SOUND INSTRUCTION ON IRREGULAR VERBS

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Annotation: *The article explores the historical and linguistic aspects of sound in human communication, focusing particularly on the role of sound patterns in mastering irregular verbs in English. It delves into the origins of human oral communication and transitions to an analysis of how sound patterns can facilitate the learning of irregular verbs. The author presents an innovative numeration system for grouping irregular verbs based on their phonetic and morphological characteristics, such as 1-1-1, 1-2-2, and 1-2-1. By highlighting sound-based learning strategies, the article offers practical insights for pre-intermediate learners, aiming to enhance their aural memory and grasp of everyday English.*

In the beginning, there was . . . sound; so might start the phonologist's (rather irreverent) credo.

One theory holds that packs of hunters seeking to close in on prey gave rise to meaningful oral communication in one of the first and foremost reversions to the mother of invention. Since those Paleolithic days, grunts, whistles, hoots, and, eventually, words have resounded across the planet, providing greetings, warnings, humor, solace, and whatever else the human heart or condition has sought to convey. Sound can also play a fun and helpful role in tackling one of the biggest challenges posed by what is increasingly referred to as the global language.

Listed alphabetically, as they often are in grammar books, irregular verbs prove an intimidating sight for pre-intermediate learners. Sound may prove a handy tool in clearing one of the greatest hurdles to speaking coherent everyday English – everyday because irregular verbs are used to describe many of the most common human actions, states of mind, or states of being: eat, drink; stand, sit; come, go; take, bring; find, lose; buy, sell; think, forget, understand, sleep, awake, and so on. Their frequent usage is, in fact, what keeps them irregular, Florida International University professor Eric Dwyer once told a class. Grouping them based on the sound pattern among their principal parts can greatly facilitate learning these indispensable verbs.

Memorizing those principal parts – present, past, and past participle – may be facilitated by grouping the verbs according to the patterns stretching across their respective troikas. Numeration facilitates this process when the third form repeats one of the others, as occurs in the vast majority of irregular verbs and, of course, all regular verbs, whose past participle is the same as the past, making the verbal pattern 1-2-2.

Anybody who can count to one can master the numeration involved in memorizing the uniform troika of such verbs as cast, hit, and put, whose three forms are all alike – hence, 1-1-1 (cast, cast, cast).

A peculiar numeration – 1-2-1 – renders the troika of such verbs as come, or containing come (i.e., become or overcome), and run, or containing run (i.e. overrun).

The peculiar part may be that only two verbs (plus associates) share this pattern, which is extremely modest compared to the number that rely on an additive – "n" or "-en" – at the end of the present to form the past participle, This group might be depicted 1-2-1(n) and counts among its dozen-odd members such mainstays as eat, give, know, see, and take. Half of these, in the present, end in a dipthong formed by a vowel – most commonly, "o" – and "w" (See accompanying chart.) Those ending in "y" replace that letter with an "i" before the final "n." Those whose present form ends in a consonant or a consonant followed by a silent "e" – eat, fall, give, shake, take – sprout a second syllable to form the past participle – in the first case by adding an "-en," in the second, only an "-n."

The most common numeration – 1-2-2 – boasts an interesting variety of sub-patterns, starting with what might be called "The Awesome Seven," a motley crew in the present, with the /i:/ sound in four of the verbs spelled in three different ways (reflective of one of the most befuddling aspects of English) and the /ai/ sound in two of them spelled differently, as well: bring, buy, catch, fight, seek, teach, think. Reflective of its awesomeness, this grouping proves a conformist crowd in the past, with a common sound at the heart – the dipthong /ɔ/ (largly spelled "ou"); the two verbs with an "a" in the present have "au" in the past, but the *awe*some sound is the same. Imitating a crow's call can make it stick in almost any student's aural memory.

The most frequent 1-2-2 pattern, sporting /i/ in the present and /ɛ/ in the past, includes such common words as bleed, dream, feed, keep, leave, read, and sleep. More than 15 verbs follow this pattern, involving, respectively, what U.S. public school educators traditionally called the long and short versions of the vowel "e" (as in "be" and "get," respectively).

A larger, related group, sporting a 1-2-2(n) pattern, includes such verbs as awake, break, choose, forget, speak, wear, and weave. A final "n" or "en" is commonly added to the **past** tense form of the verb; in a handful of verbs ranging from "bear" to "wear," the final "e" in the past is *replaced* by an "n" in the past participle (the former's participle may also be spelled "borne").

Another variation involves verbs sharing the vowel sound /ai/ at the heart of the present form, represented by the long "i" – drive, rise (arise), write. The "i" (/aɪ/) becomes "o" in the past, but, in the past participle, assumes the initial vowel's short form /ɪ/ while sprouting a second syllable. In those verbs with an alveolar (tall) final consonant (bite, hide), a doubling of that consonant occurs.

A final, straight-up 1-2-3 grouping – the pink-plank-plunk troika – reveals English's Germanic roots as well as do family relations (*Mutter, Vater, Brudder, Schwester*) and body parts (*der Finger, die Hand, das Knie*). With two exceptions, these verbs – begin, drink, ring, sing, sink, spring, swim – largely adhere to the Germanic troika vowel pattern, with an o/u variant in the past participle. Examples of their first-person singular forms read *beginne, begann, (habe) begonnen*; *trinke, trank, (habe) getrunken; singe, sang, (habe) gesungen; schwimme, schwam, (habe) geschwommen.*

Focusing on sound patterns can go far in helping pre-intermediate students over a formidable hump while making them better learn and appreciate the sounds of their new tongue.

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