

Number is the change of form a verb undergoes, to show whether its subject is singular or plural. Formerly the plural was indicated by the termination *es* in the North of England, *en* in the middle, and *eth* in the South; this *en* was the last inflection that was dropped from our language; except in *are* and *were* the plural is now indicated only by the absence of endings.

Tense, or the mode of indicating the time of an action, is very important. By some, indeed, it is considered the chief function of the verb; hence the German name for verb is *Zeitwort*. We have naturally three sets of tenses, to correspond with the natural divisions of time. But we can allude to the time of an action as the time at which, and as the time during which. We can also refer to the action as finished, or unfinished. This gives us four modifications of each of the chief tenses, irrespective of the emphatic. Thus the verb *send* would be for the present tense—

indef. I send.	incomplete, am sending.	complete, have sent	continuous, have been sending.
		emphatic, I do send.	

These tenses are more or less definite, the simple tenses being probably less definite than the compound. The present tense is the most indefinite of all, being used to express any other time more frequently than the present. It is used to express what is actually going on, customary actions, general truths, past events and future actions. This last it has in English, in common with all Gothic languages, and is owing to the fact that these languages had no future tense, and were forced to use the present as such, or resort to periphrasis. This accounts for the frequent use of the present for the future, especially after conjunctions. For the past we use the present only in animated narrative. We could not now say, "Before Abraham I am."

The only tense forms we have in English are the present and past. The mode of forming the past from the present gives us the most interesting and important classification of the verb, viz: that which divides them into two classes, *strong* and *weak*. Strong verbs have only a change of vowel to indicate past tense; their past participles end in *en*, which, however, is frequently dropped.

The method of indicating past time by a simple play upon the vowels is a remarkable development of the Gothic languages, and compares favorably with any inflection. It seems to have originated in reduplication of the first syllable of the verb, a process common in all languages to indicate past time. Compare the latin *momordi* and *fafaci* = *fefeci* = *feci*, and the Gothic *hai hait* = *hight* = *called*, and our *dodo* = *dode* = *dide* = *did*. This would always give a modified vowel for the past, and as people readily grasp at analogies, the habit was ultimately made general of forming all past tenses by the same change. In this case *i* seems to have indicated the present, *a* the past, and *u* the participle. Alongside this ancient method there arose the inflected method, formed as all inflections are by adding a word to the verb, which became in time a mere inflection. This became the favorite method of conjugation, most verbs changing to it from the older, and at present it is the only one for new verbs. It is supposed that this appended verb was *did*, contracted afterwards into *dide* and *ede* and *ed*, and finally the *e* is dropped out in pronunciation, and often in spelling; even the *d* is often dropped, as in *let*, *set*, etc. When the ellipsis of the *e* brings the *d* into contact with the final consonant of the verb, if that consonant be *t*, *k*, *p* or *s*, we get a sharp and a flat consonant united, which cannot be sounded, we consequently are forced to give *d* its