IRREGULAR VERBS

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Abstract: *In order to use many verb tenses in English, you need to know the past forms of the verbs. All verbs have a base form or 'infinitive' (for example, look, make, play). The majority of verbs, called 'Regular verbs', follow the same pattern and create the past simple and the past participle using the same word ending, -ed. There are, however, verbs that have different endings, and these are called 'Irregular verbs.' At Wall Street English you learn the regular and irregular verbs gradually throughout your course, which makes them easier to learn and remember. Here is a "how to learn regular and irregular verbs" with examples and also some tips on how to remember them.*

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A regular verb is any verb whose conjugation follows the typical pattern, or one of the typical patterns, of the language to which it belongs. A verb whose conjugation follows a different pattern is called an irregular verb. This is one instance of the distinction between regular and irregular inflection, which can also apply to other word classes, such as nouns and adjectives.

In English, for example, verbs such as play, enter, and like are regular since they form their inflected parts by adding the typical endings -s, -ing and -ed to give forms such as plays, entering, and liked. On the other hand, verbs such as drink, hit and have are irregular since some of their parts are not made according to the typical pattern: drank and drunk (not "drinked"); hit (as past tense and past participle, not "hitted") and has and had (not "haves" and "haved").

The classification of verbs as regular or irregular is to some extent a subjective matter. If some conjugational paradigm in a language is followed by a limited number of verbs, or it requires the specification of more than one principal part (as with the German strong verbs), views may differ as to whether the verbs in question should be considered irregular. Most inflectional irregularities arise as a result of series of fairly uniform historical changes so forms that appear to be irregular from a synchronic (contemporary) point of view may be seen as following more regular patterns when the verbs are analyzed from a diachronic (historical linguistic) viewpoint.

When a language develops some type of inflection, such as verb conjugation, it normally produces certain typical (regular) patterns by which words in the given class come to make their inflected forms. The language may develop a number of different regular patterns, either as a result of conditional sound changes which cause differentiation within a single pattern, or through patterns with different derivations coming to be used for the same purpose. An example of the latter is provided by the strong and weak verbs of the Germanic languages; the strong verbs inherited their method of making past forms (vowel ablaut) from Proto-Indo-European, while for the weak verbs a different method (addition of dental suffixes) developed.

Irregularities in verb conjugation (and other inflectional irregularities) may arise in various ways. Sometimes the result of multiple conditional and selective historical sound changes is to leave certain words following a practically unpredictable pattern. This has happened with the strong verbs (and some groups of weak verbs) in English; patterns such as *sing–sang–sung* and *stand–stood–stood*, although they derive from what were more or less regular patterns in older languages, are now peculiar to a single verb or small group of verbs in each case, and are viewed as irregular.

Irregularities may also arise from suppletion – forms of one verb may be taken over and used as forms of another. This has happened in the case of the English word *went*, which was originally the past tense of *wend*, but has come to be used instead as the past tense of *go*. The verb *be* also has a number of suppletive forms (*be*, *is*, *was*, etc., with various different origins) – this is common for copular verbs in Indo-European languages.

The regularity and irregularity of verbs is affected by changes taking place by way of analogy – there is often a tendency for verbs to switch to a different, usually more regular, pattern under the influence of other verbs. This is less likely when the existing forms are very familiar through common use – hence among the most common verbs in a language (like *be*, *have*, *go*, etc.) there is often a greater incidence of irregularity. (Analogy can occasionally work the other way, too – some irregular English verb forms such as *shown*, *caught* and *spat* have arisen through the influence of existing strong or irregular verbs.)

The most straightforward type of regular verb conjugation pattern involves a single class of verbs, a single principal part (the root or one particular conjugated form), and a set of exact rules which produce, from that principal part, each of the remaining forms in the verb's paradigm. This is generally considered to be the situation with regular English verbs – from the one principal part, namely the plain form of a regular verb (the bare infinitive, such as *play*, *happen*, *skim*, *interchange*, etc.), all the other inflected forms (which in English are not numerous; they consist of the third person singular present tense, the past tense and past participle, and the present participle/gerund form) can be derived by way of consistent rules. These rules involve the addition of inflectional endings (*-s*, *-[e]d*, *-ing*), together with certain morphophonological rules about how those endings are pronounced, and certain rules of spelling (such as the doubling of certain consonants). Verbs which in any way deviate from these rules (there are around 200 such verbs in the language) are classed as irregular.

A language may have more than one regular conjugation pattern. French verbs, for example, follow different patterns depending on whether their infinitive ends in *-er*, *-ir* or *-re* (complicated slightly by certain rules of spelling). A verb which does not follow the expected pattern based on the form of its infinitive is considered irregular.

In some languages, however, verbs may be considered regular even if the specification of one of their forms is not sufficient to predict all of the rest; they have more than one principal part. In Latin, for example, verbs are considered to have four principal parts (see Latin conjugation for details). Specification of all of these four forms for a given verb is sufficient to predict all of the other forms of that verb – except in a few cases, when the verb is irregular.

To some extent it may be a matter of convention or subjective preference to state whether a verb is regular or irregular. In English, for example, if a verb is allowed to have three principal parts specified (the bare infinitive, past tense and past participle), then the number of irregular verbs will be drastically reduced (this is not the conventional approach, however). The situation is similar with the strong verbs in German (these may or may not be described as irregular). In French, what are traditionally called the "regular *-re* verbs" (those that conjugate like *vendre*) are not in fact particularly numerous, and may alternatively be considered to be just another group of similarly behaving irregular verbs. The most unambiguously irregular verbs are often very commonly used verbs such as the copular verb *be* in English and its equivalents in other languages, which frequently have a variety of suppletive forms and thus follow an exceptionally unpredictable pattern of conjugation.

References

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