English: the extent of Viking impact remains open

The most articulate and far-reaching version of Scandinavian influence on English so far was Townend (2002), who pushes a carefully documented argument to the conclusion that Old Norse and Old English (OE) were mutually intelligible, that there was societal though not individual bilingualism in Anglo-Saxon times in the Danelaw area, and that Old Norse died out at some point. There is room for disagreement with Townend’s conclusions, but in fact any reference to Townend is missing in Emonds’ & Faarlund’s (E&F) bibliography, along with the rest of the specialized literature (e.g. Brink & Price 2008). New and challenging hypotheses are always welcome, to inform hypotheses where contemporary direct evidence is scant, but they require a historical and a linguistic foundation that will stand up to scrutiny. Neither of them does: E&F’s historical scenario of the death of OE at the hands of Anglicized Norse is as radical as it is implausible, and their linguistic arguments are sketchy and often ill-founded. In fact, they have not done their homework, and fail to convince.

E&F’s primary aim is to show that the grammatical skeleton of Middle English (ME) is that of what they call anglicized Norse. They seem to assume very clear-cut distinctions between the early North- and West-Germanic languages, attributing any differences between OE and ME, and any similarities between ME and Old Norse, to anglicized Norse as a source, ignoring much of the literature on OE, ignoring what was going on in the other West-Germanic languages, and never considering a case for microvariation and/or convergent evolution. Space only permits brief critical discussion of some examples.

E&F list VO syntax among the Norse properties of ME lacking in OE. It is certainly plausible that the loss of OV word orders was accelerated by contact with Scandinavian but this provides no argument for E&F’s case, which is that English has become Norse when there is substantial loss of OV by ME. They ignore a core fact from Pintzuk’s (2002) work (cited in their bibliography): OE had substantial VO word order beside various types of OV. E&F then go on to identify as Norse the 15th century word order pattern with preverbal negated objects with a similar pattern in present-day Icelandic, further ignoring the firmly established continuity between OE and late ME OV orders with negated objects (Pintzuk & Taylor 2006, cited in their bibliography).

Another property listed as Old Norse and lacking in OE is the use of shall and will as auxiliaries marking future meaning (78 ff.). Ignoring the OE facts (Denison 1993: 304 and Warner 1993: 168 ff. record future uses of modals in OE), it seems we are now to accept stages of grammaticalization processes as borrowing sources. In the same vein, ME shows occasional examples combining two modals, which E&F attribute on p. 81 to Norse as a source. Coupé & van Kemenade (2009) and Coupé (2015) show, on the other hand, that co-occurrence of modals is sporadically attested in the 13th century across the West-Germanic languages, starting with the most grammaticalized modal shall. Such sequences of modals made a hesitant start in ME but failed to catch on in the way E&F would have to expect.

Verb Second (V2) is a Norse-influenced ME innovation lacking in Old English, according to E&F. (pp. 108 ff.). Old as well as Middle English have a complex variant of V2 (e.g. van Kemenade 2012), but one heavily Norse-influenced 15th century text shows the standard Germanic categorical V2 pattern (Kroch & Taylor 1997). However much we try to make of this, E&F would predict that English, if descending from anglicized Norse, has
categorical V2, but the fact is that it has relic V2 in a restricted set of constructions such as
questions, where it has had it since the earliest times.

A putative victim of Norse influence (pp. 114-15) are inherent reflexives marked by
an object personal pronoun, Norse having drastically reduced its designated reflexive marker
sik. Other West-Germanic languages, like Dutch and as far as we can tell not due to contact
with Norse, also lost reflexive marking by object personal pronouns, which in Dutch gave rise
to reflexive marking by a designated reflexive pronoun zich, the cognate of Old Norse sik.
(Postma 2012).

These few examples are representative of the general repertoire of arguments;
notwithstanding the well-known and profound effect of contact with Norse on the historical
development of English, which could do with a good deal more informed study, anglicized
Norse makes an unlikely ancestor of Modern English.

References
Routledge.
Coupé, Giet. 2015. Syntactic Extension - The Historical Development of Dutch Verb
Coupé, Giet & Ans van Kemenade. 2009. Grammaticalization of modals in English and
Dutch: uncontingent change. In: Paola Crisma and Giuseppe Longobardi (eds.)
York: Longman.
variation and language Contact. In Ans van Kemenade and Nigel Vincent (eds.),
Parameters of Morphosyntactic Change. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University
Press, 297-325.
Pintzuk, Susan. 2002. Verb-Object order in Old English: variation as grammatical
competition. In David Lightfoot (ed.) Syntactic Effects of Morphological Change, 276-
van Kemenade and Bettelou Los (eds.) The Handbook of the History of English, 249-
Postma, Gertjan. 2012. Language contact and linguistic complexity—the rise of the reflexive
pronoun zich in a fifteenth century Netherlands border dialect. In Dianne Jonas, John
Whitman and Andrew Garret (eds.) Grammatical Change: Origins, Nature, Outcomes,
between Speakers of Old Norse and Old English. Turnhout: Brepols Publishers.
University Press.