

The Scandinavian Influence on English Language

Large numbers of Scandinavians settled in England in Old English period. Most of the settlers were Danes, and there was a considerable number of Norwegians in the southwest and north. Scandinavian farmers intermarried with the English. And in the districts where peaceful settlement took place, conditions were favorable for an extensive Scandinavian influence on Old English.

Scandinavian Place-names and Personal Names in England

More than 600 places bear Scandinavian names, e.g. Grimsby, Whitby, Derby, Rugby, and Thoresby, which end in –by, meaning “farm” or “town” in Danish.

About 300 names contain the Scandinavian word *thorp*, which means “village”. An almost equal number contain the word *thwaite*, which means “an isolated piece of land”. Examples of the latter include *Applethwaite*, *Braithwaite*, *Cowperthwaite*, *Langthwaite*, and *Satterthwaite*. There are also a hundred places bearing names ending in *toft*, which means “a piece of ground”, e.g. *Brimtoft*, *Eastoft*, *Langtoft*, *Lowestoft*, and *Nortoft*. In some districts in the counties of Yorkshire and Lincolnshire about 75 percent of the place-names are of Scandinavian origin. A similarly high percentage of Scandinavian personal names are found, e.g. names ending in –son, like *Stevenson*, and *Johnson*.

The Earliest Borrowing by Old English from the Scandinavian Languages

The number of Scandinavian words that appeared in Old English was small. The largest group was associated with sea-roving, as in *barda* (beaked ship), *cnarr* (small warship), *;* (vessel; fleet), *;mann* (pirate), *dreng* (warrior), *b tswegen* (boatman).

A little later, a number of words relating to the law or the social and administrative system entered into English. Examples include the word *law* itself, as well as *outlaw*, *wapentake* (an administrative district), which all come from the Danish language.

In addition to the above words, there are a number of Old English words that are translations of Scandinavian terms, e.g. *b t l* as (what cannot be compensated), *h m s c n* (attacking an enemy in his house), and *landc ap* (tax paid when land was bought) and other loan-translations. Such legal terminology were replaced by French terms after the Norman Conquest.

The Character of Scandinavian Loanwords

After the Danes had begun to enter into ordinary relations with the English, Scandinavian words began to enter in number into English. These words show the varied and yet simple character of the borrowings. And they made their way into English through the give-and-take of everyday life. Among nouns were *band*, *birth*, *booth*, *bull*, *calf* (of leg), *egg*, *fellow*, *gait*, *gap*, *guess*, *kid*, *leg*, *link*, *loan*, *race*, *root*, *scales*, *score*, *seat*, *sister*, *skin*, *skirt*, *sky*, *steak*, *tidings*, *trust*, *want*, and *window*, and many others. Among adjectives we find *awkward*, *flat*, *ill*, *loose*, *low*, *meeek*, *odd*, *rotten*, *scant*, *seemly*, *sly*, *tight*, and *weak*.

A surprising number of common verbs is among the borrowings, like *to bait*, *call*, *cast*, *clip*, *crave*, *crawl*, *die*, *gape*, *gasp*, *get*, *give*, *glitter*, *kindle*, *lift*, *nag*, *raise*, *rid*, *scare*, *screech*, *take*, *thrive*, and *thrust*. Lists like the above show the familiar, everyday character of the words that the Scandinavian invasions and subsequent settlement brought into the English language.

Scandinavian Structure Words and Adverbs in Old English

The consequence of the intimate relation between the Scandinavian languages and English was that the Scandinavian words borrowed by English were not confined to nouns, adjectives, and verbs. Such words extended to pronouns, prepositions, adverbs, and even a part of the verb *to be*, which are not often transferred from one language to another.

The pronouns *they*, *their*, and *them* are Scandinavian, replacing the Old English pronouns *h e*, *hiera*, and *h e*. The words *both* and *same*, which have pronominal uses, are of Scandinavian origin, too. The prepositions *till* and *fro* (from) are Scandinavian; the latter survives in the phrase 'to and fro'. From Scandinavian comes the modern form of the conjunction 'though'. The Scandinavian use of 'at' as a sign of the infinitive still survives in the English word 'ado' (at-do).

The adverbs *aloft*, *athwart*, *aye* (ever), *seemly*, and *the earlier*; all have their origin in the Scandinavian. The present plural 'are' of the verb 'to be' is a very important adoption.

The Scandinavian Effect on Old English Morphology and Syntax

The Scandinavian influence not only affected the vocabulary but also extended to morphology and syntax. Although inflections are rarely transferred from one language to another, a certain number of inflectional suffices in the Northumbrian dialect are attributed to Scandinavian influence. Among these inflections are the -s of the third person singular, present indicative of verbs, and the participial ending -and (bindand), which is now replaced by -ing. The words 'scant', 'want', and 'athwart' retain in the final 't' the neuter adjective ending of Old Norse.

Although syntax, the way words are put together to form phrases and clauses, is something in which languages less often affect each other, there are traces of Scandinavian syntactic influence. The famous linguist Otto Jespersen, a Dane himself, cites as examples the omission of the relative pronoun in relative clauses, which was rare in Old English.

Among the examples of Scandinavian syntactic influence we also find the rules for the use of *shall* and *will* in Middle English. These rules were the same as in Scandinavian.

conclusion

In addition to these Standard English words, there are thousands of Scandinavian words that are still a part of the everyday speech of people in the north and east of England. The period during which the Danish element was making its way into the English vocabulary was the tenth and eleventh centuries, the period of the fusion of the two peoples. In view of its extent and the intimate way in which the borrowed elements were incorporated, the Scandinavian influence is one of the most important foreign influences that have contributed to the English language