

THE COLLOCATIONS OF OLD ENGLISH ADJECTIVES AND OF THEIR MIDDLE  
ENGLISH COUNTERPARTS BORROWED FROM OLD NORSE  
(Kolokace staroanglických adjektiv a jejich protikladů ve střední angličtině přijatých ze  
staroseverštiny)

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Anglický jazyk

1. ročník magisterského studia

Ústav anglického jazyka a didaktiky

The Collocations of Old English Adjectives and of their Middle English Counterparts Borrowed from Old Norse<sup>1</sup> (Kolokace staroanglických adjektiv a jejich protikladů ve střední angličtině přijatých ze staroseverštiny)

1. Introduction (Úvod)

The period of Middle English was marked by a heavy influx of foreign words. One of the source languages of numerous loanwords was Old Norse (ON). The greatest inflow of Norse-derived words into English was in the period from 1381 to 1400, and then between the years 1421-1440 (Moskowich-Spiegel Fandiño, 1995:142). These and borrowings made earlier into the Late Old English started to appear abundantly during the period of Middle English in written records (Brinton and Arnovick, 2011: 248). Although many of these words became obsolete in Standard English, some survived into Present Day English (PDE) and are still productive in word-formation processes, as in the case of the word *cake* from ON *kaka* ‘cake, dessert’, participating in the creation of a PDE compound *cupcake* (Friðriksdóttir, 2014: 44).

The profound language contact that enabled the Old Norse borrowings associated mainly with the spoken discourse to enter even the written sphere was defined by a ‘switching-code’, which allowed the speakers to ‘code automatically sounds in the alien dialect into the sounds of one’s own dialect’, and a possible bilingualism due to the frequent intermarriage (Townend, 2002: 44; Miller, 2012: 98). This gave rise even to the phenomenon of ‘added complexity’ which is manifested in the ‘addition of features from other languages and innovations of features previously not existing in either of the contact languages’ (Miller, 2012: 146)<sup>2</sup>. The extended borrowing from Old Norse in this period was the result of the assimilation of Old Norse speakers and the subsequent Old Norse language death (Townend: 2002: 201); As the speakers were switching from Old Norse, they imposed many of their native vocabulary

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<sup>1</sup> This research is based on a BA Thesis (Müllerová, 2018)

<sup>2</sup> Miller refers to Trudgill (2010) *Investigations in Sociohistorical Linguistics: Stories of Colonisation and Contact*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press., as well as to Trudgill (2011) *Sociolinguistic Typology: Social Determinants of Linguistic Complexity*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

items and possibly grammatical elements on the target language. Townend calls this ‘imposition through language shift’ (Townend, 2002: 201). This is evidenced in the borrowing of even core items of vocabulary, such as ‘everyday objects and concepts, basic actions and function words’ (Brinton and Arnovick, 2011: 111).

2. Relations between the Old Norse Borrowings in English and the Native Lexis (Vztahy mezi staroseverskými výpůjčkami v angličtině a domácí slovní zásobou)

The different nature of the contact between the involved languages is reflected in the properties of the borrowings entering the language in the respective periods. Due to the ‘switching code’ active at the period of Old English, loanwords entering at this period mostly have English form as a result of ‘cognate substitution’, while the loanwords in Middle English can be often identified by their Scandinavian form (Townend, 2002: 201). The loans in Old English (OE) are also marked by a ‘cultural need’, naming new objects and concepts, while the vocabulary items imposed by the assimilating Old Norse settlers are ‘largely everyday words’, including function words, such as prepositions, conjunctions and pronouns (Miller, 2012: 106). It is precisely this high degree of contact with the profound mutual influence that is responsible for the extensive ‘convergence in both vocabulary items and morphological and syntactic structures’, which is characteristic of the Old Norse borrowings, resulting in their complicated identification (Miller, 2012: 147; De Caluwé-Dor, 1979: 680). Nonetheless, certain patterns have been identified in the behaviour of the entering loanwords.

An Old Norse borrowing could replace an English word, as in the case of the verb *nimam* and *taka* ‘take’, or both the borrowing and the corresponding English word could be retained. In this case the borrowing either became restricted to the Northern dialects, or when both of the words had been retained in the Standard dialect, some ‘semantic differentiation’ was established (Brinton and Arnovick, 2011: 168). In some cases, Old English word was retained but acquired the meaning of its Old Norse cognate, resulting in ‘the hybridization of

form and meaning’, as in the case of OE *bréad* ‘fragment’ and ON *brauð* giving PDE *bread* (Miller, 2012: 98). There were also loan-translations, ‘morpheme-for-morpheme recreations of foreign compound formations using the native lexical stock, but retaining the underlying model,’ as in *steórmann* ‘a steersman, captain’ from Icelandic *stýrimaðr* (Dance, 2003: 92).

Although some Old Norse borrowings survived into Standard Present-Day English, replacing some of the core native vocabulary items, their distribution is uneven (Miller, 2012: 109). ‘The area of the highest density of Scandinavian forms in Middle English often corresponds with the highest density of retained Norse-derived forms today’, which holds particularly true for parts of the Danelaw, mainly the so-called ‘focal area’ (Miller, 2012: 118), that is Cumberland, Westmorland, Yorkshire and a part of Lincolnshire (Miller, 2012: 99).

### 3. The Collocations of Old English Adjectives and of their Middle English Counterparts Borrowed from Old Norse (Kolokace staroanglických adjektiv a jejich protikladů ve střední angličtině přijatých ze staroseverštiny)

The aim of this research is to observe the collocations of the borrowed Old Norse adjectives in Middle English and of their Old English counterparts. Collocations, or habitually co-occurring words, between which there is a relationship of ‘mutual expectancy’ (Firth, 1962: 12), define the use of a word and its meaning. This research is thus focused on the collocations of both the native lexis and the borrowings, as it is by means of observing these that the possible relations between the native environment and the entering loanwords can be identified.

#### 3.1. Material (Materiál)

Both the Old Norse borrowings and their Old English counterparts were provided by the BA Thesis on which this research is based: 104 Old Norse adjectives from the *Middle English Dictionary*, sorted into semantic categories provided by the *Thesaurus of Old English*.

These semantic categories contained Old English adjectives with corresponding meanings which were then excerpted.

For the purposes of this research, only those Old English units were selected which started with letters from 'a' to 'i' because of the limitations of the *Dictionary of Old English*, used as a source of meanings of the Old English words, their attested spellings, and their numbers of occurrence. This yielded 255 Old English adjectives, from which only 45 words, with the frequency of occurrence higher than 10, were selected for further research, so as to avoid native words which might have faded out of use on their own or be replaced by the borrowings due to their low frequency of use. The Old English adjectives and the corresponding Old Norse borrowings were then searched in the corresponding corpora *DOEC* (Dictionary of Old English Corpus) and *PPCME2* (The Penn-Helsinki Parsed Corpus of Middle English, second edition).

### 3.2. Method (Metoda)

The number of occurrences, meanings and attested spellings of the selected Old English words were searched in the *Dictionary of Old English*. The meanings of the Old English adjectives provided by the *DOEC* were then contrasted with those included in the *Bosworth-Toller Anglo-Saxon Dictionary*. The *Historical Thesaurus of English* was used as a source of information regarding the life-span of the individual Old English words with regard to their various meanings. The relationship between the Old English units and the Present-Day English was also observed in the *OED* (Oxford English Dictionary). The *Oxford English Dictionary* was also used as a source of information about the state of the Old Norse borrowings and their relation to the Present-Day English. Both the loanwords and their Old English counterparts were then sorted into corresponding pairs, between which the relationship was researched by means of observing their corresponding collocations and meanings. These were observed in the material available in the corpora *DOEC* and *PPCME2*. The material provided by the corpora was analysed and sorted into groups matching the

meanings provided by the two dictionaries. In cases when the Old Norse borrowing could not be found in the corpus, examples of its use were excerpted from other available sources, mainly from the *Middle English Dictionary*.

### 3.3. Results: Relationships Observed between the Old Norse Borrowings and their Old English Counterparts (Výsledky: Vztahy zaznamenané mezi staroseverskými výpůjčkami a jejich staroanglickými protějšky)

Despite the limitations of the sources, some patterns have been observed in the relations between the examined Old Norse borrowings and their counterparts. One of the patterns observed is that the meanings of an Old English adjective and its use overlapped with those of an Old Norse borrowing, as in the case of *atolic* and *ugli*. Although the overlap in use could not be determined based on the corpus data, it was identified by means of the material available in the *Middle English Dictionary*. In addition, the current use and meaning of the borrowing, as the data in the *British National Corpus* show, support this view, for it also overlaps with the one of the Old English unit. The identified collocations of both *atolic* and *ugli* are summarized in the *Table 1*:

Collocations of <i>atolic</i>	Collocations shared by both	Collocations of <i>ugli</i>	PDE collocations of <i>ugly</i>
<i>devil</i>	<i>sin</i>	<i>noise</i>	<i>phr.: 'ugly as sin'</i>
	<i>to look at, to behold, to see</i>	<i>monster</i>	<i>monster</i>
	<i>'dreadful' and --</i>	<i>face</i>	<i>face</i>
		<i>foul and --</i>	
		<i>deed</i>	
		<i>dark(ness), black(ness)</i>	

*Table 1: collocations of atolic and ugly*

As can be seen in the table, the collocations of *atolic* are mostly covered by those of *ugli*. It is thus possible that the Old English word was replaced in these senses by the Old Norse borrowing.

Another pattern is that the Old Norse borrowing overlaps with the Old English word only in some of its meanings, but differs in use, as represented by the word *ēapmēde* and its counterparts *low* and *lowly*, which share the meaning 'humble' but have different

collocations, for instance, *low* collocates with *folk*, and *lowly* with *servant*, while *ēaþmēde* repeatedly co-occurs with *ingeþance* ‘thought, intent, heart, conscience’. In this case, it is thus more probable that the word *ēaþmēde* was replaced by another native word in its functions than by the borrowing, relegating the borrowing to other uses. Supportive of this are the *Middle English Dictionary* examples, in which one of the collocations of *ēaþmēde* is shared by the borrowing *low*, but it only appears in coordination with other native words, especially with *humble*, as in: ‘*Wiþ humbel herte and lowe*’. The collocations of *ēaþmēde* and its Old Norse counterparts *low* and *lowly* are summarized in the *Table 2.*:

Collocations of <i>ēaþmēde</i>	Collocations shared by <i>loue</i> and <i>ēaþmēde</i>	Collocations of <i>loue</i>	Collocations of <i>louī</i>	PDE uses of <i>low</i>
<i>ingeþance</i> ‘thought, heart, intent’	-- <i>in heart</i>	phr.: <i>high and --</i>	<i>servant</i>	‘in most senses the opposite of <i>high</i> ’
		<i>folk</i>	<i>way</i>	‘poor condition’

*Table 2.:* collocations *ēaþmēde*, *low* and *lowly*

The last of the patterns observed was that although the Old English unit was offered in the *Thesaurus* as a semantic counterpart of an Old Norse borrowing, their collocations suggest a completely different use. The borrowing therefore could not replace the native unit in question, as they have nothing in common in terms of their use, as the examined pair *geheort* and *wight* seem to prove. The collocations of both are summarized in the *Table 3.*:

Collocations of <i>geheort</i>	Collocations of <i>wight</i>
-- and <i>gestilled</i> ‘quiet, stilled’	<i>men</i>
<i>become --</i>	<i>knights</i>
	<i>sb the --</i> (used as an epithet)
	<i>wise and --</i>
	<i>deed</i>
	<i>is --</i>

*Table 3:* collocations of *wight* and *geheort*

One of the meanings of *geheort* offered by the *Dictionary of Old English* is ‘heartened, encouraged, comforted, consoled’, which seems to partly coincide with one of the meanings offered for *wight* ‘brave, valiant’. However, the collocations point to a significantly different meaning and use. The immediate context of *geheort* is connected with the ‘holy ghost’, and

thus suggests a divine encouragement, or comfort, as another collocation appearing in coordination with *geheort* suggests: *gestilled* from *gestillan* ‘to rest, cease, be still, quiet’. The meaning of *geheort* listed as ‘encouraged’ is thus not connected with courage or bravery. The collocations of *wight*, on the other hand, suggest bravery and an innate physical or intellectual ability. It also often collocates in this meaning with *knights* or *men*, and *deeds*.

With regard to the survival of the Old Norse borrowings observed it is worth noting that most of them became obsolete, archaic or dialectally restricted following the Middle English period, surviving in the Northern dialects or in Scottish English: out of the 36 examined Old Norse borrowings only 6 are still currently in Standard use: *low*, *sly*, *ugly*, *odd*, *geld* and *scant*.

The borrowings also enter the language with a set of meanings which they gradually lose, surviving into PDE only in some of their senses, for instance, *mirk* (now chiefly poetic) means according to the *Middle English Dictionary* ‘dark in colour; that cannot be seen; sinful, wicked’, but in PDE only ‘dark, gloomy, deficient in light’. The word *mirk* also illustrates that some of the Old Norse borrowings survived into PDE Standard dialect with a shift in meaning, resulting in a discrepancy between their current meaning and the one at the time of their borrowing. The ‘original’ meaning of the borrowing is retained in their dialectal usage, as in the case of the word *mirke* which not only is not archaic in Shetland and Orkney, but also still means ‘dark in colour’.

#### 4. Conclusion (Závěr)

For this research 255 Old English adjectives were selected, from which only 45 were analysed further, as they had the number of occurrences higher than 10. Apart from the severe lack of available material in the corpus selected for the borrowings in Middle English, numerous discrepancies between the data were revealed both between the dictionaries and between the corpora and the dictionaries mentioned. Either the listed senses for the individual words varied, or the corpora provided different examples of use than the dictionaries,

resulting in an apparent inconsistency. The *Bosworth-Toller Dictionary* often enumerated meanings different from those in the *Dictionary of Old English*. There were also significant drawbacks in the corpora sources selected, for the *DOEC* is not syntactically tagged and the syntactically unrestricted queries often resulted in extensive lists of examples of different words mixed together due to their similar spellings; while the searches in *PPCME2* for the Old Norse borrowings had often proved unfruitful. Therefore, the *Middle English Dictionary* was most often used as the source of the collocations for the Old Norse lexical units.

By means of comparison of the collocations excerpted from the corpora or dictionaries three possible patterns have been identified with regard to the relationship between the native lexis and the incoming borrowings. The Old English words could be replaced by the Old Norse borrowings in cases where their collocations overlapped, as was further supported by the PDE use of the borrowing, covering that of the Old English unit. Another identified pattern suggested that some of the dying Old English units were most probably replaced by other native units rather than by the corresponding borrowings, despite their shared meanings, for their collocations differed. And the last of the patterns observed suggests that some of the Old English units had a completely different use from the one of the corresponding Old Norse borrowings, and therefore could also not be replaced by them, for they had hardly anything in common, despite their sharing of one semantic field, which also seems, with regard to their use, disputable.

In terms of the survival of the borrowings themselves, several other patterns have been determined. Only 6 of the 36 Old Norse borrowings survived into PDE Standard, while the rest of the loanwords is either obsolete, archaic or dialectally restricted to the North. The Old Norse borrowings have also lost on their way into PDE some of their senses with which they have entered the language. These senses not retained in the Standard dialect often survived in other dialects, especially those tied to the areas connected with the activity of the Old Norse

settlers. Regarding this semantic shift and narrowing of use of the borrowings in the PDE Standard use, it was also noted that the Standard form reveals some preference for the negative meaning over the positive or neutral one retained in the Northern dialects, as illustrated by the word *sleigh* (PDE *sly*), which keeps its positive sense of ‘clever, wise’ in the Northern dialects, while in PDE it is used with prevalence of negative connotations as ‘crafty’.

There is definitely a potential for further research in this area, either with a sociolinguistic focus, or focused on different data, such as other parts of speech or hybrid forms, which might reveal more of the complicated relationship between the involved languages, and language contact in general. It would also be fruitful to make an overview of the discrepancies between the individual sources and suggest some unification, for these inconsistencies, if not taken into account before the research is carried out, may lead to highly unrepresentative analyses of the data.

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