugate by reduplication only; (v) and (vi), which use both reduplication and ablaut; and (vii) – (xii), which conjugate by means of ablaut. While verbs (i) – (vi) correspond to Class VII (which uses reduplication), those in (vii) – (xii) correspond to the classes in the order of VI, I, II, IV, V, and III. Additionally, Sweet's first edition of *Anglo-Saxon Primer* adopted a classification similar to Grimm's, starting with Class VII, as shown in Table (4).

⁴ Considering the attestation of OE *feohtan*, the root structure of OE Class III verbs might be **CeCC-*. (cf. Mailhammer 2011: 63ff.)

⁵ The development of the lengthened vowel in the preterite plural of Class IV and V verbs, which cannot be explained through e/ o/ zero ablaut, is discussed in Fujiwara (2024).

(3) Grimm's classification of Gothic strong verbs

	pres.	pt. sg.	pt. pl.	past part.
(i)	<i>a</i>	<i>ai-a</i>	<i>ai-a</i>	<i>a</i>
(ii)	<i>ai</i>	<i>ai-ai</i>	<i>ai-ai</i>	<i>ai</i>
(iii)	<i>au</i>	<i>ai-au</i>	<i>ai-au</i>	<i>au</i>
(iv)	<i>ē</i>	<i>ai-ē</i>	<i>ai-ē</i>	<i>ē</i>
(v)	<i>ai</i>	<i>ai-ō</i>	<i>ai-ō</i>	<i>ai</i>
(vi)	<i>ē</i>	<i>ai-ō</i>	<i>ai-ō</i>	<i>ē</i>
(vii)	<i>a</i>	<i>ō</i>	<i>ō</i>	<i>a</i>
(viii)	<i>ei</i>	<i>ai</i>	<i>i</i>	<i>i</i>
(ix)	<i>iu</i>	<i>au</i>	<i>u</i>	<i>u</i>
(x)	<i>i</i>	<i>a</i>	<i>ē</i>	<i>i</i>
(xi)	<i>i</i>	<i>a</i>	<i>ē</i>	<i>u</i>
(xii)	<i>i</i>	<i>a</i>	<i>u</i>	<i>u</i>

(4) Classification of strong verbs in *Anglo-Saxon Primer* (cf. Sweet 1822)

'Fall'	<i>feallan</i>	<i>fēoll</i>	<i>fēollon</i>	<i>feallen</i>
'Shake'	<i>scacan</i>	<i>scōc</i>	<i>scōcon</i>	<i>scacen</i>
'Bind'	<i>bindan</i>	<i>band</i>	<i>bundon</i>	<i>bunden</i>
'Bear'	<i>beran</i>	<i>bær</i>	<i>bæron</i>	<i>boren</i>
'Give'	<i>giefan</i>	<i>geaf</i>	<i>gēafon</i>	<i>giefen</i>
'Shine'	<i>scīnan</i>	<i>scan</i>	<i>scinon</i>	<i>scinen</i>
'Choose'	<i>cēosan</i>	<i>cēas</i>	<i>curon</i>	<i>coren</i>

Grimm's classification is thought to be based on his assumption that the primitive vowel system of what is called Proto-Indo-European consisted of *a-i-u*, and that other short vowels, *e* and *o*, attested in European languages, developed from the original *a*.⁶ Additionally, he seems to have

⁶ Grimm (1822: 594) maintains as follows:

wichtiger ist mir die aus dem sanskrit gewonnene bestätigung meines auf ganz anderm wege, ohne sie zu ahnen, gefundenen satzes: daß es ursprünglich nur drei kurze vocale gebe. Die altindische sprache erkennt außer den kürzen *a*, *i*, *u* keine andere und hat bloß für sie buchstaben; unglaublich, daß sie, deren alphabet alle anderen laute vollständig bezeichnet, keine schriftzeichen für *e* und *o*, wenn diese in der aussprache vorhanden gewesen wären, gehabt haben follte. Die abwesenheit des *e* und *o* im goth. benimmt jeden zweifel.

considered reduplication to be an older phenomenon than ablaut. This led him to place reduplicating verbs with the allegedly primitive vowel *a* first. The ablaut verbs are then arranged according to the length of the stem vowels: a) long – long (VII); b) long – short (VIII and IX); c) short – long (X and XI); and d) short – short.

2.3. Problems with Grimm’s Proposal

There is no doubt that Grimm made significant progress in Germanic studies by organising the conjugation system of strong verbs and developing its background, explanation, and presuppositions. However, Kamiyama (2006: 62ff) pointed out that Grimm might have regarded ablaut as something specific to Germanic languages, without realising that it could be traced back to the PIE period.⁷

Furthermore, Grimm considered *a-i-u* to be the original vowel system in PIE, based on the similarities between the Gothic writing system of vowels and the Sanskrit vowel system. This hypothesis, however, implies that PIE **a* split into *a*, *e*, and *o* in European languages such as Greek or Latin, a process for which the conditions remain unclear.

This suggests that a thorough examination of the history of ablaut theory is necessary to clarify the changes in the classification of strong verbs.

3. Progress of the Study on Proto-Indo-European Vowel System

Although Grimm’s assumption about ablaut and the primitive vowel system had the shortcomings, his proposed three-vowel system *a-i-u* remained widely accepted for approximately fifty years. This is evident in the reconstruction of PIE by Schleicher (1861: 139).⁸ This theory persisted until it was challenged by Osthoff and Brugman.

What is more important to me is the confirmation of my proposition, found from Sanskrit in a completely different way without suspecting it: that there were originally only three short vowels. The old Indian language recognises no other vowel except the short vowels *a*, *i*, *u*, and has letters only for them; it is incredible that it, whose alphabet completely describes all other sounds, should have had no letters for *e* and *o*, if they had been present in the pronunciation. The absence of *e* and *o* in Gothic removes all doubt. (translation mine)

⁷ Grimm (1822: 10) remarked that “Genau von dem umlaut muß der ablaut unterschieden werden, ein allen deutschen sprachen eigenes, wesentliches verhältniss mannigfaltiger vocalabwechselung.” = “The ablaut, an essential relationship of multiple vocal alternation peculiar to all Germanic languages, must be distinguished precisely from the umlaut.” (translation and underlining mine)

⁸ Bopp (1820) hypothesised a PIE five vowel system of *a-i-u-e-o*, which was not thoroughly examined. (cf. Kamiyama 2006: 50ff.)

3.1. Osthoff's Study on the *n*-stem Noun

Osthoff (1876) made a significant discovery regarding ablaut while studying the declension of what is now known as the *n*-stem noun. The *n*-stem noun, such as Skr. *uksā* (gen. *uksnas*), Goth. *auhsa* (gen. *auhsins*), and E *ox* (pl. *oxen*), was considered to have had the suffix *-a-* originally in Proto-Indo-European, which Zimmer (1876) argued had been expanded to *-an-* in the Germanic languages.⁹ Osthoff (1876), however, hypothesised that the same suffix *-an-* is used across these languages.¹⁰ According to him, two types of stems are used in the declension of *n*-stem nouns:

(5) Two stems of *n*-stem noun by Osthoff (1876: 32ff.) (cf. Kamiyama 2006: 77)

*uksán- (e.g. nom. sg. *uksán(-s), acc. sg. *uksán-am)

*uksan- (e.g. gen. sg. *uksan-ás)

The suffix *-an-* is retained when the accent falls on it, while *a* declined (e.g. *uks_{an}-ás > Goth. *auhsins*) or dropped (Skr. *uksnas*) before the accented syllable. He also observed that the same

⁹ The PIE *n*-stem noun is the ancestor of the Germanic weak noun.

¹⁰ Osthoff (1876: 11) mentioned as follows:

... Ich werde es vielmehr versuchen, der kategorie der alten mit dem primärsuffixe *-an-* gebildeten germanischen nomina agentis, deren patronatschaft ich gewissermassen übernommen habe, feste regeln ihrer ursprünglichen formation nachzuweisen. Und zwar wird im einzelnen zu handeln sein: erstens über die ursprüngliche betonung derselben primären nomina agentis mit *-an-*, zweitens im unmittelbaren anschluss daran über die ursprüngliche gestaltung des wurzelvocal bei solchen bildungen, drittens über die allerälteste declination dieser nomina in der indogermanischen grundsprache und über die veränderungen derselben in den einzelnen sprachen. Dieser dritte punkt wird die aufstellung und begründung einer neuen theorie über die ursprüngliche unterscheidung sogenannter starker und schwacher casus im sanskrit und in den indogermanischen sprachen überhaupt nötig machen. ...

... Rather, I will try to prove that the category of the old Germanic agent nouns formed with the primary suffix *-an-*, whose patronage I have somewhat taken over, has fixed rules of its original formation. The following will have to be dealt with in detail: firstly, the original accent of the primary agent noun with *-an-*; secondly, immediately following that, the original form of the root vowel in such formations; thirdly, the very oldest declension of these nouns in Proto-Indo-European language and the changes in the individual languages. This third point will make it necessary to establish and substantiate a new theory about the original distinction between so-called strong and weak case in Sanskrit and in the Indo-European languages in general (translation mine)

phenomenon occurs in nouns with the suffix *-tar-* (*-ter-*) and participles in *-ant-* (*-ent-*). (Osthoff 1876: 42ff.)

- (6) Two stems of *-ter-* and *-ant-* (cf. Kamiyama *ibidem*)
Skr. *mā-tār-am* (acc. sg.) vs. *mā-tr-é* (dat. sg.) “mother”
Gk. *μη-τέρ-α* (acc. sg.) vs. *μη-τρ-ί* (dat. sg.) “mother”
Skr. *pánth-ās* (nom. sg.) vs. *path-i* (loc. sg.) “way”

3.2. Brugman’s Theory of Ablaut

Brugman (1876a) expanded on Osthoff’s ideas to develop the theory of ablaut, focusing on the alternation of nasals, as seen in examples such as Skr. *pánth-ās* and *path-i* or the difference among Lat. *centum*, Gk. *ἐκατόν*, and Skr. *śatám*. Although these examples seemingly show an alternation between “vowel + nasal” and “vowel *a*”, Brugman hypothesised that this alternation could be understood as a shift between “vowel + nasal” and “nasal”, with the zero-grade turning into the vowel *a*.¹¹

Es ist durchstehende Regel, dass nach thematischem *a* vor folgendem Consonanten ein Nasal niemals spurlos wegfällt, dass dagegen ein Nasal nach bindevocalischem *a* dann schlechtweg verschwindet, wenn seine Silbe tieftönig ist. (Brugman 1876a: 294)

It is an established rule that, after a thematic *a*, a nasal followed by the consonant never disappears without a trace, but a nasal after a reduced *a* disappears completely if its syllable is unaccented. (translation mine)

In other words, the alternation between Skr. *pánth-ās* and *path-i* is derived from the alternation between PIE **pent-* and **pnt-*, and all the words, Lat. *centum*, Gk. *ἐκατόν*, and Skr. *śatám* come from PIE **kmtom*. The nasal sonants (*ŋ* and *ṃ*) have an anaptyxis in attested languages, turning into PIE *ŋ*, *ṃ* > Lat. *en*, *em*, Gk. *a*, Skr. *a*.¹²

¹¹These syllabic sonants are written as *ɲ*, *ɳ*, *ŋ* and *ṃ* according to Saussure’s proposal.

¹² This anaptyctic vowel is referred as *schwa secundum* today. (cf. Watkins 2011: 149)

He also made significant contributions to the ablaut theory in Brugman (1876b). While it was previously believed that PIE **a* split into *e* and *o* in European languages, he proposed that Proto-Indo-European language originally had the vowel *e*, which he denoted as *a₁*. Furthermore, he hypothesised the existence of another vowel *a₂* (= *o*) in PIE, which appeared as *ā* in Indo-Iranian, and *o* in European languages, as evidenced by examples like Skr. *pādam*, Gk. *πόδα* (“foot”).¹³

Wir wollen der Kürze wegen denjenigen Vocal, als dessen regelrechte Fortsetzung aind. *a*, griech. lat. slav. *e* anzusehen ist, mit *a₁*, den Grundlaut aber von aind. *ā*, griech. lat. slav. *o* mit *a₂*, bezeichnen; die genauere Qualität und Quantität dieser grundsprachlichen *a*-Laute bleibt dabei vorläufig unberücksichtigt. (Brugman 1876b: 367)

For the sake of brevity, we will designate the vowel whose descendant is Skr. *a*, and Gk., Lat., and Slav. *e*, as *a₁*, and refer to the basic sound of Skr. *ā*, Gk., Lat., and Slav. *o*, as *a₂*; the exact quality and quantity of these *a*-sounds in Proto-language will be left undetermined for the time being. (translation mine)

Brugman’s hypothesis introduced a new theory, suggesting that PIE *e*, *a*, *o* transformed into Indo-Iranian *a*, challenging the old theory that PIE *a* split into European *e* and *o*.

3.3. Saussure’s Completion of Ablaut Theory

Saussure (1878) further developed Brugmann’s theory by identifying another type of vowel alternation beyond the full- and zero-grade alternations discovered earlier. In 1878, Saussure postulated the existence of PIE vowels *a₁* and *a₂*, which alternated with each other and corresponded to *e* and *o* in European languages, as seen in examples like Lat. *tegō* – *toga*. Furthermore, in 1879, Saussure proposed that what were traditionally considered vowels *i* and *u* should actually be regarded as realisation of *y* and *w* as syllable nuclei, as syllabic sonants *ɾ*, *ɳ* and *ɹ*.

¹³ Collitz (1878) proposed that *a₁* and *a₂* should denote as *e* and *o*, as we use today.

Additionally, Saussure (1878: 361ff, 1879: 71) introduced the concept of new elements Λ and $\varnothing$ which he linked to quantitative vowel alternation in PIE, even though these elements had not yet been attested in any daughter language in those days.¹⁴

Le phonème a_1 est la voyelle radicale de toutes les racines. Il peut être seul à former le vocalisme de la racine ou bien être suivi d'une seconde sonante que nous avons appelée coefficient sonantique (p. 8).

Dans de certaines conditions qui ne sont pas connues, a_1 est remplacé par a_2 ; dans d'autres, mieux connues, il est expulsé.

a_1 étant expulsé, la racine demeurera sans voyelle dans le cas où elle ne contient point de coefficient sonantique. Dans le cas contraire, le coefficient sonantique se montre à nu, soit à l'état autophthongue (p. 8), et fournit une voyelle à la racine.

Les phonèmes Λ et $\varnothing$ sont des coefficients sonantiques. Ils ne pourront apparaître à nu que dans l'état réduit de la racine. A l'état normal de la racine, il faut qu'ils soient précédés de a_1 , et c'est des combinaisons $a_1 + \Lambda$, $a_1 + \varnothing$, que naissent les longues $\bar{A}$, $\bar{\varnothing}$. La permutation $a_1 : a_2$ s'effectue devant Λ et $\varnothing$ comme ailleurs. (Saussure 1879: 135)

The phoneme a_1 is the radical vowel of all roots. It can stand alone to form the vocalism of the root, or can be followed by a second sonant, which we have called 'coefficient sonantique'.

Under certain conditions, which are not well understood, a_1 is replaced by a_2 ; under other, better-known conditions, it is expelled.

When a_1 is expelled, the root remains vowelless in case it does not contain sonants. Otherwise, the sonant appears alone as a syllable nucleus, and provides the root with a vowel.

The phonemes Λ and $\varnothing$ are sonants. They can appear alone only in the reduced grade of the root. In the full-grade of the root, they must be preceded by a_1 , and it is from the combinations $a_1 + \Lambda$, $a_1 + \varnothing$, that the long $\bar{A}$, $\bar{\varnothing}$ arise. The alternation $a_1 : a_2$ occurs before Λ and $\varnothing$ as elsewhere. (translation and underline mine)

These studies provided crucial insights into the PIE vowel system and clarified the mechanism of ablaut, a common method of morphological derivation in Indo-European languages.

¹⁴ These elements are so-called laryngeals, which denoted as h_1 , h_2 , and h_3 . They are attested only in Anatolian languages, which were not found when Saussure hypothesised Λ and $\varnothing$.

4. Change in Strong Verb Classification

In this section, we return to the main focus of this paper by exploring the background of the changes in strong verb classification and how the research on vowel alternation seen in Section 3 contributed to these changes. Saussure and Brugmann's hypothesis that ablaut could be traced back to PIE was introduced to Germanic studies by their contemporaries, the Junggrammatikers. To the best of our knowledge, the first instance of the strong verb classification used today is Wilhelm Braune's *Gothic Grammar* of 1880. However, as stated in its preface, this system was not yet fully described.¹⁵

The first appearance of this classification in Old English grammar is found in Sievers (1882), who described the development of ablaut in Germanic languages from PIE. Notably, the first edition of Sweet's *Anglo-Saxon Primer*, published in the same year as Sievers' *Angelsächsische Grammatik*, used a verb classification similar to Grimm's.¹⁶ However, after the ninth edition, revised by Davis in 1952, it adopted the same classification we use today. Davis stated in the preface that the traditional verb classification was no longer accepted, and that the new classification reflected patterns found in more specialised works. The "more advanced books" mentioned here likely refer to literature on comparative linguistics.

In detail, In the grammar - especially in treating the verb, where Sweet's classification has failed to find acceptance - I have sought to present the facts, with

¹⁵ Braune (1880: i) stated that:

Es musste dies eine übersichtliche darstellung der laut- und formenlehre sein, welche die sprache möglichst nur aus sich selbst zur anschauung brächte, ohne zerstreute brocken aus der vergleichenden grammatik einzumischen. Denn ein sprachwissenschaftliches verständnis der germanisch- gotischen grammatik kann durch einen kurzen abriss doch nicht erzielt werden und unsystematische bemerkungen müssen den anfänger nur verwirren, ganz abgesehen davon, dass in den landläufigen hülfsbüchern die sprachwissenschaft auf ziemlich veralteten standpunkten sich zu befinden pflegt.

It had to be a clear presentation of sounds and forms, which would bring the language to view as much as possible from itself, without mixing in scattered parts of comparative linguistics, for a linguistic understanding of Germanic-Gothic grammar cannot be achieved by a brief outline, and unsystematic comments must confuse the beginner, quite apart from the fact that linguistics, in the common reference books, tends to be based on rather outdated viewpoints. (translation mine)

¹⁶ Considering Sweet's significant contributions to phonetics and phonology, it is difficult to think that he was unaware of the Junggrammatiker's ablaut theory, which was phonetically well-founded. Whatever the precise reason, he is thought to have adopted the more widely accepted classification on those days.

as few technical terms as possible, in the same groups as students will find when they come to more advanced books. (Sweet 1952: v) (underlines mine)

5. Conclusion

This paper examined the history of strong verb classification in Germanic studies by summarising the early development of research on strong verbs and ablaut theory. In Section 2, we observed that Grimm's initial classification of strong verbs and his ablaut theory had encountered certain difficulties explaining the development of the vowel system. We then traced the evolution of ablaut theory and clarified that the classification used today was developed by Junggrammatikers in the late 19th century, incorporating studies on ablaut and the PIE vowel system. Additionally, we highlighted that the revision of the classification in the Anglo-Saxon Primer was intended to bridge the gap between English philology and comparative linguistics.

Abbreviations

E: (Modern) English

Gk.: Greek

Goth.: Gothic

Lat.: Latin

OE: Old English

PIE: Proto-Indo-European

Skr.: Sanskrit

acc.: accusative

gen.: genitive

inf.: infinitive

nom.: nominative

past part.: past participle

pl.: plural

pres.: present (tense)

pt.: preterite (tense)

sg.: singular

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