

THE QUESTION OF I-UMLAUT IN THE PRETERITE OPTATIVE OF CLASS III WEAK VERBS OF OLD NORSE AND MODERN ICELANDIC

THE OLD NORSE \bar{e} -verbs are relatively few in number. Characteristically these verbs are short stems and usually intransitive. In recent years the irregular verbs of this class, especially *hafa* and *segja*, have received a good deal of attention, whereas less has been said of the morphology of its more typical representatives.

The purpose of this paper is to examine the preterite optative of this class with special attention to the presence of i-umlaut and the lack of it. To simplify the issue, all verbs that deviate from the normal paradigm of this class (i.e. *hafa*, *kaupa*, *segja*, *þegja*), verbs with j-presents (*lýja*, *hlýja* etc.), as well as verbs that have joined other classes in Modern Icelandic (*spara*, *flaka*, *luma* etc.) have been left out. Also omitted in this discussion are all verbs that have disappeared from common use in Modern Icelandic (e.g. *skolla* and *kroka*).

Typical representatives of Class III weak verbs in Old Norse can be grouped as follows:

- 1) With *a* as a root vowel:
hjara, *lafa*, *stara*, *vara*, *blaka*, *blasa*, *gapa*, *vaka*, *gnapa*.
- 2) With \bar{a} as the root vowel:
brá, *dá*, *fá*, *há*, *hvá*, *já*, *lá*, *má*, *sá*, *skrá*, *gá*, *smá*, *spá*, *strá*,
þrá, *glápa*.
- 3) With *i* as the root vowel:
lifa.
- 4) With *o* as the root vowel:
horfa, *vofa*, *þora*, *brosa*, *glotta*, *skorta*, *hvolfa*, *loða*, *tolla*,
þola.
- 5) With \bar{o} as the root vowel:
glóa, *glóra*, *slóra*, *tóra*, *góna*, *sóma*, *móka*.

6) With *u* as the root vowel:

duga, una.

7) With *ū* as the root vowel:

grúa, grúfa, hlúa, kúra, lúra, trúa, úa, drúpa, húka, slúta.

Compared to the evidence of Modern Icelandic the preterite optative forms of this class, as far as they can be determined, look as follows:

<i>Class III weak verb:</i>	<i>Old Norse pret. opt.:</i>	<i>Example cited by:</i>	<i>Modern Icelandic:</i>	<i>Example cited by:</i>
<i>a</i>				
hjára	?		a	common usage
lafa	?		a	K. claims <i>e</i> . ¹
stara	?		a	c. u.
vara	?		a	c. u.
blaka	?		a	c. u.
blasa	?		a	c. u.
gapa	?		a	c. u.
vaka	e	W,H,I,G	e	K,V,S
gnapa	?		a	c. u.
—	—	—	—	—
<i>ā</i>				
brá	?		á	c. u.
dá	?		á	c. u.
fá	?		á	c. u.
gá	æ	W	á	S
há	?		á	c. u.
hvá	?		á	c. u.
já	?		á	c. u.
lá	?		á	c. u.
má	?		á	c. u.
sá	?		á	K claims æ
skrá	?		á	c. u.
smá	?		á	c. u.
spá	?		á	c. u.
strá	?		á	c. u.
þrá	?		á	c. u.
glápa	?		á	c. u.
—	—	—	—	—

¹ The capital letters refer to the following authors: K = Kress, W = Wimmer, I = Iversen, G = Gordon, V = Valtýr Guðmundsson, S = Stefán Einarsson, Hall. = Hall-dór Halldórsson, H = Heusler. For reference to specific texts please see the Bibliography.

<i>Class III weak verb:</i>	<i>Old Norse pret. opt.:</i>	<i>Example cited by:</i>	<i>Modern Icelandic:</i>	<i>Example cited by:</i>
<i>i</i>				
lifa	i	—	i	c. u.
—	—	—	—	—
<i>o</i>				
horfa	y	W	o	Hall.
vofa	?		o	c. u.
þora	y	W	y	K, S.
brosa	?		o	V, Hall
glotta	?		o	c. u.
skorta	y	W	o	c. u.
hvolfa	?		o	c. u.
loða	?		o	K + S claim y
tolla	?		y	K, S.
þola	y	W	y	K, S.
—	—	—	—	—
<i>ō</i>				
glóa	?		ó	c. u.
glóra	?		ó	c. u.
slóra	?		ó	c. u.
tóra	?		ó	c. u.
góna	?		ó	V, S.
sóma	?		ó	c. u.
móka	?	—	ó	c. u.
—	—	—	—	—
<i>u</i>				
duga	y	W	y	K, V, S.
una	y	W, G	y	K, S.
—	—	—	—	—
<i>ū</i>				
grúa	?		ú	c. u.
grúfa	?		ú	c. u.
hlúa	?		ú	c. u.
kúra	?		ú	c. u.
lúra	?		ú	c. u.
trúa	ý	W	y	K, S.
úa	?		ú	c. u.
drúpa	?		ú	c. u.
húka	?		ú	c. u.
slúta	?		ú	c. u.

If we examine the information available about these 55 verbs in Old Norse, it turns out that only 9 are actually cited as examples showing umlaut in the preterite optative. As the table shows, all the examples

go back to the same person, i.e. Ludvig Wimmer. Other scholars such as Iversen, Heusler, Wessén and Gordon merely repeat different parts of the same data without adding any new information.

In his *Oldnordisk Formlære* Wimmer does not specifically state that umlaut took place in the preterite optative of all Class III weak verbs where it was possible, however, it is obvious from his discussion that he expects the i-umlaut to apply to the class as a whole. Heusler and Iversen as well as most other authors of Old Norse grammars, do not address themselves directly to the question of i-umlaut in the preterite optative of this class but invariably the verb 'vaka' is selected as its typical representative. Both Wessén and Gordon, however, make the claim that umlaut actually took place without noting any exceptions or further qualifying their remarks.

For Modern Icelandic there is general concensus among scholars that with only few exceptions i-umlaut is not to be found in the preterite optative of this class. Valtýr Guðmundsson, Stefán Einarsson and Kress all agree in this respect. Halldór Halldórsson is somewhat more cautious in his remark that 'Í nútíðarmáli er i-hljóðvarp ekki alltaf í vth. (opt.) af ē-sögnum, t.d. horfði, brosti.'²

It is clear from the evidence that Modern Icelandic presents that either the preterite optative of these verbs failed to take i-umlaut for the most part in Old Norse and therefore does not exhibit umlauted forms to any great extent in Modern Icelandic, or that the umlaut actually did take place in Old Norse but was subsequently lost in Modern Icelandic.

The first argument is supported by the fact that Wimmer, who appears to be the major authority on umlaut in this category, was trying to establish a normalized and not a descriptive grammar for Old Norse. His examples are relatively few and possibly misleading. At any rate neither he, nor anyone else for that matter, cares to give any sources for his data, which in turn makes its reliability subject to doubt. Furthermore, it is difficult to explain why the i-umlaut should virtually disappear in the preterite optative of this class and not in any other morphological context. Finally it could be noted that in Old

² Halldór Halldórsson, *Íslenzk málfræði handa æðri skólum*, Reykjavík 1950, p. 168.

Norse short stem words like the Class III weak verbs, i-umlaut commonly failed to take place.

For the second hypothesis it may be argued that the evidence of such verbs as *trúa*, *una*, *duga*, *þola* and *þora* where the i-umlaut has survived into Modern Icelandic, might suggest that in the most common verbs the preterite optative was most likely to be used and therefore the umlaut most likely to be preserved. It is also possible to point to *gá*, *horfa* and *skorta*, where the umlaut appears to have been lost, and maintain that they reflect the typical development from Old Norse into Modern Icelandic. In addition it must also be kept in mind that the preterite optative of weak verbs has changed from Old Norse to Modern Icelandic in the same way as the preterite optative of the strong verbs; i.e. the 1st person singular now ends with -i (e.g. *vekti*, *yndi*), whereas the plural forms have adopted the same endings as the preterite indicative (i.e. -um, -uð, -u).

The major obstacle in coming to any conclusion about this problem is clearly the lack of evidence for Old Norse. It is not that all the necessary information doesn't exist, it is simply inaccessible. Nearly all editions of Old Norse texts are either normalized in their spelling or based on a very small portion of the existent manuscripts. A prose or a verse concordance, which would be the ideal key in a study of this kind, is unfortunately not to be expected in the near future, and until this situation improves it is difficult to see how the extent of i-umlaut in the preterite optative of this class of verbs in Old Norse can be determined conclusively. In the meantime, however, there is every reason to caution against those handbooks that only give one or two examples of umlauted preterite optative forms (like 'vekða' for instance), and thus lead the reader to conclude that they are typical representatives of the Class III weak verbs in Old Norse.

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ÁGRIP

Á 19. öld töldu málfræðingar, sem fengust við fornar tungur, að þær geymdu málið hreinast og óspilltast. Ekki fóru norræn fræði varhluta af áhrifum þessarar kenningar um gullöld málsins, en langt er síðan menn misstu trúna á hana. Enn eimir þó eftir af þessum hugsunarhætti í ritum um norræna málfræði, og er í þessu greinarkorni fjallað um eitt dæmi af slíkum toga.

Í allmörgum erlendum bókum um íslenzkt formmál er staðhæft að í veikum sögnum, sem fylgja ē-beygingu, t.d. vaka, brosa og horfa, verði i-hljóðvarp í viðtengingarhætti þátíðar (eða þá, að einungis sögnin að vaka, sem hljóðverpist, er gefin sem dæmi um beygingu). Fullyrðing þessi, sem virðist eiga rætur að rekja til danska málfræðingsins Ludvigs Wimmers, er heldur hæpin, þar sem hann gefur einungis dæmi um nú sagnir, af liðlega 50, þar sem hljóðvarp á sér stað. Sé litið til sagna, sem ennþá tilheyra þessum flokki í íslenzku nútímamáli, sýna einungis sjö þeirra merki um hljóðvarp í vh. þt. Þrátt fyrir þessi fátæklegu rök, virðist það útbreidd skoðun, að hljóðvarp hafi átt sér stað eins afdráttarlaust og Wimmer vill vera láta. Ljóst er, að miklu ítarlegri heimildir þurfa að vera fyrir hendi, áður en hægt er að fullyrða nokkuð um hljóðvarp í beygingu flestra ē-sagna í formáli eða þær breytingar, sem kunna að hafa orðið á þeim til nútímamáls. Þó benda dæmin úr íslenzku nútímamáli til þess, að hljóðvarp í viðtengingarhætti þátíðar sagna hafi aldrei orðið með reglu-bundnum hætti.