

Archaic ablaut patterns in the Vedic verb

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1. The first singular active form of the Vedic sigmatic aorist injunctive does not take *vyddhi*. This is a remarkable archaism which has not been sufficiently appreciated.

2. In his article on the “proterodynamic” root present Insler calls attention to the fact that “the system of proterodynamic present inflection reflected in Vedic forms is nearly identical to the oldest system of Vedic sigmatic aorist inflection” (1972: 56). “It is only when we compare the act. indic.-inj. of proterodynamic root presents that the complete parallelism breaks down” (Insler 1972: 57). The active forms of the sigmatic aorist have lengthened grade vocalism throughout the whole paradigm and do not show the expected alternation between lengthened grade in the singular and full grade in the plural which is found in *tāṣṭi*, *tākṣati*. We must therefore ask the question: “which paradigm seems to continue the original ablaut relationship?” (Insler 1972: 58).

3. The obvious explanation is that the active paradigm of the sigmatic aorist “has participated in the same sort of leveling of vocalism observed in act. root aorists of the type *ākar*, *ākarma*, *ākarta*” (Insler 1972: 58). Insler rejects this view because the lengthened grade vocalism was extended to the third plural form of the sigmatic aorist, whereas the corresponding form of the root aorist maintains the original zero grade, e.g. *ākran*. The argument does not hold because the ending of the root aorist was *-an* < **-ent*, whereas the sigmatic form ended in **-sat* < **-snt*. The ending **-at* was replaced with *-ur*, as it was in the injunctive *takṣur* and in the reduplicated imperfect. The retention of the ablaut contrast in the paradigm of *tāṣṭi* and the extension of the lengthened grade to the third plural form of the sigmatic aorist fit “the general tendencies of the Vedic verb system to characterize act. athematic present inflection by ablaut differences, but to mark act. athematic aorist inflection by the predominant absence of any alternating vocalism” (Insler 1972: 61).

4. Lengthened grade vocalism was generalized in the active paradigm of the sigmatic aorist indicative, but not in the injunctive, which betrays the original distribution of the ablaut grades. It is noteworthy that the original distribution was already indicated by Wackernagel in his Old Indic grammar (1896: 68): the lengthened grade spread from the monosyllabic second and third singular forms to the rest of the paradigm. The archaic character of this distribution is supported by the Balto-Slavic evidence (cf. Kortlandt 1975, App. E, and 1984, sections 1.3 and 1.4). It is also clear from the Vedic material.

5. The first singular indicative has lengthened grade in RV. *ajāṣam*, *aprākṣam*, *abhārṣam*, *ayāṃsam*, *aspārṣam*, *ahārṣam*, *akāniṣam*, *akāriṣam*, *acāriṣam*, *asāniṣam*, and ambiguous

vocalism in *ayāsam*. It has full grade in *akramiṣam* and in the analogic forms *akramīm* and *aśamsiṣam*. The first person singular injunctive has full grade in VS.TS.TB. *jeṣam*, TS.KS. TB.JB. *yoṣam*, and RV. *stoṣam*, *vadhīm*, and lengthened grade in the analogic form *rāviṣam* (*ru-* ‘break’).

6. Following Hoffmann, Narten interprets *jeṣam* and first person plural RV. *jeṣma* as precative forms (1964: 120). The reason for this interpretation is evidently the absence of lengthened grade (cf. Hoffmann 1967a: 254). The functional evidence for the interpretation as precative (Hoffmann 1967b: 32f) or subjunctive (Insler 1975: 15²⁶) is very weak, while the formal objections against it are prohibitive. It is therefore preferable to retain the traditional view that these forms are what they look like: full grade injunctive forms, which were interchangeable with the corresponding subjunctive in certain contexts and which could be interpreted as precative when the latter category became common.

7. Narten assumes that the injunctive forms *yoṣam* and *stoṣam* took their vocalism from the subjunctive (1964: 213, 277). The model for this analogic development is lacking, however, because the subjunctive ending was *-āni*, not *-am*. Hoffmann attributes the alleged substitution of the injunctive ending *-am* for the earlier subjunctive ending *-ā* to the influence of the second singular imperative: “Das Bestreben, den Konjunktivausgang *-ā* von dem durch Auslautsdehnung gleichlautend gewordenen Imperativausgang zu sondern, hat das Ausweichen zu *-am*, wodurch die 1. Person deutlich gekennzeichnet wurde, gefördert” (1967a: 248). I find such influence highly improbable. The use of the first person singular injunctive for the subjunctive must be explained from the meaning of the forms. Note that standard British English offers an exact parallel in the use of ‘I shall’ where other persons ‘will’.¹

8. The indicative has lengthened grade in RV. third dual *asvārṣtām*, first plural *ajaiṣma*, *abhaiṣma*, *atāriṣma*, second plural *achānta*, third plural *achāntsur*, *abhaisur*, *atārisur*, *apāvisur*, *amādisur*, *arānisur*, *arāvisur*, *avādisur*, *asāvisur*, and ambiguous vocalism in *ayāsur*, *arājisur*, and *āvisur*. It has full grade in third dual *amanthiṣtām*, first plural *agrabhīṣma*, third plural *ataksiṣur*, *adhanvisur*, *anartisur*, *amandisur*, all of which have a root in a double consonant (cf. *grbhītá-* < **grbhH-itá-*). It has zero grade in *amatsur*, *anindisur*, and *ākṣisur* (*naś-* ‘attain’).

9. The injunctive has full grade in Rgveda second dual *aviṣtam*, *kramiṣtam*, *gamiṣtam*, *caniṣtam*, *cayīṣtam*, *mardhiṣtam*, *yodhiṣtam*, *vadhiṣtam*, *śnathiṣtam*, third dual *aviṣtām*, first plural *jeṣma*, *śramiṣma*, second plural *aviṣta(na)*, *grabhiṣta*, *raṇiṣtana*, *vadhiṣta(na)*, *śnathiṣtana*, zero grade in *himsiṣta*, and ambiguous vocalism in third plural *dhāsus*, *hāsus*. It has lengthened grade in second dual *yauṣtam* (ĀpMB. *yōṣtam*), *tāriṣtam*, second plural *naiṣta* (ĀpŚS. *yōṣta*), third plural *yausur*, *jārisur*, and in the analogic form second dual *yāviṣtam* (*yu-* ‘unite’). Note that the difference between first plural *śramiṣma* and *atāriṣma* parallels the one between *jeṣma* and *ajaiṣma*.

10. One may wonder if the ablaut difference between the indicative and the injunctive is also found in the asigmatic aorist. It has long been noticed that the third plural middle indicative forms *ākṛata* and *ārata* correspond with the injunctive forms *kranta* and *ranta* (Meillet 1920: 203, 205). The archaic character of this distribution is supported by the

isolated third plural injunctive forms *našan* and *našanta*, which correspond with indicative *āksisur* (for *āsūr* replacing **āsāt*) and *āsata*. Hoffmann's conjecture that the initial *n-* of the injunctive is of secondary origin (1957: 124f) does not explain why it is limited to the third person plural forms, cf. third singular middle *asta*. As in the case of the sigmatic aorist, it is probable that the vocalic alternation was eliminated in the indicative paradigm. This must have occurred at a much earlier stage, however, because it affected the form which was to yield *āsthur*. The full grade injunctive ending *-anta* survived in the paradigm of the subjunctive, which shared the thematic vowel. There is a trace of the original distribution in Homer *τάννται, τανύοντο*.

11. As I indicated above (section 3), the third plural ending *-ur* replaced earlier **-at* < **-nt*, not *-an* < **-ent*. Since the optative ends in *-yur*, the original form must have had zero grade both in the suffix and in the ending. This suggests that it had full grade in the root.

12. Hoffmann has argued that the root aorist optative had fixed stress on the root (1968). His proposal offers a straightforward explanation for third plural Latin *velint*, Gothic *wileina*, and OCS. *veletъ*, but not for the remarkable alternation which the latter language shows between second plural *xoštete, doвьljete* and third plural *xoteťъ, doвьleťъ*. It appears that the third person plural form differed from the other persons in the original paradigm. This enables us to remove the unlikely assumption that the root aorist differed from the root present in the accentuation of the optative.

13. Insler connects the type *dheyām* with the type *gaméyam*, the two being in complementary distribution (1975: 15). His explanation falters on two points. First, it requires the previous existence of both **dheyam* and **dhāyām*, of which the attested form represents a blending. It is highly improbable that neither of the earlier forms would have survived because both were supported by other paradigms, while the alleged blending created a new type. Second, the motivation for the spread of the new vocalism to the third person forms is very weak. The long chain of analogic changes which Insler's theory requires is too complicated to be credible.

14. Thus, I arrive at the following reconstruction of the Proto-Indo-European active root optative:

1st sg.	<i>dhH₁ieH₁m</i>	pl.	<i>dhH₁iH₁me</i>
2nd	<i>dhH₁ieH₁s</i>		<i>dhH₁iH₁te</i>
3rd	<i>dhH₁ieH₁t</i>		<i>dheH₁iH₁nt</i>

After Sievers' law and the loss of tautosyllabic laryngeals this paradigm turned into the following:

1st sg.	<i>dhiyām</i>	pl.	<i>dhīma</i>
2nd	<i>dhiyās</i>		<i>dhīta</i>
3rd	<i>dhiyāt</i>		<i>dha[?]i[?]at</i>

The generalization of **dha[?]-* and the substitution of *-ur* for **-at* yielded first singular *dheyām*, third plural *dheyur*.²

15. The isolated first person plural middle optative form *naśimahi* (three times) next to *aśimahi* (five times) suggests that this paradigm also contained a form with full grade in the root. Since the initial *n-* is lacking elsewhere in the middle optative and indicative paradigms, it was probably taken from the unattested third person plural optative form.

16. The accentual mobility in the paradigm of the optative is reminiscent of the one in the reduplicated present, where third plural *bībhṛati* and *dādhati* have both initial stress and zero grade in the root and in the ending. Thus, I reconstruct PIE **dhedhHjnti* ‘they put’. It follows that the third person plural form does not have the same origin as the other forms of the paradigm.

17. The reduplicating syllable *da-* of *dādhami* replaces earlier *di-*, which is preserved in *πιδημι* and in the desiderative present *dīdhisāmi*. It is difficult to agree with Leumann’s view that *da-* was taken from the perfect (1952: 27) because the motivation for such an analogic development was very weak. More probably, the paradigm of the present contained a form with *da-* from the very outset. This must have been the third person plural form. In my view, PIE **dhi-* was simply the pretonic (zero grade) variant of **dhe-* before a double consonant, cf. *πίρνημι*, *πίουρες*, Czech *čtvrtý* < **čьtvrtj* ‘fourth’, OCS *ѣлъ* < **šьdlъ* ‘went’.

18. The third person plural forms *yānti*, *kranta*, *dheyur*, and *dādhati* have in common that the initial syllable contains a full grade vowel. They have the same vocalism as the participles *yānt-*, *kránt-*, *dādhat-*. It is therefore probable that the form in *-nti* represents the original nominative plural form of the participle. The plural ending *-i* is also found in the Proto-Indo-European pronominal inflection: nom. **to-i*, gen. **to-i-s-om*, dat. **to-i-mus*, abl. **to-i-os*, inst. **to-i-bhi*, loc. **to-i-su*. It follows from this point of view that the secondary ending **-nt* was created on the analogy of the singular forms, where the primary *-i* had a different origin.³

Notes

- ¹ During my stay in Dublin, Dr. Patrick Sims-Williams told me that when an Irish friend asked him in front of an open door: “Will I go first?”, the only reasonable answer to him would be: “I don’t know”. Compare in this connection RV. VII 86.2 *kadā nv àntár vārune bhuvāni . . . kadā mṛṣikām sumānā abhī khyam* ‘When will I be inside Varuna? When shall I, cheerful, perceive his mercy?’ Also X 27.1 *āsāt sū me jaritah sábhivegó, yát sunvaté yájamānāya śíkṣam* ‘That will be my excitement, singer, that I shall be helpful to the pressing sacrificer’. In X 28.5 *kathá ta etád ahám á ciketam* ‘How shall I understand this (word) of yours?’ the substitution of the subjunctive for the injunctive would yield a quite different shade of meaning: it would shift the responsibility from the singer to Indra.
- ² Forms of the type *dheyām* are always trisyllabic in the Ṛgveda. This fits the explanation advanced here.
- ³ In my view, the plural ending *-i* is of Indo-Uralic origin. It can be identified with the Fennic and Northern Samoyed oblique plural suffix *-i-*, e.g. Finnish *talo* ‘house’, pl. *talot, taloi-*. It is also found as a plural object marker in the Northern Samoyed objective conjugation, e.g. Yurak *mada-i-n* ‘I (did) cut (more than two things)’, cf. Finnish *pala-n* ‘I burn (intr.)’, Lappish *puolám* < **palak-mi*.

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