



The History of Old Norse in Britain

- Norse is the first language of a substantial immigrant community
- Anglo-Saxon England is marked by over two centuries of Viking raids and Scandinavian settlement
- England was settled by Danes and Norwegians and perhaps a few Swedes



Figure 1: Location of the Danelaw on a map of Great Britain (BBC)

- 787:** first attack by Norwegians when three ships put to shore near Portland and further isolated instances
- 835 onwards:** constant threat of attack by Danish armies
- 870 onwards:** Settled Norse speakers could be found in England
- 871 - 899:** Viking wars of the time of King Alfred who reigned over Wessex
- 1016-42:** Danish King Cnut and his sons ruled over England
- 1042:** Edward the Confessor came to the throne, ending the Danish rule in England
- 11th and 12th century:** Norse continued to be spoken in the north of England

Characteristics of Old English and Old Norse

Old English (550-1100)	Old Norse (Viking Norse 700-1000)
West Germanic family	North Germanic family
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Synthetic language Weak and strong declensions as well as verbs Strong stress accent on the first or the root syllable 3 grammatical genders (masculine, feminine and neuter) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Synthetic language Weak and strong declensions as well as verbs Stress on the first syllable 3 grammatical genders (masculine, feminine and neuter)
The two languages are similar and are believed to have been "mutually intelligible to a limited extent." (Baugh and Cable 2002, 92)	

Is Middle English a creole under the influence of Old Norse or not?

Middle English IS a creole under the influence of Old Norse	Middle English IS NOT a creole under the influence of Old Norse
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sociohistorical factors Viking attacks, settlement and ultimate conquest of England influenced Old English <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Can be seen as a kind of colonialization Settlement of large numbers of Scandinavians in England Up until the time of the Norman Conquest the Scandinavian language in England was constantly being renewed by the steady stream of trade and conquest Language Due to lack of written evidence and the unlikelihood of there being any contact between written forms of Scandinavian and English we can assume that the contact between the two languages took place exclusively through direct speaker interaction Likely that the English spoken in the districts where there were large numbers of Danes acquired certain Danish habits of expression Language contact Large number of Scandinavian elements are found in English <ul style="list-style-type: none"> e.g. everyday words - e.g. <i>sister</i> (ON <i>syster</i>, OE <i>sweostor</i>) e.g. placenames - e.g. ending in <i>-by</i> ('farm' or 'town') like <i>Whitby</i> Words from all word classes entered from Scandinavian to English <ul style="list-style-type: none"> e.g. nouns, adjectives, verbs, pronouns, prepositions and adverbs Number of inflectional elements attributed to Scandinavian influence <ul style="list-style-type: none"> e.g. the <i>-s</i> of the third person singular e.g. participial ending <i>-and</i>, now replaced by <i>-ing</i> Some Middle English changes resemble processes in typical creoles <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Loss of inflectional endings, no (or strongly reduced) gender marking, SVO order, simplified segmental phonology 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sociohistorical factors <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Close kinship between the English and the Scandinavian Scandinavian were able to adapt to foreign communities very fast and they assimilated to most of the ways of English life (e.g. many of them early accepted Christianity) Language Both Germanic languages, therefore closely related <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Great similarity between the two languages Problem of distinguishing between language and dialect <ul style="list-style-type: none"> "Dialect levelling" - "loss of localised features in [...] varieties of English in Britain, to be replaced with features found over a wider region." (Kerswill 2003, 223) Many of the more common words of the two languages were identical Language contact No evidence of there being a pidgin before Middle English Opinion of some scientist that European languages with a long written tradition and history behind them ought not to be described as creoles <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Terms pidgin and creole only used for colonized countries <p>Conclusion: Even though there are significant factors indicating that Middle English could be a creole, we do not believe it is a creole. In our opinion, the term creole should only be used when speaking of the language contact situation of a colonialized country. It cannot be denied that Old English came under the influence of Old Norse and changed significantly as a result of its influence. However this was also the case with other languages like Latin or French and the changes during the time between Old and Middle English cannot be assigned to only one of the influencing languages.</p>

References:
 Baugh, Albert C. and Thomas Cable, 2002. *A History of the English Language*, 5th ed. London: Routledge
 Dalton-Puffer, Christine, 1995. "Middle English is a Creole and its Opposite: On the Value of Plausible Speculation", in *Linguistic Change Under Contact Conditions*. Ed.: Jacek Fisiak. Berlin: de Gruyter, 35-50.
 Danchev, Andrei, 1997. "The Middle English Creolization Hypothesis Revisited", in *Studies in Middle English Linguistics*. Ed.: Jacek Fisiak. Berlin: de Gruyter, 79-108.
 Görlach, Manfred, 1990. "Middle English - a Creole?", in *Studies in the History of the English Language*. Ed.: Manfred Görlach. Heidelberg: Carl Winter.
 Gordon, E. V., 1927. *An Introduction to Old Norse*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
 Hunter Blair, Peter, 2003. *An Introduction to Anglo-Saxon England*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
 Kerswill, Paul, 2003. "Dialect levelling and geographical diffusion in British English", in *Social Dialectology. In honour of Peter Trudgill*. Eds.: D. Britain and J. Cheshire. Amsterdam: Benjamins, 223-243.
 Mugglestone, Lynda, 2006. *The Oxford History of English*. Oxford: Oxford University Press
 Thomason, Sarah G., 2001. *Language Contact: An Introduction*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
 Wolf, Kirsten, 1993. *Medieval Scandinavia*. London: Routledge.
 Picture:
 British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), http://downloads.bbc.co.uk/mhttp/schools/primaryhistory/images/vikings/viking_settlements/vk_map_settlements.jpg, (accessed June 2, 2015)