

DEFINING THE OUTCOME OF LANGUAGE CONTACT: OLD ENGLISH AND OLD NORSE

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Abstract

The English language throughout its 1500 year history has been impacted by socio-historical developments and changes. One such development took place in Old English: the invasion of England by Norse tribes from c. 800-1000 A.D. was a series of events which had a significant and lasting impact on all areas of the English language. The nature of that social situation and the linguistic outcome is of interest in contact linguistics; in particular, the application by some of terms such as *creolization* and *creole* to this process and its outcome has been controversial. In this paper, I examine the English-Norse contact situation and its effects on English and propose that the linguistic outcome of this contact was a koine, and show that this account can better describe the effects of this contact situation on the English language.

1 Socio-historical background

A series of Norse invasions of England from c. 800–1000 A.D. resulted in language contact between Old English (OE) and Old Norse (ON).¹ These invasions can be

¹ The term “Norse” in this paper refers generally to the people groups which inhabited the Scandinavian peninsula and Denmark and which were involved in the raids on the British Isles. Distinctions made
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divided into three periods, each of which differed in nature and thus in impact on the language (Baugh & Cable 1993).

1.1 First period: 787 to c.850 A.D.

A period of early raids began in 787 A.D., as recounted in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, and continued with some intermissions until c. 850. These were simply plundering attacks on towns and monasteries near the coast, including the noted sackings of the monasteries at Lindisfarne and Jarrow in 793 and 794. A forty year respite from the attacks followed these sackings, but this ended in 834 with renewed attacks along the southern coast of England, in East Anglia.² The attacks in this period were apparently the work of small isolated bands. The size of the invading force and the swiftness of the raids indicate that no significant language contact took place in this period.

1.2 Second period: 850 to 878 A.D.

Much more widespread plundering by large armies marked the second period, and this resulted in extensive settlements and the establishment of the Danelaw and Norse institutions in parts of England. It began in 850 with the arrival on English soil of a fleet of 350 Norse ships; the Norse spent the winter on the island Thanet, which is on the Kentish lip of the Thames estuary, and moved upriver in the spring, capturing Canterbury and London and ravaging the surrounding countryside. Nonetheless, the Norse showed no clear-cut attempt at permanent colonization for several years, being “concerned with loot and sporadic raids rather than systematic probing of defenses with a view to stable settlement” (Loyn 1977:56).

This changed in 865 when a great Norse army arrived in East Anglia; they plundered the area in 866, and captured York, the capital of Northumbria, in 867. The invaders then turned south to Mercia, and again attacked East Anglia, London, and Wessex. They established a base in Bernicia in northernmost Northumbria and set up an overlordship in the Tyne region. The army’s fifteen years of fighting in England culminated with “the colonisation by the Danes of extensive tracts of northern and eastern England and, consequently, in the first implanting on English soil of the Norse language” (Geipel 1971:40). Many of the Norse attackers remained in Northumbria, making a home for themselves and “the first permanent settlement of Danes in England” (Geipel 1971:41).

These attacks had left the eastern part of England largely in the hands of the Norse, but King Alfred (871–899) took the throne of Wessex and resisted the Norse rule. After seven years, he led his people to victory over them at Ethandun in 878, and the Treaty of Wedmore was signed by the English and Norse in 886. The Norse swore by the treaty to leave Wessex alone and to “confine activities to areas east of Watling Street and

between “Norwegians” and “Danish” by some of the authors quoted here do not correlate to the modern-day usage of these terms.

² See the map in the Appendix.

north of the Thames” (Geipel 1971:42), or east of a line from Chester to London,³ the area delimited by this treaty became known as the Danelaw. Distinctively Scandinavian institutions were established in the North and in the East Midlands, and Norse legal and monetary systems eventually replaced their English counterparts in the Danelaw. The system of land measurements and administrative districts and their governance was also replaced by agrarian settlements and a retention of military organization, as “[I]and settlement and the introduction of immigrants were achieved under the discipline of armies which maintained fortified headquarters at Northampton, Cambridge, Tempsford, Thetford and Huntingdon” (Loyn 1977:60). The Norse presence was particularly strong in the North, where “York dominated the whole area, rapidly developing into a powerful Scandinavian fortified market ... [and] emerged as the political heart of a vigorous colonising movement in Northumbria” (Loyn 1977:60). The large numbers of invasions and settlements and the establishment of a permanent and influential Norse presence in the northern and eastern parts of England in this period were significant for language contact.

1.3 Third period: 878 to 1042 A.D.

Political adjustment and assimilation marked the third period. Two large Norse fleets landed in Kent in 892; from there, the invaders struck inland towards Wessex, and they were joined by many of the Norse who were already living in England. King Alfred, who had remained watchful of the Norse after the Treaty of Wedmore, renewed the fight against them, finally prevailing after four years in the summer of 896. The Norse dispersed to Northumbria, East Anglia, and Normandy, where they continued to be put on the defensive under Alfred’s successors, the Wessex kings Edward the Elder (900–925) and Athelstan (925–939). When a powerful force of Vikings arrived in Yorkshire, the Norse living in England “now stood to suffer as much from any further Viking irruptions as did their Anglian neighbors”, and “the inhabitants of eastern England, Angles and Danes alike, [took] up their weapons and rall[ied] to King Aethelstan’s side” (Geipel 1971:47). Nevertheless, the Vikings captured York and ruled for some years, but the English gradually reclaimed much of the land of central and east England, including all of Northumbria, which had been under Norse control.

Almost all of England was again under English control by the middle of the tenth century, but Norse influence was still strong in the northern and eastern areas. In the re-taking of Norse lands, “[t]he colonists were nowhere extirpated, they seem to have offered scant resistance to the reclamation of their lands, and their absorption into the fabric of the English nation appears to have taken place without undue violence” (Geipel 1971:47). While maintaining some aspects of their cultural identity, the “Danish farmers, settled and often Christianised, came to realise that their best hope of peaceful future lay in acceptance of the overlordship of the West Saxon dynasty” (Loyn 1977:63).

A series of new invasions began in 991, however, when Viking fleets attacked the southern coasts of Wessex from Dorset to Cornwall. The Norse made their way north towards York, and they were joined by many second- and third-generation Norse inhabitants on their way through the Danelaw. The Wessex King Athelred (978–1016) was

³ See the map in the Appendix.

angered by this betrayal and ordered the killing of all foreigners outside the Danelaw. In retaliation, the Norse King Sveinn led a great fleet of warships to East Anglia in the spring of 1007, and the invaders swept inland from East Anglia. Reinforcements arrived from Denmark in 1009, and Sveinn stepped up the attacks, invading Northumbria and scorching Oxford. Aethelred abandoned the throne and fled to Normandy in 1013, and having taken the capital Winchester, Sveinn seized the throne of Wessex in 1014. He died shortly thereafter, however, and Aethelred returned briefly “to deal, with malicious brutality, with the vociferous pro-Danish element in the north and east” who wanted Sveinn’s son Canute to return from Denmark to claim the throne (Geipel 1971:50).

Canute landed with a fleet in 1015, and “in a matter of months, the whole country, save for London, was in Danish hands” (Geipel 1971:50). After the death of Aethelred in 1016 and his successor Edmund shortly thereafter, Canute was proclaimed king of all England; he ruled over an empire consisting of England, Denmark, and Norway by 1028. Many of his followers “elected to remain on English soil, becoming, as had their predecessors, farmers, landowners and traders—not merely in the Danelaw, but also further to the south and west” (Geipel 1971:51). This Anglo-Norse state ended, however, with William of Normandy’s conquest of England in 1066, and Norse resistance to William led to the “Harrying of the North, in which large areas were depopulated and scorched black; ... placename evidence suggests that much of the northern Danelaw was eventually repopulated by settlers of mixed Scandinavian/Irish parentage ... [and there were] no further attempts by the Danes to reestablish the lost portions of the [Danelaw]” (Geipel 1971:51–52). The substantial numbers of Norse who settled within the northern and eastern parts of England during this period and their shifting political loyalties and cultural integration resulted in significant contact between English and Norse speakers.

2 The impact on the English language

This situation of extended language contact between English and Norse had considerable impact on all aspects of the English language, particularly those language varieties which were spoken in the northern and eastern areas of England. Some of the effects were lost, but many survived, and features of this language variety were later diffused into the dialects which would become the foundation of “Standard English”, so that many of these effects can be seen in Modern English.

2.1 The lexicon

Norse lexical influence on English is still readily apparent in the Modern English lexicon, even though some lexical effects which were found in the Northern ME dialects were subsequently lost. Many of the lexical items which show the influence of Norse on English are “new” words (i.e. ones for which there was no OE parallel), such as *steak* < ON *steik*; *reindeer* < ON *hreindyri*; *snare* < ON *snara*; *sprint* < ON *spretta*; and *flat* < ON *flatr*, all of which are of Norse origin. In other cases, the Norse word replaced an OE word; for example, *window* < ON *vindauga* “‘wind eye’”; *window*’ took the place of OE *eyethurl* “‘eye hole’”; *window*’; *take* < ON *taka* replaced the OE *niman*; and *sky* < ON *ský* replaced the OE *ūprodor* and *wolcen*.

Other cases are not so clear-cut; because the English and the Norse language varieties were similar in many aspects and had many roots in common, the contact also resulted in more subtle influences on the English lexicon. The origin of particular words for which there was an ON and OE common root can be determined by knowing the outcome of certain phonological developments that distinguish the two language varieties. The cluster **-sk-*, for example, had been palatalized in OE to [ʃ] (orthographically <*sc*>) but remained [sk] in ON. These separate developments indicate, therefore, that words such as *sky* < ON *sky'*, *skin* < ON *skinn*, and *whisk* < ON *visk* are of Norse origin, and words such as *shall* < OE *sceal* (cf. ON. *skal*) and *fish* < OE *fisc* (cf. ON *fiskr*) are of English origin. This development also gave rise to Modern English word pairs as *shirt* (from OE *scyrte*) and *skirt* (from ON *skyrta*), where distinctive semantics now distinguish two words which are etymologically the same. Other word pairs of this type include *no – nay* (ON *nei*), *whole – hale* (OE *hál*, ON *heill*), and *rear – raise* (OE *ræran*, ON. *reisa*).⁴ Similarly, the differential development of OE and ON [k] and [g] in certain contexts reveals that *egg*, *kid*, *get*, and *give* owe their current phonetic shape to the Norse influence; the OE pronunciations *eyren* ‘eggs’⁵ and *jefa* ‘give’ were eventually replaced in standard English.

Other Norse influences can be found in the semantics of lexical items, an effect which is particularly salient in those cases where the phonetic shape could be derived directly from either OE or ON. Modern English *bloom* (flower), for example, could represent the normal development of either OE *blōma* or ON *blōm*, but its OE meaning of ‘ingot of iron’ leads to the conclusion that its modern use must have been influenced by the ‘flower, bloom’ meaning of the ON cognate. In other examples, both phonetic and semantic influence can be seen; for example, the modern word *gift* indicates Norse influence in its phonetics, with the initial [g] contrasting with the OE cognate’s initial [j], and in its semantics, where the meaning reflects ON ‘gift, present’ rather than the OE cognate ‘payment for a wife’. Finally, this lexical influence resulted in the development of “compromise forms” which cannot be traced directly to either OE or ON exclusively; for example, the ME *werse* ‘worse’ shows influence from both ON *werre* and OE *wyrsa*, and the ME *whaare* ‘where’ and *thaare* ‘there’ were influenced by both the ON *hwar* and *θar* and the OE *hwēr*, *θēr*.

2.2 Morphology

English morphology also reflects Norse influence, both in its derivational and inflectional affixes and in its function words. The phonetics of the ME derivational prefix *umbe-* ‘around’ indicate influence from the ON *umb-* rather than the normal development of OE *ymbe-*; similarly, the ME suffix *-leik* ‘-ness’ reflects ON *-leik-r* rather than OE

⁴ Note that while *rear* originally was mostly synonymous with *raise*, it has become quite limited in its usage; as a child, I was taught the semantic distinction of *rear a (human) child* vs. *raise cattle (sheep, etc.)*, but this has largely been lost in favor of the use of *raise* in both senses.

⁵ As commented on by William Caxton in the preface to his English translation/paraphrase of the *Aeneid*.

–*lāk*. In the inflectional domain, the ME suffix of the present participle –*ande* can be compared with the ON –*ande* versus the OE –*ende*.⁶

Independent morphemes (or function words) also reflect Norse influence. The ME preposition *til* ‘to’ < ON *til* is still found in the Modern English *till*, which exists alongside the more common *to* from OE *tō*. Similarly, while Modern English *from* developed from OE *fram/from*, the more limited form *fro*, as in the phrase *to and fro*, reflects ME *fraa/froa* ‘from’ from ON *frā*. Perhaps the most significant and lasting area of Norse influence on English is seen in the personal pronoun system, in the third person pronouns *they*, *them*, and *their*. These forms clearly demonstrate the influence of the Norse. In particular, the initial [ð] of the Modern English forms can be traced to Norse; compare *they* with the ON *þei-r* and OE *hīe*, *hēo*, and ME *theim* ‘them’ and *theire* ‘their’ with the ON *þei-m* and *þei-ra* and the Northumbrian OE *him* and *hira* or Mercian OE *heom* and *heora*.

2.3 Morphosyntax

The ME of Northern England, and later of more geographically wide-spread varieties of English, is marked in comparison to OE by a fairly dramatic shift in the morphosyntax from a highly synthetic system to one more analytic. While changes in the inflectional system were underway before the Norse contact occurred and can be attributed to factors such as phonological change (e.g., a reduction of unstressed vowels, loss of word-final consonants), the overall impact of these changes was accelerated in the areas in which Norse-English contact took place.

Morphosyntactic features of OE c.850 A.D. included a noun system which had three basic noun classes, the strong masculine, strong feminine, and weak nouns; these were inflected for singular and plural number, and nominative, accusative, genitive, and dative case. Adjectives were indefinite or definite, and were inflected for singular and plural number; masculine, feminine, and neuter gender; and nominative, accusative, genitive, dative, and instrumental case. Demonstratives were similarly inflected for case and number, and for gender in the singular. The verbal system inflected for number and for three persons, as well as tense, voice, and mood. The ME morphosyntactic system, in contrast, bore greater similarity to that of Modern English, with nouns being marked only for singular or plural, and a genitive case marking in the singular; adjectives were no longer inflected, the demonstrative had been reduced to a single form *the*, and verbs distinguished only the third person singular in the present tense. While these changes cannot be directly attributed to Norse influence in the same way that morpho-lexical effects can be, the correlation between the acceleration of these changes and the geographical location of the Norse settlements leads to the conclusion that English-Norse contact played a role.

⁶ These elements and others in which the Norse influence is apparent are clearly and thoroughly documented by Thomason and Kaufman (1988:293–95).

3 Analysis

The contact between English and Norse had a lasting impact on the English language, as has been shown. What can be said about this situation from a theoretical standpoint, and particularly within the field of language contact studies? An analysis that can account for the linguistic effects of the contact situation, while fitting the socio-historical situation appropriately, is needed.

3.1 Koines

The term “koine”, while used for many years, has not always been well-defined linguistically. The definition of koine that I adopt here is that given by Siegel (1985), and it can be broken down into three sections. First, a koine is defined by the language contact situation in which it developed: It is “the stabilized result of mixing of linguistic subsystems such as regional or literary dialects” (Siegel 1985:363). Second, a koine is defined in terms of how it was used socio-historically: “It usually serves as a lingua franca among speakers of the different contributing varieties” (ibid.). Third, it is defined by linguistic characteristics with respect to the language varieties from which it developed: It “is characterized by a mixture of features of these varieties and most often by reduction or simplification in comparison” (ibid.).

Can these three aspects of the definition of koines be applied to the result of the English-Norse situation? The first criterion is that the contact situation involve the “mixing of linguistic subsystems”, which Siegel goes on to define by saying that:

Two or more different linguistic varieties may be considered subsystems of the same linguistic system if they are genetically closely related and thus typologically similar enough to fulfill at least one of two criteria (1) they are mutually intelligible (2) they share a superposed, genetically related linguistic system, such as a national standard or literary language. (Siegel 1985:365)

The English and Norse language varieties involved here were genetically closely related and are generally believed to have been mutually intelligible. For example, Thomason and Kaufman state that Norse and English at the time of their contact were structurally and lexically close enough that “it was relatively easy to understand the other language without learning to speak it” although “one could never be in doubt which language was being spoken” (1988:303).

The criterion of usage as a “lingua franca” among the speakers of English and Norse is difficult to prove definitively because of a lack of direct evidence. The facts that are known about the socio-historical situation, however, support such a scenario. The third criterion of a koine containing a “mixture of features” and being characterized by “reduction or simplification” in comparison to the varieties from which it developed closely parallels the features of the variety of English that developed from that spoken in northern England during the time of contact, such as the reduction and simplification of

the nominal and verbal inflectional systems, the development of “compromise forms”, and the influence of Norse on personal pronouns; see §§2.2-2.3.

3.2 Koineization

The facts of koineization, or the process of koine formation, lend further support to naming the outcome of this contact situation a koine. Siegel’s definition of koineization builds on the socio-historical criteria given above (§3.1). Koineization is “a gradual process which occurs only after prolonged contact between speakers who can most often understand each other to some extent” (Siegel 1985:372). Here the necessity of some mutual intelligibility is reiterated, but with an additional focus on the processual aspect of koineization. Koine formation is not an abrupt process, but rather a gradual one, growing out of prolonged contact between speakers. The contact between English and Norse took place over a period of 200 years, from c. 865 to 1066 A.D., with some contact taking place before then and certainly continuing to a certain extent even after the Norman conquest.

The process of koineization can be divided into three stages. The first or “pre-koine stage” is “the unstabilized stage of the beginning of koineization” during which “various forms of the varieties in contact are used concurrently and inconsistently”. At this stage, “[l]evelling and some mixing has begun to occur, and there may be various degrees of reduction, but few forms have emerged as the accepted compromise” (Siegel 1985:373). Similarly, Trudgill (1986:107) says that “there may be an enormous amount of linguistic variability in the early stages” of (dialect) contact situations. Evidence of such a period in which “[t]he Scandinavian and English words were being used side by side” (Baugh & Cable 1993:98) can be seen in the basic nature of many of the Norse-origin words in English. In the English-Norse contact situation, this stage likely occurred in the late ninth or early tenth century, or at the end of the second period and the early part of the third period of contact (§§1.2-1.3), when Norse settlements were being formed and institutions being established in England, and some more or less regular contact was taking place.

The second stage of koineization results in a “stabilized koine”. In this stage, “[l]exical, phonological, and morphological norms have been distilled from the various subsystems in contact, and a new compromise subsystem has emerged”. This stabilized system is “often reduced in morphological complexity compared to the contributing subsystems” (Siegel 1985:373). This stage is one in which “focusing ... takes place by means of a reduction of the forms available” (Trudgill 1986:107), which is the process which Trudgill particularly calls “koinéization”, “which consists of the levelling out of minority and otherwise marked speech forms, and of simplification, which involves, crucially, a reduction in irregularities” (Trudgill 1986:107). This stage in koineization would have occurred in the third period of English-Norse contact, as assimilation and adjustment was taking place socially and politically between the Norse and English.

The third stage is that in which an “expanded koine” may appear, “often accompanied by linguistic expansion, for example, in greater morphological complexity

and stylistic options” (Siegel 1985:373–74). This may happen concurrently with the social expansion of the koine; for instance, it may become the literary language or the standard language of a country. This third stage is where we find “[t]he result of the focusing associated with koinéization [which] is a historically mixed but synchronically stable dialect which contains elements from the different dialects that went into the mixture, as well as interdialectal forms that were present in none” (Trudgill 1986:107–8). This stage likely occurred late in the third period of English-Norse contact and in the following years.

What brings about the formation of koines in general, and how does this apply to the English-Norse contact situation? “The contact status quo may end with certain political, social, economic or demographic changes which cause either increased interaction among speakers of various linguistic subsystems or decreased inclination to maintain linguistic distinctions” (Siegel 1985:366). Norse was certainly spoken in the Danelaw and other Norse settlements for some time, but Thomason and Kaufman believe that it was lost within two generations of an area’s reintegration into English control.⁷ The change of political and social status of Norse may well have caused such a change in the interaction between the speakers as well as in attitudes towards the native language varieties. Kerswill and Williams’s finding in their study on modern-day koine formation that “focusing occurs in either the second or third generation (the children or grandchildren of the migrants)” (2000:71) further confirms that the timeline proposed by Thomason and Kaufman fits the koineization hypothesis.

The English and Norse language varieties were both maintained in areas under Norse control, with perhaps some “bilingualism” in the communities, but with most interactions able to be accomplished using the original, mutually intelligible languages. After areas were returned to English control, the social situation changed, with more interaction between the groups, and with no longer as much impetus to maintain the distinctions between the languages. By the second or third generation of this changed social situation, the children had developed a new, compromise language variety, or koine, and Norse was lost. I could also propose that the dialects of English original to the areas in question were lost as well, as we have seen the differences between the language varieties found in these areas compared to the previous forms of English found there. The fact that these northern dialects were later influential in the formation of London standard English resulted in the spread of many of the “Norse” features from the northern koine into the other dialects of English.

3.4 Outcome of koineization

Linguistically, a koine “is characterized by a mixture of features of these varieties and most often by reduction or simplification in comparison” (Siegel 1985:363). The

⁷ “Norse began to go out of use in any area when the area was reintegrated (through conquest) to the English polity, and was effectively defunct within two generations ... of this reintegration” (Thomason & Kaufman 1988:284). Therefore, Norse began to go out of use earliest in the southern parts of the Danelaw, or the Midlands, from c. 920–980, and was lost in the north from c. 955–1015 (1988:337).

mixture of English and Norse features was seen in the lexical effects of the English-Norse contact (§2.1). Northern Middle English's lexicon had many words of Norse origin, particularly words that were very "basic" in nature. Other cases in which words show the influence of the Norse in their semantics also reveal this mixture. Even more telling are those words which are apparent blends of the original English and Norse words. For example, some English words were

modified, taking on some of the character of the corresponding Scandinavian word. *Give* and *get* with their hard *g* are examples, as are *scatter* beside *shatter*, and *Thursday* instead of the OE *Thunresdæg* ... [and also note the] survival of such hybrid forms as *shriek* and *screech*. (Baugh & Cable 1993:99)

We also saw this in ME *werse* 'worse' from ON *werre*, OE *wyrsa*, as well as ME *whaare* 'where' and *thaare* 'there' from ON *hwar* and *þar*, OE *hwēr*, *þēr* (§2.1; Thomason & Kaufman 1988:294).

The early stage of variation is followed by a period of leveling and focusing, during which "forms that are not removed during koinéization ... will tend to be re-assigned according to certain patterns. ... retained variants may acquire different degrees of formality and be reallocated the function of stylistic variants" (Trudgill 1986:110). This can be seen in word pairs where "[o]ccasionally both the English and Scandinavian words were retained with a difference of meaning or use ... [e.g. the English – Norse pairs] *no* – *nay*, *whole* – *hale*, *rear* – *raise*, *hide* – *skin*, *sick* – *ill*" (Baugh & Cable 1993:99).

Reduction or simplification in comparison to the original linguistic varieties is clearly seen in Northern ME. Kerswill and Williams describe "simplification" as referring to "an increase in morphological regularity, an increase in invariable word forms, and a decrease in the number of morphological categories. In addition, 'simplification' covers morphological and lexical transparency" (2000:85). The northern dialects of ME showed an increase in analyticity, with loss of grammatical gender, loss of case markings on nouns, and loss of some verbal inflections, all of which can be explained as the expected outcome of koine formation.

4 Previous analyses

The English-Norse contact situation discussed here has been treated in other language-contact studies, such as in creole and second language acquisition studies. How well can these other analyses account for the facts of this situation and how do they compare with the analysis presented here?

4.1 Borrowing

Thomason and Kaufman (1988) discuss this language contact situation within their framework of degrees of borrowing correlated with the intensity of language con-

tact. They put the English-Norse contact effects “on the borderline of types 2 and 3 of our borrowing scale” (1988:307), and say that the outcome “suggests an intense contact situation, either category (3) borrowing or considerable influence through shift, or (more likely) both” (1988:281). They emphasize the “normal” transmission of Old English to Middle English, concluding that “the available evidence puts ME squarely in the large group of normally transmitted languages, not in the smaller group of mixed languages which (in our view) have no genetic affiliations” (1988:312).⁸ They focus on the identity between OE and ME so that “the Middle English of the Danelaw, in spite of its Norse component, its greater phonological and morphological simplicity, and its other regional peculiarities neither simple nor Norse, is **English**” (1988:280). For this reason, they affirm that “in the contact between Norse and English no case can be made for anything other than rather heavy linguistic borrowing by English from Norse” (1988:310).

Thomason and Kaufman particularly address the issue of the morphosyntactic changes that took place from OE to ME because of the importance that has been attributed to these changes in language contact studies. They emphasize the fact that these changes were already underway in OE before the arrival of the Norse and conclude that while the language contact situation may well have helped or accelerated these changes, they would have taken place anyway. The lexical and morphological influences of Norse are mostly the result of borrowing, in this viewpoint.

Borrowing certainly played a major role in this contact situation, but this process cannot explain all of its effects. The borrowing framework is weak in dealing with intense language contact situations because it is too general. Once “borrowing” can be invoked to account for all manner of changes, it loses its explanatory power and suffers from a lack of limitations. For example, while the presence of such Norse words such as *steak*, *sky*, and *window* in the ME lexicon can unproblematically be explained as the result of borrowing, the explanation of the more subtle effects of Norse influence on the lexicon is more complicated. For instance, in the cases of phonetic and semantic influence, was the whole lexical item borrowed, or merely the phonetics or the semantics? What would lead to the borrowing of words which already had a close cognate in OE, giving word pairs such as *shirt-skirt*? How does borrowing account for compromise forms which show the influence of both languages?

Other questions about the borrowing framework relate to its explanation of the morphosyntactic effects. Why were derivational and inflectional morphemes borrowed? These borrowings are seen as evidence of and therefore explained by fairly intense contact, but this lacks explanatory force. Similarly, the change in the morphosyntactic system does not receive a good explanation in this account. In summary, while borrowing was likely involved here, it does not provide an explanation for all of the aspects of this language contact situation.

⁸ This is in particular a reaction against the creolization hypothesis of Bailey and Maroldt (1977); see §4.2.

4.2 Creolization

Bailey and Maroldt's (1977) proposal that the outcome of the English-Norse contact situation was a creolization of English was the impetus for Thomason and Kaufman's emphasis on borrowing and "normal" language transmission. Bailey and Maroldt define creolization as "a gradient mixture of two or more languages" (1977:21), and they state that "[i]t cannot be doubted that it [Middle English] is a mixed language, or creole" (1977:22). They further define a creole as "the result of mixing which is substantial enough to result in a new system, a system that is separate from its antecedent parent systems" (1977:21), which they base particularly on the criterion that "creoles often have special identifying traits, such as morphological (derivational and inflectional) simplification—or rather 'analyticity' in the morphological sense" (1977:21). While their particular focus is on the contact between "Anglo-Saxon" and Old French, they also attribute the "creolization" of Middle English to the earlier contact between Old Norse and "Anglo-Saxon", so that "the infusion of Old Norse elements led to that sort of linguistic instability which linguistic mixture generally creates, and thus prepared the ground for even more substantial foreign creolization afterwards" (1977:26). The borrowing of such basic concepts or lexico-morphological items as "*die, give, take, are, ... they, their*" from Scandinavian "strongly supports the assumption of an Old Norse/Anglo-Saxon creolization prior to French influence" (1977:27).

This viewpoint was also advocated by Poussa (1982), who focused even more on the role of the Norse contact, whereas Bailey and Maroldt's focus was more on the later contact with the French. She states that "the fundamental changes which took place between standard literary OE and Chancery Standard English: loss of grammatical gender, extreme simplification of inflexions and borrowing of form-words and common lexical words, may be ascribed to a creolization with Old Scandinavian during the OE period" (Poussa 1982:84).

The treatment of the English-Norse contact situation as a case of creolization is problematic in many respects. The notion of "creolization" itself and the definition of a "creole" are not without controversy. The term creole is typically used with languages that meet certain structural and/or socio-historical criteria (see, e.g., McWhorter 1998, DeGraff 2003 as examples of these competing viewpoints). Both Bailey and Maroldt and Poussa focus on structural considerations in the presentation of their hypotheses, but even if one accepts a structural definition of creoles, it is worth noting that the outcome of this contact situation does not match well with "creolization criteria" as they have been defined in previous studies. For example, McWhorter says that the clustering of three structural traits distinguishes a creole language: "little or no inflectional affixation", "little or no use of tone to lexically contrast monosyllables or encode syntax", and "semantically regular derivational affixation" (1998:798). This third structural trait can be further clarified: he claims that "in languages known as creoles, derivation is generally semantically transparent; ... evolved semantic idiosyncrasy ... is unknown" (1998:797). He, in fact, does specifically address the question of the creolization of English,⁹ noting

⁹ In particular, as his comments are in response to Bailey & Maroldt 1977, he is dealing with the question with regard to the outcome of the English-French contact subsequent to the Norman Conquest.

that "... while rather low in inflection, English does retain eight inflectional affixes. In addition, however, it is crucially distinct from creoles in its semantically evolved derivation" (1998:798). From this perspective, the contact between English and Norse (and subsequently French) likely added to the semantic idiosyncrasy and opacity of derivational affixes in English in that many of what were formerly semantically transparent and derivationally productive affixes became at most marginally productive, but remain in the language in certain forms where their affixal status might be clear but not their semantics.

Danchev (1997) employs a different set of structural criteria but comes to the same conclusion. He notes that the loss of OE short and long diphthongs and umlaut vowels, the accelerated loss of case endings in ME, and the loss of gender marking which is seen in ME adjectives and nouns can in a limited sense be seen as fulfilling creolization criteria. However, other criteria, such as prevalingly open syllable structure, no morph-syntactically marked passive, preverbal tense marking, reduced use of *be* copulas, the use of the same verb for possession and existence, lack of non-finite verbal forms, and lexical circumlocution, are not found in Middle English. Danchev concludes that while "[a]pproximately half of the more outstanding (weightier) creoleness (or creoleness-like) features occur in Middle English ... [t]hese are the features that have been attributed to more general factors ... defined as *universal language communication strategies*" (1997:97). These general changes, while "matched by similar or even identical changes ... in pidgins, creoles, and learner interlanguages", are found "in many other languages (related and unrelated ones)" (1997:98).

Wallmansberger (1988) similarly says that while "on the one hand reductions in surface morphology and the incipient, but quite noticeable trend towards analyticity correspond to factors in any creolization index, on the other hand the criteria that would constitute conclusive evidence for creolization are absent" (1988:29). Even for those who hold to structural criteria of creoles, therefore, the facts of English do not support the creolization hypothesis; nor does the contact situation between Norse and English fit the socio-historical definition as it has been applied to Caribbean and other creoles.

4.3 Interlanguage

Realizing the problematic aspects of describing the outcome of the English-Norse contact as a creole, some studies have applied the term "interlanguage", taken from second language acquisition, to this case. Fisiak proposed that "what must have emerged was an interlanguage. The formation of the interlanguage must have resembled the process of pidginization but it is doubtful whether it ever underwent any further development towards creolization" (Fisiak 1977 in Danchev 1997:80). Danchev further states that this interlanguage "developed first in the areas of Anglo-Scandinavian community bilingualism and then gradually spread over most of the country" (Danchev 1986:248). He sees interlanguage as "an apparently convenient alternative choice" because it is a "broader and more neutral blanket notion" than creole, but it also "covers most of the features shared by Middle English with pidgins and creoles" (1997:98).

Danchev concludes in his discussion of Fisiak's interlanguage hypothesis that the term does not really fit the ME situation since "while an interlanguage is a more or less developed approximation of an easily identifiable target language, for Middle English no such comparison is available" (1997:99). This is the most serious problem with the proposal: second language acquisition implies a source and target language, but which would be which in this situation? Also problematic is the fact that "interlanguage" implies that the changes in the language are the result of imperfect acquisition; the linguistic effects of the Norse contact on English are not of this type.

4.4 Neutralization

O'Neil (1978) deals with the effects of the contact on the grammar or morpho-syntax of English. In particular, he compares and contrasts the morphosyntactic changes which occurred in Northern English with those that occurred in other English dialects, as well as those that occurred in other Germanic languages. One of the characteristics of Northern Middle English (§2.3) was a "simplification" of the inflectional system, which led to an increased dependence on word order and other syntactic factors. This reduction has been important but controversial in discussions of this situation as we have seen, with creolization advocates claiming it as strong evidence for their position, but Thomason and Kaufman (1988) emphasizing instead that simplification had begun prior to the contact, and stating that the contact merely accelerated a process that would have taken place anyway.

O'Neil (1978) makes a specific distinction between what he refers to as "simplification" and "neutralization", with simplification being what was happening to the morphosyntactic system prior to and removed from the contact situation, and neutralization being what happened in the area of English-Norse contact. He notes that neutralization "is always rapid change and change involving very closely related languages (or dialects). And it is relatively superficial aspects of the languages (inflections, stress, tone, etc.) that are neutralized" (1978:248–49). He applies this notion specifically to the English/Norse contact situation as a key example of this outcome: "the complex inflectional system of Old English was largely and rapidly neutralized on contact with the complex inflectional system of Old Norse" (1978:249).

The focus of O'Neil's study is on the effects of contact on the morphosyntactic system of a language, but within this context he does mention some of the morphological effects as well. In particular, he explains the "borrowing" of the Norse forms of the third person plural pronouns (§2.2) as being "...presumably related to the fact that (a) distinctness between the plural and singular forms of the third person pronoun was lost or significantly reduced and perhaps not attended to at all by foreign ears, and (b) verb inflections marking singular from plural forms were also lost" (1978:261), thereby relating it to other changes in the language at the time. He makes a clear distinction between these morpho-lexical effects and the effects on the grammatical system, however: "...the inflectional simplicity is not borrowed ... What we have instead of borrowing is a neutralization of the inflections brought about by the speakers of the two languages in

their reaching for the inflectional common denominator by means of which they could communicate..." (1978:261).

The idea of neutralization presented by O'Neil fits well with the overall theory of koineization and specifically with the effects of the English-Norse contact on the English language. A crucial characteristic of a koine, as seen earlier, is that it is "often reduced in morphological complexity compared to the contributing subsystems" (Siegel 1985:373), which could also be described as "neutralized". The sociohistorical criteria for the contact situations are similar as well, with Siegel's "linguistically related subsystems" in koineization relatable to O'Neil's "two closely related languages differing for the most part only in superficial aspects of their grammars (inflections, accent, tone, etc.)" (1978:283), which he proposes as the inputs to neutralization.

Neutralization, however, deals mostly with the effects on the grammar of this language contact, while koineization presents a larger picture of the effects on the whole system. In other words, neutralization fits well as one part of the koineization process, and as one characteristic of the resulting linguistic system, but does not add much in the way of explaining lexical and morphological effects of the English-Norse contact on the English language.

5 Conclusion

The outcome of the English-Norse contact situation can best be analyzed within the framework of koineization. This analysis fits the sociohistorical context and the linguistic effects on the language varieties spoken in the northern and eastern parts of England, many of which later spread into standard English and are thus found in the Modern English. The creolization hypothesis as proposed by Bailey and Maroldt (1977) and Poussa (1982) is particularly problematic and the term "creole" should not be applied to the result of this contact situation. The other hypotheses that have been proposed to account for this situation, however, also have difficulty in adequately capturing the effects of the contact situation. The term "koiné" takes into account the genetic and typological closeness of the language varieties involved in the English-Norse contact situation, and the koineization account explains the types of linguistic effects which are seen as resulting from it.

Appendix. Map of England.



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