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NIM OR *TAKE*? A COMPETITION BETWEEN TWO HIGH FREQUENCY VERBS IN MIDDLE ENGLISH

JERZY WEŁNA

University of Warsaw

ABSTRACT

The paper discusses the fates of the verb *nim* (OE *niman*) which began to be displaced in later Old English by its synonym ON *take*. The native verb was eliminated from the standard speech in the 15th century, although it still survived until the 17th century in non-standard varieties of English. In order to establish the circumstances of the replacement the study concentrates on the chronological and geographical aspects of the process. Also, it confronts the research data with the statistics offered in Rynell's similar study (1948). The evidence comes from corpora such as the MED, the OED and selected Middle English texts.

1. Lexical substitution in English

The turn of the 11th century witnessed drastic changes on all levels of English, which rapidly began to modify its phonology, morphology, syntax and lexicon. The Norman Conquest of 1066 and its consequences only contributed to the precipitation of those processes occurring in what is now called the period of transition from Old English to Middle English. The enrichment of the vocabulary was effected either through the semantic modification of less frequent English words or through borrowing from other languages, French and Scandinavian in particular. In both cases the new word, native or foreign, often replaced the one used earlier, as in the case of the native noun *hund*, now semantically peripheral *hound*, which became replaced by *dog*, another native noun, or a substitution of Norman French *flour* 'flower' for the native noun *blom*(*a*) 'flower', now *bloom* surviving with a restricted sense. What a student of the history of English very often finds surprising is the apparent lack of logic in such substitutions. In other contemporary Germanic languages the original vocabulary which is strongly rooted in their lexicons in a prevailing number of cases survives into our times with only slight modifications of meaning, if any at all, as in the case of German

Hund 'dog' and *Blume* 'flower' which continue in Standard German with their original sense retained.

The employment of a loanword which refers to a new object, idea or activity is easily understood, while a process of replacing one word by another with the same sense is sometimes triggered by factors difficult to comprehend. Likewise illogical seems to be the English replacement of the Anglo-Saxon verb *weorfan* by Scandinavian cast, in turn replaced by another native verb *throw* (OE *þrawan*), which can again be confronted with German, a language retaining the verb *werfen* 'throw' in its original sense whose tradition goes back to the Old High German times. Occasionally the substitution could be caused by phonological factors, like attrition, as in the case of OE *æ* 'law', a modest residue of the earlier more substantial form OE *aewe*. The poor phonological structure of the noun only consisting of a single vowel may have determined its replacement by the Scandinavian borrowing *lagu* 'law' in Middle English.

The present author's earlier paper (Wełna 2001) discussed the loss in Middle English of the continuations of *ēode*, the preterite of the infinitive *gān* 'go', which seems to have reflected an attempt at removing the suppletive past tense form from the Old English sequence inf. *gan* : pt *ēode* : pp *ʒegan*. The attempt failed since the loss of *ēode* coincided with the rise of a new sequence involving suppletion, ME *go* : *wente* : *gone*, with the preterite *wente* 'went' representing the native verb *wendan* 'turn'. The logical conclusion is that the functional factor, here an effort to introduce a new word to either fill a semantic gap or simplify a complex system, need not be the only reason for a replacement of an old item by a native item or a loanword. According to Hansen (1984), with reference to Weinreich (1968: 56-61), "also homonymy and the need for synonyms may be decisive in bringing about borrowings from the language which is incidentally made available by the contact". A similar conclusion is implied in the older studies on language contact in Germanic, such as Offe (1908), Teichert (1912), Holthausen (1915/1919), Jaeschke (1931) and Prins (1941-1942).

On the basis of the *Oxford English Dictionary* (*OED*), as well as the data from the *Middle English Dictionary* (*MED*) and texts from *Literature Online* (www.lion.chadwyck.co.uk) the present study will aim at reconsidering the problem of the competition of the two verbs having the sense 'take', i.e. *niman*, recorded in the *OED* under the headword *nim*, and its synonym *tacan*, an Early Middle English borrowing from Scandinavian. The textual sources exploited here differ considerably from those used by Rynell (1948), so far the only study dealing extensively with the problem of the rivalry between these two verbs. (The statistics from Rynell 1948 is listed as the Appendix.) Here, an effort is made at establishing the approximate date when the loanword *take* began to win the competition in the standard type of English, replacing *nim* in its basic senses, with the focus on the dialectal aspects of the rivalry. It should also be made clear

that, like in other analogous cases of replacement, the substitution of the Scandinavian loanword *take* for native *nim* was not complete since the latter has survived in the non-standard forms of the language, e.g. in dialects, with its sense modified.

2. Forms of *niman* in Old and Middle English

Referring to one of the most basic actions, OE *niman* enjoyed a very high frequency of use, being one of the most widely encountered words in Old English literature. Equally common were its relatives in other Germanic languages, whose Proto-Germanic root **nem-* is reflected in, e.g., OFris. *nima*, *nema*, OHG *neman*, OS *niman*, *neman*, OHG *neman* and ON *nema*. (For the rise of the forms of *niman*, cf. Gough 1973.) Especially intriguing was the situation in Scandinavian since Old Norse also possessed a synonymous verb *taka* (pt *tok* : pp *tekinn*) which later found its way into English. As compared with the *niman*-type, *tacan* had a rather scant representation in Germanic, being only related to MDu./EMod.Fris. *táken* and, possibly, Go. *tēkan*. On consulting the *OED* one can find forms of *niman* much richer than those of *tacan*. A mere comparison of spellings in the *OED* reveals four different root vowels in the present tense of *niman* in Middle English, i.e. *nim-*, *niom-*, *nym-*, *nem-*), and only one of *tacan* (i.e. *tak-*). Analogously, six preterite Middle English roots (*nom-*, *nam-*, *nem-*, *neom-*, *nym-*, *num-*) and two past participle roots (*num-*, *nom-*) of *niman* respectively match only two preterite roots (*tok-*, *tuk-*) and one past participle root *tak-* of *tacan*. Needless to say, the forms of the Scandinavian loanword, being drastically less numerous than those of the native verb, were easier to handle in speech, a state of things which may have favoured the subsequent loss of *nim* at the expense of *take*.

The earliest instances of *nim* registered in the *OED* come from the Mercian glossaries:

1) c725 *Auserunt*, **nomun** [*Erf.* **noumun**], hlodun. (*Corpus Gloss.* (Hessels) A 909)
c825 *Adempto*, **ʒinumni**. (*Epinal Gloss.* 100), Hauserunt, **naamun** (113); Eadiʒ se **nimeð** & ʒecnyseð ða litlan his to stane (*Vesp. Ps.* cxxxvi. 9); þu **nome** hond ða swiðran mine (lxxii. 24), He sende engel his & **nom** mec of scepum feadur mines (*Vesp. Hymns* I).

and analogous forms are also common in *Beowulf* (2a), in the pure West Saxon dialect of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* (2b) and in King Ælfred (2c):

2) a) *Beowulf* (Z.) Ac he me habban wile d[r]eore fahne ʒif mec deað **nimeð** (447). Onsend hiʒelace ʒif mec hild **nime** (452). Forð near ætstop, **nam** þa mid handa..rinc on ræste (745); ʒif þæt ʒegangeð þæt ðe gar **nimeð**

(1847); þenden reafode rinc oðerne, **nam** on Ongenðio irenbyrnan (2986).

b) *O.E. Chron.* He..hiene him to biscep suna **nam** (an. 853); Hie him friþ **namon** [*Laud MS.* hi heom wið frið **ʒenamon**]; [Hi] winter setl **namon** on East Englum (an. 866). Her **nom** Beorhtric cyning Offan dohtor Eadburʒe (an. 787); & a-hreddon eall þæt hie **ʒenumen** hæfdon… (an. 917); þa **namen** his sune & his frend & brohten his lic to Englalande (an. 1135).

c) 888 K. Ælfred. Ða hlafordas **naman** swa hwæt swa hi hæfden (*Boeth.* xxix. §2); þonne **nimað** hi hiora men mid him (*Boeth.* xx); & eall þæt his fennas & moras **ʒenumen** habbað (xviii. §2); c890 He hine his ríces **benam** (*Bæda* iii. vii); c893 þe mon **nime** ænne eles dropan, and drype on an mycel fyr (iv. vii).

The variation of forms shown in (2) became enriched in Middle English when *niman* developed another variant, *nēme(n)*, with long [e:] in the present tense reflecting open syllable lengthening in the North. The preterite continued to use the earlier forms with short [a], as in *nam*, and produced forms with short [o] (*nom*) in Western dialects, simultaneously retaining the old form *nōm* with long close [o:] in the singular and the plural. Consequently, the verb developed variation between short [a], short [o] and long close [e:] in the present and, in addition, that between long open [ɔ:] from OE [ɑ:] (*nōmon* from OE *nāmon*) and long close [o:] in the preterite.

3. The earliest occurrences of *tacan*

It comes as a surprise that the Scandinavian loanword *tacan* is first registered not, as could be expected, in the Northern dialects where contacts with Scandinavian culture were most intense, but in *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, more precisely in its Early Middle English continuation known as *The Peterborough Chronicle*, the MS E of which comes from Northhamptonshire, i.e. Central Western East Midland (the quotations below come from the *MED*):

3) Eall þæt he mihte **tacen** wið innen & wið uten of læred & of læwed swa he sende ouer sæ agenes him (an.1127 *Peterb.Chron.* LdMisc 636).

?a1160 Dauid, king of Scotland, toc to uuerrien him. Ða **tocan** þa oðrew & helden her castles (an. 1135); Te eorl of Angæu wærd ded, & his sune Henri **toc** to þe rice…

Henri… **toc** al Peitou. Đe king **toc** his feord & beset hire in þe tur. Henri … **toc** hire to wiue. Te Lundenissce folc hire wolde **taecen**, & scae fleh (an. 114: *Peterb. Chron.* LdMisc 636).

As shown above, *tacan* appears in the *Chronicle* fully equipped with morphological markers representing both the present and the preterite forms. The different versions of the *Chronicle* contain passages which indicate that *take* was not yet fully domesticated. Although MS D (an. 1075) which was composed around 1100 contains the preterite *tōc* 'took', a later version of the Chronicle, MS E, coming from c. 1154, employs again the traditional form *nam*; cf. also Rynell (1948: 47-48):

4) c1100 He..**tóc** [*MS. E* **nam**] swilce ʒerihta swa he him ʒelaʒade (*O.E. Chron.* MS. D an. 1075).

The statistics of the occurrence of *nim* and *toc* shows unambiguously that the old form still prevailed in quantitative terms over the loanword. On comparing the *OED* data relevant to the *Chronicle* split into two periods, that before 1122 (the Old English type) and the other, 1122-1154 (the Middle English type), we obtain the following data:

5)

	NIM		TAK	
Before 1121	14		4	
1121-1154	29		8	
	niman	3/1	*tacan*	1/0
	nimon/en	0/3	*tæcen*	0/2
	nam(on/en)	8/22	*toc(an/en)*	4/6
	nom	1/0		
	(ʒe)numen	2/3		

The data in (5), numerically modest as they are, show that the *Chronicle* maintains a balance between the prevailing *nim*-forms and the new *take*-forms, which is evident from the proportion 2 NIM : 1 TAK in both types and in both periods. The prevalence of the preterite over the present tense forms is due to the character of the text which required the concentration of the scribes on the past, not current events. Considering the fact that *take* appears in other documents much

later its use in the *Chronicle* seems to confirm the hypothesis of the presence of the Scandinavian loanword in the English of the former Danelaw district.

The sections which follow contain a review of the distribution of *nim* and *take* in particular dialects, according to a chronological sequence.

4. Kentish

For lack of a larger quantity of texts Kentish data are as a rule scant. Item (6) lists the numbers of the *OED* citations of the forms of *nim(e)* and *take*. Square brackets enclose the total number of quotations from the *OED* which contain forms of *nim* and *take*:

6) a) c1315 William of Shoreham, Kent [614]
4 NIM (*nom/eth/en* 2, *y-nome* 2)
15 TAK (*tak/(e)th/þ* 12, *toke* 3)

b) 1340 *Ayenbite of Inwyt*, Kent [2546]
29 NIM (*nim/e/þ* 20, *y-/nom/e* 7, *nyme* 1, *nem* 1)
5 TAK (*tak/i(y)nges/th* 4, *y-take* 1)

Although the time distance between the two texts is small (around 25 years) they show a completely opposite proportions of *nim* to *take*, i.e. 1 NIM : 4 TAK in William of Shoreham against roughly 6 NIM : 1 TAK in the *Ayenbite of Inwyt*. This is yet another proof that William of Shoreham MS did not come from his hand, but represents the dialect of the scribe who copied it. Evidently, the text does not exhibit typical Kentish features, one of them being a numerical prevalence of the forms of the native verb *nim*, typical of the South, over the non-Southern loanword *take*. The only reliable fact is that the forms of *nim* in the *Ayenbite*, without doubt the most representative Kentish text, are still dominant in the middle of the 14th century, i.e. at the time when, as will be seen soon, other dialects show an opposite proportion. This tendency is also confirmed by Rynell (1948) who examined only the text of the *Ayenbite*. His figures for the *Ayenbite*, 195 NIM : 27 TAK, also exhibit the prevalence of the old forms.

5. South Western

One of the earlier South Western manuscripts, *South English Legendary*, contains a fragment in which both verbs, *nim* and *take*, coexist in the same sentence, and even express a similar meaning; cf.:

7) c1290 Seint Fraunceys nam þat tresor.. and in ore louerdes warde it tok
(*St. Francis* 66 in *S. Eng. Leg.* 55).

In general, the evidence from the Southwest is incomparably more valuable and numerous than the data from Kentish. The texts listed as (8) cover a time range from the turn of the 14th to mid-15th century, i.e. around 150 years, a time span which matches almost perfectly the Late Middle English period; cf.:

8) a) c1290 *S. Eng. Legendary*, Gloucestershire (nSW) [1707]
62 NIM (*nam* 22, *nom/e/n* 20, *i/y-nome* 11, *nim/e/st/th* 8, *y-neme* 1)
21 TAK (*take/n* 9, *tok/en* 9, *i-take* 3)

b) 1297 Robert of Gloucester, Gloucestershire (nSW) [3245]
97 NIM (*nom/e/on* 64, *i/y-nome* 19, *nyme/þ* 8, *nime/þ* 6)
20 TAK (*tok* (*toc*) 13, *take* 5, *i-take* 2)

c) c1325 *Sir Orfeo*, Gloucestershire (nSW) [42]
3 NIM (*-nome* 2, *y-nome* 1)
1 TAK (*toke* 1)

d) c1330 *Arthur & Merlin*, Dorsetshire (sSW) [676]
3 NIM (*nam* 2, *nomen* 1)
16 TAK (*tok/e/n* 14, *take/n* 2)

e) c1380 *Sir Firumbras*, Devonshire (wSW) [1006]
5 NIM (*nam* 2, *nem* 1, *nome* 1, y-*nome* 1)
38 TAK (*tok* 18, *take/n* 17, i/y-take 2)

f) c1380 Wyclif, Oxfordshire (nSW) [11968]
4 NIM (*nym* 4)
408 TAK (*take/th/en* 300*, *toc* (*toc*) 108)

g) c1449 Pecock, Oxfordshire (nSW) [1431]
2 NIM (*nym* 1, *nom* 1)
40 TAK (*tak/e/ith/un* 35, *to(o)k* 5)

The statistical data from the Southwest allow the identification of the time caesura when the occurrences of *take* began to grow rapidly and finally outnumbered those of its native rival *nim*. The initial proportions in favour of the native item in the three texts from Gloucestershire (3 : 1 in *South Eng. Legendary*, *Sir Orfeo* and 5,5 : 1 in Robert of Gloucester), all belonging to the end of Early Middle English, changed drastically to the opposite around 1330. A reverse tendency can be found in *Arthur and Merlin*, with the proportion of roughly 5 : 1 favouring the loanword, which increased to 7 : 1 in *Sir Firumbras* (c1380). As a result what we witness is an almost complete elimination of *nim* in Wyclif in the last quarter of the 14th century (4 NIM : 408 TAK).

Gradually losing its principal sense, the displaced native verb began to appear with prefixes, thus narrowing down its original meaning, as evidenced in *Sir Orfeo*, a poem from the first quarter of the 14th century (see (9) below). More than one hundred years later, in the middle of the 15th century and in a different dialect, Reginald Pecock of Oxfordshire (later working in London) still used the native word with prefixes as a kind of a special term, whose new sense testified to its having undergone semantic narrowing (9), cf.:

9) c1320 To his owne lady wel ny he come, And hur wel ny had **undernome** (*Orfeo* 306), With ryght gode wille they can out gon... So long they have **undernome**, That to Crassens they were ycome (441).

c1449 Wherbi he canne schewe and proue it to be a defaute for which he **vndir~nymeth** and blameth (Pecock *Repr.* Prol. 2); He comith not to liȝt, that hise werkis ben not **vndernome** (i. xvii. 97).

The above data are hardly comparable with those in Rynell's study of 1948 as his set of texts from the South and Southwest was completely different. Two his early texts from c.1200, *The Owl and the Nightingale* (16 NIM) and *Proverbs of Alfred* (1 NIM), contain no *take*-forms, but the equally early *Trinity Homilies* have 2 such forms (70 NIM) and *Vices and Virtues* has 1 form (70 NIM). Although the manuscript of Robert of Gloucester's *Chronicle* (e14th c.) is later than that of *King Horn* (mid-13th c.), its *nim*-forms (510) there prevail over *take*-forms (99), while the romance of Horn shows the ratio 4 (NIM) : 34 (TAK). Rather unexpectedly Rynell (1948) classifies Chaucer's works as representing the Southern type, where *The Canterbury Tales* (1387-1400, Ellesmere MS 15th c.) shows the proportion 11 NIM : 379 TAK.

Summing up, the Southwest seems to have been the territory where the loanword became generally accepted in the latter half of the 14th century.

6. West Midland

Linguistic changes in West Midland always had much in common with the South West. Frequently these two dialects are regarded as forming one linguistic area, referred to as Western, which is usually based on phonological criteria. As regards the operation of the replacement in time what was determined in the case of the South West is also true of West Midland. The distribution of the forms of the two verbs in various texts is shown below; cf.:

10) a) c1205 Layamon, Worcestershire/Somersetshire (WM/SW) [5448]
116 NIM (*nom* 78, *nim/eþ/en* 14, *nam* 10, *nemen* 5, *inumen* 5, *i-nomen* 2, *nyme* 1, *næm* 1)
13 TAK (*take/de/n* 8, *tok/en* 4, *i-taken* 1)

b) a1225 *Ancrene Riwle*, Cheshire (wWM) [3832]
37 NIM (*nim/eþ/en* 22, *nom/eþ* 10, *inumen* 3, *nemen* 2)
3*TAK (*tak/eþ* 2, *toc* 1; **MED*!)

c) a1300 *St. Gregory*, Staffordshire (sWM) [27]
2 NIM (*nom* 2)
2 TAK (*tak/e* 2)

d) c1300 *King Alisaunder*, Shropshire (wWM) [1422]
7 NIM (*nymeth* 3, *nam* 2, *nom* 1, *y-nomen* 1)
27 TAK (*to(o)k* 16, *take* 9, y-*take* 2)

e) c1300 *Harrowing of Hell*, Staffordshire (sWM) [112]
3 NIM (*nam* 2, *nomen* 1)
2 TAK (*tak* 1, *toce* 1)

f) c1325 *Early Eng. All. Poetry*, (?nWM) [2688]
6 NIM (*nome/n* 3, *nym* 1, *nem* 1, *nummen* 1)
15 TAK (*take* 11, *toke/n* 4)

g) c1340 *Sir Gawain*, Lancashire (nWM) [1295]
2 NIM (*neme* 1, *nomen* 1)
11 TAK (*ta/n/s* 6, *tok/e/n* 4, *take* 1)

h) c1350 *William of Palerne*, Herefordshire (sWM) [1313]
1 NIM (*nom* 1)
20 TAK (*take/s* 13, *tok* 7)

i) 1362 Langland Staffordshire (sWM) [5865]
11 NIM (*nym/eth/en* 7, *nom/e* 3, *nam* 1)
101 TAK (*take/th/en* 70, *to(o)k* 25, *i/y-take* 6)

j) a1400 *Chester Plays*, Cheshire (wWM) [422]
1 NIM (*nom* 1)
13 TAK (*take/th/s* 13)

k) a1400-1450 *Alexander*, Lancashire (nWM) [2037]
3 NIM (*nymes* 2, *name* 1)
19 TAK (*take* 12, *tuk* 6, *tok* 1)

l) c1400 *Destruction of Troy*, South Lancashire (nWM) [3530]
2 NIM (*nem* 1, *name* 1)
64 TAK (*take/th/en* 40, *tok* 24)

The original prevalence of *nim* over *take* is evident in Layamon's *Brut* (c1205), a poem from the beginning of the 13th century, in which the proportion between the native item and the loanword is 9 : 1. On comparing that text with another major literary work, William Langland's *Piers the Plowman*, a poem written more than 150 years later, we find a reverse proportion 1 (*nim*) : 9 (*take*), with similar absolute numbers. Here, the caesura between the statistically less and more frequent occurrences of *take* can be put around 1300. The text which separates the less frequent from the more frequent forms of take is *King Alisaunder*, representing Shropshire, which exhibits the proportion 7 NIM : 27 TAK. The last text, the *Destruction of Troy*, shows numerous forms of *take* (64) and only weak evidence of *nim* (2).

Rynell's (1948) selection of West Midland texts agrees with the above in three items only: Laȝamon's *Brut* (525 NIM : 35 TAK), *Ancrene Riwle* (104 NIM : 3 TAK) and *Sir Gawain* (6 NIM : 31 TAK). The statistics of the total occurrence of *nim* and *take* in these three texts corresponds proportionally to the incidence of these verbs in the same texts as recorded by the *OED* (see (10) above). As regards other texts absent from (10), Rynell's (1948) study offers the following figures for particular texts, all from around 1200: *Lambeth Homilies* (1190) 52 NIM : 1 TAK, *Sawles Warde* 7 NIM : 0 TAK, *Seinte Katherine* 20 NIM : 7 TAK, *Seinte Juliene* 13 NIM : 2 TAK, *Seinte Marherete* 8 NIM : 2 TAK, *Hali Meiðhad* 18 NIM : 4 TAK. A slight prevalence of *take*-forms is seen hundred years later in William Herebert (c1333) 3 NIM : 6 TAK, while poetical works from around 1400 (except *Patience* 5 NIM : 3 TAK) already exhibit a distinct tendency to prefer *take* (*Cleanness* 7 NIM : 17 TAK, *Pearl* 3 NIM : 15 TAK). Needless to say that there is a dramatic increase in the employment of *take* co-occurring with the elimination of *nim* in the period from around 1450 onwards, cf. *A Stanzaic Life of Christ* (5 NIM : 158 TAK), Pecock's *Instructions for Parish Priests* and *Festial* (1 NIM : 480 TAK) and John Audeley (no NIM : 117 TAK).

7. East Midlands

The East Midlands, the area in the southern part of which Standard English was born, showed no linguistic uniformity as it embraced several regions, such as the North East Midlands, East Anglia (Norfolk and Suffolk), and London (South), all exhibiting distinct dialectal traits. As regards our problem, an early text which offers evidence drastically different from the rest is the *Ormulum* (c1200), where *take* prevails over *nim* (33 NIM : 340 TAK in Rynell 1948). This is not surprising as Orm, the author of the poem, lived in the northerly areas of England where Danish influences were stronger than elsewhere in the region. A similar distribution is seen in *Havelok*, another text from Lincolnshire (13 NIM : 43 TAK; Rynell 1948). Quite interesting results are obtained on examining the

Peterborough Chronicle, the earliest East Midland document, with the ratio 8 NIM : 1 TAKE for the early part (1122-1131) and 10 NIM : 7 TAK for the so-called Middle English segment (1132-1154; cf. item (5) above). It can be thus concluded that on the whole, the East Midland was receptive to innovations, which resulted in a quick domestication of the Scandinavian loanword (see (11) below). For convenience the long list of texts from East Midland is split into two parts (11a-h) and (11i-o):

11) a) c1200 *Ormulum*, Lincolnshire (nEM) [2952]
4 NIM (*namm* 3, *nimenn* 1)
102 TAK (*tok* (*toc*) 63, *tak*(*tac*)/*eþþ*/*enn* 39)

b) c1210 *Bestiary*, Norfolk (eEM) [463]
4 NIM (*nimeþ* 4)
2 TAK (*takeþ* 2)

c) c1250 *Genesis & Exodus*, Norfolk (eEM) [2074]
53 NIM (*nam* 32, *num*/*en* 17, *nimen* 4)
17 TAK (*take*/*þ*/*n* 11, *tok*/*e*/*n* 6)

d) a1300 *King Horn*, Essex/Middlesex (sEM) [431]
1 NIM (*neme* 1)
11 TAK (*tok* 7, *tak*/*e* 4)

e) c1300 *Havelok*, Lincolnshire (nEM) [855]
2 NIM (*nam* 1, *numen* 1)
16 TAK (*tok*/*e* 11, *take* 5)

f) 13.. *Coer de Lyon*, London (sEM) [583]
2 NIM (*neme* 1, *ynome* 1)
19 TAK (*to*(*o*)*k*/*e* 14, *tak*/*e* 4, *i-take* 1)

g) c1314 *Guy of Warwick*, Suffolk (eEM) [649]
6 NIM (*nam*/*e*/*n* 6, *nim*/*eþ*/*en* 3)
12 TAK (*tok*/*e* 7, *take* 5)

h) c1320 *Seven Sages*, Essex/Middlesex (sEM) [614]
3 NIM (*nim* 1, *nome* 1, *inome* 1)
9 TAK (*tak*/*e*/*th* 6, *tok*/*e* 3)

Apart from the *Bestiary*, which contains very few instances of both verbs (5 NIM : 2 TAK in Rydell's count), the only text which shows prevalence of *nim* over *take* is mid-13th century *Genesis & Exodus*, representing the dialect of Norfolk (126 NIM : 54 TAK in Rynell 1948). All other texts contain considerably

more *take*- than *nim*-forms, even though the numbers are not imposing. As the territory labelled as East Midland was formerly to a large extent part of the Danelaw area such distribution is not surprising. But the dominant position of *take*-forms in London (cf. early 14th century *Coer de Lyon*) shows that the loan-word gained popularity in more standard varieties of English. This is also reflected in texts coming from around 1340 onwards; see below:

11′) i) 1338 Robert Mannyng, Lincolnshire (nEM) [4470]
21 NIM (*nam* 11, *nome/n* 7, *nyme/th/s* 2, *ynam* 1)
162 TAK (*to(o)k* 84, *tak/e* 78)

j) c1385 Chaucer, London (sEM) [11902]
14 NIM (*nam/e* 5, *no(o)me/d/n* 5, *nyme/th* 2, *nemne* 1, *i-nome* 1)
212 TAK (*take* 140, *to(o)k* 69, *i/y-take* 3)

k) 1390 Gower, London (sEM) [4680]
8 NIM (*nam* 4, *nom/e* 4)
165 TAK (*tak/e/th/n* 95, *tok* 70)

l) c1440 *Prompt. Parvulorum*, Norfolk (eEM) [5634]
1 NIM (*nom* 1)
26 TAK (*take* 25, *y-take* 1)

m) 1447 Bokenham, Suffolk (eEM) [490]
1 NIM (*nam* 1)
8 TAK (*to(o)k/e* 5, *tak/e/yn* 3)

n) 1480 Caxton, London (sEM) [10324]
3 NIM (*nome* 2, *nym* 1)
415 TAK (*take* 230, *to(o)k* 185)

o) 1486 Book of St. Albans, Hertfordshire (sEM) [732]
7 NIM (*nym/ne* 5, *nom/me* 2)
53 TAK (*take/n/e* 50, *tok/yn* 3)

Examples in (8 i-o) are evident proof that in the middle of the 14th century *nim* was relegated into the distant periphery of the lexicon of English. Although still found in the language of 14th century London poets, the verb must have been heavily marked semantically as indicated by its extremely low incidence in the important 15th century texts. Possibly, it could be felt as a foreign word since the author of the *Promptorium Parvulorum* decided to treat *nim* together with words of foreign origin which require translation; cf.:

12) c1440 **Nomyn**, or **take** wythe the palsye *paraliticus*(*Promp. Parv.* 358/1).

Characteristically, the only three occurrences of *nim* in Caxton are not simplex unprefixed-forms, but items with the prefixes *be-/by-* and *under-*, i.e. forms whose original general meaning was modified to 'deprive' or 'receive'; cf.:

13) 1480 To **benymme** Edwarde of his ryght (Caxton *Chron. Eng.* vii. 93/1); Euer he that was strengest **bynome** hym that was feblyst (xcvi. 76); 1483 He supplanted me of my patrymonye and now..he hath **undernome** from me my blessyng (*Gold. Leg.* 45).

Summing up, as compared with West Midlands, East Midlands was more consistent in implementing *take*, which became a standard form in the 14th century.

8. North

The evidence from the North represents not only Northern English but also Scottish dialects. It is to be regretted that documents earlier than the famous *Cursor Mundi* have not survived so that what is at our disposal is the poem itself in its Northern English and Scottish versions as well as several minor documents from Yorkshire and Scotland, listed under (14):

14) a) a1300 *Cursor Mundi*, Scotland/Northumberland [12751](various MSS)
27 NIM (nam/e 13, nom 6, num 5, nym 1, i-nom/en 1, i-num 1)
371 TAK (*take* 217, *to(o)k* 153, *i-take* 1)

b) c1320 *Sir Tristrem*, Yorkshire [478]
1 NIM (*nem* 1)
13 TAK (*tok/e* 10, *take/n* 1, *ytake* 1)

c) c1375 *Scottish Leg.* Saints, Scotland [1921]
1 NIM (*num* 1)
31 TAK (*tak/is/en* 31)

d) c1450 *St. Cuthbert*, Yorkshire [785]
5 NIM (*nym/e* 3, *nome* 2)
26 TAK (*tok* 14, *take* 12)

e) c1470 Henry (*Wallace*), Scotland [2086]
3 NIM (*nome* 2, *ynom* 1)
79 TAK (*tuk* 40, *take* 35, *ta* 4)

For lack of earlier evidence we can only point out that the Northern preference for the Scandinavian form reflects the fact of the North being for a long stretch of time dominated by the Vikings. The relatively high 8% presence of *nim*-forms in the *Cursor Mundi* is rather surprising in a dialect under strong Danish influence. However, in the later literary texts in the North they may have been

employed as archaisms and such seems to have been their position in both social and regional non-standard types of English.

The data from Rynell (1948) support in full the Northern tendency to eliminate *nim*-forms, although the latter are still relatively numerous in the manuscript Cott. Vesp. A III of the *Cursor Mundi* (36 NIM) and in Thomas Castelford's *Chronicle* (c1327, MS from c1400, with the ratio NIM 20 : TAK 170). Texts from the later period show a total lack of *nim*-forms, although *take*-forms are represented abundantly. Here belong Richard Rolle, *The Pricke of Conscience*, *The York Plays*, *Catholicon Anglicum*, Barbour's *Bruce* and essentially also *Towneley Plays* (1 NIM : 209 TAK). A survival of a small number of *nim*-forms is to be noted in two mid-15th century manuscripts, *Morte Arthure* (6 NIM : 57 TAK) and *The Life of St. Cuthbert* (8 NIM : 78 TAK). For a complete data from Rynell (1948) see the Appendix.

9. Concluding remarks

Although the present study has been based on a limited corpus from the *OED* and the *MED* confined exclusively to those Middle English texts which contained forms of *nim* or their variants, the following tentative conclusions can be formulated as regards the loss of the native word and the spread of *take*:

1. The chronology of the earliest forms of *take* shows that in early 13th century western dialects it was losing competition with *nim*, if we consider the high frequency of the latter verb in Layamon (SW), Robert of Gloucester (SW) and *South Eng. Legendary* (WM). The turning point was the period around the year 1330 when the loanword *take* began to dominate.
2. The presence of *take*-forms in the *Peterborough Chronicle* (12th century) may be proof that *tacan* had existed in the Anglo-Saxon language spoken in the Danelaw district.
3. In the East Midland the distribution of the new forms depended on geography. While in the North East Midland the loanword got rid of its native competitor in the early 13th century (cf. the *Ormulum*), the old verb still prevailed in Norfolk (*Genesis & Exodus*) in the middle of the same century.
4. A rapid rise in the incidence of *take* in the East Midland around 1330 precisely matches a similar development in the West. In that respect the East Midland and the West Midland show a far-reaching unanimity. As was expected, scribes from the North and from Scotland favoured *take*-forms, which appear in large numbers from the earliest times. But it should be recalled once more that texts from that area come from a relatively late period so that the incidence of *nim* and *take* in, for instance, 13th century Northern English remains unknown.

Last but not least, it is to be emphasized that the statistical reliability of data from the *Oxford English Dictionary* has been confirmed. Although smaller in number those data exhibit numerical proportions analogous to the proportions of *nim* and *take* obtained from the examination of complete texts by Rynell (1948).

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APPENDIX

Occurrences of *nim* and *take* (and their variants) in Middle English dialects based on Rynell (1948): a cumulative list

Kent	Date/MS	NIM	TAK
The Kentish Sermons	<1250/<1300	3	2
Dan Michel's *Ayenbite of Inwyt*	1340 (holograph)	195	27
South(western)			
Robert of Gloucester's *Chronicle*	c1300/c1330	510	99
The Owl and the Nightingale	>1200/c1250	16	–
The Proverbs of Alfred	<1200/1250-1300	1	–
Trinity Homilies	1100-1200/c1200	70	2
Vices and Virtues	c1200/1200>	70	1
King Horn (Cbg Gg 4.27.2)	c1225/c1260	4	34
Geoffrey Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* (Ellesmere MS)	1387-1400/1400>	11	379
West Midlands			
Patience	1350-1400/c1400	5	3
Cleanness	1350-1400/c1400	7	17
Pearl	1350-1400/c1400	3	15
Sir Gawain and the Green Knight	1350-1400/c1400	6	31
St. Erkenwald	c1386/c1477	–	5
A Stanzaic *Life of Christ*	1350-1400/1450-1500	5	158
Pecock's *Instructions for Parish Priests & Festial*	1400>/1450	1	480
John Audeley	c1426/1425-1450	–	117
William Herebert	c1333 (holograph)	3	6
Lambeth Homilies	<1066/c1190	52	1
Sawles Warde	>1200/c1210	7	–
Seinte Katherine	>1200/c1210	20	7
Seinte Juliene	>1200/c1210	13	2
Seinte Marherete	>1200/c1210	8	2
Hali Meiðhad	>1200/c1210	18	4
Ancrene Riwle (Northern WM)	<1225/1230-1250	104	3
Laȝamon's *Brut*	c1205/1200-1225	525	35

East Midlands			
Ormulum	c1200 (holograph)	33	340
Havelok	c1250/c1310	13	43
Robert Mannyng's			
– *Handlyng Synne*	c1310/c1360 (Harley)	23	215
– *Chronicle* (lines 1-10,000)	c1300	67	236
Anglo-Saxon Chronicle			
– (1122-1131)	c1122-31	8	1
-- (1132-1154)	c1154/c1272	10	7
Dame Siriþ	c1200	1	1
The Bestiary	1200-1250/<1300	5	2
Genesis & Exodus	c1250/c1300	126	54
Dux Moraud	1300-1350/>1350	–	3
John Grimestone's *Commonplace Book*	1372 (holograph)	1	17
Promptorium Parvulorum	1440/>1440	8	55
Ludus Coventriae	c1450/>1450	2	319
North			
Cursor Mundi (Cott. Vesp. A III)	c1300/-1350	36	222
Barbour's *Bruce*	1375/1487	–	623
The Life of St. Cuthbert	c1450/c1450	8	78
Richard Rolle	1325-1349/c1400	–	42
The Pricke of Conscience	c1350/c1400	–	72
Catholicon Anglicum	c1475/1483	–	23
The York Plays	c1350/c1440	–	300
Towneley Plays	c1400/1450-75	1	209
Thomas Castelford's *Chronicle*	<1327/c1400	20	170
Morte Arthure	c1360/c1440	6	57