

1 Inflectional categories of the verb

This section is concerned with the question of what inflectional distinctions apply in the English verbal system: how many different forms of a lexeme need to be recognised, and how are they to be named? The question of how the forms of a lexeme are derived from its lexical base is a morphological one, and is dealt with in Ch. 18.

1.1 Summary presentation of the categories

We begin with a brief listing of the inflectional categories of verbs. Each inflectional category will be taken up in turn in §§1.3–9, after an explanation of the concept of syncretism.

■ Lexical vs auxiliary verbs

The two main types of verbs in English are the **auxiliary** verbs, comprising a small list of verbs with very specific syntactic properties, and the non-auxiliary verbs, i.e. all the rest of the verbs in the dictionary, which we will call the **lexical** verbs. The two types of verb differ in inflectional morphology as well as syntax.

■ Lexical verbs: the six-term paradigm

The set of inflectional forms of a variable lexeme is called a **paradigm**, and virtually all lexical verbs have a paradigm with six forms, as illustrated in [1].

[1]

		<i>take</i>	<i>want</i>	<i>hit</i>
Primary	{ preterite	<i>took</i>	<i>wanted</i>	<i>hit</i>
	{ present tense	{ 3rd sg <i>takes</i>	<i>wants</i>	<i>hits</i>
		{ plain <i>take</i>	<i>want</i>	<i>hit</i>
Secondary	{ plain form	<i>take</i>	<i>want</i>	<i>hit</i>
	{ gerund-participle	<i>taking</i>	<i>wanting</i>	<i>hitting</i>
	{ past participle	<i>taken</i>	<i>wanted</i>	<i>hit</i>

■ Auxiliary verbs

The auxiliary verbs depart from the above system in three main ways.