

THE OLD NORSE INFLUENCE ON ENGLISH, THE ‘VIKING HYPOTHESIS’, AND MIDDLE ENGLISH WORD ORDER PARALLELS WITH ICELANDIC

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Abstract: The effect of Old Norse on the English language has been the subject of a flourishing and evolving area of research for over a century. In this dissertation I provide an extensive assessment of this topic, investigating the methodology behind identifying the linguistic evidence, the historical context, the ways in which English has shown signs of Norse influence and the attempts to define the result of the Old Norse language contact. In particular depth, I examine the controversial and bold theory made by Emonds and Faarlund (2014) that the Scandinavian presence in England resulted in a complete replacement of the native Old English with an ‘Anglicised Norse’ by the Middle English period. I offer a comprehensive summary of their proposal, including the syntactic evidence at the heart of their work, and assess the overall reception in the academic community to their daring challenge against the traditional view of English linguistic genealogy. In the final section I consider an element of Middle English syntax that could show Old Norse influence, which is the presence of OV (object-verb) word order with negated and quantified objects, and its similarities with other North Germanic languages.

Keywords: Historical linguistics, Scandinavian, Old English, language contact, language change over time, syntax, lexicon, linguistic genealogy.

Supervisor(s): William van der Wurff.

1. Introduction

It is well known that the English language has come into contact with and been influenced by multiple languages throughout the extensive history of conquests, invasions and settlements of the British Isles since the Anglo-Saxons arrived in the 5th century AD, after the end of the Roman settlement of Britain. The main languages which have shown a strong presence in English are French, Latin, Old Norse, as well as its Germanic roots from Old English, and it is the latter two of these which are under the spotlight in this dissertation. Old English (OE) is generally outlined as the language spoken by the Anglo-Saxons in England from their arrival in the 5th century until around 1150AD, which is the beginning of the Middle English (ME) period. During this time of the Anglo-Saxons and Old English, there was another linguistic community which played a significant role in England; the speakers of Old Norse (ON). These were the Viking invaders of the 8th century onwards and are referred to in this paper (and others) as Scandinavians, Norse and Danes, often interchangeably, as the majority of them had come from Denmark. I will be investigating the extent to which this Scandinavian language and its speakers had an impact on the development of Middle English through various lenses, which I outline next.

This paper is made up of three main parts. The first will be a comprehensive overview of the current knowledge of the influence of Old Norse, the language spoken by the Scandinavian incomers to England between the 8th and 12th century, on Old and Middle English. This will include a summary of the socio-historical background of this language contact, recounting the events which led to the Norse presence in areas of England and the political rivalries with the Anglo-Saxon kings, up until the Norman Conquest in 1066. I will then investigate the methods by which scholars have been identifying evidence of the Scandinavian language contact, as well as evaluating the difficulties they face with this task. This is followed by a consideration of some of the ways in which we can see Norse influence on English, and then the subsequent subsection is a small investigation into the timeframe of this Norse influence, primarily the lexical element, using data from two vocabulary-based sources to see when words of Scandinavian origin appeared in English. Finally, in section 3, I look at two proposed theories of defining this significant language contact and influence in England, namely creolisation and koineisation, in order to set the scene for the following segment of this paper.

The next segment of this paper is a review of the significant and controversial book, “English: The Language of the Vikings”, by two well-established researchers, Joseph Emonds and Jan

Terje Faarlund, from 2014. I will provide a comprehensive overview of their principal theory, that English is a North Germanic language rather than the generally established West Germanic language that most scholars believe it to be, as well as summarise the substantial syntactic evidence and sociohistorical support they provide to back this claim. I will then review how the book and its controversial theory have been received in the years since its publication by the academic community. I include both positive and negative criticisms from a range of researchers and determine that the overall reception is one of scepticism and refutation, albeit with some sense of admiration for their challenge against the status quo.

My final section is a consideration of an element of Middle English grammar which could show potential for Scandinavian influence, namely the surfacing of OV (object-verb) word order with negative and quantified objects. I will first give a summary of the established understanding of the word order change from Old to Middle English, and the theory of Scandinavian influence on this change. I will then provide an overview of the instances in which OV word order was still shown in the Middle English period, and follow this with a discussion of the proposed parallels with Modern Icelandic (van der Wurff, 1999) as well as a consideration of OV word order in Norwegian.

2. Scandinavian Influence on Old and Middle English

2.1 Socio-historical setting for Scandinavian contact

The beginning of the language contact situation between Old Norse and Old English in England is thought to have begun in 787AD, with the ransacking of coastal towns and monasteries by the Vikings, which was written about in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle. This initiated the first of the three outlined periods of the Scandinavian presence in England (Baugh and Cable, 2002), which was a phase of raids and plundering attacks along the North East coast, as well as East Anglia, until around 850. This early stage did not seem to have the motivation of conquest or settlement, and was “apparently the work of small, isolated bands” (Dawson, 2003).

After these initial raids, however, the second period began with a series of much more intense and widespread attacks, including the invasion of the south-eastern coast of England by 350 Norse ships in the year 850. The Vikings spent their first winter in England in 851, on the Isle of Thanet, which marked a change in their presence in England, as before then they had “always returned to their ships before the arrival of winter and sailed away with what they had collected” (Björkman, 1900). A more organised Norse invasion began in 865 in East Anglia, where the

Viking invaders stayed for a year or so until they travelled north and took York, the capital of Northumbria, in 867. This was followed by the capture of Nottingham in 868, and the conquering of East Anglia, along with the death of the East Anglian King Edmund in 869 and 870. The next 7 years were fraught with an intense vying for power in Wessex between the newly established Danes and the native English, led by King Alfred the Great, which ultimately led to the defeat of the Danes and the signing of the Treaty of Wedmore in 886. This Treaty, signed by Alfred and Guthrum, defined the area of England where the Danes could have control, namely that which was above the Thames and east of the line between London and Chester. This area from this point onwards was known as the Danelaw and, apart from the Scandinavians accepting Christianity as a part of the agreement and their leader Guthrum being baptised, the area would be subject to Scandinavian law, administration and governance.

The third period followed the establishment of the Danelaw and was marked by political adjustment and assimilation (Baugh and Cable, 2002). There was a continued vying for power between the Norse and the English, despite the Treaty of Wedmore intending to put an end to this problem. In 892, two large Norse fleets landed in the south-east of England and headed towards Wessex, where King Alfred put up a strong fight against them and was victorious in 896, pushing the Norse back towards Northumbria and East Anglia. Alfred's son, Edward the Elder (900-925), and grandson, Athelstan (925-939), kept the Scandinavians on the defensive, and when another surge of Vikings arrived in Yorkshire, "the inhabitants of eastern England, Angles and Danes alike, [took] up their weapons and rall[ied] to King Aethelstan's side" (Giepel, 1971, cited in Dawson, 2003). Although there was still Norse influence in the northern and eastern parts of England, the English had regained control of most of the country, with the Norse inhabitants putting up little resistance to it, having assimilated and settled into their way of life, albeit still with some of their cultural identity.

In 991, "when England seemed at last on the point of solving its Danish problem, a new and formidable succession of invasions began" (Baugh and Cable, 2002), this time ending in Norse conquest. A renewed force of Vikings attacked the south coast of England once more, and defeated the English at the Battle of Maldon, the subject of a famous Old English war poem. This led to further reinforcements from Scandinavia, led by the Norse king Svein, in 1007, and in 1013, the king of Wessex, Aethelred (the Unready), fled to Normandy and his throne was taken by Svein, who became the first Danish king of England. Svein died in 1014, however, and Aethelred returned to fight for his throne. Svein's son, Cnut, brought a fleet from Denmark to contest against Aethelred, and in 1016, following the death of both Aethelred and his

successor, Edmund Ironside, he became the second Danish king of England, after his father. By 1016, King Cnut the Great was the ruler of England, Denmark and Norway, and England was under Danish rule until 1042, 24 years before the Norman Conquest of 1066.

2.2 Identifying linguistic evidence as Scandinavian origin

It is clear now that the intense and prolonged presence of Norse speakers in England would likely have led to at least some language exchange and influence on Old and Middle English. In order to measure or discuss the extent to which Old Norse had an effect on Old and Middle English, we must consider how to successfully classify linguistic features such as lexicon and syntactic features as originating from either Old English or Old Norse. This task is often more difficult than it initially sounds, as Old English and Old Norse were closely related languages, both stemming from Proto-Germanic, and there are varying theories around their mutual intelligibility. Townend's book, *Language and History in Viking Age England* (2002), investigated thoroughly whether the two languages were mutually intelligible, and concluded that there would have been "adequate intelligibility" between the two languages, which he defined as meaning that speakers would not need to be bilingual to communicate on some level. This means that many words would have been very similar in both languages and also, as Björkman (1900) commented, when English speakers adopted words from Norse speakers, they would "have been able to give the loan-words... a thoroughly English form" by using their understanding of the phonological equivalents in OE and ON. There is also a fairly limited amount of physical evidence of both Old Norse in general and Old English from the areas where the Scandinavians settled and took control, namely the northern and eastern areas of England, so it can be hard or near impossible to verify where a word came from originally.

There are, however, still effective methods used to identify whether words have originated from Old English or Old Norse, or Old English words which have been influenced by Scandinavian language contact. One of which is through looking at phonological elements of morphemes which have undergone different changes in ON and OE from their shared Proto-Germanic roots. Occasionally there are ON and OE cognates which show these phonological differences clearly, but where there aren't cognates, there is generally enough phonological evidence and understanding of Old and Middle English to create reconstructed cognates with which to compare. Dance (2017) provided the following list of the main phonological discriminators which aid in identifying Middle English words with ON origin rather than OE:

- PGrmc. */ai/ > ON /ei/, compared to OE /ɑ:/.
- PGrmc. */au/ > ON /au, ou/ (usually > ME /o:/), compared to OE /æ:a/
- PGrmc. */e:/ (NWGmc. */a:/) > ON /ɑ:/ (> ME /ɔ:/), compared to OE (WS) /æ:/ (> /o:/ before nasals).
- PGrmc. /ð/ > ON /ð/ (medially or finally), compared to OE /d/.
- PGrmc. /g/, /k/ > ON /g/, /k/, compared to OE /j/, /dʒ/, /tʃ/ in palatalization environments.
- PGrmc. /sk/ > ON /sk/, compared to OE /ʃ/.

The last two sound changes in the list are perhaps the most well-known phonological ways to recognise Scandinavian origin in English words, as they can be seen in numerous Present-Day English words as well as Middle English. For example, when looking at the modern words *shirt* and *skirt*, one can use the fact that the hard *sk* sound in Proto-Germanic changed to a palatalised *sh* sound (written *sc*) in Old English, but remained a hard *sk* in Old Norse, to identify which word has a native origin and which is from Scandinavian. This method of identifying ON influence is the most commonly relied upon and most dependable in terms of accuracy; in the words of Björkman (1900), “there are no loan-word tests more reliable than the phonetic ones”, as the phonology of Old English and Old Norse is one of the only differences that researchers of the topic are fairly confident of.

Another way, albeit less common, in which words can be shown to likely have Scandinavian origin is through the meaning rather than the phonology. There are words from Old English which have remained in use in Middle English, but which possess the meaning of its Old Norse cognate rather than the original native meaning. The most common example given of this is likely the word *bloom* (‘flower’); in Old English, *blōma* meant ‘an ingot of iron’, but in Old Norse *blōm* meant ‘flower’, like the modern Norwegian *blomst*.

2.3 Evidence of Scandinavian Influence

2.3.1 Vocabulary

As discussed in the subsection above, the English lexicon is home to a significant number of words with Scandinavian origin, mostly introduced during the aforementioned time of Norse presence in England. The type and quantity of words introduced or borrowed from Old Norse varied throughout the phases of Scandinavian invasion, settlement and political rule, and reflect the likely nature of the interaction and communication between the native Anglo-Saxons and the newcomers, the Vikings.

As Baugh and Cable (2002) explained, the first influx of Scandinavian words into English, specifically Old English at the time, was not very large, “amounting to only about two score”. The words included *cnearr* (‘small warship’), *dreng* (‘warrior’), *orrest* (‘battle’), *bātswegen* (‘boatman’) and *rān* (‘robbery’, ‘rapine’). This set of words, amongst others, indicates that the relationship between the Anglo-Saxon and the Norse-speaking invaders at the beginning was not wholly amicable, and that their communications were based around the actions of “a sea-roving and predatory people” (Baugh and Cable, 2002).

Following this initial period of hostility and the first wave of invasions by the Scandinavians came the settling and establishment of areas under Norse authority, mostly within the Danelaw as discussed in section 2.1. This stage is also reflected within the lexicon of Scandinavian words found in English, as a number of words appear which relate to the “social and administrative system of the Danelaw” (Baugh and Cable, 2002), such as *law* (‘law’, this includes the related terms *outlaw* and *bylaw*), *hold* (‘freeholder’), *wapentake* (‘administrative district’) and *hūsting* (‘assembly’).

Up until this point, many of the words of Scandinavian origin were likely describing concepts or things which may not have had a word in English prior to that point, or perhaps an uncommon word which was not often used, and so it made sense that English would adopt the Scandinavian word. The time period succeeding the initial introduction and establishment of Scandinavian people in England, however, shows many more words entering the English language for which there were already English cognates or words which were used for those meanings. Baugh and Cable (2002) provided an illustrative list of these words, which I will include here:

Nouns: *axletree, band, bank, birth, boon, booth, brink, bull, calf* (of leg), *crook, dirt, down* (feathers), *dregs, egg, fellow, freckle, gait, gap, girth, guess, hap, keel, kid, leg, link, loan, mire, race, reef* (of sail), *reindeer, rift, root, scab, scales, score, scrap, seat, sister, skill, skin, skirt, sky, slaughter, snare, stack, steak, swain, thrift, tidings, trust, want, window*

Adjectives: *awkward, flat, ill, loose, low, meek, muggy, odd, rotten, rugged, scant, seemly, sly, tattered, tight, and weak.*

Verbs: *to bait, bask, batten, call, cast, clip, cow, crave, crawl, die, droop, egg* (on), *flit, gape, gasp, get, give, glitter, kindle, lift, lug, nag, raise, rake, ransack, rid, rive, scare, scout* (an idea), *scowl, screech, snub, sprint, take, thrive, thrust.*

As it should be clear to see, the Scandinavian loanwords introduced to English from the new inhabitants were no longer slightly unusual words relating to seafaring, violence or a legal system, but rather every-day, common words for which the majority would have had a way of being expressed in the native English vocabulary. For example, *window*, from the ON *vindauga*, replaced the Old English *eagbyrl*, and is now cognate with the Modern Norwegian *vindu/vindaug* (Bokmål and Nynorsk, respectively).

2.3.2 Syntax and morphology

The effect that Old Norse contact had on English syntax and morphosyntax is less overtly identifiable as its lexicon, but there are still some areas in which it is generally agreed that changes are due to Scandinavian influence. One of the most interesting and clear examples of the Norse impact on the morphology of English is the replacement of the native third person plural pronouns to the Norse-derived *they*, *their* and *them*. The Old English pronouns were *hīe*, *hira* and *him*, which would have normally developed into *hi* (*he*), *here* and *hem*, as was seen in southern areas away from the Scandinavian-influenced areas. However, starting in the northern areas and slowly spreading into the rest of the country, the Old Norse forms *þeir*, *þeira* and *þeim* were adopted. This is significant as it is highly unusual for a language to adopt such a fundamental word as a pronoun from another language, so this shows the extent to which the two speaker communities were intertwined.

The morphosyntactic system of Middle English is another area of suggested Scandinavian influence, although potentially not a direct influence from Old Norse itself, but rather from its speakers living in England and learning the language. Old English prior to the intense presence of the Norse incomers was highly inflectional, where nouns were masculine, feminine or weak, and were inflected for singular, plural and four cases (nominative, accusative, dative and genitive). Adjectives were also inflected similarly, and verbs were conjugated differently for each person (first, second and third singular and plural). As Baugh and Cable (2002) discuss, their inflectional system was quite different to Old Norse's, but the lexicon of the two languages were likely very similar, so it would have been the endings of the words which "put obstacles in the way of mutual understanding". This may have led to enough confusion between English and Norse speakers that they would have dropped the inflections in order to understand one another better, and then this habit would have been repeated enough that it led to an overall change in the morphosyntax of English. It should be noted, however, that northern Old English

was already identified as having fewer inflections than its southern counterparts before the strong Norse influence took place, and so this feature can only be partly attributed to the communications between Old English and Old Norse speakers.

Another aspect of Middle English syntax that has been suggested to have shown variation and change due to the Norse presence in England is in its V2 (verb-second) grammar. V2 is a common feature of Germanic languages, whereby the tensed verb of a phrase is placed in the second position, following a single constituent (and not necessarily the subject). It has been found that there are two forms of the V2 rule in Germanic languages, differing in the position to which they move in the underlying syntactic structure. Kroch and Taylor (1996) investigated the V2 rule in Old and Middle English and found that there was a difference between the northern and southern dialect of Middle English in terms of which form of V2 they applied. After a thorough consideration of the details, they stated that they “feel confident... in claiming, on grounds of dating as well as grammatical analysis, that the characteristic features of the V2 syntax of northern Middle English arose out of contact with Scandinavian” (1996).

2.3.3 Place names

Another way to measure the Scandinavian impact on English, as well as gauging how widespread and sizeable the Norse settlements in England were, is to look at the names of towns and villages. This is because there are a significant number, more than 1,400 according to Baugh and Cable (2002), of places in England which bear partly or fully Scandinavian-derived names, and this can give an indication of how intense the presence of Norse-speakers was in a certain area. Town or village names ending in *-by*, *-thorp(e)*, *-thwaite*, and *-toft* make up the vast majority of them, *-by* and *-thorp(e)* being the most common due to their general meanings of ‘town’ and ‘village’, respectively.

2.5 Timeframe of Norse influence

Having established the socio-historical situation in England around the time period of the Danelaw, as well as the linguistic evidence of language contact between English and Norse, a question that has been considered by linguists and historians is at what point in this timeline did Old Norse have the most significant linguistic influence in England. This is a question that played a role in Emonds’ and Faarlund’s (2014) theory, which I will discuss in the following section. However, I felt it appropriate to investigate this question separately here first, and to

provide some insight on the matter with data I have collected from the Oxford English Dictionary (OED) and from a study by Moskowich (1995), who used data from the Middle English Dictionary (MED).

If we consider the timeframe of Norse presence in England as outlined in section 2.1, a common assumption is that the main period of linguistic influence would have taken place during the time of Scandinavian power, when the Danelaw was a large, established region of the country, and that following the Norman conquest, Norman French would have taken over as the main language contact situation. Dawson (2003), for example, writes that “the contact between English and Norse took place over a period of 200 years, from c.865 to 1066 A.D.”, although she does remark that it would have carried on “to some extent” after 1066. However, as some researchers such as Emonds (2011) proposed, there is an argument to be made that the majority of the language influence from Scandinavian took place after the Norman conquest, when both English and Scandinavian-speaking populations were subjugated under the new Norman-French rule. Emonds (2011) even went as far as to say it was a “complete *fusion* of two previously separate populations” [Emonds’ emphasis]. This is because, during the time of the Danelaw, there was likely hostility between the two populations due to the vying for political power and violent nature of the Scandinavian invasion and presence in England, and this may not have led to intense language exchange as that would require regular and involved communicating.

I investigated this idea by collecting data from the OED and a study by Moskowich (1995), both of which show the presence of words of Scandinavian origin and the time when they were first found in English, shown in figures 1 and 2 below. Moskowich collected data from the Middle English Dictionary (MED), first edited by Hans Kurath and Sherman Khun in 1956 (Moskowich, 1995). Unlike the results from the OED, Moskowich counted all occurrences of Scandinavian loanword usage, rather than the number of loanwords themselves, in order to ascertain how deeply the Scandinavian loanwords were embedded in the English speakers’ lexicons.

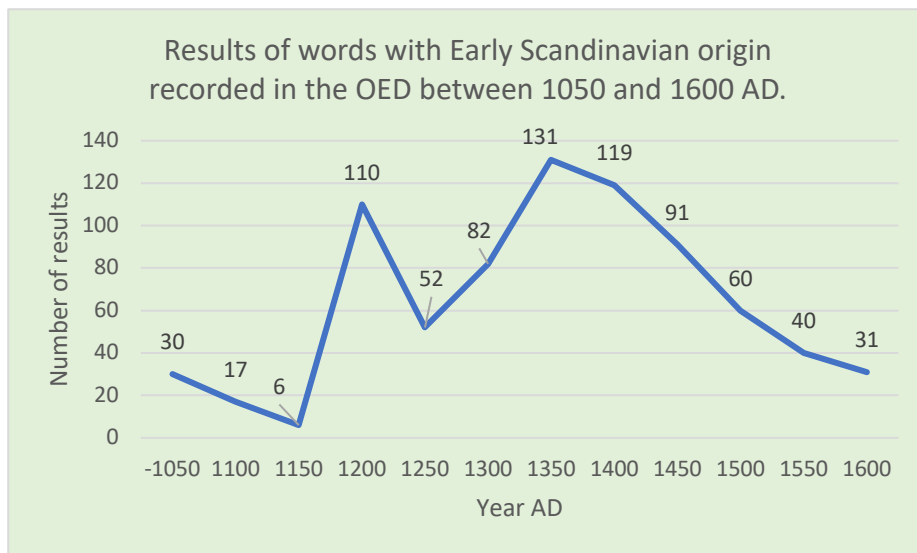


Figure 1

The results in Figure 1 show that there wasn't a strong presence of words with Scandinavian origin before 1150, and from then they generally increase in number until around 1400, where they begin to drop again. This is interesting as it shows that, despite there having been a Scandinavian presence of parts of England since the 8th century, their lexical influence on English was not abundantly present in written texts until after 1150. The number of words with Scandinavian origin peaks around 1350, 200 years after the Norman Conquest, which marked the end of any political power held by Scandinavians in England.

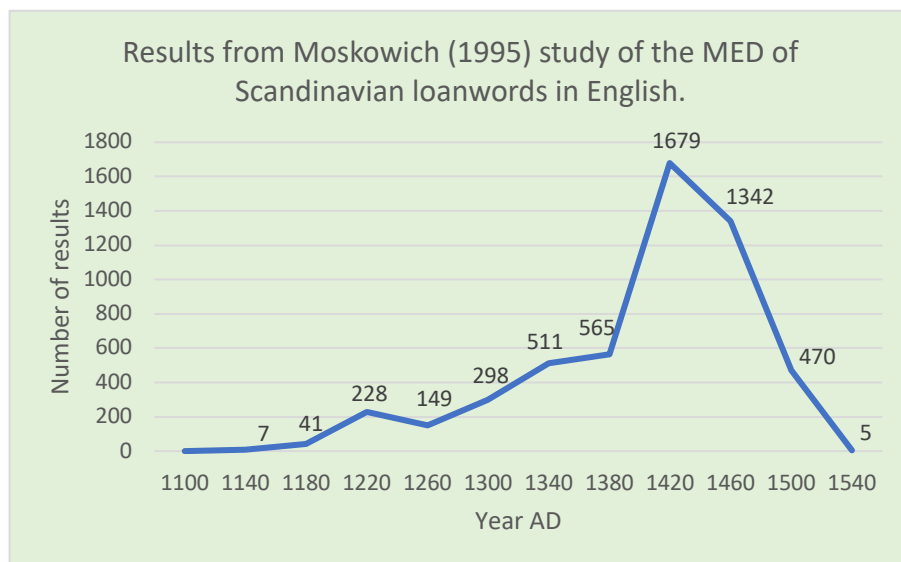


Figure 2

The results in Figure 2 display a similar pattern to the results from the OED, showing a steady increase in the occurrences of words with Scandinavian origin over the years from 1140 to

1420, and then a decline after this point. As mentioned, this data is from the MED and so it doesn't show results from before 1100, but as the results are very low in 1100 and 1140, it can be assumed that instances of Scandinavian loan-words were probably not very frequent before then either.

As shown, there is statistical evidence from the OED and MED which support the hypothesis that the main time period of Scandinavian influence on Old and subsequently Middle English took place not only during the time of Norse political power and the Danelaw, but also after 1066, when English and Scandinavian communities were both "laid low by the thorough and merciless Norman Conquest" (Emonds, 2011). However, this delay in Scandinavian lexical influence in English has also been attributed to the lack of written evidence from the areas of Danish control (the north and east of England), as the majority of written sources from Old English were produced in Wessex, the heart of Anglo-Saxon political power at the time.

3. Defining the result of Scandinavian influence

3.1 Introduction

In regard to defining the outcome of the Scandinavian influence on English, there has been much debate and various terms have been suggested by researchers, most famously creolisation and koineisation, although some linguists such as Emonds and Faarlund, who will be discussed in depth in section 4, have proposed that Middle English is descended directly from Old Norse (2014) rather than being a creole or koine (although they claim to have no problem defining ME as a "lexical creole"). Other researchers on the topic have shown no desire to define the language influence of Old Norse on English as anything more than heavy borrowing (e.g., Thomason and Kaufman, 1988).

3.2 Creole

The idea of Middle English being a creole is one which, as noted by O'Neil (2019), "has been durable, but paradoxically the hypothesis itself is not popular among language scholars." Two of the most notable advocates of creolisation in English were Bailey and Maroldt (1977), who famously wrote that "it cannot be doubted that [Middle English] is a mixed language, or creole". It should be noted, however, that their definition of a creole varies from that of more recent linguists, having written that a creole is "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). Bailey and Maroldt were mainly focused on the result of English and French language contact, but they also mention that the contact with Old Norse created the linguistic instability, and set the scene, for later creolisation. Poussa (1982) concentrated more on the Old Norse situation, and stated that the change from Old to Middle English “may be ascribed to a creolization with Old Scandinavian during the OE period”.

The proposals put forth by Bailey and Maroldt (1977) and Poussa (1982), amongst others, have been disputed strongly by various scholars, such as Görlach (1986), who concluded his rebuttal of their theory by stating that “to call every mixed language a ‘creole’ would make the term useless”. McWhorter (2002) was also critical of Bailey and Maroldt’s proposal, stating both that “lexical mixture itself does not equate with creolization”, and that the loss of inflection in Middle English had already begun in Old English before the Norman Conquest. These are but two examples of the multiple other rejections of the idea of English being a creole.

O’Niel (2019) discusses the Middle English Creolisation Hypothesis at length and theorises that its most attractive characteristic as a topic of persistent debate is its ideological connotations, rather than there being strong linguistic, historic or terminological evidence to support the claim. As examined by Michel DeGraff (2003), there is a deep and uncomfortable history around the term *creole*, with its origins dating back to the colonial era when Europeans were colonising the ‘New World’ and encountering the people living there and their languages. The early notions around creoles and their speakers were based on ill-informed ideas of linguistic, intellectual and evolutionary inferiority toward the speakers of many non-Indo-European languages, which viewed them to be ‘primitive’. This coincided with the notion of ‘creole exceptionalism’ which still persists today; the idea that creole languages are extremely simplified or ‘degenerate’ versions of their Indo-European parent languages (e.g., French, English), or are ‘living linguistic fossils’ which some speculate can provide insight into the evolution of hominid protolanguage (Degraff, 2003). Degraff refutes these ideas around creoles and their speakers, but it is clear now why the concept of Middle English being a creole has attracted much attention and consideration in the academic community. If Middle English were truly demonstrated to be a creole, it would “classify a “major” European language alongside “minor” Caribbean languages such as Haitian Creole and Jamaican Patois” (O’Niel, 2019), which would potentially redefine the way we view language genealogy as well as the way we

view creoles and their features. As examined above, however, this is a generally unsupported idea, and I believe it is unlikely to gain much more traction in the future.

3.3 Koine

A theory with more support overall is that of koineisation; a term which, like creolisation, is not very easily defined. One considerable work theorising Middle English to be a koine was written by Dawson (2003), who followed Siegel's (1985) definition of a koine:

A koine is the stabilized result of mixing of linguistic subsystems such as regional or literary dialects. It usually serves as a *lingua franca* among speakers of the different contributing varieties and is characterized by a mixture of features of these varieties and most often by reduction or simplification in comparison.

Dawson addressed the first part of the definition by stating that Old English and Old Norse “are generally believed to be mutually intelligible” (2003), as shown by Townend (2002), and so this is in line with them being regional dialects, in a sense. They both developed from Proto-Germanic and were very close genetically. Dawson then claims that “the socio-historical situation... support[s] such a scenario” of the koine being a *lingua franca* for the speakers in England, although she admits that it is not easy to prove this. Thirdly, she names features of northern Middle English, which spread to the more southern dialects to become standard Modern English, to show that there was both a mixture of features of Old Norse and Old English, and a reduction or simplification in the resulting language. This includes the loss of the rich inflectional systems on noun phrases and verbs from Old English, and the fact that Middle English had personal pronouns from Old Norse. Other scholars who have supported the theory of koineisation include Warner (2017), O’Niel (2019), McWhorter (2002) and Watts (2011), and it is generally a less controversial theory than creolisation as it has fewer ideological connotations, and its definition appears to be more applicable to that of English and Old Norse due to their likely mutual intelligibility.

4. Emonds’ and Faarlund’s (2014) proposal

4.1 Introduction

In 2014, two well-established researchers, Joseph Emonds and Jan Terje Faarlund, the former a theoretical syntactician and the latter an historical syntactician with a specialisation in Scandinavian, published a book which, from the very title onwards, claimed English to be “the

language of the Vikings”. In other words, the principal hypothesis of this work is that Middle English, and thus all later stages of English (the descendancy of Modern English from Middle English is not contested), were not the direct descendant of Old English but rather of Old Norse, due to the presence of the Scandinavians in England. This has been called the ‘Viking Hypothesis’ (Kortmann, 2016, Crisma and Pintzuk, 2019). Emonds’ and Faarlund’s focal arguments are of a syntactic nature, as their specialised fields would suggest, but they do review other linguistic areas such as lexicon as well. They also paint a picture of the sociohistorical situation which they believe led to their hypothesised scenario of Old English being replaced by Anglicised Norse.

4.2 The syntactic, lexical, and morphosyntactic evidence

Emonds and Faarlund offer a fairly extensive array of lexical, syntactic and morphological features of the Middle English language which they claim lead to the undeniable interpretation that it is categorically ‘Anglicised Norse’ rather than the descendant of Old English, as the traditional view would say.

They begin with the lexical factor of Middle English, even though they state that “no principles of language descent even remotely depend on differences in sources of vocabulary of this order” (p.57), supporting this statement by reminding the reader that English is never classified as a Romance language, despite much of its vocabulary having French or Latin origins. They discuss that there was, and still is, evidently a vast number of common, everyday words of Scandinavian origin in the English language after the Old English period; around 1,800 that are “fully convincing” or “probable”, they cite from Baugh and Cable (2002). They suggest that this number is most likely an underestimate, and criticise the method used by previous researchers who assume that any Middle English word which had cognates in Old English and Old Norse must derive from the Old English term, stating that “as much as 50% of this vocabulary... can be equally well attributed to both Old English and Norse” (p49).

Following on from the vocabulary-based chapter, E&F then set out to enlighten their readers with the main substance of their argument; the syntactic properties of Middle English which they claim are not found in Old English but are present in Old Norse, as well as syntactic innovations shared between English and Scandinavian languages. They also discuss features of Old English which are not found in Middle English or Old Scandinavian, to support their

hypothesis that Old English died out and was replaced with Norse. In total, they provide around 20 syntactic features over these three categories in order to prove their proposal. An example of some features from the first category are subject-to-subject raising and subject-to-object raising, shown in (1) below (taken from E&F, 2014):

- 1a) It is likely that John is the most competent person.
- b) John is likely to be the most competent person.
- c) I believe John/myself to be ill.

(1a) and (1b) show how subject-to-subject raising occurs, where the subject in the subordinate clause in (1a) is raised to the subject in the main clause in (1b). E&F state that “subject raising is absent from Old English” (p.73), and quote Denison (1993) saying that “Subject Raising was rare before the second half of the Middle English period” (p.73). They then show that this construction was “normal and unmarked” (p.74) in Old Norse, and present in Middle English, albeit rare, concluding that this is “fairly certain to be an uninterrupted continuation of Norse syntax” (p.75). (1c) shows subject-to-object raising, also known as accusative with infinitive, whereby the subject of the subordinate clause is raised to be the object of the main verb, despite not being the semantic object of the main verb. E&F again discuss this in terms of their theory, stating that this construction was not present in Old English, but was “very common in Norse” (p.77). They reach the same conclusion for both subject-to-subject and subject-to-object raising, which is that they prove the North Germanic quality of Middle English syntax. These are two examples of the many syntactic features they provide which they show have little to no evidence in Old English but do in Old Norse, others of which include preposition stranding, periphrastic auxiliary verbs (shall and will), and split infinitives.

The two subsequent chapters address the other morphosyntactic features that they believe prove Norse ancestry, namely those of Old English which are not present in Middle English, and those which aren't present in Old English or Old Norse but seem to be shared innovations between Middle English and Scandinavian languages. The former of these includes features such as the loss of the subjunctive used in indirect discourse (reported speech), the loss of “correlative adverbs” (e.g., *swa... swa*, meaning ‘just as’, ‘so that’ or, literally, ‘so... so’ Old English), and the loss of two ways of introducing relative clauses in Old English. Among the shared innovations between Middle England and Scandinavian, they include analytic grading for longer adjectives, which is the fact that in English we use the bound morpheme *-er* to grade

many adjectives, but for longer or more infrequent adjectives we use *more* or *most*, as shown in (2).

- 2a) He is smarter than me.
- b) *I am thoughtfuller than my brother.
- c) I am more thoughtful than my brother.

E&F state that English and Modern Scandinavian are the only Germanic languages to do this, whereas West Germanic languages will use their bound morpheme to grade all adjectives, regardless of length. Other shared innovations include tag questions based on syntactic copies, where the tag question copies the auxiliary (or uses *do*) and gives it a reversed polarity (e.g., *You like swimming, don't you?*) and analytic indirect objects, where indirect objects “are signaled by neither overt case nor a preposition” (p.128) (e.g., *I gave the dog a bone*).

4.3 The sociolinguistic support for their claim

Throughout their work, E&F provide sociolinguistic justifications for their claims, attempting to explain not only that the linguistic evidence points to the “unorthodox, but... inescapable conclusion” (p.154) that Middle English descends from Old Norse, but *why* this would have occurred in terms of the actual speakers and cultural communities in England at the time of language contact. Their assertions vary in terms of having strong evidence or previous general agreement in the academic community to back them up.

When discussing the period of Norse presence in England, E&F give a fairly generous portrayal of the influence, political power and population size of the Scandinavian settlers, compared with previous scholars. For example, rather than defining the Danelaw as an area of England, they describe England as having “consisted of two countries with a highly unstable border, the Danelaw and Wessex” (p.35), which implies that the Danelaw had a separate population and identity to the rest of England. They consistently describe the Scandinavians as dominant and extensively settled in England and call it highly unlikely that they would “completely [abandon] their native tongue and [adopt] the language of the English peasants that they ruled” (p.39). Further, when considering the political changes in England in the first half of the 11th century, they describe Edward the Confessor (King of England from 1042-1066), known by many to be one of the last Anglo-Saxon kings, as “in no way Anglo-Saxon” (p36), due to his mother’s Danish lineage and her second marriage to Cnut, as well as his extended time in

Normandy growing up. This is an interesting claim, as it was Cnut's father, Svein, whose invasion of England caused Edward's father, Aethelred the Unready, to lose his throne, and was the reason why Edward was taken to Normandy as a child.

Their explanation for the vast Old English vocabulary in Middle English (or Anglicised Norse) is that the Norse people who migrated to England and brought their language with them would have needed to adopt many new words for concepts and things which they may not have had experience of in Scandinavia. They provide a list of topics that this would have encompassed, of which examples include Christianity, as the Norse incomers arrived with their own religion and became Christian over time, crops and food production, as the fairer climate and the Roman legacy in England meant this might have been more varied, and other Roman-related elements of English life such as roadbuilding, plumbing and town layouts. They also mention that, as it was likely that more Scandinavian men than women moved to England, they would have married English women, who would have learnt the Norse language spoken by their husbands and thus taught it to their children, "mak[ing] free use of their native [English] vocabulary when lacking for words in the new tongue" (p.39).

5. Response to Emonds and Faarlund (2014)

5.1 Support of their proposal

In section 4, it was shown that Emonds and Faarlund (2014) supported their theory with a substantial number of arguments and pieces of linguistic evidence, ranging from sociohistorical to syntactic and lexical. This led to some positive feedback from members of the academic community, such as Holmberg (2016). Holmberg (2016) gave a favourable review of E&F's thesis, agreeing with their conclusion that the sizeable number of shared syntactic constructions between Middle English and Old Norse seems more likely to have come from the former descending directly from the latter, rather than the constructions evolving independently in both languages, in parallel. He did, however, add the cautious disclaimer, "if the facts in E&F are more or less right", admitting that their evidence may not be incontrovertible and there could be room for alternative interpretations for at least some of the arguments they made. Holmberg (2016) also mentions that E&F's inclusion of innovations shared by English and the Scandinavian languages is not quite as convincing an argument, as they happened after the time of Norse migration and language contact had ceased, but in general his review of the 'Viking Hypothesis' is a positive one.

Another encouraging assessment of E&F's work was Lightfoot's (2016), who described their work as "a radical challenge" to the standard view of the development of English throughout its history and offered no opposition to the evidence they put forth in support of their theory. Quite the opposite, in fact, Lightfoot describes both their syntactic evidence and their sociohistorical explanations for their theory as plausible, especially the former. He was complimentary of much of their syntactic proof, describing, for example, E&F's discussion of preposition stranding in Middle English as "excellent" and their approach to the change from head-final to head-initial VPs as "good [and] nuanced". Similarly to Holmberg, Lightfoot (2016) avoids concluding that E&F have proven their hypothesis to be true, but rather praises them for their "substantial contribution to our understanding of the history of English", in that they have given a fresh and bold perspective which may lead to new research around the topics they discussed.

5.2 Criticisms

Naturally, as is the case of many controversial theories or proposals against the status quo, there have been significant rebuttals to Emonds' and Faarlund's work. One comprehensive criticism of Emonds and Faarlund's case was composed by Bech and Walkden (2015), who presented a large number of arguments against E&F's methodology and the ways in which they chose to interpret and portray many pieces of syntactic evidence. In regard to their methodology, they critique E&F's lack of any consideration of sound correspondences or regular sound changes, despite their early acknowledgment of it as crucial in determining language genealogy. Bech and Walkden use this fact to also disregard E&F's idea that any Middle English word with Old English and Old Norse cognates could plausibly derive from either one (this was also commented on by Thomason, 2016). Following on from this, they provide an extensive criticism of a number of E&F's syntactic arguments, showing that for many of them, E&F have either misrepresented or omitted key information in favour of their hypothesis, and failed to address features which may falsify their hypothesis, such as the complete lack of a postposed article in Middle English (a distinctive feature of Scandinavian languages).

Pons-Sanz (2015) was also critical of E&F's arguments in a review of their book, focusing mainly on the lexical elements of Anglo-Scandinavian language contact in the book, which is her self-described area of expertise. One criticism Pons-Sanz makes is on the way in which E&F discuss the time period or dating of Norse influence on Old English. She states that they

fail to mention that a very possible reason why we only begin to see ON vocabulary in English following the Norman Conquest is due to the lack of surviving OE texts from dialects other than Late West Saxon. This means it is not easy to form an accurate picture of the languages/dialects spoken in Scandinavian-inhabited areas at that time, and so the increase of ON vocabulary in the ME period may be due simply to the increase of available texts written in those areas of the country.

A common problem discussed in many comments on E&F's theory is their lack of a thorough, in-depth consideration of the key literature on many of the topics or linguistic ideas that they consider in their book. In the succinct words of van Kemenade (2016), "they have not done their homework." Pons-Sanz (2015) and Bech and Walkden (2015) mention this too, criticising their dependence on introductory level works such as Baugh and Cable (2002) and Strang (1970), as well as using Wikipedia, to make and support their bold claims, rather than more in-depth and specific research.

A slightly different type of criticism was put forth by Trudgill (2016), in which the author does not dispute the syntactic evidence in E&F's book, stating that E&F "have brilliantly demonstrated that the syntax of my native language [English] owes a great deal to the syntax of ON", but instead criticises the need at all to categorise English as distinctly North or West Germanic. Trudgill considers E&F's references to Universal Grammar as an indication of their generativist views, which he interprets as being intent on discrete categorisation, or "thinking in boxes", and states that he does not find this very helpful from the point of view of a variationist.

5.4 Overall consensus

From my overview of the general reception in the academic community to E&F's unconventional theory, it seems that the majority of their fellow researchers are not convinced by their arguments. This is not completely unexpected, due to the fact that E&F are essentially contesting one of the most long-standing ideas around the development of the English language, which has been examined and considered by countless scholars over centuries. As Lightfoot (2016) wrote, "rewriting the history of English will not go unresisted", and it certainly hasn't thus far. The main criticisms are of their potential misinterpretations of the syntactic, lexical and historical facts they use to support their hypothesis, and their lack of

discussion covering the previous detailed and significant works on this topic, and instead using what could be described as surface-level sources to make their arguments.

There is, however, what I sense to be a level of appreciation in several of the reviews, even the more negative ones, for their bold and contentious thesis, as it sparked conversation and gave a potentially fresh perspective on an established and well-studied topic. It should be encouraged to challenge enduring theories and ideas, as even if the challenger is revealed to be incorrect or their arguments are shown to be flawed, it provides support for the original theory and ensures we do not hold our beliefs simply because that's the way it is.

6. OV word order in Middle English – another sign of Norse influence?

6.1 OV to VO from Old to Middle English

When considering the linguistic developments in the history of English from the Old to the Middle period, including within the context of Scandinavian influence on English, one of the most fundamental changes is that of the basic syntax moving from an object-verb (OV) to verb-object (VO) word order. Present Day English is irrefutably an SVO language, varying seldom from this structure due to its being an analytical language rather than synthetic. Analytic languages depend on sentence structure and function words to assist with conveying the meaning of an utterance, and so generally vary little in word order. Old English, on the other hand, was a more synthetic language with a richer inflectional system, and so had a freer basic syntax, due to the meaning of each constituent being understandable without needing to be in a specific part of the sentence. There is some debate over Old English's underlying word order, but as Pintzuk (1996) stated, "according to most generative accounts, Old English is an OV language". This means that a change took place between Old English and Present Day English, by which the general underlying syntax moved from OV to VO, and this is evident in Middle English.

It has been discussed by various scholars, including Emonds and Faarlund (2014) and Trips (2002), that there may have been Scandinavian influence which caused or accelerated this word order change in English. This is because Old Norse is generally thought to be an SVO language, and the time period of the change in English from OV to VO seems to coincide with when we see the other Norse linguistic elements appear. Trips (2002) explored this idea in detail, investigating Old and Middle English evidence such as *Ormulum*, a 12th century poetic text written in Lincolnshire, an area that was within the Danelaw and so was influenced heavily by

Old Norse. She concluded her investigation with the assertion that the OV to VO word order change was indeed likely to have been brought about by Scandinavian language contact due to the variation in the dialects within or closer to the areas of Norse speaking communities in England.

6.2 SOV with negative and quantified objects in ME

Despite Middle English being generally agreed to be a mostly VO language, however, it has been shown by various researchers (e.g., Pintzuk, 1996, van der Wurff, 1995, 1999, Moerenhout and van der Wurff, 2000) that there were still occurrences of OV word order in the Middle English period. Pintzuk and Taylor (2006) also investigated this, and provided data with which I created the following figure:

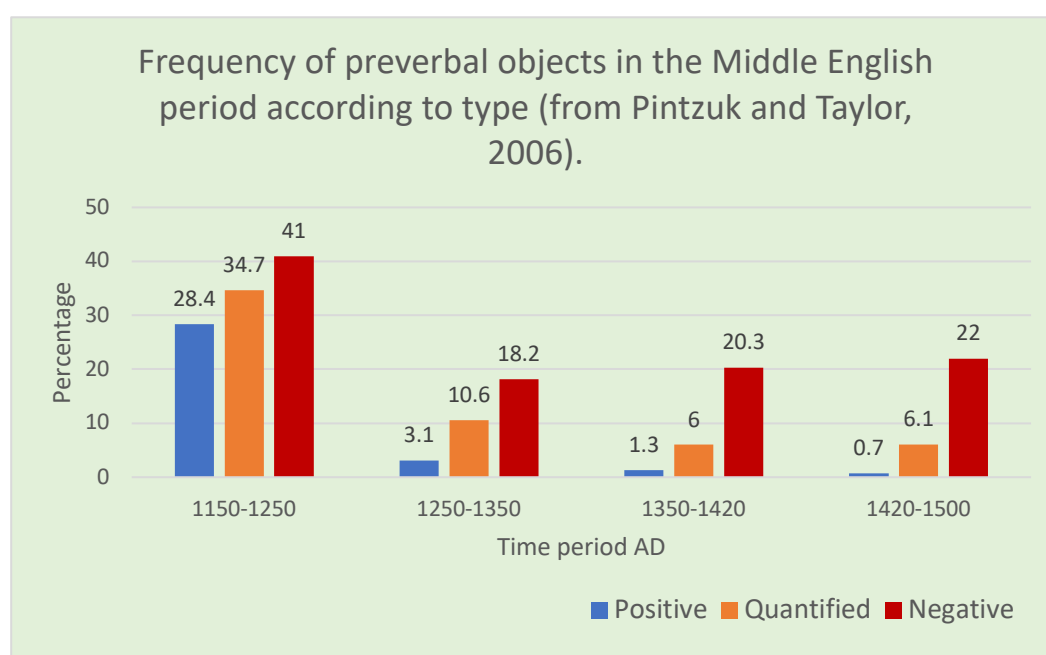


Figure 3

Figure 3 shows that throughout the Middle English period, some OV word orders were still occurring, most often with negative objects, and slightly more quantified objects than positive, but they were all in the minority compared to VO word order. As investigated by van der Wurff and Foster (2010), instances of OV word order in prose had “withered away completely by the end of the 16th century”, and only surfaced in stylistic forms of writing, namely poetry and verse, most likely in order to fit with a rhyme or meter. This point in time makes sense for OV word order to not be found any longer, as the 16th century was the period when scholars tend

to define the end of Late Middle English and the beginning of Early Modern English. Early Modern English is the immediate predecessor of the version of English spoken today in England and is firmly an SVO language with almost no instances of OV word order.

6.3 Parallels with Modern Icelandic and Modern Norwegian

Van der Wurff (1999) acknowledged the instances in which OV word order was still surfacing in Middle English and found that there is a parallel in Modern Icelandic where OV is allowed “in exactly the same contexts” as Middle English, specifically 15th century English. These contexts, taken from van der Wurff (1999), are shown in (3). He does note, however, that there are some differences between the two languages in terms of these contexts, despite their evident parallels. For example, (3a) is optional in Middle English but obligatory in Modern Icelandic, and (3b) in Modern Icelandic is not allowed with certain quantifiers, with some quantifiers varying in how acceptable they are judged by native speakers in such a context.

- 3a) *aux + negative object + V*
- b) *aux + quantified object + V*
- c) *object (+ aux) + V (in relative clause)*
- d) *object (+ aux) + V (in coordinate clause)*

Pintzuk and Taylor (2004) refuted van der Wurff’s (1999) proposal in their work titled “why and how Early English is not Icelandic”. They used quantitative evidence to disprove the hypothesis that the word order patterns with negative and quantified objects behaved the same way in Old English and Modern Icelandic. However, if we look at this conclusion through the lens of the Viking hypothesis (2014), which is that Middle English did not descend from Old English but rather Old Norse, this investigation into Old English does not disprove their theory. Naturally it does not prove it either. However, if, as van der Wurff (1999) discussed, Middle English shares similarities with Modern Icelandic, and Pintzuk and Taylor (2004) are correct in their claim that Old English does not, then this could provide support for E&F’s theory. This is because it could be an element of Middle English syntax which shares parallels with a Scandinavian language but not with Old English, as they claim many of the syntactic elements in their book do. This could then potentially be added to their list of 20 or so syntactic elements as its own feature of Middle English syntax, rather than a small addition to one of their existing features, namely the change from OV to VO word order overall from Old to Middle English. Van Kemenade (2016) does, however, point out that there is an “established continuity between

OE and late ME OV orders with negated objects” (citing Pintzuk and Taylor, 2006), which may prove difficult to explain in terms of this theory.

The surfacing of OV word order with negative objects in Early to Modern Norwegian also shows similarity to the instances discussed above in Middle English and Modern Icelandic. It is still seen as acceptable by some Norwegian speakers to produce sentences such as (4) and (5) (examples (4) – (9) from S. Ålvik, personal communication), and in fact, the VO word order of this sentence, as in (6) and (7), is not deemed grammatical by any speakers (Sundquist, 2006).

4) Jeg har ingenting sett.

I have nothing seen.

5) Jeg har intet gjort.

I have nothing done.

6) *Jeg har sett ingenting.

I have seen nothing.

7) *Jeg har gjort intet.

I have done nothing.

8) Jeg har ikke sett noe.

I have not seen anything.

9) Jeg har ikke gjort noe.

I have not done anything.

Despite (4) and (5) being viewed as acceptable by some native speakers, however, they are viewed as having a ‘stylistically marked’ or ‘archaic’ quality, and most prefer phrasing these sentences in the style of (8) and (9), using the negative sentential adverb *ikke* and the quantifier *noen* rather than the negative object *ingen*. The fact that (4) and (5) are judged as acceptable by some native speakers but not all, however, shows a similarity with the case of Modern Icelandic and quantified objects, where some quantifiers are judged differently by different speakers in terms of whether they can be allowed in an OV word order or not. This is an interesting slight parallel, as quantified objects in OV contexts are no longer acceptable by native Norwegian speakers, but before this point there likely would have been a time where some speakers judged them acceptable and some didn’t. This could indicate that Modern Icelandic is in this initial stage of losing preverbal quantified objects.

6.4 Discussion

It is interesting to consider that, in terms of the Viking hypothesis, the descendant languages of Old Norse investigated in this section, namely English, Norwegian and Icelandic, all exhibited similar instances of OV word order with negative objects and quantified objects at different times in their history. As Moerenhout and van der Wurff (2004) propose, there would be merit in an in-depth comparison between the relevant syntactic features of 19th century Norwegian, 16th century English and Modern Icelandic of today. This would hopefully show the context for the loss of the OV word order with quantified and negative objects in English and Norwegian (although there are still some remnants of this word order in the latter), and Modern Icelandic could be used as a control, seeing as this loss of OV word order has not yet taken place. Or, as I suggested in the section above, the loss of OV word order with quantified and negative objects in Modern Icelandic could be in its initial stages, due to the fact that some quantifiers depend on speakers' judgements as to whether they are acceptable before a verb or not, and in both Middle English and Modern Norwegian (and other Scandinavian languages (van der Wurff, 1999)) quantified objects were much less likely to appear before a verb, when compared to negative objects.

However, it is not undisputed that Old Norse language contact played a significant role in the change from OV to VO word order in English, due to the presence of VO word orders already in Old English. If it is indeed true that this change in English word order would have happened in any case, and was not due to Scandinavian influence, then naturally it is also unlikely that this smaller element of VO/OV word order, namely OV word order with negative and quantified objects, would be indicative of North Germanic roots in English.

7. Conclusions

To conclude, in this essay I have aimed to shed light on the extent of the Norse influence on Middle English, following the intense, prolonged and memorable presence of Scandinavians in England from the 8th century until the years after the Norman Conquest. In the first part, made up of sections 2 and 3, I examined a range of significant and interesting works on different areas relating to Scandinavian influence, such as the Middle English Creolisation Hypothesis, as well as using data from the OED and the MED (from Moskowich, 1995) to investigate the time period of Norse lexical impact on English. In the second part, sections 4 and 5, I provided

an in-depth evaluation of Emonds and Faarlund's book, *English: Language of the Vikings* (2014) and its reception by the academic community, concluding that the general response was critical and did not support their hypothesis, although there were some positive comments. Finally, in section 6, I considered the OV word order parallels in Middle English and Icelandic (and Norwegian) to assess whether it could be a sign of Norse influence, and conclude that, while it is an interesting parallel, it cannot be shown for certain at this point in time that it supports Norse influence on English.

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