

# The influence of Old Norse on English

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Studij: Preddiplomski studij Engleskog i njemačkog jezika i književnosti

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Mentor: prof. dr. sc. Mario Brdar

Osijek, 2018.

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## **Summary:**

English vocabulary and grammar have been changed and reshaped by several foreign influences through their contact with the English people. Different invaders caused a great difference in the northern and southern English dialect. Due to the contact between various invaders and the natives, these dialects exhibit differences in phonology, morphology, vocabulary and syntax. Norse invasions have influenced the English language, especially the northern part, while the southern part has been noticeably influenced by German invasions.

The first Viking raids started in the 7<sup>th</sup> century. Over 300 years Vikings were invading the English territory, until the Norman invasion, which marked the end of the Viking Age. Territories like East Anglia, Lincolnshire and Northumbria have been raided and plundered. Norse settlers did not only leave their mark on the English territory, culture and history through war, trade and art but they also influenced a noticeable part of the language. Archaic words used before have vanished from the vocabulary, while a small number of words have managed to survive by adapting to the changes in the English language. The purpose of this paper is to distinguish and single out the Old Norse influences from other foreign influences as well as to classify historic influences from the linguistic influence and to establish how productive the Norse influence was on the English Language.

Key words: the English language, the Old English language, Old Norse, Vikings' historical development, Norse influence, grammar, vocabulary, synta

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## 1. Introduction

„The Anglo, Saxons, Jutes, who settled in Britain in the fifth and sixth centuries, though speaking substantially the same language, brought with them their peculiarities of dialects. They established themselves independently in different parts of the country [...]” (Henry Bradley 1968: 19). The British territory was targeted more than once by different invaders. A variety of invaders had several reasons to attack foreign lands. Some of them were in search for new land, while others were led by the aim of conquering and plundering. A great deal of foreign influences have shaped the English language. Old German takes the biggest credit in shaping the English language, while languages like Latin and French also took a great a part in shaping not only the vocabulary but also grammar. The English language also borrowed and adapted words and terms from the Old Norse. What is more, Old Norse and Old English come from the same Germanic family. The same root of the languages helped the Vikings and the Anglo-Saxons to establish some bases of communication. Krause and Slocum state that the “Old Norse may be succinctly characterized as the ‘language of the Vikings’. Indeed the term Viking is found in Old Norse itself; but its’ used in other languages (cf. Old English wicing), where it refers to the seafaring marauders who plagued their shores, typically forms the basis for the modern connotations” (Krause and Slocum).



## 2. Anglo-Norse contact and their social factors

According to Dennis Freeborn “Old Norse is the name now given to the group of Scandinavian languages and dialects spoken by the Norsemen-Danish and Norwegian Vikings.

It was cognate with Old English; that is, they both came from the same earlier Germanic language. It seems likely that the two languages were similar enough in vocabulary for OE speakers to understand common ON words, and vice versa, so that the English and Norsemen could communicate” (1992: 46). The contact between the Anglo-Saxons and the Norse was established when the Norsemen arrived for the first time on the British Isles to conquer and plunder new lands. The biggest difference between those two groups was their different standing point in religion. While the Anglo-Saxons were Christians, the Norsemen were pagans. Their lifestyle and point of view on family and wealth was also different to some extent.

### 2.1 War and invasions

According to the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, the arrival of Vikings in England was recorded in 787 AD. Most of the information about the Viking crusades and invasions is captured in Chronicles, Sagas, artifacts and archaeological evidence. Holman states that “in Scandinavia itself, there are no contemporary written sources that allow historians to select a particular date as either a beginning or an end to the Viking Age, so here the periodization is much more of an approximation, covering the years from c. 750 to c. 1100” (2003: 3).

Viking travelers were portrayed as bloodthirsty and ruthless raiders. Historic documents describe Vikings invasions as merciless and continual attacks on the English territory. Due to the fact that Vikings were pagans and had no understanding for the Christian religion, they have encroached on and raided Christian missionaries. An English Abbey on Lindisfarne situated off the coast in Northumberland was raided by the Vikings in 793 AD. This invasion led the beginning of the Vikings Age and was the first recorded attack of Vikings on the English territory. In that same year Alcuin of York wrote a letter reporting the sight of Norwegian Vikings to the bishop of

Lindisfarne Highbald and King of Northumbria Ethelred. In this letter he reported seeing Vikings sailing across the North Sea to Northumbria. The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle recoded and described the invasion as follows:

“A great famine soon followed these tokens; and a little after that, in the same year, on the 6th before the Ides of January, the ravaging od the *heathen men* lamentably destroyed the God's church at the Lindsfarne throught rapine and slaughter” (Giles 1994: 40).

Monasteries were wealthy targets due to their valuable christian objects. Another reason for the Vikings' continual attacks was the fact that the monasteries were not as safeguarded as the towns. The monks were not trained to carry or wield weapons, therefore the Vikings raids did not involve fleets of thousand men, but rather smaller parties. They plundered abbyes, stealing ecclesiastical silver, golden cups and other artifacts they found to be valuable. Monks were slaughtered and thrown in the sea to drown. Some monks were even captured as slaves. While Lindisfarne Abbey was abandoned after the attack, other monasteris in Scotland and northern England vanished. Some monks from the Lindisfarne abbey managed to flee before the attack, carrying valuable possessions like scrolls and church items. Iona Abbey, situated in Scotland, was attacked subsequently by Vikings raiders. In 806 AD Vikings burned the monastery to the ground and slaughtered 68 Monks. Monks that managed to escape, fled to Kells. They managed to preserve a gospel-book which is now known as ‘Books of Kells’.

According to the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, Vikings were referred as the Heathen Army:

„This year the *heathen army* sat down in Thanet, and *made peace* with the men of Kent, and the men of Kent promised them money for the peace; and during the peace of the promise of money the army stole away by night, and ravaged all Kent to the eastward” (Giles 1994: 49).

In the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle the term *making peace* with the army stands for ‘paying the army off’ so that they would discontinue their raiding and leave the territory. Such bargains would end without success, because the Vikings would not hold their end of the deal. They would take the money and raid the territories disregarding the promises. The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle leaves out crucial information about the Norsemen. The Chronicle does not mention how many men travelled by ship nor how many ships have sailed towards the British Isles. Due to this incomplete

but quite important piece of information it is difficult to reach any further conclusion. It appears that the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle sheds light only upon the certain event and data that is more relevant to the Anglo-Saxon history than it is to the Norse history.

The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle mentions heathen ravaging in 865 AD. This exact year and event is mentioned in the *Tale of Ragnar's Sons*, which tells the great story about a Heathen Army led by the sons of Ragnar Lodbrok (Old Norse: *Ragnarr Loðbrók*) that invaded England. According to Katherine Holman, the Saga of Ragnar Loðbrók mentions Ragnar's sons taking revenge upon King Ælla, who was responsible for Ragnar Lodbrok's death (Holman 2003: 20). The legendary Viking ruler of Sweden and Denmark Ragnar conducted a raid on Northumbria, which resulted in defeat of the Viking army. According to the story, Ragnar was captured by King Ælla and thrown into a snake pit to die. Ivar the Boneless, Björn Ironside, and Sigurd sentenced King Ælla to the gruesome torture-execution called Blood Eagle. According to Firth, in this brutal procedure the shape of the eagle would be cut into the back of the victim, then the ribs would be cut away from the spine and the ribs and lungs would be pulled out to resemble blood-stained wings (2017). Whether Ragnar Lodbrok was an existing person or a mere myth is uncertain to this date. As many other scholars, Katherine Holman expresses her contemporary opinion about the existence of Ragnar Lodbrok. Katherine Holman state that “while the three sons are historical figures, there is no evidence for the existence of a man called Ragnar Loðbrók, and the story of the snake pit is a complete literary fabrication” (2003: 20).

Ivar the Boneless (Old Norse: *Ívarr hinn Beinlausí*) was a Viking warrior and leader. According to the *Tale of Ragnar Lodbrok*, Ivar the Boneless was the son of Ragnar Lodbrok and Aslaug. The origin of Ivar the Boneless' name is still uncertain, but according to the *Tale of Ragnar Lodbrok*, it is believed that Ivar the Boneless suffered from a genetic condition where his bones were deformed called *osteogenesis imperfecta*. The Tale mentions how his condition was caused by a curse. Aslaug who was völva <sup>1</sup> and had the power to predict the future, told her husband that

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<sup>1</sup> Völva is a female shaman and seer in the Norse mythology. According to Llyod, a Völva was considered a Seiðr (sometimes anglicized as seidhr, seidh, seidr, seithr, seith, or seid) is an Old Norse term for a type of sorcery which was practiced in Norse society during the Late Scandinavian Iron Age. (Llyod 2016)

they must wait three days before copulating, but Ragnar was impatient and lustful after his journey, therefore he could not wait three days. Ragnar's son was born with deformation due to his own disobedience. Disregarding his condition, Ivar the Boneless was believed to be a great warrior, commander and strategist.

After avenging the death of their father Ragnar Lodbrok the Ivar and the *Heathen Army* continued invading Northumbria. The army went from East-Anglia to York in Northumbria. They invaded York, which they called at that time Jorvik, in the year 867 AD. According to the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, King Ælla and of Northumbria and Osberth of Northumbria whose throne was usurped share the same enemy and therefore they gathered a large force," and sought they army at the town of York, and stormed the town, and some of them got within and there was an excessive slaughter made of the Northumbrians, some within, some without, and the kings were both slain: and the remained made peace with the army" (Giles 1994:49).

In the years 868 AD the same army went to Nottingham. Burhred, the king of Mercians, begged Ethelred, the king of Wessex, for assistance. King Alfred agreed to help them. Uniting their forces, they travelled to besiege Nottingham, but the battle resolved without a fight, therefore peace was made between the Heathens and the Christians. In 869 AD York served as a base for the heathen army over a whole year. In the year 870 AD the heathen army rode across Mercia to East-Anglia where the chiefs Hingwar and Hubba defeated King Edmund in battle. Due to the similarity between the name Hingwar and Hyngwa, scholars believe that Hingwar is Ivar the Boneless, who travelled along with his brother Hubba, who is more known as Ubba. Abbats and monks were tortured and slain.

The army led by Ivar the Boneless and Olaf the White have conquered Dumbarton in Scotland in 870 AD. Ivar the Boneless returned to Dublin in 871 AD. According to Mike Baker and Geoffrey van Leeuwen, Ivar's body was brought back to England. His body was buried on the coast as a talisman to prevent further conquest of his kingdoms by foreigners. William the Conqueror supposedly had the body dug up and destroyed, making any examination of his remains impossible (2003).

According to Steven Bivans, Professor Martin Biddle from the Oxford University and his wife Birthe Kjølbye-Biddle discovered the remains of an identified human in the 1970s. Thomas Walker, who was a farmer, originally discovered the remains in the 17<sup>th</sup> century but as the time

went on they were forgotten, until Biddle and his wife rediscovered the remains. Professor Biddle suggested that the body belong to a 274 cm tall Viking. Regarding the fact that the body was buried with at least 249 people in Repton, Biddle and his wife concluded that this body belonged to an important Viking leader named Ivar the Boneless. The body was found disemboweled and buried with a boar's tusk and a small Thor's hammer (2014).

According to the Anglo-Saxon chronicle in the year 875 AD the heathen army reached Repton:

"This year *the army* went to *Repton*: and Halfdene went with someone of the army into North-humbria, and took up winter-quarters by the river Tyne. [...] and that summer king Alfred went out to sea with a fleet, and fought against the forces of seven ships, and one of them he took, and put the rest to flight" (Giles 1994: 53).

*The Annals of Ulster* which are annals of medieval Ireland with recorded entries from A.D 431 to A.D 1540 mention the first Viking entry in the year 794 A.D. The annals refers to the Vikings as *gentiles*. After the years 851 the Annals of Ulster refers to them also by the names *foreigner*' and *Northemen*, whereas the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle refers to them Vikings as *heathens* or *Danes*. Calling them *Danes* is not precise. Norse Vikings can be easily mistaken for Danish Vikings due to such unprecise addressing. According to the Annals of Ulster, the Heathen army has been driven away from Dublin and the Irish territory completely in 902 AD:

"Expulsion of Genitels from ireland, i.e. (From) the fortress of Ath-cliath, by Maelfindia, son of Flannacan, with the men of Bregh, and by Cerbhall, son of Murican, with the Leinstermen; when they left a great number of their ships, and escaped half-dead, after having been wounded and broken" (Cathal MacGuire et al. 1887: 417).

At the Battle of Edington in 878 A.D Alfred the Great defeated the Great Heathen Army that consisted of warriors from Denmark, Sweden and Norway under the lead of Guthrum, who was the king of the Danish Vikings. According to Holman, Alfred the Great is an important historical figure, who was not a Scandinavian, but had considerable interaction with Scandinavians. Alfred the Great spent much of his reign repelling Scandinavian raiders, even though Holman states that he is 'not a Viking in any sense of the word' (2003: 3).

After the death of Cnut, who was the king of Denmark, England and Norway in 1036 A.D, Edward the Confessor reigned until his death in 1066. Edward the Confessor's death led to battles for the crown in England. The next leader to claim the throne was Harald Hardrada, a king of Norway. "Harald's claim to the English throne was based on a treaty between Harthacnut and King Magnus the Good Olafsson of Norway, signed in 1036. A fleet of some 200 Norwegian ships sailed up the Humber, landing at Riccall on the River Ouse" (Holman 2003: 121). Harald Hardrada attempt to seize the throne through a battle resulted in failure. Hardrada's invasion which unsuccessful had a great impact on the English history, because it the left a perfect opportunity for Normandy to attack England. The year 1066 is marked as the end of the Viking Age.

## **2.2 Trade and artistry**

The real reasons for the Vikings invasions have been debated among experts, therefore there are still uncertainties. Scholars believe that the Vikings were motivated by overpopulation and lack of viable farmland. Besides the need for conquering new land and expanding their territory, they saw the land as a new opportunity for cultivation. In the early 9<sup>th</sup> century the Viking trade system was unsuccessful due to their piracy. They were more focused on plundering than trading. Gareth William states "that issuing coins was one of the established rights associated with Christian kingship in Europe in the early Middle Ages." He also states that "the Anglo-Saxons themselves had adopted coinage as soon as they converted to Christianity, and the Vikings did just the same" (2017). In the 9<sup>th</sup> century Vikings did not have the sufficient knowledge about coinage and therefore did not understand its importance. Precious metals that they would wear as jewelry were their way of showing wealth and power. Except wearing jewelry they would show their wealth through ornamented weaponry. Even though the Viking culture has influenced the English greatly, the conversion to Christianity is one crucial point out of many, where the English has influenced the Vikings.

Vikings were experts in shipbuilding and navigation. Even though they navigation system is unknown till the present day, they managed to travel and reach distant places. Their ship structures served later as examples for better prototypes. David Welsh states that:

“Viking longboat which remains an engineering marvel had reshaped the people and culture of the British Isles, while simultaneously spreading as far east as modern Russia and as far southeast as modern-day Turkey, where the "Varangian Guard" served Byzantine emperors for centuries. At the heart of it all, of course, was the longboat, their unparalleled means of transportation” (2013).

Brooches, glass bead jewellery and combs were one of most recognizable Viking artifacts. Borre and Oseberg are specific Viking styles in jewel-crafting and artistry. Oseberg contains beast motifs and sinuous animal forms, whereas Borre contains features from the Oseberg and Jelling style. Pieces of such artifacts have been found in Russia, Iceland and England.

### **3. Linguistic factors and contact between Old Norse and English**

The Proto-Germanic language, also referred as Primitive Germanic or Common Germanic, branches into three dialect groups. The problem with the three dialect groups is that the North Germanic, West Germanic and East Germanic were not synchronized and therefore did not exist in exactly the same time. This problem brings the equality of the dialect groups in question. The West Germanic dialect group consist of Anglo-Frisian and Netherlandic German, which are the subcategories of this group. While West Scandinavian and East Scandinavian belong to the North Germanic dialect group, Gothic belongs to East Germanic. What is important in the analysis between Old English (OE) and Old Norse (ON), is the fact that Old English developed from the West Germanic dialect group. While on the other hand, the Old Norse developed from North Germanic dialect group. Regarding the fact that both ON and OE developed from the Proto-Germanic group, these languages have certain aspects in grammar and vocabulary in common. According to Dennis Freeborn, speakers of different language would simplify their own language when talking to each other. “Many of OE words therefore have similar cognate ON words, and often we cannot be sure whether MnE reflex has come from OE or ON, or from both.” He explains how marked words by ‘fr ON’ in dictionaries, which means that the OE words is most likely adopted from the ON, are proof of close contact between the OE and ON (1992: 47). Due to the establish contact and closeness of the two different languages, it is a complex task to decipher whether certain Elements in English language were influenced by the ON or OE. In some cases, it is rather impossible to determine the origin of certain elements,

because they were in usage by both sides before and during their contact. As already mentioned, both Norse and English belonged to the Germanic language family and did not differ much but due to the separation of the Germanic tribes and the fact that the tribes lived in complete isolation, the language of these two tribes changed over the years. These two tribes lived for about 200 years apart, in complete isolation one from another, which only meant that the changes in each language would be made separately, leading the Germanic language to split into more dialect groups.

### 3.1 Contrast between old English and old Norse

Old Norse and Old English, as previously mentioned, belonged before their separation to the same group of languages. Regarding the fact that they came from the same ancestor language, it is logical to assume that they share similarities in vocabulary, phonetics, grammar and syntax. According to Freeborn it is likely that “the two languages were similar enough in vocabulary for OE speakers to understand common ON words, and vice versa, so that the English and Norsemen could communicate” (1992: 52). Whether these two languages were in truth mutually intelligible is yet to be proven. Old Norse and Old English are different and similar in many other aspects in vocabulary, grammar and syntax. Only the most important similarities and differences will be mentioned.

The biggest similarity these two languages share is the fact that both originated from the Germanic language. Old Norse and Old English share strong and weak verbs. Strong verb forms are in the case of these two languages characterized by vowel gradation, while the weak verb forms are formed by suffixes. Both languages share two tenses, viz. the present and the past. Personal pronouns consist of the first and second person in ON and OE and include the dual number. The dual number “is specifically for talking about groups of two things, for example "we two" or "you two" or "they two".<sup>2</sup>The first and second person of pronouns and the dual number added to the pronoun is shown in the *picture 1*. below.

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<sup>2</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Old\\_English\\_grammar](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Old_English_grammar).



### First person

Case	Singular	Plural	Dual
<b>Nominative</b>	ic, ĩc	þē	þit
<b>Accusative</b>	mec, mē	ūsic, ūs	uncit, unc
<b>Genitive</b>	mīn	ūre	uncer
<b>Dative</b>	mē	ūs	unc

### Second person

Case	Singular	Plural	Dual
<b>Nominative</b>	þū	gē	git
<b>Accusative</b>	þec, þē	ēopic, ēop	incit, inc
<b>Genitive</b>	þīn	ēoper	incer
<b>Dative</b>	þē	ēop	inc

3

Picture 1.

According to Gay ‘‘only a few vocalic variations seem to separate the two systems, which are given in the list (2) below, and no differences exist in their consonant inventories, which have remained all but parallel since the time of Common Germanic’’ (2014: 19).

(2)	<u>Old English</u>	<u>Old Norse</u>
	<i>æ</i> - <i>dæg</i> ‘day’	<i>a</i> - <i>dagr</i> ‘day’
	<i>ǣ</i> - <i>rǣd</i> ‘advice, counsel’	<i>á</i> - <i>ráð</i> ‘advice, counsel’
	<i>ā</i> - <i>bān</i> ‘bone’	<i>ei</i> - <i>bein</i> ‘bone’
	<i>ēa</i> - <i>hlēapan</i> ‘to leap’	<i>au</i> - <i>hlaupa</i> ‘to leap’
	<i>ēo</i> - <i>fēower</i> ‘four’	<i>jó</i> - <i>ffórir</i> ‘four’ <sup>8</sup>

Picture 2. (from Gay 2014: 20)

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<sup>3</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Old\\_English\\_grammar](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Old_English_grammar).

Old Norse differs from Old English with only one case of infinitive, while Old English has two infinitives for each verb. The OE infinitive is shown in the example of ‘to sing’, whose infinitives are *singan* and *tō singenne*. Unlike the ON, OE has developed the active voice and a passive voice, which was still not advanced at that time.

### 3.2 Old Norse influences on Old English

‘‘Because the words that survive from Old Norse are often quite close to Old English but replace the native words, the relationship between the two peoples must themselves have been close. It was also in very many ways, quite ordinary, centering on family relationships, normal activities and forms of administration and law’’ (Elaine Treharne 2004). The most borrowed words from the ON in the OE were proper names, place-names, natural or topographical terms. There are two possible existing reasons why it comes to conscious borrowing and adapting between two similar languages. A language mainly borrows terms for things that are unknown or nonexistent, therefore they borrow loanwords to spread their vocabulary and knowledge. This way a language borrows new but foreign words or terms from a foreign language and in some cases changes the borrowed terms. Another reason for borrowing words is the native speaker’s belief that a certain foreign word has more power attached to the word than their own native word. In such case, the native speaker chooses the foreign word over his native word.

The English language has adopted over 100 Norse words. A lot of words that were borrowed belonged to the open-class words, while there were cases where the closed-class words were adapted into the English language as well. One such example is the third person plural pronoun *they*. The personal pronoun was derived from the possessive pronoun *their*, while *their* was originally derived from the ON pronoun *þeir*. The modification of grammar, syntax and pronunciation had also left a great mark on OE.

Certain changes in pronunciation are still evident to date After the Germanic tribe split into the North Germanic group and the West Germanic group changes occurred in the sounds <sk> <sh> and <k> <ch>. The West Germanic group was keen on using <sh>, but due to the contact with ON, they changed <sk> to <sh>. This modification can be seen in the example of *skiold* which appears to be as *shield* after the change. Another change is the /k/ which was replaced by /ch/.

This change is visible in the example *Kildwick* that changes into *Childwick*. The Element /g/ came to substitute /j/, which is also seeable in the example of *Marrick* which changes into *Marige*. Eckman (1981) explains that “these phonological substitutions, like the function word borrowings, are from a modern point of view best understood as imposition effects. The absence of a phoneme in the native language of an adult second language learner is the most common reason, after all, for sound substitutions in second language acquisition, as when English /th/ is replaced by /s,z/ or /t,d/ in the speech of nonnatives” (as cited in Kroch Anthony et. Alii).

Proper nouns and names of places underwent the biggest change. "The Old Norse *eorl* (earl), which originally meant merely a man of noble birth, came to be used in its Scandinavian sense of ruler of a district. Other words of Scandinavian origin are *awe, call, creave, fellow, get, hit, husband, knife, leg, loft, loose, low, odd, root, same, scant, skin, scrip, take, Thursday, thrall, want, wrong*" (Bradely 1904: 84). Old English also borrowed warlike and violent terminology, like *scathe* derived from *skaða*, and *slaughter* derived from *slatra* were borrowed from the Vikings. The word *berserkr*, also derived from the ON into the OE, stood for a berserker who was a Viking warrior dressed in leather armor. The word berserker or *slatra* are great examples of the OE borrowing term which they did not have from the ON. Angelika Lutz explain how "Dieter Kastovsky (2006: 33) characterizes the early loans from Old Norse as mainly technical terms for ships, money, legal institutions, warface. etc." and concludes that "the relatively low number of loans in the earlier period is typical of cultural clash, where words denoting referents unknown to one language are borrowed by the other, especially when this is the language of the rulers, as was the case in the Danelaw" (as cited Angelika Lutz 2010: 19-21).

Bradly explains that "there has been a curious tendency to grow dissatisfied with the tameness of the verbs denoting violent actions, such as throwing or dealing blows, and to substitute more emphatic synonyms" (1904 : 165). Bradely explains his theory on "the Old English word for 'to throw' was *weorpan*, identical with the German *werfen*. The Germans have been content to keep the old verb in use, but in English it was superseded by cast (adopted from the Old Norse), and this is its turn by throw (corresponding to te German *drehen*), which properly meant to twist or wrench" (1904 : 165).

The ON also had influences on place names. Towns in the northeast of England which end with *-by* were influenced by the Norse. *Whitby, Willerby and Grimsby* are examples of such towns. While the Norse place names ended with *-by*, the OE place- names ended with *-tun*, as is the place

called *Withington*. The Old Norse also influenced the names of days. According to Jordan John-Erik, Thursday (*Porsdagr*) is one of the most noticeable Norse influences on the English language. Jordan explains “that Thursday stands for *Thor’s day*. ‘*Tuesday, Wednesday and Friday* are sometimes also attributed to the Norse gods *Tyr, Odin and Freya*, respectively; but the days are actually named after the Anglo-Saxon equivalents of these gods, *Tiw, Wodan and Friga*. The similarity of these names points to the common ancestry of the various Germanic tribes in prehistoric northern Europe — centuries before their descendants clashed on England’s shores” (Jordan 2015).

The Norse Language was also accountable for the number of synonyms in the English language, which had only enriched the language. Examples of such synonymy are *hide* and *skin* and *no* and *nay*. Bradely explains the interesting origin behind the words cross:

“The word *cross* of course comes ultimately from Latin, but its form is due to the Northmen who had lent it from Christians of Ireland. Some of our common words, which existed in Old English, have been assimilated to the kindred Scandinavian synonyms: thus *sister* descends not from the Old English *sweostor*, but the old Norse *syster*” (1904: 84).

It is also extremely necessary to include words that have been borrowed from the ON, but have changed semantically in the English language. *Sky* is a great example for such an instance. In ON *sky* stood for *cloud*, while in the English *sky* stands for *atmosphere*.

### **3.3 Old Norse influence on Middle English**

The Middle English dates from the year 1150 to the year 1500. Middle English developed from Old English. The development underwent through some extreme changes. Number of features that were integrated in the Old English have disappeared and some features in syntax and phonology have been simplified over time. After the fall of the Viking Age, England battled with new invaders. With the rise of the Norman Conquest, English underwent a great change. The invention of the printing press made the writing process in the Middle Ages profoundly easier. Due to the printing press, there are more historical writing in Middle English than in Old English. The change between in these two same but different languages can be seen through the comparison

of written historical materials. The Middle English had been influenced greatly by the Norman and Latin language, but there are fewer examples where the Middle English was influenced by the Old Norse. Even though a smaller number of Norse words has survived and adapted in the English language, there are many words that are now obsolete.

According to Bator, "Authors agree that historical events such as invasions are one of the most important factors of obsolescence." Bator states that "the Norman Conquest was one of the primary reasons which contributed to the loss of a number of Scandinavian loan words present in English" (2010). Some loanwords from the ON have undergone a change in semantics. Through time, words like *husband* derived from the ON *húsbóndi* changed meaning in the Middle English. *Húsbóndi* in ON stood for 'a farmer of the house', but after the change in meaning now it stands for a 'man that is bound to a woman through marriage'

Another considerable change is the English plural, which differs from the OE plural. Today, we have only two instances that have survived since the Middle English that indicate the plural form. The endings *-s* and *-es* indicate plural, but today we still have some irregular indications of plural like the singular word *foot* which appears in the plural form as *feet*. Another example of such a case is *ox* which appears in the plural form as *oxen*. Through the contact the OE terminated their inconsistent plural form and adapted to the suffix *-s* or *-es*. At the beginning of the contact between ON and OE, the latter did not have a formed system of inflection. Not only have the noun endings been lost or altered but also the adjective marking has gone through a change. Adjectives received the demonstrative forms *the, this, that, these and those*. The genitive case marked by *-s* was passed from the Old English into the Middle English. The loss of person pronouns in the Middle English is yet another important change. The Old English pronouns *hīe, hīera, him, and hīe* were changed for loanwords from the Old Norse language and integrated into the Middle English.

Another example where the ON language influences the OE is the ending *-ling*. It "can be said to have had a diminutive force in Old English, but it was frequently so used in Old Norse, as in *gǫeslingr*, which was adopted into English as *gosling* (dialectally *gesling*). The Norse suffix has in Modern English become quite common as means of forming diminutive nouns. We have *kingling, princeling, squireling*, and many similar words" (Bradley 1904: 138).

Old Norse has not only influences phonetics and vocabulary but also the English syntax. According to Braumüller, the SVO order in English "has had consequences for the position of the particle: it has become consistently postposed" (as cited Angelika Lutz 2010: 32). Elenbaas states "Judging from the Old Icelandic evidence of the 13th century, Old Norse particle verb must have been structurally very similar to those of Old English" (as cited Angelika Lutz 2010: 32).

### 3.4 Norse loanwords in the English language

The OE borrowed terms from the ON that mostly belonged to administration and warfare. To date, there are about 150 ON loanwords that have left their mark on the English language. On the other hand, there is a great deal of borrowed words which was used in the OE but became obsolete over the time.

In the following table borrowed terms from the ON in the OE are handed. The table shows how the ON words have changed over time. The table is divided in three categories. In the category Old Norse words, ON terms are displayed, while in the categories Contemporary English words and Middle English words displays ON loanwords that have undergone a graphophonic change. Graphophonic changes are more evident in some words, while in others they are considerably smaller. An example for a more evident graphophonic change is the ON word *byrðr*, which changed over time to *birth*. A less evident graphophonic change is shown in the ON word *ský* which changed to *sky*. The word *ský* underwent a semantic change and therefore is a case of such change. The initial meaning of the word *ský* was cloud but today sky stand for everything that lies above the surface of the Earth, including the atmosphere and outer space.<sup>4</sup> In the table there are examples of words that state no evident graphophonic change. Such examples are the words *saga* and *egg*. Semantic changes of the words are not stated. Most of the given words have not changed in meaning, while a smaller number has gone through some semantic change that does not deviate from the intended meaning but rather takes on a more restricted meaning. An example of such a quality is the word *hūsbōndi*. In the ON and OE *hūsbōndi* stood for a householder or a

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<sup>4</sup> <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sky>

master of house. Today the word husband stands for the man to whom a woman is married; a married man.<sup>5</sup>

<b>contemporary English words</b>	<b>middle English words</b>	<b>Old Norse words</b>
anger (n.)	anger	angra
bag (n.)	bag	baggi
food (n.)	bait	beit
ball (n.)	ball	böllr
berserk (adj.)	berserk	berserker
birth (n.)	birth	byrðr
bleak (adj.)	bleak	bleikr
bull (n.)	bull	boli
cast (v.)	cast	kasta
dead (v.)	die	deyja
egg (n.)	egg	egg
fellow (n.)	fellow	felagi
fjord (n.)	fjord	fjörthr
freckle (n.)	frecken	freknur
gosling (n.)	gesling	gæslingr
guest (n.)	guest	gestr
hunt or chase (v.)	bait	beita
husband (n.)	husband	hūsbōndi
knife (n.)	knife	knífr
leg (n.)	leg	leggr

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<sup>5</sup> <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/husband>

likely (adv.)	likely	líkligr
mistake (n.)	mistake	mistaka
outlaw(n.)	outlaw	utlagi
race (n.)	race	rás
raft (n.)	rafter	raptr
raise (v.)	raise	reisa
ransack (v.)	ransack	rannsaka
reindeer (n.)	reindeer	hreindýri
rive (v.)	rive	rifa
root (n.)	root	rót
saga (n.)	saga	saga
same (adj.)	same	sami
scare (v.)	scare	skirra
seat (n.)	seat	sæti
skin (n.)	skin	skinn
skirt (n.)	skirt	skyrta
sky (n.)	sky	ský
slaughter (v.)	slaughter	sláhtr
slave (n.)	thrall	thræll
sly (adj.)	sly	sløegr
snub (v.)	snub	snubba
stagger (v.)	stagger	staka
steak (v.)	steak	steik
take (v.)	take	taka
tarn (n.)	tarn	tjörn
awe (n.)	awe	agi
thrift (v.)	thrift	thrifta
thrust (v.)	thrust	thrýsta



thwart (v.)	thwerte	thver
valkyrie (n.)	valkyrie	valkyrja
wand (n.)	wand	vǫndr
wicked, harmful, ill (adj.)	ill	illr
window (n.)	window	vindauga
wing (n.)	wing	vængr
wrong (adj. /adv.)	wrong	rangr

In the table above there are 55 examples of ON loanwords that are used in the contemporary English language. The displayed verbs, nouns, adjectives and adverbs belong to the most frequent and significant ON loanwords in the English Language. To conclude, the table proves that the contemporary English language was influenced by the ON language. ON loanwords are to date evident in the English language, although they underwent graphophonic and semantic changes over time.

#### **4. Conclusion**

The goal of this paper was to show the relationship and the well-established contact between the Old Norse and the Old English. Many Norse words, which have influenced the English language and are today a part of it, have become essential in everyday speech. Without the Old Norse influence the English language would look and sound a lot different from how it is today.

Norse words that have been introduced to the English language have not only left their mark on the English language but also helped reshape it. The Norse words that managed to survive in the English language and are visible even today. They belong to different categories: warfare, law, objects, phenomena, weaponry and personal. The Norsemen did not only manage to reshape the language but also managed to leave traces in the culture and history on the English territory and historical books. Even though there are borrowed words from the ON that managed to survive, there is a great deal of borrowed words which became obsolete over the time.

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