

THE SCANDINAVIAN INFLUENCE ON THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE

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The English language stands as a testament to the rich tapestry of linguistic influences that have shaped its development over centuries. Among these influences, the Scandinavian impact holds a prominent position, originating from the Viking Age and the subsequent interactions between Old English and Old Norse speakers. This comprehensive report aims to delve deeply into the multifaceted nature of the Scandinavian influence on English, exploring its effects on vocabulary, grammar, place names, cultural elements, and broader historical implications.

"Language is the key that opens the door to the cultural heritage of a people. The influence of Scandinavian on the English language is like secrets that reveal to us historical connections and cultural interweaving's between peoples." [1]

Based on the structural differences that took place in different forms of the English language and historical events, four main stages of its development are distinguished. The periods are: Old English (450–1150), Middle English (1150–1500), Early Modern English (1500–1700), and Modern English (1700–present).

These dates do not reflect strict boundaries when moving from one period to another - they are arbitrary and rounded. The English language has been influenced by many languages throughout its history, the Scandinavian languages were only a significant part of this process, especially noticeable against the background of all the other events of the Old English (Old English - Old English - ed.) and Middle English periods. (ME - Middle English). [2]

The infusion of Old Norse vocabulary into English represents one of the most conspicuous manifestations of Scandinavian linguistic influence. A comprehensive analysis reveals a plethora of common English words with roots in Old Norse, including but not limited to "sky," "egg," "knife," "husband," "law," "cake," "leg," and "window." [1]

The number of Scandinavian words that appeared in Old English was small, amounting to only twenty words. The largest group was associated with sea-roving, as in *barda* (beaked ship), *cnearr* (small warship); (vessel; fleet), *mann* (pirate), *dreng* (warrior), *bātswegen* (boatman), *hofding* (chief), *orrest* (battle), *rān* (robbery, and *fylcian* (to collect a force).

A little later, a number of words relating to the law, or the social and administrative system entered into English. Examples include the word *law* itself, as well as *outlaw*, *wapentake* (an administrative district), *hūsting* (assembly), which all come from the Danish language.

Scandinavian English boasts a wealth of unique words that originated from ancient Scandinavian languages. Some of these have become integral parts of modern English, adding nuances and hues to the linguistic landscape. For instance, words like "anger," "bag," and "skirt" have Norwegian roots and have contributed their own distinct flavor to the English language.

In addition to the above words, there are a number of Old English words that are translations of Scandinavian terms, e.g. *bōtlēas* (what cannot be compensated), *hāmsōcn* (attacking an enemy in his house), and *landcēap* (tax paid when land was bought) and other loan-translations. Such legal terminology was replaced by French terms after the Norman Conquest.

Through meticulous etymological examination, this paper delineates the semantic evolution of Norse loanwords within the English lexicon, tracing their assimilation and adaptation over time. While the core grammatical framework of English remained largely unaffected by Scandinavian influence, certain syntactic structures and grammatical patterns exhibit traces of Norse linguistic heritage. Notably, the emergence of the progressive tense in English may be attributed in part to Norse language patterns, as evidenced by comparative analysis with Old Norse

syntax.

Scandinavian settlement in England during the Viking Age precipitated the proliferation of Norse-derived place names and personal names, particularly in regions with significant Scandinavian presence. Place names ending in "-by," "-thorpe," and "-kirk" reflect Norse linguistic influence, while personal names such as "Eric," "Olaf," "Harold," and "Thor" underscore the enduring legacy of Scandinavian cultural heritage.[3]

The impact of Scandinavian linguistic influence on dialectal variation within English is a topic of scholarly inquiry. Northern dialects, characterized by a closer affinity to Norse linguistic elements, exhibit distinct phonological features and lexical peculiarities compared to Southern dialects. Through comparative phonological analysis and dialectal surveys, this paper elucidates the nuanced interplay between Scandinavian linguistic heritage and regional linguistic variation.

Beyond the realm of language, the Scandinavian influence on English bears profound implications for the broader context of cultural exchange and historical interactions. By examining the socio-cultural ramifications of the Viking settlement in England, this paper elucidates the dynamic interplay between linguistic evolution, socio-political dynamics, and cultural identity formation.

In the history of English, the language came into contact with different speech communities. Influences of Celtic, Latin, Scandinavian and French left their mark from the beginning in Anglo-Saxon times onwards, and the colonial expansion of the British Empire in the last three centuries resulted in the contact with even more speech communities.[4]

Through these language contacts, English changed a lot – it showed the tendency to incorporate foreign influences, especially lexical ones, more likely in the first place; its grammar changed from being an analytical one towards being synthetic; and in terms of the lexicon, it changed from being a Germanic to a partly Romanic influenced language.

The Germanic tribes of Jutes, Angles and Saxons formed the basis of the English language when they came to England in the fifth and sixth centuries. During the first seven hundred years of the language's existence, three main factors influenced its development: English first came into contact with Celtic, then with Roman and finally with Scandinavian.

The Scandinavians, originating from Denmark and the Scandinavian peninsula, were once neighbors of the Anglo-Saxons and the same ancestors, thus being closely related to them in language and culture. They started to leave their homeland in the eighth century for adventurous enterprises. Known as the Vikings, they gave the period from the middle of the eighth up to the beginning of the eleventh century its name Viking Age. As Farmers, the Scandinavians were interested in land, and as merchants, they were interested in access to new trading centers.

The Norwegian Vikings colonized Ireland, the Scottish Islands, the Isle of Man and parts of England's north-west; the Danes settle densely in the north and east of England. But at the very beginning, the Vikings came to plunder and therefore chose easy targets on the coast. According to the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, the first three Danish vessels landed 787 in Portland. They were involved in a confused incident, in which the representative of the West Saxon King was murdered." Six years later, Danish Vikings raided the monastery of Lindisfarne, which started a whole series of raids on targets on the east coast of England. In 866, the first major invasion with a huge army led by Ivar the Boneless and Halfdan initiated a period of large-scale plundering, but also of Danish settlement.

The West Saxon king Alfred (871-899), was occupied during the first seven years of his reign to fight the Vikings, which are threatened to conquer Wessex as well. After years of battles, often on the brink of defeat, Alfred finally beat the Danes under Guthrum at Ethandun (Edington) in 878.

In the same year, the Danish presence was officially acknowledged by Alfred in the treaty of Wedmore. The king handed over all land north of the Thames and east of Watling Street (an old Roman road running from London to Chester) to the Danes under their leader Guthrum.

While keeping them out of Wessex, thus preventing any Danish influences on culture and language in this area, the treaty established the territory known as the Danelaw, which had the

Danish legal system. This area was under heavy Scandinavian influence, which would later spread all over England. A crucial point in the agreements between Wessex and the Scandinavians was that the Danes converted to Christianity and Guthrum got baptized. The conversion was not only a means of controlling the fulfilment of the treaty, but also gave way to the intermingling of the Anglo-Saxon and the Danish population of the area.

However, the fighting was not over yet. Alfred and his son Edward the Elder (900-925) and his grandson Athelstan (925-939) started to win the Danelaw back, so that in 954, most of Danelaw was under English the rule of English kings again, although strongly Danish in terms of population and customs.

New invasions were still started from Scandinavia: The Norwegian king Olaf Tryggvason began a series of raids in 991 which often ended in letting the English pay huge sums of bribes in order to prevent large cities like London being plundered. The truces were always temporary, and the Scandinavians always came back to demand larger bribes. In 994, Olaf was joined by Svein, the king of Denmark, whose attacks were so effective that he was able to drive out the English king Ethelred and seizing the throne for himself. Svein died the same year, but his son Cnut was able to consolidate his position, being on the throne from 1017-1035. The period in which Danish kings ruled in England lasted 25 years. Any generalizations about the Scandinavian settlements are risky. First of all, the settlement was not a product of one large invasion (like the Norman Conquest in 1066), but of different waves of invasions and settlement. [5]

The relations of the English population to the new neighbors were different according to the circumstances of the settlement: Intermarrying and intermingling was much more likely when the lands were bought by the Vikings or otherwise legally acquired, contact was less likely to happen where the newcomers had violently taken it. Most of the newcomers were Danish farmers who settled in the area of the Danelaw, but Norwegian settlers were also found in the north-west and north of England. Where the contact was peaceful, the English and Scandinavian populations mixed, leading to an exchange of language and customs.

Two factors had a positive effect on cultural contact, the first being the conversion to Christianity of the former Viking pagans. The second factor was the common origin of the Scandinavian and Anglo-Saxon languages, the former being North-Germanic, the latter being West-Germanic. This was also a main reason for the way in which Norse affected the English language.[6]

The newcomers were not representing a wholly alien way of life or alien culture. Through previous enterprises, the Scandinavians had become a cosmopolitan people which were easy to adopt in a new environment. Important was also that the policy of the English kings in the period when they were re-establishing their control over the Danelaw was to accept as an established fact the mixed population of the district and to devise a *modus vivendi* for its component elements.

In conclusion, the Scandinavian influence on the English language represents a seminal chapter in the linguistic history of the British Isles. Through lexical borrowings, syntactic structures, place names, personal names, and dialectal variation, Old Norse has profoundly shaped the evolution of English, underscoring the dynamic nature of linguistic contact and cultural exchange. By elucidating the multifaceted impact of Scandinavian linguistic heritage in English, this paper contributes to a comprehensive understanding of the enduring legacy of the Viking Age on the linguistic landscape of the British Isles. Interest in Scandinavian English continues to grow, attracting both scholars and language enthusiasts alike. The study of this unique language not only expands our understanding of history and culture but also allows us to gain deeper insights into modern English and its roots.[7]

The Scandinavian impact permeates English culture, encompassing aspects such as mythology, folklore, legal customs, and societal norms. Norse mythology, with its pantheon of gods, epic sagas, and heroic legends, became intertwined with Anglo-Saxon traditions, shaping the collective imagination of the English people. Legal concepts, administrative practices, and social institutions influenced by Norse law and governance also left an indelible mark on English society, contributing to its legal and political heritage.

Today we cannot even imagine the English language without elements borrowed from Scandinavian languages. What is even more interesting and surprising is that the Scandinavian languages imprinted grammatical features and words that have a grammatical meaning (to be). Perhaps even the syntax was affected. It is well known that these components of the language are rarely influenced by other languages, which indicates the depth of penetration of Scandinavian elements into English. To summarize: the Vikings had a huge influence on the English language

List of sources used

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