Old English Vocabulary 1

Fundamental differences compared to Modern English:
- Approx. 24,000 lexical items in OE corpus
- About 85% no longer in use
- Only 3% words are loan words compared with over 70% today
- OE profoundly of Germanic roots
- Frequent use of prefixes, suffixes and compound words to extend OE lexis

Old English Vocabulary 2

CARLY 2003: 22

Lexical Borrowing 1

During Anglo-Saxon period, essentially two sources:
- Latin
- Norse

Latin
- Borrowings resulting from Christianity, e.g. altar, angel, font, mass, priest, psalm
- Literacy and learning, e.g. history, school, title
- General (e.g. domestic), e.g. plant, lentil, mat, sock

Norse
- Following Viking raids and Norse & Danish settlement resulting in the establishment of the Danelaw

Language Contact 1

MCDOWALL 1989: 15
Language Contact 2

- It is likely that the Danes (& Norsemen) did not displace the English in the same way as the Celts.
- They probably lived close together with intermarriage.
- We don’t know whether OE and ON were entirely mutually intelligible, but there must have been a certain amount of bilingualism, which can account for the borrowing.

“The Norse influence on English was pervasive, in the sense that its results are found in all parts of the language; but it was not deep except in the lexicon.” (Thomason & Kaufman 1988:302)

Language Contact 3

- One of the only examples of evidence of OE/ON code-mixing is found in an 11th century runic inscription at Aldbrough (Yorkshire):

  Ulf let æræran cyrice for hanum and for Gunwara saula

Ulf had (this) church built for him(self) and for Gunwaru’s soul

- *Ulf* is a Danish name (OE: *Wulf*) and the dative object of the preposition *for* is ON *hanum* rather than OE *him*.

Norse Lexical Borrowings 1

Three main types of borrowings:

- Place names
- Personal names
- General words

Norse Place Names

- *-by*
- *-holm*
- *-thorp*
- *-thwaite*
- *-toft*

Crystal 2003: 25

SCANDINAVIAN PLACE NAMES

Scandinavian place names in England, related to the boundary line of the Danelaw. There are over 1,500 such place names (p. 141) in England, especially in Yorkshire and Lincolnshire. Over 600 end in -by, the Scandinavian word for "farm" or "town"—Derby, Grimsby, Rugby, Naseby, etc. Many other end in -thorp (village), as in Althorp, Aistonthorp, and Linthorpe; -thwaite ("clearing"), as in Whythwaite, Applethwaite, and Stainton; -toft ("homestead"), as in Lowtoft, Easto, and Sandtoft. The -by ending is almost entirely confined to the area of the Danelaw, supporting a theory of Scandinavian origin, despite the existence of the word by "dwelling" in Old English.

(After P. H. Sawyer, 1962.)
Norse Personal Names

-son vs. OE-ing

SCANDINAVIAN PERSONAL NAMES

The distribution of English family names (p. 149) ending in -son, such as Davidson, Jackson, and Anderson. The figures give the number of different surnames which are thought to have come from each county. The Scandinavian influence in the north and east is very clear, especially in Yorkshire and north Lincolnshire, where over 60% per cent of personal names in early Middle English records show Scandinavian influence.

Results of Language Contact on Lexis 1

- Almost 1,000 general Norse words entered English
- Yet only c. 150 appear in OE manuscripts, e.g. landing, score, fellow, take
- Most loanwords don’t appear in writing until early 12th century, including many of our most common words, e.g. both, same, get, give, take
- Even the closed pronoun word class (3rd person plural) was affected, spreading southwards in Middle English period from Northern dialects; they first (C14th), followed by their vs. her(e)hir(e) (C15th) and lastly them vs. hem (early C16th)

Results of Language Contact on Lexis 2

Through close contacts over a prolonged period, many duplicate words must have arisen with 3 possible developments:

- Survival of ON word, e.g. egg vs. OE ey, sister vs. OE sweostor
- Survival of OE word, e.g. path vs. ON reike
- Both ON & OE words retained with different meanings:
  - e.g. ON dike, raise, skill, skirt
  - OE ditch, rise, craft, shirt

Results of Language Contact on Morphology

- It is generally thought that language contact between ON & OE speakers led to a swifter decay of the complex morphology of OE, changing more quickly in the North, e.g.
  - Loss of grammatical gender (replaced by 'natural' gender)
  - Simplification of gender, number & case agreement e.g. in adjectives and demonstratives (including the definite article)
  - General loss of dative & genitive plurals

“The gap between the two is not great, but it may well have encouraged speakers to replace inflections with a different system. When all of these differing pronunciations are taken into account, communication may have at times been difficult.”

(Blake 1996: 80)
Results of Language Contact on Syntax

Likely influences of ON/OE language contact:

- **Relative pronouns**
  - Instead of OE *þe* ‘who, which’, a competing *as* arose (cf. ON *som* also meaning ‘as’), still found in northern dialects of English, e.g. *the man as came yesterday*
  - **Zero relative** = object (relatively rare in languages of world), e.g. *the man [zero] I saw yesterday*
  - **Preposition stranding** (also relatively rare in languages of world), e.g. *the room I saw him in*

References