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An Old Norse–Old English contact phenomenon: the retention of the dative plural inflection -um *in the Northumbrian dialect of Old English**

The elements of the oppositions STASIS and CHANGE, RETENTION and LOSS, INSULARITY and OPENNESS, CLOSE-KNIT COMMUNITY and LOOSE - KNIT COMMUNITY all seem to represent the two poles CONSERVATIVENESS and INNOVATIVENESS, respectively. It will be shown that when a linguistic system is given an external stimulus via language contact, the conservative and innovative elements of the oppositions can mix, resulting in seemingly conservative elements pairing up with innovative ones. Under these circumstances retention can no longer be regarded a necessarily conservative feature and change can appear to take the shape of stasis.

1 Introduction

This paper deals with the retention of the dative plural exponent *-um* in the Northumbrian dialect of Old English.[1] It will be claimed that this phenomenon in the otherwise innovative and progressive dialect must have been due to language contact between Old Norse and Old English. First, it is shown that the radical morphological simplification in Northumbrian is due to language contact. Then, it is claimed that the very same language contact

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1 This paper deals with the developments within the nominal paradigm only. The scope of the reasearch can be broadened later to include the adjectival and pronominal developments.

influenced the retention of the dative plural inflection in the same dialect. Finally, the conservative phenomenon of retention is investigated in the light of alternative explanations and from various angles, which, both directly and indirectly, reinforce the validity of the proposed language contact-induced developments.

The corpus that was analysed comprises specimens from all the dialects of Old English: West Saxon, Mercian, Kentish and Northumbrian. The dialect texts that have been included in the corpus are as follows: the West Saxon dialect is represented by the *West Saxon Gospels,* of which there exists an earlier version (MS Corpus Christi College 140, from the beginning of the eleventh century) and a later one (MS Hatton 38, from the twelfth century), both of which have been analysed. Henceforth these two versions will be referred to as WSG1 and WSG2, respectively. I have also investigated some extracts from the *Battle of Maldon* (henceforth abbreviated as BM, from about 1000) and from the *Battle of Brunanburh* (henceforth abbreviated as BB, from about 995). The Northumbrian dialect area is represented in my corpus by the interlinear glosses to the *Lindisfarne Gospels* (henceforth abbreviated as Li), added in about 975 at Chester-le-Street, sixteen miles from Durham, by the glossator Aldred. The other Northumbrian dialect specimen is the inscription on the Kirkdale Sundial, inscribed on the wall of St Gregory's Minster, Helmsley, North Yorkshire, between 1055–1065. The Mercian dialect is represented by the interlinear glosses to the *Rushworth Gospels* (henceforth abbreviated as Ru1),[2] added around 975, by the glossator Farmon. It can be seen that WSG1, BB and BM are more or less contemporaries of Li and Ru1. Although in the present paper data are not drawn from Old Kentish, this dialect is represented in my corpus by the so-called *Kentish Psalms* and *Glosses to Proverbs.*

2 Language contact and inflectional reduction

Examining the dialect data in (1)–(2),[3] one can notice a considerable extent of dialect divergence, the most conspicuous characteristic of which is that the

[2] While *Rushworth 1* is in Mercian, *Rushworth 2* is in Northumbrian.

[3] In the translation of the Old English data, the present-day English meaning of the words is given, together with the indication of the case and number of the nouns and determiners. When the WSG1, WSG2 and Li data are all given, this order is maintained under each point. When there is no difference concerning the choice of words in the different dialects but only orthographic or phonological divergence, the translation of the first piece of data is given only.

Northumbrian dialect displays a strong and progressive tendency to reduce the nominal inflections. Importantly, this reduction seems to be consistent as it applies to almost all the four cases, the singular and the plural alike, all of the declensional classes and the three grammatical genders. At the same time, by preserving the original classical Old English inflections, the West Saxon dialect remains conservative.[4]

(1)	a.	WSG1	on	scype
	b.	WSG2	on	scype
	c.	Li	in	scip
			'in	ship-dat.sg.'

(2)	a.	WSG1	þurh	þone	witegan
	b.	WSG2	þurh	þanne	witegan
	c.	Li	ðerh	ðone	witgo
			'through	the-acc.sg.	prophet-acc.sg.'

What may have caused this advanced state of simplification of the morphological system in Northumbrian? The widely attested answer states that this fact must have been due to language contact between Old English and Old Norse. Nevertheless, views differ as to the extent of this contact and as to its role. As regards the extent, it is still to be decided whether this contact can qualify as a case of creolisation or non-creolisation. As far as its role is concerned, it is still debated whether the contact was the initiator or merely the accelerator of the changes.

[4] Some of the major features of the decay of the declensional system are the following: (i) the genitive singular *-es* is extended from the *a*-stem nouns, and it is used beside the conservative forms in most of the other classes, for example, in *o*-stem nouns and weak nouns; (ii) the nominative and accusative plural *-as* is extended from masculine *a*-stem nouns to neuters and to other declensions; (iii) the nominative and accusative plural neuter *-o* and *-a* are extended from neuter *a*-stem nouns with short root syllables to those with long ones; (iv) after the erosion of the final nasal *-n,* the distinction in the nominative singular of masculine and feminine weak nouns disappears, and both end prevailingly in *-a,* whereas the neuters have *-o* and *-u* in all singular cases and in nominative and accusative plural (*witgo*) (Campbell 1959 : 222); (v) the final *-e* of the dative singular tends to disappear in all declensional classes; (vi) in *u*-stem masculine nouns the genitive singular is frequently *-u* instead of the expected *-a*; (vii) in the genitive plural of weak nouns, the exponent *-ena* is replaced with *-ana* (*witgana* for *witegena*); (viii) the strong noun *dæg* often has a weak genitive plural in *-ena* or *-ana* (Campbell 1959 : 24). Further examples of dialect divergence between West Saxon and Northumbrian (and also Mercian), respectively are due to morphological levelling. See §§**4.1** and **4.2.**

Many terms for the outcome of this language contact have been coined so far. Among the terms one can find Björkman's (1900–2) 'amalgamation of Scandinavian and English dialects', Hofmann's (1955) 'Sprachmischung', Geipel's (1971) 'fusion', Baugh & Cable's (1978) 'intimate mingling' and Poussa's (1982) 'creolisation' hypothesis, in the wake of Domingue (1977) and Bailey & Maroldt (1977). All of these terms suggest a type of contact affecting the participating languages rather profoundly. In the present paper no stance is given as to which term to adopt, since the importance lies elsewhere: whichever way it may be called, it is this linguistic situation "that is held responsible for accelerating or even initiating, certain major restructurings of the English language at the end of the OE and the beginning of the ME period" (Kastovsky 1992 : 327).

Before examining the conflicting views, it is worth looking at the historical and social background in brief. It is known that the Northumbrian dialect area had been exposed to strong and repeated Viking attacks from the second part of the eighth century onwards and besides East Mercia it is this area that was subsequently and continuously settled and populated by Scandinavian immigrants up until the Norman Conquest. This latter peaceful infiltration and dense settlement was made possible by the treaty of Wedmore in 886, which allocated the Scandinavians the area north of the line of Watling Street, which area came to be known as the Danelaw.

The generally held view states that people living in the Northumbrian area (akin to those living in Mercia) became bilingual as a consequence of the contact. First, it was the English population that had to be able to communicate in the language of the invaders. Later, however, due to the overall majority of the original inhabitants, it was the Scandinavian population that slowly, perhaps in a few generations, became bilingual through intermarriage. This phase was followed by the extinction of their language in the centuries following the Norman conquest. This natural process is clearly described in Hansen's (1984 : 83–88) language shift and language death scenario. It is argued that the Scandinavians too became bilingual, then they restricted Scandinavian to intimate situations, which type of limited scope and monostylistic use is the prerequisite of language death. Finally, they switched to English for all situations. The completion of this shift was largely facilitated by the fact that Old Norse was a spoken variety only.

In the divergence between the spoken and written use of the language, one can find a link to Poussa's (1982) creolisation hypothesis, according to which the contact-induced creole developed into the so-called Midland koinē, understandable in the north and the south alike. This was followed by diglossia: whereas Late West Saxon continued for a while as the written standard language, the Midland creole koinē was used for everyday spoken exchanges. Poussa's creolisation account implicitly assigns language contact the role of initiator in the subsequent changes. Taking the example of Late Northumbrian and Late Mercian, the need to communicate with the invaders and the frequent cases of intermarriage effectively eroded both the nominal and the verbal inflectional system, resulting in the inflections tending to be done away with altogether for the following reason: as the word stems of the two languages resembled each other and were even identical in many cases, it was only the inflections that really conspicuously differed, threatening mutual intelligibility. Thus, getting rid of the morphological obstacles must have seemed the easiest way to overcome this threat in a society composed of large numbers of bilingual speakers exhibiting diverse levels of proficiency in the two idioms. It is easy to see that the creolisation account naturally supports the view which states that the contact initiated and not merely accelerated the changes.

Although entirely accepting the significance of bilingualism, arguments against the rather fashionable idea of creolisation are numerous. A representative of the non-creolisation view, Görlach (1986 : 334), acknowledges that there indeed was a far-reaching simplification with analogy at work, but this did not, however, lead to the complete loss of the inflectional system. To support his view with evidence, Görlach (*ibid.*) cites the *-s* genitive marking, which even extended to the so-called *father*-type nouns, and he adds that datives were marked until the 14th century. Also, Middle English did not lose gender and case in pronouns, number in nouns, personal endings and tense markers in verbs, all of which are attestedly important properties of creoles (*ibid.*). Concerning the role of the contact, Görlach says that the change appeared in the reduction of redundancy inherent in the Old English system, and the special needs of communication "triggered off or speeded up" changes that might otherwise have taken place much longer (*op.cit.* : 340). On grounds of his reasoning, it can be inferred that Görlach regards the contact both as initiator and accelerator of the simplification.

Allen (1997), too, argues against creolisation, and in her view language contact only accelerated the propagation of internally motivated innovations already afoot in Early Northumbrian. She presents some evidence: the *Leiden Riddle* and some other short pre-Scandinavian texts already show that Northumbrian was advanced as contrasted with the contemporary West Saxon, especially regarding the loss of the common nasal *-n* inflectional element of the weak declension and the reduction of back vowels in unstressed word-final syllables (*op.cit.* : 67). The phonological changes responsible for these simplifications were (i) the neutralisation of unstressed vowels, which weakened the declensional class distinctions; (ii) the loss of final *-n,* which further weakened these distinctions (*op.cit.* : 69). This was followed by case syncretism and analogical levelling.

When arguing against creolisation, Allen (1997 : 73) connects the impact of language contact with the notion of variation. She asserts that variation is always present in a language, but in stable social conditions innovations are not accepted, whereas in unstable social conditions, when relationships and community ties become volatile, changes spread faster, as the acceptance of the innovative variants is quicker due to the weakened social ties and norms. This is what happened in Northumbrian, in which the contact hastened the reduction of case marking categories. Also, it hastened the acceptance and spread of naturally arising variants rather than introduced new variants through imperfect language learning (*op.cit.* : 87).

To sum up, after having enumerated but deliberately not having opted for any of the alternative views on the extent and the role of the Old Norse and Old English contact, it can be noted that whichever scenario is correct, in around 1000 the Northumbrian dialect was considerably ahead of its West Saxon counterpart as regards inflectional erosion and loss.

3 Retention as a language contact phenomenon

Importantly, however, in the Northumbrian dialect there is a remarkable feature, exemplified amply in Li, which cannot at all be considered a case of inflectional reduction.[5] Quite the contrary, it seems that the inflectional exponent *-um* of the dative plural did not become reduced, levelled or lost. It is consistently to be found in all declensional classes and in all the three genders alike. Also, this exponent is found uniformly in all the possible environments of the dative case (including occurrence with certain prepositions and marking the indirect object). This systematic behaviour can be studied in the data below.

	Li	WSG1	BM and BB	WSG2
(3)	in dalum geliornesse 'in the dales of Galilea'	on galileisce dælas 'in Galilean dales'	—	on galileisse dales 'in Galilean dales'
(4)	of herum ðæra camella 'of the hairs of the camel'	of olfenda hærum 'of camel's hairs'	—	of oluende hære 'of camel's hairs'
(5)	of stanum ðissum 'of stones these'	of þisum stanum 'of these stones'	—	of þisen stanen 'of these stones'

[5] Just like in Mercian; see §**4.2.**

	Li	WSG1	BM and BB	WSG2
(6)	mið fotum 'with feet'	mid hyra fotum 'with their feet'	—	mid hyra fotan 'with their feet'
(7)	—	—	of handon 'from hands'	—
(8)	—	—	on wundun by wounds	—

If one looks at the first two columns only, it seems that the West Saxon dialect and the Northumbrian dialect were on a par with each other. However, in WSG2 the exponent of the plural dative is almost systematically *-en,* and the alternative endings exemplified in (3–4) and (6) occur extremely rarely. The two West Saxon contemporaries of the Northumbrian glosses, BB and BM, exhibit the change in progress, as they have the dative endings *-un* and *-on.*

This dialect difference appears even more pronounced if one considers a rather late specimen of Northumbrian which exhibits Scandinavian influence. It is the inscription on the Kirkdale Sundial, from North Yorkshire, inscribed between 1055–1065, ninety years after Li. The inscription reads as follows (Freeborn 1998 : 48–49):[6]

(9) Orm Gamalsuna bohte Sanctus Gregorius minster ðonne hit wes æl tobrocan & tofalan & he hit let macan newan from grunde Christe & Sanctus Gregorius in Eadward dagum cyning in Tosti dagum eorl. Þis is dages solmerca æt ilcum tide. & Hawarð me wrohte & Brand preostas.

It can be seen that there are two nouns having the dative plural exponent *-um*: (i) *in Tosti dagum eorl*; (ii) *in Eadward dagum cyning.*[7]

[6] The translation is as follows: Orm Gamalson bought St Gregory's Minster when it was all broken and fallen down and he caused it to be made anew from the ground to Christ and St Gregory in King Edward's days and in Earl Tosti's days. This is a day's sun marker for each hour. Hawarth and Brand priests made me.

[7] It is important to note that this unique inscription contains many traits of Scandinavian impact: (i) most of the names are of Scandinavian origin; (ii) in *Gamalsuna* one can see the patronymic suffix *-suna* ('son'), the adding of which to form personal names was a Scandinavian custom, which was later adopted throughout England, superseding the Anglo-Saxon patronymic suffix *-ing* (Freeborn 1998 : 49).

After the divergent dialect behaviour has been presented, the question arises: why did the otherwise progressive and innovative Northumbrian dialect preserve the classical Old English *-um* dative inflection, whereas the otherwise conservative West Saxon dialect followed the natural path of gradual phonological reduction, from *-um* $\rightarrow$ *-en,* through $m \rightarrow n$ (simplification), $u \rightarrow e$ (the reduction path being $u \rightarrow o \rightarrow a \rightarrow e$)? What can explain this Janus-faced nature of the northernmost Old English dialect? In the following it will be shown that again the answer must lie in language contact, regardless of whether the contact with Old Norse directly brought about the retention of this exponent or it only accelerated the tendency already present in the pre-Viking Northumbrian dialect.

Adducing the cases of mediaeval Danish and 18th century Afrikaans to explain the Middle English developments, Görlach (1986 : 340) argues that the phonological reduction and the subsequent loss of inflections could have been realised when the speakers of the two languages of similar social prestige, driven by the need to make themselves understood as easily as possible, kept the stems of the words but eliminated their own respective inflections. This in turn must have happened only if a considerable amount of everyday words resembled each other in the two languages, and the inflections differed from each other, thereby impeding mutual intelligibility. Using Görlach's set of these criteria, let us examine whether this was indeed the case. It can be claimed that in the long run the status and the prestige of the two languages in contact was the same. Also, a great deal of the wordstock of the two languages was common, and due to the nature of the contact the lexis must have been confined to everyday notions. These everyday words were the ones most likely to be mutually intelligible due to the common ancestry of Danish and English and the relatively short time that had lapsed after the Jutes, Angles and the Saxons departed from their mainland area of residence. The respective nominal inflectional systems of classical Old English and Old Norse, as can be seen in tables **A** and **B** below, diverged considerably from each other, both in the strong and the weak declension (Campbell 1959 and Haugen 1976).[8]

[8] Due to lack of space, only some of the declensional classes are represented here. For a comprehensive account on Old English see Campbell 1959, whereas the Old Norse system can be studied in its entirety in Haugen 1976 and Gordon 1957, from which my data are drawn.

		a-stem[9] (masc)		*o*-stem (fem)		*u*-stem (masc)	
		OE	ON	OE	ON	OE	ON
		'stone'	'arm'	'love'	'hole'	'son'	'shield'
SINGULAR	NOMINATIVE	stan	armr	lufu	grof	sunu	skjoldr
	ACCUSATIVE	stan	arm	lufe	grof	sunu	skjold
	GENITIVE	stanes	arms	lufe	grafar	suna	skjaldar
	DATIVE	stane	armi	lufe	grof	suna	skildi
PLURAL	NOMINATIVE	stanas	armar	lufa	grafar	suna	skildir
	ACCUSATIVE	stanas	arma	lufa	grafar	suna	skjoldu
	GENITIVE	stana	arma	lufa	grafa	suna	skjalda
	DATIVE	stanum	ormum	lufum	grofum	sunum	skjoldum

Table A: The strong declension in classical Old English and Old Norse compared

		Masculine		Feminine	Neuter
		OE	ON	OE	ON
		'man'	'man'	'heart'	'heart'
SINGULAR	NOMINATIVE	guma	gumi	heorte	hjarta
	ACCUSATIVE	guman	guma	heortan	hjarta
	GENITIVE	guman	guma	heortan	hjarta
	DATIVE	guman	guma	heortan	hjarta
PLURAL	NOMINATIVE	guman	gum(n)ar	heortan	hjortu
	ACCUSATIVE	guman	gum(n)a	heortan	hjortu
	GENITIVE	gumena	gumna	heortena	hjartna
	DATIVE	gumum	gum(n)um	heortum	hjortum

Table B: The weak declension in classical Old English and Old Norse compared

It can be observed that most of the Old Norse inflectional endings were considerably different from the Old English ones, which must have initiated or accelerated the simplification process described above within the non-creolisation account. At the same time, the paradigm data above are also compatible with the proposed creolisation scenario, since, the necessary conditions satisfied, it is equally possible that most of the inflections in the different declensions tended to be done away with altogether.

[9] Old English and Old Norse nouns are traditionally classified on the basis of their Germanic themes.

In Northumbrian, the inflections that remained unaffected by the reduction included the dative plural (*-um* in all declensions), the genitive singular (in *a*-stem nouns: *-es*) and the nominative/accusative plural (*a*-stem nouns: *-as*). In this dialect the genitive singular, the nominative/accusative plural, and to some extent, the genitive plural inflection, started to serve as targets for analogical levelling in the other declensions. Analogical levelling was already on the increase in Northumbrian around 975 (see also the analogical dative plural in §**4.1**). In West Saxon, however, phonological reduction was still to do its duty before large scale levelling would set in, much later than in the north and the north east.

In spite of the many divergent inflectional endings, from the tables it can be clearly seen that Old English and Old Norse nouns had one inflectional exponent in common, and this exponent was the entirely systematic dative plural *-um,* occurring in all genders and all declension types.[10] Moreover, in Old Norse *-um* occurred word-finally even if the noun was definite, as the so-called *slutartikel* was attached immediately to the stem, not to the inflectional suffix, as in the other cases. As a result, the two peoples who lived during the co-existence of Old Norse and Old English in Northumbria from about 800 on, did not need to eliminate the dative plural *-um* immediately in their daily exchanges, as it did not cause any misunderstanding between the interlocutors, whereas the divergence of the other inflectional

[10] As can also be seen, the genitive plural of strong nouns (*-a*) and weak nouns (*-ena*) in classical Old English were identical or almost identical with the respective strong and weak genitive plurals in Old Norse (*-a* for strong nouns and *-na* for weak ones). The coverage of the behaviour of the genitive plural inflections is beyond the scope of this paper, as it would require a separate paper. Suffice it to note at this point only that according to my data, Northumbrian exhibits only occasional phonological reduction of the genitive plural exponents. Some examples: (i) *wæro* for the West Saxon *wæra* ('the men's); (ii) *monno* for the West Saxon *monna* ('the men's); (iii) the completely reduced *scoe* ('of the shoes') for West Saxon *scoena.* At the same time, besides the classical Old English forms, one can find many examples of the weak exponent *-ana* (instead of *-ena*) replacing the exponent *-a* in strong nouns, as in *fiscana* for *fisca, ceastrana* for *ceastra.* These early signs of phonological reduction and analogical extension cannot be observed in the contemporary West Saxon (WSG1, BB, BM), whereas in WSG2 the variation is purely of phonological kind: the strong exponent *-a* is often found as *-e,* and the weak exponent *-ena* is often found as *-ene.* Therefore it can be claimed that the phonological process affecting the genitive was present both in West Saxon and in Northumbrian, although the former seems to have introduced it at a later time, and although the latter had full forms as variants besides the reduced ones. This variational character may mean that the genitive plural was not retained in Northumbrian due to language contact.

endings must have hindered or severely imperilled mutual intelligibility. So it can be claimed that the people living in the given area kept on using *-um* (for a short while only) and both the phonological reduction and the morphological simplification described above failed to apply.

At the same time the phonologically conditioned natural process of the reduction of *-um* (the path being *-um* → *-un* → *-on* → *-an* → *-en* → *-e* → ∅) is detectable in West Saxon, where one can find most of the dative forms in the highly reduced *-en* (the later WSG2), some examples of the moderately reduced *-un,* together with some examples of *-on* and *-an.* Consider the West Saxon data in (3)–(8) above.

Finally, it can be added that Kristensson's study of the Middle English toponymy of the West Midlands and the six northern counties (1987: 172–173) provides further evidence for assigning retention to language contact. He finds that Old English m in the dative plural ending *-um* was preserved besides the six northern counties (north of the Humber) in Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire. In the southern parts of the West Midlands, the Old English *-um* appears as *-un/-en/-e* in the late thirteenth and early fourteenth century.

4 Alternative models, explanations and further conclusions

In this section five more aspects will be discussed. They are expected to help to examine this retentional phenomenon from different angles and to verify the explanation proposed in the present paper.

4.1 Analogical levelling

The first aspect that needs investigating is analogical levelling. In the present research the plural forms of the other cases were also examined with the aim to find similar variation or retention of exponents. What could be observed is that in the *West Saxon Gospels* the later analogical *-as* plural is missing for the dative and the genitive cases only, it is only the nominative and the accusative cases that have this analogically levelled ending, so it can be argued that in the plural paradigm the analogical levelling of the nominative *-as* had not yet reached the terrain of the dative and the genitive.

Interestingly, however, in the Northumbrian text we can find some early signs of the plural marker's analogical levelling reaching as far as the dative plural. In Li, the glossator Aldred rendered the Latin *in caelis* as *in heofnum & heofnas,* a coordinated construction, which solution shows hesitation as to whether to accept the new, analogical variant of the dative plural or to stick to the older variant. In the analysed corpus there are cases when the analogical form *heofnas* stands alone.

The fact that the Northumbrian scribe exclusively used *these* two variants, whereas the contemporary West Saxon one used the classical form, proves two things: (i) in Northumbrian there were no transitional forms that showed the gradual phonological reduction of *-um*; (ii) the novel variant was analogically modelled on the plural nominative *-as* at a relatively early date, earlier than in West Saxon. On the basis of this the following conclusion can be drawn: the late retention of *-um* must have blocked the occurrence of its reduced development, and when this contact-induced and systematically preserved *-um* finally fell prey to the sweeping analogical levelling, there were no reduced forms to linger on as parallel variants of the novel and also contact-induced or contact-accelerated *-as*. Importantly, the levelling of *-as* to all the declensions was either directly triggered off (according to Görlach 1986 and Poussa 1982) or indirectly accelerated by the contact situation (according to Allen 1997). The analogical levelling must have been completed sometime between 1065 and 1200, as in the *Ormulum,* of Northeast Midlands provenance, dating from 1200, the only plural dative exponent is *-es,* the reflex of *-as* (Freeborn 1998 : 87):

(10) Wiþþ all þe fele wordess
'with all the many words'

Unfortunately, however, the insurmountable problem one has to face when wishing to see the gradual process of the replacement of *-um* with *-es* in its entirety is that from the intervening period there are no surviving manuscripts of northern provenance.

The fact that only the original and the most innovative exponents of the dative plural cooccur in the Northumbrian glosses, and in this ratio, proves that the indigenous phonologically conditioned process, viz., the reduction of unstressed back vowels, fails to apply whereas the morphological levelling is already afoot. Note that this configuration is compatible with the explanation offered in the present paper, according to which it was the Scandinavian influence that caused the Northumbrian dialect to preserve the older exponent, which retention in turn did not give any chance to the natural phonological reduction to apply.

4.2 On the status of Late Mercian

The argumentation in favour of assigning a significant role to language contact would not be complete and sufficiently convincing if one neglected the discussion of the developments in the other major dialect area exposed to Scandinavians, the contemporary Mercian dialect. It is not unexpected to state that with regard to reduction and retention phenomena, Mercian occupied an intermediate and even mediating position between Northumbrian and West Saxon, much akin to its Middle English continuation, the Midlands dialect, intermediate between the northern and the southern dialect areas. This status could be brought about as Mercian was also influenced by Old Norse, but at the same time it was largely and directly affected by West Saxon.

About the Mercian inflections in Ru1 the following can be noted: the dative plural is exclusively *-um.* The other case endings are more or less fully preserved, the greatest extent of erosion in inflectional endings is detectable in the dative singular. Another important feature is the frequent loss of *-n* in weak nouns (Campbell 1959 : 189, Hogg 1992a, §7.100). On the basis of this evidence, it can be claimed that in many respects Mercian is much closer to the progressive Northumbrian dialect than to the language of Wessex, but some forms may have been preserved probably due to the influence of the neighbouring West Saxon area, which had been unaffected by Viking raids and hence it had been enjoying political and some degree of linguistic stability.

Confirming Mercian's intermediate status, Hogg (1992a : 305) observes, too, that Ru1 shows loss of *-n* (in infinitives, adverbs and numerals) but not to the same extent as Northumbrian. Also, it can be added that Campbell (1959 : 112) claims that the Ru1 manuscript is penetrated by West Saxon spellings, and many striking non-Anglian features invade the text. This is further evidence in favour of the explanation that the aforementioned distortion in the extent of the inflectional simplification was due to some cross-dialect influence.

4.3 Suffix replacement

The next aspect that must be examined is the possibility outlined in Hogg's (1992a : 306) suffix replacement account. Hogg suggests that the weak nouns' robust evidence of *-an* endings (in the accusative, genitive, dative singular, and the nominative/accusative plural) triggered both the weak and the strong nouns' dative plural *-um* endings to be replaced with *-an,* which was subsequently reduced to *-en.* This analogical spread can be termed suffix replacement, and the argument in its favour can be that there are no texts that have examples of the dative plural ending in *-un* or *-om.* However, we saw in (8) that in BB there is a dative exponent *-un.* Also, in the

Northumbrian and Mercian dialect no evidence for Hogg's analogical suffix replacement can be found, as there are no dative plural forms in *-an* or even its later development, *-en.* This means that such suffix replacement cannot have happened earlier either. And as regards the later development of the dative plural exponent, in line with my argumentation above, if anything, it was the strong masculine *a*-stem plural nominative *-es* that could have qualified to induce the above kind of suffix replacement in these dialects. It can be concluded that the proposed suffix replacement is likely to have happened in the other Old English dialects.

4.4 On the possibility of conservative scribal practice

The fourth aspect one has to consider is the possibility of conservative scribal practice. Accordingly, the question is whether it helps to clarify the intriguingly ambivalent morphological character of the Northumbrian dialect specimen if we take into account the dimension of scribal practice.

One could argue that in Li ⟨um⟩ was a conservative graphemic solution that the scribe resorted to, as he did not want to mark the reduced forms by using other grapheme combinations like ⟨an⟩, ⟨en⟩ or ⟨on⟩, because he simply felt obliged to follow some conservative scribal tradition. Now the fact is that this very same glossator, Aldred, did not feel inhibited and did not prevent himself from using a great number of variant spellings elsewhere, in other inflections and in other common words (Campbell 1959 : 222–260 passim). For instance, he used variant spellings for the accusative singular and plural of *witega* 'prophet': one can find *witgæ, witga, witgo* instead of the classical West Saxon *witegan.*

In connection with the back vowels in this period, Strang (1970 : 341) notes that hesitation between the spellings ⟨u⟩ and ⟨o⟩ in unstressed positions does not indicate a sound midway between the two phonemes, but that the new sound has been arrived at, and sometimes appears in spellings, while at other times orthographic habits prevail. We can generalise from this that when variation between two endings can be found in a text, this means that the new sound in the ending has been reached. Therefore, following Strang's reasoning, it can be claimed that in Northumbrian, as there is no variation between *-um* and *-un/-on/-an/-en,* the new sound combination cannot have been reached.

With respect to the possibility of the presence of conservative scribal practice disguising the real language use, it is highly unlikely that the scribe was following a conservative tradition. This is, however, not to deny that in itself, of course, writing is attestedly more conservative than speech. Allen

(1997 : 72–73) tries to define the nature of the internalised grammar of the *Lindisfarne Gospels* glossator. She draws up two possibilities: (i) the scribe's own internalised case marking was significantly different from that reflected in his work: i.e., he learnt as part of his scribal training a linguistic system which was not that of his first language; (ii) the scribe's work essentially reflects the spoken language as far as case categories go. Allen (1997) opts for the second possibility, as she states that the use of the inflectional forms is easy to reconcile with the second assumption, as this use is highly systematic. On the basis of evidence in Allen 1997, it can be concluded that the scribe's grammar cannot have been conservative. Allen (*op.cit.* : 73) adds, however, that it is likely that the more innovative forms that occur only rarely in the glosses occurred more frequently in informal speech and that Aldred possibly used some innovative forms in speech that are not found in his writing. All in all, the influence of conservative scribal practice is more likely in the case of Old Kentish, which is discussed in the next section.

4.5 Phonological conditioning for the retention of *-um* and the case of Late Old Kentish

Campbell (1959 : 157) claims that in Late West Saxon the dative plural of nouns and adjectives, and the dative singular masculine and neutral adjectives occurred frequently as *-on* and *-an* instead of *-um.* His argument goes that presumably, first *m* changed to *n,* and when *u* was no longer protected by *m,* unaccented *u* became *o* and then *a.* He notes that this did not happen in Late Old Kentish, Late Mercian and Late Northumbrian, which all preserved *-um.* Campbell does not give any reason why these latter dialects preserved *u* longer than Late West Saxon. At any rate, Campbell's account, relying on phonological conditioning, is compatible with the explanation proposed in the present paper, since this phonological conditioning can be regarded as a consequence of language contact, which, through the participating languages' robust evidence of *-um,* must have blocked and postponed the application of the reduction process. Alternatively, if one opts for the possibility that phonological conditioning preceded contact, it can be argued that contact only reinforced this phonological protection, which is compatible with the view that language contact does not necessarily have to be the initiator of changes, and instead it can play the role of accelerator of loss or reinforcer of retention.

The intriguing point here is the behaviour of Kentish, which was obviously unaffected by Scandinavian migration and settlement,[11] but which also shows the retention of *-um* in the so-called *Kentish Glosses to Proverbs* (Campbell 1959 : 157). This is, however, not exactly the case, for Campbell himself notes that occasionally in Early Old Kentish charters *-em* is found instead of *-um* (*ibid.*). This is a significant point, since it can be seen that the phonological process had already applied to the unstressed back vowel at an early date.

As in the aforementioned occurrences of *-em* the influence of analogy cannot be excluded completely (Campbell 1959 : 157), the explanation for the peculiar status of Kentish one can resort to is as follows. Throughout the Middle Ages Kentish was the most conservative of all the English dialects. This is the dialect which was most typically influenced by the conservative scribal practice. Since the area had Canterbury as its focal point, the documents produced in this dialect must have been affected by conservative scribal practices even when the spoken variety of the dialect would have allowed for the use of the innovative variants used even in writing in the more innovative dialects. Also, it was Kentish that preserved the remnants of the grammatical gender and some other inflectional traits of classical Old English well into the 14th century (Görlach 1986 : 340). Furthermore, one must take into consideration the influence which Mercian (in the era of Mercian political dominance, from the early eighth to the mid-ninth century) and West Saxon (in the era of West Saxon political dominance, from the mid-ninth century onwards) exerted on Kentish. One is not surprised to find that during and even after Mercia's hegemony, the archbishop of Canterbury was Mercian. Toon (1992 : 427) notes that the religious community at Canterbury, which was largely responsible for the production of documents, was representative of England, so it may even be the case that the rather conservative forms were retained in order to facilitate communication between the divergent parts of England through the medium of the idealised classical Old English, which had the dative plural consistently in *-um*. Toon (1992 : 450) claims that Mercian letter forms and linguistic forms are abundantly

[11] The Viking army attacking London and East Anglia (besides the coast of Northeast Midlands) at frequent intervals used the islands of the Thames Estuary (mostly Sheppey and Thanet) as their overwintering place. At the advent of spring they usually continued upriver or further north to East Anglia, sometimes also setting foot on Kentish soil with the aim of plundering and not settling: for example in 851 they plundered Canterbury but did not found any settlements (Allen 1997 : 67). The place name evidence and the later history of the Kentish dialect attest that there was not any quantifiable Scandinavian element in Kent.

documented in the Kentish charters of the Mercian dominance period. All in all, one can regard as well-based Campbell's doubt that "it is not possible to be sure if the extant copies reflect the orthographic practice of the area of the grant or that of the kingdom of the monarch concerned" (1959 : 6) and his claim that the dialect of the two extant Kentish poems from the late 10th century is considerably mixed. Having examined the social and linguistic background of Old Kentish, it can be concluded that the retention of *-um* in Kentish is just another example of its overall conservatism (or dialect contact with Mercian) and it is not the result of language contact.

5 Conclusion

In this paper it has been pointed out that it was the contact between Old Norse and Old English which, to a large extent, influenced, either through initiating or accelerating, the retention of the dative plural exponent *-um* in the Northumbrian dialect. Also, it has been claimed that this retention was not phonologically conditioned or due to conservative scribal practice, nor did it serve as the input for analogical suffix replacement involving weak nouns. Besides Northumbrian, Mercian was also affected by Old Norse, which resulted in similar retention.

Abstracting from the concrete case, now it is possible to conclude that language contact, traditionally thought to reinforce or introduce innovative tendencies, can also be claimed to reinforce or introduce seemingly conservative tendencies. The latter is what happened in the case of Northumbrian and Mercian. The contact in question did not let the otherwise innovative or natural phonological reduction to run its course. Instead, through blocking the phonological process it helped morphological levelling to affect the nominal paradigm, a chronologically more progressive phenomenon than reduction, prior to affecting the conservative Old English dialects.

The unresolved issue of the precise extent and the role of the language contact in question has also been noted. This, however, is irrelevant for the present discussion, as the explanation proposed in this paper is compatible on the one hand both with the creolisation and the non-creolisation view, and on the other hand, both with the initiating and the accelerating role of the contact. Whichever scenario and role is the correct one, and whichever way the outcome of the language contact is dubbed, the retention of the dative plural exponent *-um* can be ascribed to Scandinavian influence.

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