Recently, the role of Scandinavian influence on English has become a controversial topic. Towards the end of 2012, Terje Faarlund (together with Joseph Edmonds) claimed that modern English is a Scandinavian language, causing widespread reaction in cyberspace. National newspapers, such as Norway’s Aftenposten, and international outlets, such as the online Economist, as well as a number of language professionals and enthusiasts picked up the story. Traditionally, students have learned and teachers have taught that Norse exerted an important if limited influence on early English lexis. For example, both Barbara Strang’s past classic and Dieter Kastovsky’s recent chapter on vocabulary assert that Scandinavian lexical influence is surpassed only by Latin before the influx of French in the long wake of the Norman Conquest. While scholars have also recognized the structural influence of Scandinavian, Faarlund’s and Edmond’s contention that modern English is fundamentally a Scandinavian language with some West Germanic coloring flew in the face of much conventional wisdom. Faarlund’s article, which appeared in the University of Oslo’s research magazine, and his online response to a colleague’s detailed criticism offered a few examples and principles. Specific points raised to illustrate the similarities included word order, the group genitive and the split infinitive; a more comprehensive argument was yet to come. In


rather stark contrast to such bold but rather sparsely supported claims about the influence of Scandinavian on English, Sara Pons-Sanz’s most recent book, *The Lexical Effects of Anglo-Scandinavian Linguistic Contact on Old English* (2013), marks a little over a decade of new research into Anglo-Scandinavian linguistic contact that has tested and refined many of the assumptions that lay behind the conventional wisdom doing so in careful, if not headline-grabbing, fashion that will serve future scholars. This short review offers a brief survey of these important contributions. *Lexical Effects* represents Pons-Sanz’s third book on the subject with each contribution incorporating an increasingly broad corpus and scope. From Aldred’s glosses in the Lindisfarne Gospels (Pons Sanz 2000) to a detailed study of Norse-derived words in the works of Wulfstan (Pons-Sanz 2007), the present work now encompasses the entire corpus of Old English, offering a tried methodology for the period. In addition to Pons-Sanz’s contributions, two related studies, namely Richard Dance’s *Words Derived from Old Norse in Early Middle English* (2003), and slightly more distant, Matthew Townend’s *Language and History in Viking Age England* (2002) have examined the relationship between early English and Old Norse. As a whole, these works represent a considerable refinement of our assessment of Scandinavian influence on and linguistic contact with early English and offer a firm foundation for future work that promises to address the structural influence of Scandinavian on English.

The recognized proximity and similarities shared by Old Norse and Old English have long spurred questions regarding mutual intelligibility between the two languages. Influential scholars weighed in on both sides, but the subject received its first extensive, book-length study with the appearance of Matthew Townend’s *Language and History*. Townend’s work engaged with Old English, Anglo-Latin and Old Norse texts for evidence of contact between speakers, both in examining the way in which Scandinavian material (such as Ælfric’s handling of Scandinavian gods in his homiletic writing) is incorporated into texts as well as the representation of interlinguistic exchanges. In addition, although many of the present-day methods used to measure mutual intelligibility cannot be applied to the distant past, Townend nevertheless argued that modern approaches, cast broadly as empirical, anecdotal, philological and social, can be used to create a reliable overall picture. In particular, Townend considered “test-the-informant” tests (or Recorded Text Tests), where sentences and passages spoken by a speaker of one dialect are played back to the speaker of another dialect, who is asked a series of questions to ascertain his/her comprehension. While these tests are unavailable when dealing with historic language contact, Townend queried evidence from place-names to demonstrate the mechanisms of intelligibility that such tests are meant to illustrate. In short, cognate substitution in place-names by new arrivals suggests dialect intelligibility whereby a speaker is aware of the sound and lexical
correspondences between the speech of groups and this understanding is reflected in adaptations. Specifically, Townend pointed to 192 Old English place names in which Norse arrivals switched their own forms for cognate indigenous forms (for example, ON *heimr for OE *hām). The area is broader and the rate higher than one would expect if mutual intelligibility was limited to a small number of individuals.

Consequently, Townend concluded that Viking Age England was a bilingual society, but not a society comprised of bilingual individuals (2002: 195). In other words, the period demonstrates “adequate or pragmatic intelligibility”, that is “the ability to understand individual words…and so to preclude the need for one or both speech communities in the Danelaw to become bilingual, or for interpreters to be habitually used for the purposes of Anglo-Norse communication” (2002: 183).

The argument for intelligibility reinforces our conception of the proximity of the languages, but at the same time emphasizes (due to the proximity) the difficulty in ascertaining the origins of individual words even with historical hindsight. As a result, the assertions and lists of many handbooks do not adequately assess the process of Norse influence on English lexis. Indeed, easily identified “loan-words” are but one part of the picture of lexical influence. In his study of Norse influence on the lexis of a group of texts from the South-West Midlands (namely, the AB-group (*Ancrene Wisse*, the “Katherine Group”, and the “Wohunge group”), and Layamon’s *Brut*, selected “Lambeth Homilies”, the “Worcester fragments” and the glosses of the tremulous hand of Worcester), Richard Dance considered an expanded range of lexical borrowing. Employing taxonomic systems developed by Helmut Gneuss and Einar Haugen that now figure in handbooks of historical linguistics, Dance examined not only “loanwords”, that is the simple importation of a foreign item without any obvious morphemic substitution, but also their opposite “loanshifts”, which include “loan-translations” (often commonly known as “calques”, morpheme-for-morpheme recreations of foreign compounds) and “semantic loans”, wherein the sense or meaning of a word in another language is borrowed. Additionally, Dance considered hybrid creations, terms formed on the basis of borrowed material, but created using the word-formation processes of the borrowing language.

In addition to expanding our framework for considering the effects of contact, Dance challenged traditional views that linked Scandinavian loans to Scandinavian settlement in the early Middle English period. While traditional attempts to situate the South-West Midland texts viewed their Norse lexis as the basis for an area that had Scandinavian settlement, Dance, on the other hand, decoupled lexis

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5. See Dance 2003: 94–97; Pons-Sanz uses the term “new formations” (2013: 5) for these loans.
from settlement, arguing that Norse-derived terms were already widely present in the period, because the terms entered Northern dialects at an early date and then spread either through written documents or amongst speakers, a particular process that is unpredictable and difficult to assess fully. Consequently, the appearance of Norse-derived terms in these texts should be considered not as an argument for specific dialects, but rather as part of the usage of the writers. To this end, Dance provided an analysis of Scandinavian loan words as they appeared in their literary contexts, namely in marked registers such as alliterative collocations where Dance detected a stylistic motivation and concluded that Norse vocabulary was a stylistic resource for the writers of these early Middle English texts. While Dance limited his study temporally and geographically so as to provide a more thorough-going analysis his conclusion called for wider contextualization: “the place of the Norse-derived element in the usage of the Southwest Midlands can be appreciated as fully as possible only in the context of much further and more detailed investigation into the origins, nature and development of the ultimately Scandinavian vocabulary as a whole” (2003: 329).

Using many of the same methods elaborated by Dance and voicing many similar concerns, Sara Pons-Sanz’s *Norse-Derived Vocabulary in Late Old English Texts* addressed possible and probable Scandinavian loan-words in the apt figure of Wulfstan who served as bishop of London, Worcester and archbishop of York, and legalist for both Æthelred (r. 978–1013 and 1014–1016) and Cnut (r. 1016–1035). This corpus represents something unique in that it can be tied to a specific figure whose career, which spanned both English and Scandinavian rulers, offers a specific context for linguistic contact. As such the contextual understanding, that is the stylistic, lexical and semantic analysis of the use of certain Norse-derived words that served as the hallmark of Dance’s book, takes on a similar but different scope in considering the lexical choices of an individual. Previous attempts to explain the archbishop’s use of Norse-derived terms focused on his contacts in York, his addressing a Scandinavian audience, and his possible East Anglian origin. Characteristic of Pons-Sanz’s emphasis on probabilities, she eschewed any single monolithic answer – “it is...generally speaking, too simplistic to give one single reason for the selection of a Norse-derived term” (2007: 229) – but rather recognized that the writer made choices in employing certain words and that the motivation for one choice need not apply to a subsequent choice. As a result, it is difficult to distinguish whether much of the legal vocabulary for which Scandinavian influence is known can be attributed specifically to Wulfstan’s influence or more vaguely to broader trends. Sensibly, Pons-Sanz suggested that Wulfstan’s influence lies in part behind the popularization of some terms and collocations (2007: 256–257).
Given the laudatory reviews of Pons-Sanz’s study of Wulfstan’s vocabulary, those interested in the subject will welcome The Lexical Effects of Anglo-Scandinavian Linguistic Contact on Old English, which encompasses the entire corpus of Old English. Pons-Sanz incorporates recent discussions on ways of looking at “borrowing”, such as Andreas Fischer’s survey,\(^6\) and largely employs terminology from Haugen which will be familiar from her earlier work and that of Richard Dance. In her words, Norse-derived then refers both to “Old Norse loans and new formations which have a loan as a base (in a derivative) or as (at least) one of the lexemes (in a compound)” (Pons-Sanz 2013: 5).

The attention to detail within a tested and accepted framework typifies the whole of Lexical Effects. Pons-Sanz offers in her first chapter a brief historical overview (necessarily succint) of the Norse settlement of Anglo-Saxon England and the impact of Norse on English. The chapter also surveys theses and studies of Anglo-Scandinavian linguistic contact, including the thesis that posits Middle English, particularly those varieties heavily influenced by Old Norse, be considered a type of creole, which is particularly relevant to the notion that present-day English is a Scandinavian language.

Pons-Sanz’s second chapter offers an “etymological study”, discusses the frameworks within which one can identify Norse-Derived terms and then provides a thorough survey of terms that indicate Norse derivation based on (1) phonological evidence, (2) morphological evidence, (3) words that suggest a close association with Scandinavian settlers and (4) other possible sources. The third chapter, a lexico-semantic study, comprises an overview of grammatical categories and how these categories relate to types of language contact; in short, the more basic the vocabulary and the higher the number of function words, the more intense the language contact situation. Norse-derived terms are then classified based on their lexico-semantic field so that readers can see the areas in which influence is most pronounced (few will be surprised to see the legal world figure prominently). The distribution of words is then categorized by chronological and dialectal distribution, a pattern that generally conforms to expectations: technical terms are the first recorded, non-technical terms thereafter, and function words restricted to late Old English texts. The bulk of the chapter is reserved for the in-depth study of individual terms within their semantic field. This analysis allows readers to distinguish words that are peripheral parts of the semantic field and those that become ‘core’ terms like eorl, grið and lagu as well as their connected terms. Accordingly, the analysis offers “some hints in connection with the reasons that may have led to the use, popularization, or eventual loss of particular terms” (Pons-Sanz 2013: 242).

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Considering the evidence from a slightly different point of view, the fourth chapter examines Norse-derived terms in their textual context. Given the scope of the book, Pons-Sanz selects case studies to explore “what the texts can or cannot tell us about the terms, and what the terms can or cannot tell us about the texts and the sociolinguistic situation surrounding them” (2013: 245). Readers are directed to Pons-Sanz’s earlier work on Wulfstan’s use of Norse-derived terms for the textual surroundings of those particular uses. The most recent book explores the D- and E-versions of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, Ælfric (necessarily brief), Aldred’s and Owun’s glosses to the Lindesfarne and Rushworth gospels, the Battle of Maldon, the Lives of St Nicholas and St Giles, the collected glosses to the Lindesfarne Gospels and Durham Ritual, and the Chronicle of Æthelred and Cnut.

The results are often inconclusive; Norse-derived terms in the Battle of Maldon, for example, cannot help us reject ‘any of the places of composition that have been suggested for it’ (Pons-Sanz 2013: 262). Nor can such terms provide better evidence for the composition of the Lives of St Nicholas and St Giles. Similarly tentative conclusions are reached when using Norse-derived terms to examine authorship. Differences in lexical choices in the glosses of the Lindesfarne Gospels and the Durham Ritual might hint at different authors, but could also reflect the evolving choices of a single individual (Pons-Sanz 2013: 269). Similarly, regarding the Chronicle of Æthelred and Cnut, the prevalent view of a series of annals that share “if not the same author, at least the same impetus cannot be easily rejected” (Pons-Sanz 2013: 271).

The volume also includes over two hundred pages of appendices, which offer useful tools and background. Therein we are given an alphabetical list of Norse-derived terms in Old English texts which marks the texts according to the groups arranged by date found in Section 3.3 (incorrectly referred to 3.2.3 on p. 281); this gives a brief snapshot of the period in which the word is attested (group 1 is earlier, group 6 later, and group 7 problematic) without suggesting that a word definitively entered the language at a particular date. The second appendix offers a short description of every text in which a Norse-derived term is found, paying particular attention to attribution, date and localization. The third appendix presents an intriguing list of terms that are more likely indigenous than Norse-derived. This list, based on terms that have been discussed as Norse-derived in studies published since the beginning of the twentieth century, effectively reduces the number of words for which Norse derivation is attributed as it tends to favor an English formation in the absence of compelling evidence for a Norse derivation. For example, Pons-Sanz’s discussion of hrīmceald (‘icy cold’), which has been suggested as a Norse-derived term based on hrímkaldr (‘rime-cold’) finds “no reason to discard the possibility that the Old English and the Old Norse compounds are independent formations” based on the existence of other OE compounds with the
same determinant (2013: 447). Finally, the fourth appendix examines words that are found in texts in manuscripts that are included in the *Old English Corpus* but are also found in Margaret Laing’s catalogue of sources for early Middle English (Laing 1993).

The short concluding chapter is perhaps indicative of some of the larger difficulties that surround a study of this kind (and which the author readily and repeatedly recognizes). That is the evidence is not only incomplete, but controversial and as a result poses difficulties in postulating the interactions between Old Norse and Old English speakers and the subsequent processes of linguistic contact and influence. Indeed, in the absence of firm conclusions Pons-Sanz informs readers: “‘Transparency in decision-making has indeed been the ethos dominating the chapters and appendices in this book that deal with such issues, and the monograph in general’ (2013: 274). Indeed, it is the transparency (and the comprehensiveness) that will best serve future research. Not everyone will agree with all judgements on Norse versus native derivation, but everyone will benefit from the explicit grounds on which careful conclusions have been offered.

One imagines that most readers will use Dance’s and Pons-Sanz’s books as references, consulting them for the latest scholarly opinion on specific words.7 Indeed, these studies offer much useful background and serious challenges to long-held views in their more discursive sections, which bear sustained reading, yet it is the words themselves that serve as the core of the examination. Other work, however, has endeavoured to paint the picture of Anglo-Scandinavian linguistic contact in rather broader strokes. For example, Roberta Frank (2007) has portrayed the Scandinavian invaders as “achingly hip”, a touch of humour that reflects a serious exploration of possible processes of co-optation and hybridization as well as a view of the Norse as wild and exotic. Adopting a rather different stance (and tone), Angelika Lutz (2012) has employed general principles of contact linguistics to shed further light on the situation. Lutz finds Old English lexical evidence for Old Norse influence very much like later loans from French. Both involve extended foreign rule and in keeping with the tenets of general contact linguistics should be characterized as superstratal. Moreover, Lutz finds that the structural influence – that is the integration of function words, the reduction of inflexions and the fixing of VO order – should be attributed to the similarities of the two languages in contact. Nevertheless, considering this process of koineization Lutz defers to further study: “Whether and in which way, the stratal roles of the contact languages determined the character of the resulting compromise language remains to be seen” (2012: 34). Although further investigation is awaited,

7. The same might also be said, albeit to a lesser extent, of Townend 2002, specifically with regards to place-names.
Lutz’s casting of lexical influence and structural influence with the framework contact linguistics and the consequent characterization of the two phenomena as representative of different contact situations represents an important refinement of our description of the contact situation.

Strikingly, Lutz’s recognition of the similarities between borrowing from Norse and French iterates a point that has enjoyed increasing critical attention, namely that the Norman Conquest, conceived of, taught as, and popularly imagined as the most important date in early medieval English history, has tended to obscure the other conquest of the eleventh century.\(^8\)

The prominence of the Norman invasion, be it cast as a sudden reversal for the English kingdom or a step forward for English progress and civilization, elides Scandinavian impact on England in the shape of long-standing settlement and over twenty-five years of Scandinavian rule earlier in the century. As an example, one indicative, accessible volume on the history of English gives a prominent section to the Norman Conquest and the influence of French, while tucking the influence of Scandinavian within a section on grammatical change within Old English (Leith 1996: 117–123). While we continue to grapple with the profound effect this settlement and rule had on English, the claim that the outcome was a fundamentally Scandinavian language seems nevertheless to stretch credulity. In the resulting compromise, there is still much that is English. Sara Pons-Sanz’s most recent book is a fitting capstone to the recent number of thorough, innovative studies of the lexical influence of Norse on English, studies that have augmented traditional philological techniques in their careful consideration of the context in which Norse derivations appear. Many of the assumptions underpinning the alleged Norse derivation of words have been thoroughly and judiciously challenged. If the number of words that can securely claim Norse derivation is smaller than one previously thought, the importance of the morphosyntactic influence remains acknowledged and to be further explored.\(^9\) The hyperbole involved in the assertion that English is a Scandinavian language serves as a poignant reminder of work to be done. One hopes that the transparency that has characterized the lexical studies of the past decade serves the analyses of the structural influence, and thereby future generations, as well.

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8. On the comparative differences in critical attention paid to the two conquests and the politics involved, see Treharne 2012.

9. See Pons-Sanz 2013: 10, for example.
Bibliography


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