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Trabajo de Fin de Grado

Scandinavian influence in the East

Midlands: the case of *The Peterborough*

Chronicle

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Abstract

The Danes were present in England for centuries with constant raids that culminated in the Danish conquest of Cnut the Great in 1016. This essay will attempt to determine the linguistic influence of this conquest by analysing the first lines of the entry for 1137 of *The Peterborough Chronicle*. This text has been chosen for this study because it was written in Cambridgeshire and reflects the East Midlands dialect during the evolution from Old English to Middle English.

Firstly, there are several examples of Scandinavian vocabulary in the manuscript. Furthermore, there are English words whose spelling was modified to show Danish phonology. Secondly, syntax and morphology were also affected, to the extent that the third person ending *-s* in verbs is thought to have a Scandinavian origin. This short analysis leads to the conclusion that the Danes conditioned the East Midlands dialect, which is considered by some experts to be the predecessor of Standard English.

Key words: Old English, Middle English, Peterborough Chronicle, Danelaw, Scandinavian Influence.

Resumen

Los daneses estuvieron presentes en Inglaterra durante siglos, con constantes incursiones que culminaron en la invasión danesa llevada a cabo por Canuto el grande en 1016. Con este trabajo se intentará determinar la influencia lingüística de la conquista por medio de un análisis de las primeras líneas de la entrada de 1137 de *The Peterborough Chronicle*. Se ha escogido este texto para este estudio debido a que fue escrito en Cambridgeshire y refleja el dialecto de las East Midlands durante el paso de inglés antiguo a inglés medio.

En primer lugar, hay numerosos ejemplos de vocabulario escandinavo en el manuscrito. De hecho, se pueden encontrar palabras inglesas cuya grafía ha sido modificada por la influencia de la fonología danesa. En segundo lugar, la sintaxis y la morfología también se vieron afectadas, hasta el punto de que se cree que la desinencia verbal de tercera persona *-s* tiene un origen escandinavo. Con este análisis se ha llegado a la conclusión de que los daneses condicionaron el dialecto de las East Midlands, el cual es considerado por muchos expertos como el predecesor del inglés estándar actual.

Palabras clave: inglés antiguo, inglés medio, Peterborough Chronicle, Danelaw, Escandinavismos.

List of abbreviations

EDD	English Dialect Dictionary
eModE	early Modern English
ME	Middle English
n.	Noun
PdE	Present Day English
OE	Old English
OED	Oxford English Dictionary
Vb.	Verb.

Introduction

The aim of this study is to analyse the linguistic influence of the Danish invasions during the Old English period. The Vikings were present in the island for centuries, so it should be expected to find many Scandinavian features in it. For my sample analysis I have chosen lines 1-24 of the entry for 1137 of *The Peterborough Chronicle*. This text was written in Cambridgeshire during early ME. This main objective can be divided into some sub objectives:

- To detect Scandinavisms in the manuscript and analyse their importance and presence to Present Day English.
- To study the impact of the Danes on Old English grammar and morphology.
- To determine whether the Scandinavians influenced the English language at all in the transition from OE to ME.

In this essay, the main focus will be on the entry for 1137. It describes “the nineteen terrible years of Stephen’s reign (1135-1154), the successes of Abbot Martin who died in 1155, and the martyrdom of St William of Norwich in 1144” (Burrow and Turville-Petre 87). The *Oxford English Dictionary* (hereinafter OED) will help to determine the etymology and history of the early Middle English words.

Scandinavian invasions

As it is recorded by Bede in *Historia Ecclesiastica Gentis Anglorum* (composed in about AD 731), England was occupied by three Germanic tribes known as Angles, Saxons and Jutes. They were invited by the Britons as they needed help to fight the Picts and the Scots in the North of the island. It seems likely the Britons were helpless

after the Roman Empire abandoned England in AD 410, so the Germanic tribes took advantage of their situation and settled in Great Britain.

The Anglo-Saxons soon conquered what is known nowadays as England. It is difficult to establish the beginning of Old English; as stated by Baker, the Anglo-Saxons created an extensive body of vernacular literature, and important poems like *Beowulf* that may date from the eighth century (3).

There was no sense of country in England during this time. The land was divided into seven kingdoms: Northumbria, Mercia, East Anglia, Kent, Essex, Sussex, and Wessex. Initially Kent was believed to be the most prosperous one, but in the seventh century the power shifted from the South to the kingdom of Northumbria, which became the centre of literature and learning. In the eighth century, Mercia also gained power when King Offa proclaimed himself King of England.

However, during the last decades of the eighth century, Viking raids began in Northumbria, East Anglia, Essex and Kent. At first, the Danes organized small incursions in the undefended coasts of Britain, but they managed to gather a large army and attacked the island in 865. They won many battles, until Alfred the Great of Wessex (848-899) defeated the Danish army and prevented them from conquering the whole country. However, the Danes settled in what is known as the 'Danelaw'. In fact, the Danes managed to conquer England fifty years before the Norman Conquest, when Cnut the Great's campaigns on the island were successful and he became King of England (Howard 140-141). He married Emma of Normandy, who was the mother of Edward the Confessor. His childless death provoked the Norman Conquest in 1066, marking the end of the Danish conquest and the beginning of the ME period.

The ‘Danelaw’ is “the northern, central and eastern parts of Anglo-Saxon England in which Danish law and custom were observed” (Collins Dictionary). The Danes did not occupy this vast area, but their military power was dominating enough to leave their mark on English culture. The English grammar and vocabulary were affected in many ways, as it will be seen later.



Picture 1. Map of England during the Danish conquest and the location of the city of Peterborough (Botev 2006).

The Peterborough Chronicle

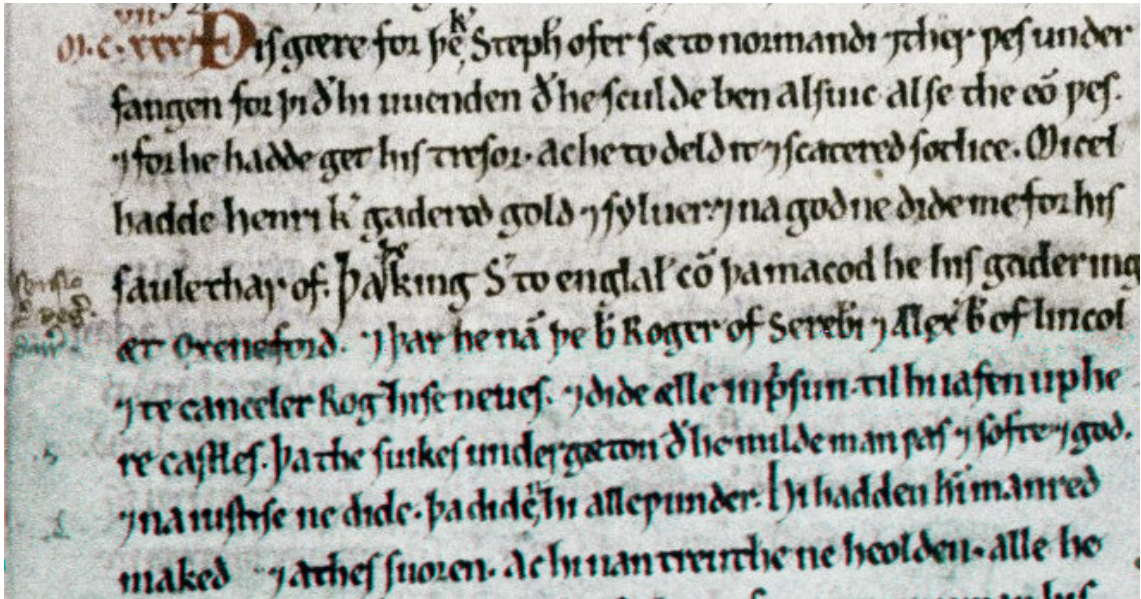
The *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* is a collection of manuscripts written in Wessex during the reign of Alfred the Great in the ninth century. This collection records the history of Britain from the birth of Christ, through the Roman conquest until the eighth century.

Two hundred years later, the monks in Peterborough Abbey in Cambridgeshire elaborated a version of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*. This version of the manuscript is considered to be the longest and fullest, and contains essential information for the history of England and the English language. It is divided into three parts:

- The first part, written before 1122, consists of a copied version of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle.
- Between 1122 and 1131, the scribe added entries dealing with events of that time. This second part is known as the First Continuation.
- Finally, between 1131 and 1155, a different scribe added what is known as the Final Continuation.

These last two parts have been studied and analysed by experts, as they are an original document that has been preserved throughout the centuries. *The Peterborough Chronicle* is one of the first examples of English literature written after the Norman Conquest in 1066. It reflects the dialect of the East Midlands, which is usually considered as the ancestor of standard PdE. As it is stated by Shores:

The interest in the First and Final Continuations of The Peterborough Chronicle has been exceptional, not only because of their general linguistic importance as twelfth century English, but also because of their use as a source in the study of such historical problems as the fixation of word order and the loss of inflections, the loss of grammatical gender, the development of relative pronouns, vocabulary, and the auxiliary-main verb pattern, to name some. (20)



Picture 2. The first lines of the entry for 1137 of *The Peterborough Chronicle*. It is now held by the Bodleian Library (Oxford).

The Peterborough Abbey (Cambridgeshire) is located in the Danelaw, 120km North of London. Therefore, as it is expected of a text written in the East Midlands, it reflects several Scandinavian elements, which will constitute the main body of this essay.

Signs of Scandinavian influence

The Danes had a great influence in Cambridgeshire, as it was part of the Danelaw before the Norman Conquest. The scribe of the 'Final Continuation' of *The Peterborough Chronicle* reflects the dialect of the East Midlands and makes use of several Scandinavian words along this part of the manuscript. Due to the length of the manuscript, the main focus of this study will be put on the first lines of the 1137 entry.

Vocabulary

In line 18, the scribe makes use of the Scandinavianism <carlman> (men). It seems that the scribe grouped together Old Norse <karl> and the English word <man>.

According to the OED, the Scandinavian word was sometimes found in OE, during the times of the Danish kings, in compound words such as *hús-carl* or *butse-carl* (or *carl-man* as in this text), but never as a separate word. It was not until ME that the word was introduced into English, resulting in Present Day <carl>. This word is almost obsolete, with the meaning of “a man of the common people, a bondman, a churl”. In Scotland, it passed into a “vague term of disparagement or contempt, and chiefly with appropriate epithets”.

In line 24, the word <hærnes> means *brains*. However, according to the OED, the PdE word <brain> is derived from the OE form <bræg(e)n>. It may be found in ME as <breyne(e), brawn, breyn(e)>.

The form <hærnes> was taken from Old Norse <harns>, which was usually used in plural. Even though the word is obsolete nowadays, OED indicates that it is still used in certain regions of Scotland. *The English Dialect Dictionary* (hereinafter EDD), finds it also in nineteenth century texts from Northumberland, Cumberland, Westmorland, Yorkshire, and Lancashire. Therefore, the presence of this Dane word in several Northern dialects proves the impact of the Danish conquest in ME. It is interesting that some compound nouns were born from this Scandinavism such as *harnless* (meaning “brainless”) and *harn-pan* (meaning “the brain-pan or skull”).

Old Norse <harns> entered directly in Middle English.

Phonology

The transitive verb *scatter*, which meant “to dissipate, squander (goods or possessions)” (OED *Scatter*, *vb.*), is now obsolete. OED indicates its obscure origin. However, it shows that it had different spellings in ME: in Northern and East Midlands

texts, it was common to find forms like <scatere, skater, scater> representing the initial /sk/. However, in Southern texts, it is more common the initial /ʃ/, represented with the digraph <sh> or <sch>.

It is widely known that Scandinavians preferred the velar consonants such as /k, g/ instead of affricates or palatals. The presence of the Danes in the North and East of England influenced these dialects and provoked doublets such as <kirk> in the North and <chirche> in the South.

The same difference between North (influenced by Old Norse) and South is manifested in the spelling of the word <sculde>. In Middle English, the most common spellings were <schulde, schude, sholde> representing the initial voiceless palato-alveolar fricative. However, the *Peterborough Chronicle* represents a dialect of the East Midlands, and the spelling <sculde> is affected by Old Norse, probable representing a pronunciation with /sk/.

Third person pronouns: the case of *she*

The third person singular pronouns were inflected by gender during OE. This inflection is retained in the entries written before 1121, as it is a copy of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*.

	Masculine	Neuter	Feminine	Plural
Nominative	Hē 'he'	Hit 'it'	Hēo 'she'	Hīe 'they'
Accusative	Hine 'him'	Hit 'it'	Hīe 'her'	Hīe 'them'
Genitive	His 'his'	His 'its'	Hire 'her'	Hira 'their'
Dative	Him 'him'	Him 'it'	Hire 'her'	Him 'them'

Table 1. *Third-person singular pronouns in Old English* (Baker 42).

It was not until late ME that the personal pronoun system experienced the collapse of the dative and accusative case distinction. The dative predominated in the

masculine, feminine, and plural, whereas the accusative predominated in the neuter (Curzan 301).

The beginning of the loss of inflection is observable throughout the *Peterborough Chronicle*: the pronouns of the first section of the text are highly inflected and belong to Old English. Nevertheless, in the First and Final Continuation, the text shows pronouns that are much closer to those of PdE. It was not until late ME that the personal pronoun system experienced the collapse of the dative and accusative case distinction (301).

- The masculine singular pronoun barely changed: <he> remained as the common option for the nominative, and <his> for the genitive. The *Peterborough Chronicle* already uses <him> as a direct object.

- The neuter singular pronoun lost the initial <-h> in the nominative (Northern development). However, the form <its> did not appear until early Modern English, and <his> remained as the most common form for the genitive.

The plural and feminine forms followed more complex developments.

- The plural th- form was not adopted until eModE by Scandinavian influence. Of course, they first appeared in the North, an area inscribed inside the old Danelaw. It is believed by experts that the th- forms were adopted across the country seeking a better communication. The third person masculine pronoun and the plural were phonologically very close, so the Norse plural pronoun seemed like a better option.

The etymology of the pronoun <she> has been the subject of debate for as long as the history of the English language has been studied. Experts cannot decide whether

the actual form is derived from OE <hēo, hīo> or OE <sēo, sīo>. Of course, both options present an important problem: developing the voiceless palato-alveolar fricative /ʃ/.

It seems like Britton offered a possible solution to this problem in his 1991 article, where he states that Present Day <she> is definitely derived from OE <hēo, hīo>. Through a process of ‘resyllabification’ by **Scandinavian influence**, he gets the initial palato-alveolar fricative /ʃ/. Then, with a poorly supported theory, he states that there was a blending between a ‘stressed form’ /he:/ and an ‘unstressed form’ /ço:/. Regardless the veracity of this evolution, it seems almost certain that the forms <hēo, hīo> are the basis for PdE <she>. The influence of the Danes seems clear taking into account that Old Norse went through a process or resyllabification of diphthongs during the 11th century. (Britton)

It should be noted that these changes on the pronouns started in the North. This fact only supports the theory of the Scandinavian influence in the new third-person singular feminine pronoun. In fact, the first appearance of the form <scæ> can be found in the Final Continuation of the *Peterborough Chronicle*. It is not a coincidence that the first spelling indicating the /ʃ/ pronunciation appears in a manuscript from a monastery in the Danelaw.

-s plural

During late OE, there was a process of loss of distinctiveness of vowels in unstressed syllables and inflectional endings. In most parts of England, this meant the birth of schwa /ə/ in this weakly stressed position. This schwa, which was generally represented graphically by means of <e>, brought about a huge simplification of inflexions and diminished the grammatical gender distinction in English.

This process of simplification did not happen at once, but took several years and with different rates depending on the dialect area. As it happened with other processes mentioned in this study, it started in the North and the East Midlands due to Scandinavian influence. It is believed by some linguists that the Danes who settled in England found the Anglo-Saxon plural system too complex. Both OE and Old Norse are believed to have been mutually intelligible during the Danish invasions (Haugen 138), so this could explain why the West Midlands and the South were not so innovative. This difference between North and South was illustrated by Burrow and Turville-Petre:

In very many respects the language of these latter works (*The Owl and The Nightingale*, Lazamon's *Brut* and *Ancrene Wisse*) is much more conservative than that of *The Peterborough Chronicle*, and represents a transitional system undergoing a process of simplification and loss that was already well advanced in the North and East. (20)

One of the most relevant Scandinavian influenced changes in inflexion during early ME was the ending on plural nouns. In OE all nouns were declined according to the case and grammatical gender; furthermore, they were divided into strong, weak, athematic, etc. When *The Peterborough Chronicle* was written, the most common marker of plural in the Eastern dialect was <-es> (or reduced to <-s>). This evolution of the ending in plural nouns in *The Peterborough Chronicle* was fully studied by Hotta (following the ideas of Roedler). He found out that even though the first part provides some evidence of the s-plural spreading over the unhistorical cases, the second part shows a great step forward to the dominance of -s (10).

One of the clearest examples of this plural can be found in line 12 of the 1137 entry: "nan treuthe ne heolden. Alle he wæron forsworen and here treotthes forloren".

The plural <treothes> is indicated by the scribe by means of the ending –s. In the same line, the reader can appreciate the contrast with the singular <treuthe>.

Conclusion

After a thorough analysis of the Scandinavian influenced elements in these few lines of *The Peterborough Chronicle*, it may be concluded that the Danish influence seemed to be crucial in the development of the East Midlands dialect. This dialect is considered to be the predecessor of the Standard English, and the manuscript reflects the changes English was going through during the 12th century on its way to ME.

By studying the evolution of the third person pronouns and the plural inflections, it can be stated that, during that time in Peterborough, the scribes were more innovative than those in the South and West. The ‘Danelaw’ was a pioneering territory in setting the basis for the English we use nowadays. The Vikings also influenced English vocabulary and its pronunciation, to the extent that in these few lines there are several examples of Scandinavisms, both lexical and phonological. These changes came about due to the presence of the Scandinavian settlers.

In the future, it would be interesting to study in depth the signs of Scandinavian lexical and phonological influence from OE to ME in *The Peterborough Chronicle*.

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