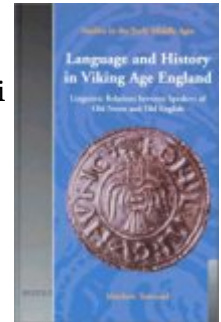


**Matthew Townend.** *Language and History in Viking Age England: Linguistic Relations between Speakers of Old Norse and Old English.* Turnhout: Brepols Publishers, 2002. xvi + 248 pp. \$89.95, cloth, ISBN 978-2-503-51292-1.



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The Language of Anglo-Scandinavian England

Matthew Townend, in *Language and History in Viking Age England*, is concerned with the extent to which Old Norse and Old English were mutually intelligible to the Anglo-Saxons and the Vikings when they established and continued to maintain contact in England from the eighth to the eleventh centuries. Earlier historians (Stenton, Baugh, Jespersen, Fell, among others) have argued that the language situation among this mixed group of speakers was most likely one of mutual intelligibility, but Townend argues justifiably that to date no one has provided a detailed descriptive account of the textual and linguistic evidence that supports or disputes such a claim. His book, which has evolved from his doctoral thesis, is an attempt to fill this gap within the field of the history of the English language.

The book consists of six chapters, the first an introduction which establishes his argument and methods, the last a conclusion which suggests a preliminary linguistic historical model for the study of Old Norse in England, and four chapters of argued evidence (phonological, lexical, textual,

and literary) for mutual intelligibility rather than for a language situation that was bilingual and requiring the use of interpreters. An extensive corpus of Old English place-names showing Scandinavian influence is included in chapter 3.

Chapter 1, "Introduction: Anglo-Norse Language Contact," is delightful reading, for it reminds us of the questions we should be asking about language when we encounter texts and historical records of the period that name these two groups of speakers as participants. As just one example, when the ninth-century Stockholm Codex Aureus was recovered later from Viking hands, Townend queries "What, therefore, were the linguistic means by which Ealdorman Aelfred negotiated with the Vikings for the recovery of the gospel-book?" (p. 4). Indeed, we find so much mention of contact between the two groups of speakers (and Townend supplies abundant examples) in which they use language to do things, achieve goals, and take action—i.e., establish treaties, buy back land, negotiate contracts, arrange marriages, settle disputes, and solve daily life problems together—that we wonder how all

this was managed if they could not understand one another. There is no question that the varieties they spoke were different, but to what extent did these differences interfere with their daily lives? How were negotiations conducted and in what language? What degree of difficulty did these linguistic situations place on these different groups of speakers?

In order to study the evidence systematically, Townend applies the methodology that is currently used in general bilingual studies to determine dialect intelligibility. Chapter 2, for instance, "The Languages: Viking Age Norse and English," focuses on questions of cultural interaction between the two groups of speakers after the Germanic migration to England in the fifth century and up to the Viking invasions in the ninth century. A comparison of the two language systems (the phonological component only) reveals how close Old English and Old Norse were at the time of contact. Archeological evidence shows that trade contacts persisted until the seventh century but diminished thereafter between the two groups so that separation was marked for at least 250 years before the Viking invasions. However, Townend concludes that linguistic analysis shows predictable sound changes among other elements and thus indicates a degree of similarity and congruity between the phonological systems of the two varieties.

In Chapter 3, "The Scandinavianisation of Old English Place-Names," Townend articulates several key theoretical assumptions he relies on in his study that are based on the work of Hockett, and Milliken and Milliken. Essentially, intelligibility by the hearer in spoken interaction is achieved by the hearer's holistic and perceptual knowledge of individual words, knowledge that allows for a certain degree of variation that may be encountered in dialects. The hearer also has the ability to parse words, thereby allowing certain properties (including correct phonemic correspondences) to be switched easily where variability exists, thus facil-

itating comprehension. So Townend investigates how the Vikings dealt with place-names they encountered in Old English (all of which would be heard since the Vikings, Townend argues, were not literate in Old English). He analyzes a significant corpus of data based on Gillian Fellows-Jenson's studies of recorded settlement names in order to note phonemic and lexical substitutions made by the Vikings: the Old English form (pre-Viking contact) is included along with the Scandinavianized form. A thorough appendix to chapter 3 lists 228 such examples of recorded place-names. Townend's linguistic analysis reveals that intelligibility was successful on the part of Norse speakers in the sense that they conducted predictable and patterned phonemic and lexical "switching-codes" throughout the data. His evidence demonstrates that the language situation was not one of bilingualism (requiring interpreters), for different types of lexical substitutions would be expected if that were the case.

Unfortunately, no corpus exists which shows comparable data on how the Anglo-Saxons worked through their encounters with Scandinavian place-names. Instead, in chapter 4, "Anglo-Norse Contact in Anglo-Saxon Sources," Townend examines three texts--"The Voyages of Ohthere and Wulfstan" in the Old English Orosius; Aethelweard's Latin Chronicle; and Aelfric's homily *De Falsis Diis*--in order to note what the texts reveal about the language situation and the Old Norse language itself when the Anglo-Saxons talk about their encounters with Scandinavian visitors. The analysis in this chapter is fruitful, for Townend has a keen eye for searching out his linguistic interest in these texts. He notices that no interpreters are ever mentioned in these encounters although there are abundant examples of interpreters mentioned in other texts of the period when other languages are at issue. (This is explained in detail with abundant examples in chapter 5.) Townend notes loans and loan-translations from Old Norse, Norse personal names and place-names (and the ways these are handled),

and evidence of an awareness by the Anglo-Saxons of the linguistic differences between the two varieties. In chapter 5, "Literary Accounts and Anecdotal Evidence," Townend studies the Old Norse Sagas for further evidence of descriptions of encounters between the two groups of speakers and the way the two language varieties are perceived and talked about.

Chapter 6, "Old Norse in England: Towards a Linguistic History," effectively articulates Townend's groundwork for a preliminary linguistic historical model of Old Norse in England. He clearly summarizes again the methodology he uses to test mutual intelligibility: (1) conducting a linguistic comparison of the two language varieties (chapter 2); (2) testing the informant by searching for evidence (place-names) that reveals how the Scandinavians were able to negotiate their own linguistic knowledge with the dialect they encountered (chapter 3); (3) asking the informant by examining the way each group describes their linguistic encounters with the other (chapter 4); and (4) determining the social attitudes of each group toward the other's language and their social relations with each other (chapter 5).

The book's conclusion is that "Viking Age England was a bilingual society, but not a society comprised of bilingual individuals..." (p. 195). Townend emphasizes that his evidence shows "adequate" intelligibility between the two groups, but he defines this in precise terms:

"[B]y adequate or pragmatic intelligibility I do precisely mean, amongst other things, the ability to understand individual words, if this ability was sufficiently widespread and sufficiently successful to permit face-to-face and day-to-day transactions, and so to preclude the need for one or both of the speech communities in the Danelaw to become bilingual, or for interpreters to be habitually used for the purposes of Anglo-Norse communication." (p. 183)

The focus here is on individual words, for Townend's study relies heavily on phonological

and lexical evidence and does not explore, by argued choice, the morphological or syntactic complexities of the two varieties. Townend does at times underplay the difference between lexical meaning and sentential meaning and does not push queries that might show how misunderstandings could and did occur because of morphological or syntactic differences. However, this is not a criticism of the book, for Townend, too, points out that these are certainly areas to pursue along with the study of Old Norse loan words in Middle English, regional studies, and studies of the differences between the Old Norse of England and the Old Norse of Scandinavia during Viking Age England.

The book is lucid, well-argued, thorough, with an extensive bibliography, and is recommended for anyone interested in Viking Age England, linguists, historians, literary specialists, or otherwise. But linguists especially will appreciate the focus on process--what speakers actually did with language--rather than product--the language they produced--a discussion much needed in the field of the history of the English language, especially in textbooks.

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