

The progress of /ʌ/.

Many Modern English strong verbs have past participles with /ʌ/ in the root; many of those verbs also have /ʌ/ in the root in the finite past. The majority of these pasts and past participles are inherited from Old English (or are early Old Norse loan-words), but some are innovations. They fall into the following classes in terms of when they first appear in the historical record.

1. Inherited from Old English.

(a) /ɪ/ in the present, /æ/ or /æ:/ in the finite past:

begin, began, begun < OE *beginnan, begann, begunnon, begunnen* (the velar *g* has been levelled into the present; unlike most words with velar *g* before a front vowel, this verb can't be a Norse loan because it didn't exist in Norse)

drink, drank, drunk < OE *drincan, dranc, druncon, druncen*

shrink, shrank, shrunk < OE *scrincan, scranc, scruncon, scruncen* 'wither, shrink'

sing, sang, sung < OE *singan, sang, sungon, sungen*

sink, sank, sunk < OE *sincan, sanc, suncon, suncen*

spring, sprang, sprung < OE *springan, sprang, sprungon, sprungen*

stink, stank, stunk < OE *stincan, stanc, stuncon, stuncen* 'smell (intrans.)'

swim, swam, swum < OE *swimman, swamm, swummon, swummen*

(b) /ɪ/ in the present, /ʌ/ in the finite past:

cling, clung, clung < OE *clingan, clang, cluncon, clungen* 'wither, contract, cling'

slink, slunk, slunk < OE *slincon, slanc, sluncon, sluncen* 'crawl, slink'

spin, spun, spun < OE *spinnan, spann, spunnon, spunnen*

sting, stung, stung < OE *stingan, stang, stuncon, stungen* 'thrust in, stab, sting'

swing, swung, swung < OE *swingan, swang, swuncon, swungen* 'flog, beat, strike'

win, won, won < OE *winnan, wann, wunnon, wunnen* 'labor, struggle, fight, attain'

wring, wrung, wrung < OE *wringan, wrang, wruncon, wrungen* 'twist, wring out'

(c) other:

run, ran, run < OE *irnan, arn, urnon, urnen* and (much rarer) *rinnan, rann, runnon, runnen*

2. Early Old Norse loanwords.

sling, slung, slung ← ON *slyngva, slong, slungu, slunginn*

fling, flung, flung: first attested ca. 1300 in northern Middle English (we have no earlier northern material); apparently borrowed from ON *flengja* ‘flog’, but the latter is a weak verb (past 3sg. *flengði*); the English verb might have been borrowed from an unattested ON strong verb **flinga* of which *flengja* was the derived intensive—or, when [ɛŋ] became [iŋ] in English, the borrowed verb *flengja* might have become strong, in which case it belongs below

3. Middle English additions.

ring, rang, rung ←< OE *hringan, hringde, hringed*; past *ringed* survives into the 18th c., but *rang* appears ca. 1300, and both pl. *rongen* (where “o” spells /u/) and past ptc. *i-rungen* already in the 13th c.

4. Early Modern English additions.

string, strung, strung: derived from the noun *string* in the 16th century; past and past ptc. *stringed* occur, but past ptc. *strung* appears by the 1590’s and past *strung* by the 1630’s

stick, stuck, stuck ←< OE *stician, sticode, sticod*; past and past ptc. *sticked* survive into the 17th c., but strong forms begin to appear in the 15th c. (past *stak* in the north), and past and past ptc. *stuck* appear in the 16th c.

dig, dug, dug: apparently borrowed from French *diguer* in the 14th c.; past and past ptc. *digged* are normal into the 18th c., but past ptc. *dug* appears in the 16th and past *dug* in the 18th

hang, hung ~ hanged, hung ~ hanged ←< OE *hōn, hēng, hēngon, hangen* (trans.) and *hangian, hangode, hangod* (intrans.), probably also ON *hengja, hengði, hengt* (trans.); the development seems to have been:

- 1) the root-syllable of past ptc. *hangen* was levelled into the present, and the regular shortening and raising of the vowel in the trans. past gave a paradigm *hang*, past *hing*;
- 2) in the north, the Norse loan regularly became (present) *hing*, and its regular past *hinged* was replaced by strong *hang* before ca. 1300;

3) to the new northern paradigm *hing, hang* a past ptc. *hung* was created, which spread southwards and eventually muscled its way into the finite past (like *dug*, see immediately above); past and past ptc. *hung* are standard by the end of the 16th c.

The spread of *hung* at the expense of *hanged* relegated the latter to specialized use ('executed by hanging').

strike, struck, struck ←< OE *strīcan, strāc, stricon, stricen*: the ablaut should be *strike, stroke, stricken*, and until the early modern period it was; past ptc. *strucken* appears in the 16th c., and past and past participle *struck* in the 17th

5. Modern English additions.

sneak, sneaked ~ *snuck, sneaked* ~ *snuck*: the verb first appears in the 16th c. with no obvious source; *snuck* is first attested from New Orleans in the 1880's as a non-standard form

Philip Baldi (Classics, Penn State) reports hearing *rutch* for *reached* at a sports event (!).