# Fights and Games: Terms for SPEECH in Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

The Arthurian romance Sir Gawain and the Green Knight (SGGK) is one of the best-known examples of the so-called "Alliterative Revival" of the late Middle English period. These poems are characterized, generally speaking, by the presence of four stressed syllables in each line, the first three of which tend to alliterate.[1] The alliterative requirements of their metrical structure and their authors' taste for technically accurate and detailed descriptions, where a single concept could be referred to by a wide array of terms through variation, meant that poets needed to have access to a large pool of terms ((near)-synonyms as well as words related to each other in terms of hyponymy, metonymy, and different levels of prototypicality) so as to refer to common concepts and key elements in the narrative. Traditional poetic words (including archaisms), dialectally marked words, and loans from various languages, mainly French and Old Norse (many of which are also dialectally marked), helped to develop the authors' lexical repertoire. [2]

In keeping with the significance of lexical richness in these texts, scholars have already paid much attention to the Gawain-poet's choices in connection with terms referring to elements of thematic, generic and cultural significance in the text, such as knights,[3] horses,[4] armor,[5] landscape,[6] hunting,[7] and the legal and commercial terms included in the various agreements Gawain enters into.[8] Yet, scholarly attention has not extended to the poet's choices in connection with the lexico-semantic field of SPEECH, with the important exception of a few words, mainly the Middle English (ME) legal terms covenaunt and foreward, the apparent neologism "luf-talkyng" and ME treuth, a central term in the poem referring to a

complex set of moral, religious, cultural, and linguistic concepts.[9] We should not forget either Michiko Ogura's very brief description of the syntactic contexts where one can find some of the verbs for SPEECH (particularly ME seien, tellen and quod/th, a residual form of ME quethen) in our author's texts.[10]

Despite the lack of due scholarly attention, the study of the terms for SPEECH in SGGK is very important for our understanding of the text because speech representation plays a central role in the poem.[11] To some extent, this is a generic convention, in keeping with its topic and metrical form. On the one hand, as noted by Frank Brandsma, "[i]n Arthurian romance, knights seem to talk at least as much as they fight."[12] On the other, together with nouns meaning 'man, warrior' and verbs of movement, verbs referring to SPEECH are among those words which attract the highest number of near-synonyms in late alliterative texts.[13] Thus, from both a generic and a formal perspective, the study of terms belonging to this lexico-semantic field engages with the very fabric of the poem and, therefore, requires further attention.

Instead of focusing primarily on the links between the poem's rich vocabulary and near-contemporary cultural practices, as is generally the case in previous studies, this paper brings together various theoretical approaches to lexical semantics and stylistics to scrutinize the relations between the various terms referring to SPEECH. Following this line of enquiry, some verbs meaning 'to utter' are shown to be particularly important for the development of the combative atmosphere that surrounds Camelot's interaction with the Green Knight (overtly) and Gawain's discussions with the Lady of Hautdesert (covertly); hence, this study reveals a crucial aspect in the text's replacement of martial encounters with verbal duels (see further Section 4.1). This approach also enables us to account further for the games that the poet plays on his audience by, on the one hand, tricking them about the significance of Gawain's stay in Hautdesert for his agreement with the Green Knight and, on the other, offering visual

and linguistic clues about this connection (see further Section 4.2). Accordingly, the significance of this paper lies, not on the provision of new readings, but on the fact that it demonstrates the centrality of an understudied lexico-semantic field for the artistic success of this well-known poem.

## 2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

As noted above, the work presented here is grounded in historical lexical semantics. Lexical semantic studies can take an onomasiological or a semasiological approach, which, as Louise Sylvester explains, can be distinguished as follows: "[t]he semasiological approach begins with the set of lexemes and investigates what they mean and what they meant at different times during the period in question […] The onomasiological approach takes a set of objects or concepts as the starting point and investigates what words were used to express them."[14] By focusing on the relationships between various terms referring to SPEECH, this paper takes primarily an onomasiological approach, based on one of the key contributions of structuralist semantics: the lexical field. The latter can be defined as "a set of semantically related lexical items whose meanings are mutually interdependent and which together provide a conceptual structure for a certain domain of reality."[15] Although in some early structural studies the terms lexical field, semantic field and word field are treated as synonyms,[16] here lexico-semantic field encompasses the structure of concepts referred to as well as the set of lexical items that cover those concepts. Word field, on the other hand, has a purely morphological sense: it refers to the group of terms that share the same root, either as simplexes, derivatives or compounds.

The study of the semantic connections between the various terms that are part of the lexico-semantic field of SPEECH in SGGK is based on the relational approach to structural

semantics, with particular emphasis on the relationship of semantic inclusion that holds between a more general term (the superordinate term or hyperonym) and a more specific one belonging to the same taxonomy (the subordinate term or hyponym), and the relationship of semantic identity commonly referred to as synonymy.[17] Field theory and the significance of semantic inclusion and identity (together with folk and expert categorization) are at the core of the taxonomy presented by the Historical Thesaurus of English (HTE), which classifies the vocabulary included in the Oxford English Dictionary (OED), as well as the terms collected in the Thesaurus of Old English.[18] As noted below (Section 3), the HTE's classification is the main starting point for this study.

However, given that the aim is to analyze the lexical choices made by the poet to express a particular concept, this general onomasiological approach is also supplemented with a semasiological focus on the polysemy of some terms. Polysemy is explored in relation to two of the main tenets of cognitive semantics, a more recent approach to lexical semantics: prototype theory and conceptual metaphor theory.[19] Prototype theory, based on the work of the psychologist Eleanor Rosch,[20] suggests that category membership is not binary, defined by a single set of necessary and sufficient attributes, but gradual in terms of typicality, with the core members of the category being commonly recognized as the more typical examples of that category and those standing in the periphery sharing some of those attributes but not necessarily others. This gradation in typicality can be applied both onomasiologically, in terms of the members of a lexico-semantic field; and semasiologically, in terms of the various meanings of a word, with some meanings being considered more central or prototypical than others.

Conceptual metaphor theory, pioneered by George Lakoff and Mark Johnson,[21] views metaphors, not as examples of lexical embellishment, but as key cognitive structures that allow us to make sense of the reality around us: we conceptualize a target domain (often

referring to something more abstract) in terms of a source domain (often referring to something more concrete), with the mapping between the two domains being based on the alignment between their elements. These alignments give rise to different linguistic manifestations of the same underlying conceptual metaphor; for instance, expressions such as "We are at a crossroads," "The relationship is at a dead-end," "It's been a long, bumpy road, but we got there," "Look how far we've come," etc. are all manifestations of the metaphor LOVE IS A JOURNEY, with the lovers being conceptualized as travellers, the relationship as a means of transport, its development as a journey, its aims as the journey's destination, etc.[22] While prototype theory can help us think about the structure of the semantic space of a term, conceptual metaphor theory can be used to explain the similar patterns of polysemy and semantic change of words originally associated with particular domains / lexico-semantic fields. Thus, Section 4.1 explores the thematic significance of the polysemy of various verbs whose meaning 'to utter' seems to be an extension of their prototypical meaning 'to throw, hurl' / 'to release', this polysemy being exploited (and possibly having originally developed, at least as far as ME werpen and casten are concerned) in relation to the metaphor ARGUMENT IS WAR. These verbs, it is argued, enhance the sense of antagonism between the characters, who engage in verbal combats rather than physical fights.

In order to investigate further the poet's lexical choices, stylistic concerns related to the formal structure of the poem (see above, Section 1), the use of linguistic variation for the sake of characterization (see below, Section 4.2.2), and the contrast between foregrounding and backgrounding are also taken into account. The term foregrounding was introduced to the field of stylistics by Paul Garvin in order to render the Czech word aktualisaze ('actualization') in his translation of Prague Circle structuralist Jan Mukarovský's 1932 article on the nature of poetic language.[23] In keeping with the views of the Prague Circle and Russian formalists, Mukarovský believed that the main function of the poetic / literary

language was to surprise the reader in relation to its use of the linguistic medium it is based on, to de-automatize the way in which we normally interpret language. Moreover, in a literary text itself, particular terms can be foregrounded (i.e. made more prominent) against the (less prominent) background of the rest of the text. The two main ways through which foregrounding is achieved are deviation from an expected norm (which might have been set outside the text or by the text itself) and parallelism (which could, in any case, be seen as deviation from the general norm of repetition avoidance).[24]

## 3. METHODOLOGICAL DECISIONS

The identification of the terms belonging to the lexico-semantic field of SPEECH in the poem has been carried out through the careful reading of the text and the manual extraction of the possible candidates with the help of J. R. R. Tolkien and E. V. Gordon's edition, Malcolm Andrew and Ronald Waldron's edition and translation, and Ad Putter and Myra Stokes's edition, as well as the MED and the OED.[25] For the sake of rigor and consistency, this selection has subsequently been narrowed down to the terms with a relevant meaning recorded by the HTE in section 02.07.03 THE MIND > LANGUAGE > SPEECH (and its subsections). However, on some occasions decisions in relation to the association of attested forms with a particular lemma, the inclusion / exclusion of a term, or its semantic categorization do not follow the information provided by the OED / HTE:

a) Lemma identification: the forms that Andrew and Waldron present as "lauced" (ll. 1212 and 1766) and "lauce" (l. 2124) have troubled the text's editors for over a century because it is not clear whether the two minims between <a> and <c> should be read as <u> or <n>.[26] The OED prefers to read an <n> and hence associates these forms with ME launcen (cp. Anglo-Norman, AN, lancer 'to throw, cast');[27] this reading would bring this verb in line with ME werpen and

casten, as another example of the metaphorical connection between hurling objects and producing speech (see further below, Section 4.1). However, this reading has been rejected in favor of <u> and these forms are interpreted instead as belonging to the paradigm of ME losen 'to let loose' (cp. ME los 'loose', cp. Old Icelandic, OIc, lauss 'loose').[28] In keeping with Andrew and Waldron's, and Putter and Stokes's editions and the MED, this is the interpretation followed here.[29]

b) Sense identification: although the OED does not record a sense related to SPEECH for ME ME cast in line 1295, delen in line 1668, leten in line 1086, and reformen in line 378, they are included in this study on the basis that the MED and the main editors of the text agree in associating these uses with this lexico-semantic field.[30] Accordingly, they are interpreted as meaning 'utterance', 'to converse', 'to utter' and 'to rehearse, restate', respectively. We need to remember that the OED takes a semasiological approach and focuses on the meanings that can be attributed to a word, while the onomasiological starting point of the present article requires that we also pay attention to specific uses of a word in the text.[31]

d) Category identification: the categorization of ME breven when it means 'to recount, relate' and ME recorden when it means 'to repeat, rehearse' does not seem to have been consistently handled in the HTE: while the former is only associated with the provision of information in society (03.09.05), ME recorden is included in 02.07.03.06.01 RECITATION.[32] Given the categorization provided for recount on the one hand, and repeat and rehearse on the other, the aforementioned verbs are here associated with 02.07.03.03 NARRATION, and 02.07.03.04 REPETITION, respectively.

On the basis of these methodological decisions, we can identify sixty terms referring to SPEECH in the poem. They are mainly restricted to two grammatical categories: nouns (twenty) and verbs (thirty-eight), with only two adjectives. Many of them (eight nouns and thirteen verbs) are associated with the more general category 02.07.03, meaning 'speech, act

of speaking' and 'to speak, say, utter', respectively, a clear exemplification of the high level of near-synonymy in this field:

- Nouns: ME carp, cast, lote, resoun, saue, speche, spel, word
- Verbs: ME carpen, casten, leten, losen, melen, nevenen, nornen, quethen, reden, seien, speken, spellen and werpen.

The other terms refer to more specific concepts within this lexico-semantic field. Table 1 presents their distribution in terms of their meaning and grammatical categories. It shows very clearly that, other than the most general reference to the generation of speech, most terms are associated with the subfields of CONVERSATION, REQUEST and AGREEMENT, some of the most important areas of speech production for the plot of the story.

| Semantic categories | Nouns | Verbs | Adjectives |
|---|---|---|---|
| 02.07.03.02 MANNER OF SPEAKING | | ME yeien | |
| 02.07.03.03 NARRATION | ME tale | ME breven, rehersen, tellen | |
| 02.07.03.04 REPETITION | | ME naiten, recorden, reformen, rehersen | |
| 02.07.03.07 CONVERSATION | ME daliaunce, talke, talkinge | ME casten (unto), dalien, delen, speken, talken | |
| 02.07.03.10 TACITURNITY / RETICENCE | ME silence | | ME stille<br>ME ston-stille |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| 02.07.03.12 REQUEST | ME *askinge*, bon | ME asken, beden, bisechen, callen, craven, ethen, frainen, nornen, pleden, preien | |
| 02.07.03.13 AGREEMENT | ME bargaine, covenaunt, foreward, hot, treuth | ME accorden, baithen, graunten, hoten, sikeren, sweren | |

Table 1. Distribution of the terms for SPEECH in their lexico-semantic subfields

## 4. TERMS FOR SPEECH AND THE POET'S ART

The selection of a particular term in an alliterative poem depends on a number of factors: semantic, syntactic, metrical, etc. Without doubt, syntactic and metrical (i.e. formal) factors often influence the choice of various words and it is particularly interesting to see how they might have led authors to use a word with a somewhat uncommon meaning. For instance, the prominence of ME carpen in alliterative texts as a semantically colorless term, commonly meaning 'to speak' (cp. ll. 263, 360, 377, 1088, 1221, 1979) and 'to speak with, converse' (cp. ll. 696 and 1225) and lacking the negative connotations with which it is used in some near-contemporary texts,[33] could be taken as an example of the tendencies towards generalization and melioration exhibited by terms which, like this verb, are frequently used by alliterative poets because of the need of near-synonyms starting in different sounds.[34]

Yet, the poet's artistic dexterity comes more clearly to the forefront when we can see that his lexical choices are not mainly dictated by form but interact successfully with semantic, thematic and non-formal stylistic factors. This interaction takes center stage in the discussion presented in this section.[35] In Section 4.1 I discuss how the Gawain-poet relies on terms for SPEECH to develop the agonistic atmosphere that dominates much of the text in spite of the absence of physical combat per se, while in Section 4.2 I focus on the way in which terms for SPEECH help the author to play with his audience by keeping them in the dark about the significance of Gawain's acceptance of the girdle for the knightly quest he accepted in Camelot and, at the same time, offering them hints about the close relationship between the two courts which can be unpacked in subsequent encounters with the text.

## 4.1. VERBAL CONFRONTATION

As noted in the introduction, conversations rather than physical fights dominate most of the action in this text: here being able to overcome opponents in verbal exchanges is much more important than engaging them in battle. The physicality of words and their weapon-like qualities, a manifestation of the well-known conceptual metaphor ARGUMENT IS WAR, are highlighted right at the beginning of the poem, when the Green Knight prompts Arthur into action by claiming: "Now is þe reuel and þe renoun of þe Rounde Table / Ouerwalt wyth a worde of on wyȝes speche" (ll. 313-14; Now is the revelry and renown of the Round Table overthrown by a word of one man's speech). This statement exemplifies the power that oral and early literate cultures are said to attribute to speech.[36] As noted by Ong, this power derives from the fact that

> [sound] must emanate from a source here and now discernibly active, with the result that involvement with sound is involvement with the present, with here-and-now existence

> and activity. Sound signals the present use of power, since sound must be in active production in order to exist at all.[37]

Ong associates the power and dynamism of oral speech with the fact that, in these cultures, verbal encounters are often portrayed as being highly agonistic:

> Writing fosters abstractions that disengage knowledge from the arena where human beings struggle with one another. It separates the knower from the known. By keeping knowledge embedded in the human lifeworld, orality situates knowledge within the context of struggle.[38]

The combative nature of speech can be seen most clearly in the medieval episodes commonly referred to as "flyting." They involve "a reciprocal thrust of résumés turned weapon, of words coinciding with, or leading inexorably to, deeds."[39] After all, Ong argues, "[i]n oral-aural cultures it is […] eminently credible that words can be used to achieve an effect such as weapons or tools can achieve."[40]

The fact that in Present-Day English we still use very frequently manifestations of the conceptual metaphor ARGUMENT IS WAR (e.g. "What's your strategy to win the argument?," "He attacked all the weak points of my argument," "You don't agree. Okay, shoot!") suggests that the representation of verbal encounters in agonistic terms is not restricted to oral or early literate cultures.[41] The difference, then, seems to lie in the fact that orality fosters reliance on ritualized verbal aggression as a way to gain status and power (as seen in the connections between flyting and modern practices such as flaming),[42] as well as in the level of physicality attributed to weapon-like words.

Although other terms referring to SPEECH also help to develop the idea of verbal confrontation in our text, the Gawain-poet relies mainly on a set of polysemous verbs, particularly ME casten, losen and werpen, for this purpose. They all have a sense associated with the throwing or releasing of objects as their core or prototypical meaning, and 'to utter'

as one of their peripheral meanings; thus, they all exemplify the broader conceptual metaphor WORDS ARE OBJECTS EXCHANGED BETWEEN INTERLOCUTORS.[43] This conceptualization highlights the physicality and dynamism of the words. These traits can be said to be present in the various contexts where the verbs are attested in the text, although they are not always associated with the combative power of words: consider, for instance, line 64, where ME casten refers to the utterance of expressions of enjoyment by the Arthurian court; and line 1423, where ME werpen refers to the huntsman's utterance of orders and words of encouragement to the dogs just before the hunt.[44] There are, however, some other contexts where the verbs' core meaning (viz. 'to throw, hurl' for ME casten and werpen, and 'to free, let loose, release' for ME losen) becomes particularly important in identifying words with flying weapons, which interlocutors throw at each other like fighters would do with any type of missile.

Other scholars have noticed the significance of verbal aggression at the beginning of the text. Indeed, the initial conversation between the Green Knight and Arthur could be discussed as a non-prototypical example of flyting or the structured interactional exchanges by which an outsider requests an action from Camelot.[45] However, the role that verbs meaning 'to utter' play in this respect has not been explored. These verbs help the poet to set the scene right from the first time the Arthurian court meets the Green Knight:

> Þe fyrst word þat he warp, "Wher is", he sayd,
> "Þe gouernour of þis gyng? Gladly I wolde
> Se þat segg in syȝt, and with hymself speke
> Raysoun." (ll. 224-27)
> (The first word that he uttered, "Where," he said, "is the ruler of this company? I would gladly set eyes on that man and speak words with him.")

Þerfore to answare watz arȝe mony aþel freke

And al stouned at his steuen and ston-stil seten

In a swoghe sylence þurȝ þe sale riche.

As al were slypped vpon slepe so slaked hor lotez

In hyȝe—

I deme hit not al for doute

Bot sum for cortaysye—

Bot let hym þat al schulde loute

Cast vnto þat wyȝe. (ll. 241-49)

(Therefore many a knight was afraid to answer, and all were astounded by his voice and sat stone-still in a deathly silence throughout the fine hall. Their voices died away as if they had all fallen asleep suddenly—I judge it not wholly for fear but partly for courtesy—but allowed him to whom were all duty bound to defer to address the man.)

In line 224 the common alliterative collocation werpen word(es) underscores the Green Knight's brusque and unfriendly mannerism the first time we hear him speak,[46] and, therefore, it is only appropriate that, in response, the Arthurian court should have to "cast vnto that wyȝe" (l. 249).[47] "Carpe with" or "speke with" could, in theory, have been used in line 249 as well, but the connotations would have been very different because the latter do not have the same association as ME casten with antagonistic verbal encounters.[48] Outside our poem, line 1712 in Cleanness is the only other context in the Gawain-poet's corpus where the verb is used as a term for SPEECH and it refers to Belshazzar's speaking boastfully, full of arrogance and blasphemy, at God. Moreover, the presence of ME casten in line 249 highlights the irony in the narrator's comment. He does not make it easy for us to believe that courtesy might have been the main factor behind the knights' unwillingness to engage in verbal sparring (and its

likely physical follow-up) with the Green Knight because he emphasizes their fear both explicitly and implicitly in line 241. ME freke is one of the stock terms for 'man, warrior' in alliterative poetry, but it seems to have retained some of the strong connotations of boldness and belligerence expressed by its ancestor, the poetic term OE freca 'warrior, bold man'.[49] Its presence in non-alliterative position is rather unexpected and, hence, as noted by Marie Borroff,[50] it enables the poet to contrast the supposed bravery of the Arthurian knights with the terror that they feel at the sight of the green visitor.

Notably, though, in accordance with the ambiguity that surrounds the Green Knight's intentions and appearance (fierce vs. peaceful, otherworldly vs. knowledgeable about courtly fashions),[51] he simply tells the court in his first speech that he would like to talk with the leader of the "gyng," a term that could be interpreted with strong martial connotations:[52] "with himself speke / Resoun" (ll. 226-27; lit. speak words with him). His utterance joins the common and semantically colorless ME speken with a polysemous and rather more peripheral noun to refer to SPEECH, thus foregrounding to the latter. ME resoun is only attested three times with this meaning in the poem,[53] all of them in Fitt I and all of them in connection with the Green Knight (twice in direct speech and once as a reference to his words). On the one hand, the noun's etymology and core meaning (cp. AN raisun 'reason, explanation; word') implies that he is seeking to establish the reasons for the court's renown through an interaction based on one's intellectual rather than martial capacity (cp. l. 392, where the Green Knight uses it in connection with Gawain's ability to recollect the terms of their agreement).[54] Moreover, its French origin associates it with other terms referring to the polite conversation that one expects in a court (cp. ME dalien, daliaunce; see below, Section 4.2.1). On the other hand, one wonders whether the poet, who is known to have been very keen on word-play,[55] also had in mind ME resoun 'echoing sound, a reverberation' (cp. ME resounen 'to echo, resound') because just after the Green Knight has spoken we are told that everyone was "stouned at his steuen" (l. 242), where

the phonetic nature rather than the content of his utterance is emphasized (cp. l. 443, where, again, ME resoun is used in a context where the nature of the utterance, i.e. the fact that it is uttered by a headless knight, is much more frightening than its actual content, which has already been mentioned).

Other terms offer further suggestions that the initial interaction between the Green Knight and the Arthurian court is presented as a verbal fight, a fight most courtiers are unwilling to become involved with. In line 307 we are told that "non wolde kepe hym with carp." Tolkien and Gordon suggest that this structure means that no one wanted to "engage in conversation with him,"[56] and, similarly, Andrew and Waldron translate it as "no one would hold speech with him,"[57] but Putter and Stokes indicate that ME kepen should be interpreted here as meaning 'to respond to', a usage analogous to those contexts where we are told that "one warrior kepes [meets] an assault from another."[58] In this respect, the connotations of this expression are very similar to those of ME casten unto in line 249. When his verbal attacks are met with silence, the Green Knight feels immediately empowered to claim victory, saying that his words have been instrumental in crashing the reputation that the Arthurian knights have achieved (one assumes) through martial prowess (ll. 313-14, quoted above).

Elsewhere in the poem the verbal exchanges between Gawain and the Green Knight continue to be associated with physical conflict. The role of speech as a defensive weapon is highlighted by the expressions werpen wernyng (l. 2253; 'to utter resistance') and casten cavillacioun (l. 2275; 'to utter objection'), which are presented in the final conversation between the two knights as ways in which one can protect himself from an imminent axe-stroke.[59] After all, in his conversation with the servant that guides him to the Green Chapel, Gawain presents what he assumes will be a violent encounter with the Green Knight as a conversation: "Bot I wyl to þe chapel, for chaunce þat may falle, / And talk wyth þat ilk tulk

þe tale þat me lyste" (ll. 2132-33; but I am determined to go to the chapel, whatever may happen, speak whatever words I wish with that same man).

While Gawain's encounter with the Green Knight is overtly antagonistic, his conversations with the Lady of Castle Hautdesert are less clearly so, but they are similarly framed as instances of verbal fights, where verbal aggression is also intended to provoke action. The Lady is on the offensive, armed with "spechez of specialté þat sprange of her mouthe" (l. 1778; expressions of affection that sprang from her mouth) and following a strategy that focuses on what she sees as Gawain's shortcomings in relation to the code of courtesy, rather than chivalry.[60] Gawain has to defend himself as best he can (cp. ll. 1282 and 1551, where ME defense and defenden are specifically used in the context of his interaction with the Lady) and refrain from action in spite of the constant taunting and prodding.

In these exchanges the offensive capabilities of words are somewhat downplayed by the uses of ME losen; this verb lacks the strong sense of aggression of ME werpen and casten and thus helps to present verbal combats under a veneer of courtly pastimes:[61]

> Wyth chynne and cheke ful swete,
> Boþe quit and red in blande,
> Ful lufly con ho lete
> Wyth lyppez smal laȝande:
> "God moroun, Sir Gawayn," sayde þat gay lady,
> "Ȝe ar a sleper vnslyȝe, þat mon may slyde hider.
> Now ar ȝe tan astyt! Bot true vus may schape,
> I schal bynde yow in your bedde—þat be ȝe trayst."
> Al laȝande þe lady lanced þo bourdez. (ll. 1204-12)

(With very lively chin and cheek, both white and red together, she spoke very amiably with slender laughing lips. "Good morning, Sir Gawain," said the fair lady, "you are an unwary sleeper, that one might slip in here. Now you are captured in a moment. Unless we can arrange a truce between ourselves, I shall bind you in your bed—be sure of that." All laughing, the lady uttered those jests.)

ME losen here reminds us that the joking words that the Lady utters are part of her literal and metaphorical attempts to entrap Gawain, i.e. her weapons in a fight where she demands a "true" (l. 1210).[62] Furthermore, the verb offers a humorous contrast between the Lady's free speech and Gawain's situation, as the Lady has attempted to "bind" him to his bed. The freedom with which words are uttered (they appear to be just let go) is reminiscent of the expression ME leten lotes in line 1086 ("Þe lorde let for luf lotez so myry"; the lord uttered such merry words in friendship). That is the only context in the poem (and the poet's oeuvre) where ME leten clearly refers to the lexico-semantic field of SPEECH; its use emphasizes the unorderly manner in which Bertilak (the Lord of Hautdesert) is uttering his "lotez" by creating an image in which he just opens his mouth and lets them rush out, "[a]s wyȝ that wolde of his wyte, ne wyst quat he myȝt" (l. 1087; like a man who was about to go off his head, who didn't know what he might do).[63] Clearly, though, he did know what he was going to do next, as this directly precedes his suggestion of the exchange of winnings agreement. In both contexts, the apparent lack of full control of one's words hides a carefully planned strategy.

Similarly, in line 1766 the exchange of words between Gawain and the Lady is associated with the happiness and joy that surrounds their interactions as well as the "gret perile" (l. 1768) that exists between them on the basis of the Lady's manoeuvres:

With smoþe smylyng and smolt þay smeten into merþe,
Þat al watz blis and bonchef þat breke hem bitwene,

And wynne.

Þay lauced wordes gode,

Much wele þen watz þerinne.

Gret perile bitwene hem stod,

Nif Maré of hir knyȝt mynne.

For þat prynces of pris depresed hym so þikke,

Nurned hym so neȝe þe þred, þat nede hym bihoued

Oþer lach þer hir luf oþer lodly refuse. (ll. 1763-72)

(With pleasant and gentle smiles they fall into [conversation on] pleasant subjects, so everything that was broached between them was bliss and happiness and joy. They uttered friendly words; much delight was then in that place. There was great peril between them, unless Mary be mindful of her knight. For that noble princess pressed him so insistently, urged him so near the limit, that he needs must either accept her love there or rudely refuse.)

The presence of ME losen in these scenes is in keeping with its only other use referring to SPEECH in the text, line 2124, where the servant's promise to "lauce neuer tale" (never utter an account) about Gawain's avoidance of the Green Knight reminds us of the Green Knight's taunt in lines 313-14 regarding the power of speech to destroy one's reputation: you let your words loose and off they go to cause harm.

As suggested by the use of ME losen in line 1766, in his conversations with the Lady Gawain has to fight her with her own weapons, i.e. courtly speech.[64] Therefore, it is fully fitting that he should think carefully about his "castes" (l. 1295; speeches) when the Lady "stonyed hym wyth ful stor wordez" (l. 1291; lit. astounded him with her severe words, but with the sense "delivered in words a stiff blow that stunned him," as translated by Putter and Stokes).[65] In this

conversation she questions his identity and, closely linked with this, his communication skills by invoking "He that spedez vche a spech" (l. 1292; He who prospers every speech), although this invocation could also be taken as a request for further "ammunition." The noun ME cast is used unexpectedly in this context, for this is the only context in the poet's works (and the Middle English corpus) where it refers to SPEECH and the only context in the Gawain-poet's texts where it does not alliterate.[66] This deviation from the poet's semantic and stylistic patterns foregrounds the term. Unfortunately, Gawain discovers only too late that his own "castes" are not enough to counteract the Lady's "cast" (l. 2413; here it has the meaning 'contrivance, trick', and hence it is a member of the lexico-semantic field of ACTION OR OPERATION; *HTE*, 01.15.14). This failure is the reason why he is slightly injured by the "cast" (l. 2298; stroke) that the Green Knight strikes after two seemingly failed attempts. No wonder the latter describes the Lady as Gawain's "enmy kene" (l. 2406; bitter enemy).

## 4.2. THE POET'S GAMES

### 4.2.1. Keeping his audience in the dark

The Green Knight's revelation in Fitt IV that he is actually the Lord of Hautdesert and that the punishment that Gawain has received is the result of his failure to keep his word in relation to their exchange of winnings agreement by not handing in the girdle that his wife gave him surprises the audience approaching the poem for the first time as much as Gawain. The impact of the revelation lies in the fact that, until that point, the poet has managed to keep his audience unaware of the significance of Gawain's stay at Castle Hautdesert for his engagement with the Green Knight. He has done so, on the one hand, by presenting Hautdesert as the epitome of courtliness and hospitality, and, on the other hand, by diminishing the significance of the agreement that Gawain establishes with the Lady.[67] I have explored elsewhere how reliance on

various modes of speech representation helps the poet to achieve these aims.[68] I analyse below the contribution of various terms belonging to the lexico-semantic field of SPEECH in this respect.

We have seen in Section 4.1 that some terms associated with SPEECH are key to linking lexically and thematically the various tests that Gawain has to endure (in Arthur's court, in Hautdesert, on his way to the Green Chapel and once there while he awaits what he assumes will be certain death), as manifestations of the conceptual metaphor ARGUMENT IS WAR. However, the exchanges between Gawain and the Lady also exemplify the fact that conversation as a pleasurable activity is a central component of courtly life. In this respect, Gawain's world is very far from that of Raoul de Houdenc (ca1200), who urged knights to "strike high and speak low" (as translated by Mark Johnston) in Le Roman des eles (XI.315-16).[69] Instead, it shares the values that Ramon Llull (1232-1316) puts forward when admonishing aspiring knights in his treatise Le Libre del Ordre de Cauayleria (VI.21):

> It behoves a knight to be a lover of the common good, since knighthood was established for the community of people, and the common good is greater and more necessary than personal good. And it behoves a knight to speak with fine words, wear fine clothes and have a fine harness and a grand household, for all these things are necessary in order to honour Chivalry. Courtesy and Chivalry belong together, for baseness and uncouth words are contrary to Chivalry.[70]

Just as speech events can carry out non-physical battles, they can also be used as one of the means through which one performs courteisie, where performance is understood as "heightened and deliberately communicative behaviours, public displays that use visual as well as rhetorical resources […] at the intersection of agency and prescription, innovation and memory, self and social group."[71] Thus, courtly conversations can be associated with other

visual and ritualized displays of one's (social) identity, such as one's clothing or behavior in formal situations (e.g. tournaments).

The terms that most clearly define conversation as a courtly activity in the poem are the French loans ME dalien and daliaunce, recorded in lines 1114 and 1253, and 1012 and 1529, respectively.[72] Compare, for instance, the aggressive nature of the exchanges involving ME werpen and cast(en) discussed in the previous section with the conversations presented in these lines:

> Bot ȝet I wot þat Wawen and þe wale burde
> Such comfort of her compaynye caȝten togeder
> Þurȝ her dere dalyaunce of her derne wordez,
> Wyth clene cortays carp closed fro fylþe,
> Þat hor play watz passande vche prynce gomen,
> In vayres. (ll. 1010-15)
> (But still I know that Gawain and the delightful lady found such pleasure in each other's company through the pleasant courtly conversation of their confidential words, with chaste courteous speech free from impurity, that their pleasant occupation surpassed the pleasure of any nobleman there, in truth.)

> So sayde þe lorde of þat lede; þay laȝed vchone.
> Þay dronken and daylyeden and dalten vntyȝtel,
> Þise lordez and ladyez, quyle þat hem lyked,
> And syþen with frenkysch fare and fele fayre lotez
> Þay stoden and stemed and stylly speken,
> Kysten ful comlyly and kaȝten her leue. (ll. 1113-18)

(So said the lord of that people; everyone laughed. They drank and conversed and behaved freely, these lords and ladies, as long as they pleased, and then, with [French] manners, and many courteous words they stood and lingered and spoke quietly, kissed most courteously and took their leave.)

The difference in contexts and the nature of the speech involved (the private space of the bedroom where tense conversations are being held vs. the public context of the court, where no difficult conversations have taken place yet and Gawain and the Lady can enjoy pleasant courtly entertainment) make the semantically neutral ME carp preferable to ME cast(es) in line 1013, even though the latter would have also fitted the alliterative and structural pattern of the line.

Lines 1116-17 describe courtly behavior based on polite conversation in terms of its French models. Accordingly, the choice the French-derived terms ME dalien and daliaunce to describe such practice is fully appropriate and in keeping with other uses of (Anglo-)French words in connection with the poem's courtly settings and activities.[73] As Sylvester warns us, we need to be careful not to assume that terms of French origin necessarily had an air of sophistication or prestige, as many of them (like this verb and noun) were already present in Anglo-Norman and, therefore, they might have enjoyed wider use in England than scholars recognized in the past.[74] However, it is significant that ME dalien and daliaunce are restricted to the pleasurable conversations in Hautdesert,[75] with similar conversations in the Arthurian court (equally important for the strengthening of social ties) being described with the native ME talken (l. 108). The talken word field does not seem to have as strong associations with polite conversation because these terms can be used to refer not only to such conversations (cp. as well ll. 977 and 1486),[76] but also to rather less courteous encounters. Consider, for instance, line 2133, where it refers to what Gawain assumes will be a physical engagement

with the Green Knight (see above, Section 4.1). Thus, the restriction of ME dalien and daliaunce to the conversations held in Castle Hautdesert can be taken as an attempt to highlight the impeccable hospitality and courtliness that Gawain experiences in Hautdesert and, more importantly, the fact that its inhabitants behave very differently from the Green Knight, whose rough mannerism shocks Arthur and his knights.

Preventing Gawain and the audience from establishing clear direct connections between Hautdesert's inhabitants and the Green Knight is fundamental for the success of the story. Equally important is not to draw too much attention to the significance of the fact that Gawain breaks his treuth, or pledged word, by not handing the girdle to the Lord during the third exchange of winnings. This is partially achieved by the way in which Gawain's pledge to the Lady is framed.

The various agreements that Gawain enters into and the strong legal character that they give the text is one of the areas related to the role of speech in *SGGK* that has received most scholarly attention. Like courtly conversation, these agreements and the significance of treuth help develop the very bonds that keep society going. ME covenaunt and foreward are key terms in this function of speech and, accordingly, their semantic repertoire has often been discussed. They can both be used with the meaning 'formal agreement', particularly one that relates to doing something in the future,[77] as well as 'specific terms or conditions of an agreement':[78] see lines 393, 1384, 1642, 2328, 2340 and 1123, 1408, 2242, respectively, for ME covenaunt; and lines 1105, 1395, 1636, 2347 and 378, 409, 1405, 1934, respectively, for ME foreward. They are the core nouns of this subfield in the poem, while ME bargaine is a more peripheral term, having been used only once (l. 1112). However, the stylistic relationships between the terms belonging to this lexico-semantic subfield have not received the same amount of attention. This is the topic of the following lines.

ME covenaunt and foreward link Gawain's exchanges with both the Green Knight and Bertilak; it is mainly the two alter egos who use these words, as they are the ones who establish the terms of the agreements, while Gawain is simply asked to agree to them, an act which is expressed with three verbs: ME graunten (ll. 1103, 1110, and 1683), ME baithen (l. 1404), and ME accorden (l. 1408). This does not mean that Gawain does not pay attention to the specific terms that he is agreeing to, as he is very careful to bring them up in order to maintain his courtesy (l. 1395) and, more importantly, his life (ll. 1934 and 2328). Notably, in line 1934 he mentions the specific terms of the agreement as he is about to break them because he is not going to hand over everything that he has "won" on that day (cp. ll. 1106-07 and 1638). In that respect, it is interesting that we find the same three verbs meaning 'to agree' in very close proximity in the third temptation scene, as Gawain enters into an agreement which, effectively, makes it impossible for him to keep his previous one with Bertilak (ME baithen in l. 1840, ME graunten in l. 1861, and ME accorden in l. 1863). However, the agreement that he makes with the Lady, where he consents to keep secret the fact that she has given him the girdle, is very different from the others he establishes:

> And biso3t hym for hir sake disceuer hit neuer
> Bot to lelly layne fro hir lorde; þe leude hym acordez
> Þat neuer wy3e schulde hit wyt, iwysse, bot þay twayne,
> For no3te. (ll. 1862-65)
> (And she implored him, for her sake, never to reveal it, but faithfully to conceal it from her lord. The knight agrees that no one should ever know of it, indeed, but they two on any account.)

This agreement is never presented as a bargaine, covenaunt or foreward, nor do we have any specific reference to Gawain's pledging of his word (ME treuth). In contrast, Gawain is asked to pledge his word as part of his first agreement with the Green Knight ("þou schal siker me, segge, bi þi trawþe…," l. 394, you must promise me, sir, on your word of honor…),[79] and he keeps on doing it as he fulfils his agreements with Bertilak and his alter ego ("bi my trawþe," l. 1638, upon my word of honor; "haf here my trawþe," l. 2287, have here my word of honor). Other than the use of the verb ME accorden and the modal verb "schulde" (l. 1864; cp. for instance ll. 283-300 and 390-94), the context of his agreement with the Lady does not include any legal terms, legalistic formulas or ritual acts (e.g. the drinking that seals Gawain's agreement to participate in the exchange of winnings with Bertilak in ll. 1112, 1409, and 1684). This and the fact that the establishment of this agreement is not reported in direct speech while the others are minimize its significance in the context of the other agreements that Gawain establishes.[80]

### 4.2.2. Offering clues

More than fifty years ago Cecily Clark made the scholarly community aware of an important factor of the Gawain-poet's craft, viz. his ability to grant characters individualized voices,[81] a stylistic trait that differentiates *SGGK* from other near-contemporary texts, such as Malory's Morte Darthur,[82] and brings it closer to the linguistic variation that we encounter in Chaucer's Canterbury Tales.[83] Clark showed that, had Gawain been more observant, he could have realized that the Green Knight and Bertilak are actually the same person because they share an idiolect characterized by certain morphosyntactic features indicating directness and imperiousness: e.g. the common use of imperatives and second person singular forms where plural forms would have been more appropriate from a sociolinguistic perspective.[84] Clark

did not pay attention to the characters' lexical choices. However, the examination of the distribution of various terms for SPEECH, particularly terms referring to AGREEMENT (HTE, 02.07.03.13), indicates that the characters' idiolect is not only characterized by grammatical features.

Some lexical choices are particularly associated with the Green Knight: we have seen in Section 4.1 that the use of ME resoun in the text as a term for SPEECH is closely associated with his words and helps to highlight the ambiguity that surrounds this character. Other lexical choices bring him close to Bertilak. A clear example is the expression "I ethe þe, haþel" (I entreat you, sir), which the Green Knight uses, first, to conjure Gawain to tell him his name (l. 379); and, once he has revealed his true identity, to urge him to visit him and his wife in Hautdesert (l. 2467). This expression projects the directness and imperiousness that Clark identified in their speech. The connection between these two uses is very strong, as these are the only occurrences of the verb in the text (and the poet's corpus, for that matter). ME ethen seems to have been one of the most peripheral members of the lexico-semantic subfield of REQUEST (HTE, 02.07.03.12), as suggested by its limited attestations (it is otherwise only attested in l. 340 of The Wars of Alexander, another late Middle English alliterative text),[85] and the fact that it has an alliterative rank of 100%.[86] This differentiates it from the other verbs in this subfield, with the exception of ME nornen, which seems to have been similarly peripheral, and ME frainen, a verb with wider use in Middle English.[87]

It is, however, in relation to the various agreements established in the text where we see the lexical connections between the Green Knight and Bertilak most clearly. Besides references to ME covenaunt and foreward (see above, Section 4.2.1), various other lexical and thematic traits hint at their close relationship:

a) There are three verbs in the text referring to the making of a vow, pledge or promise: ME hoten, sikeren and sweren (HTE, 02.07.03.13.02). ME hoten seems to be the poet's preferred

term to refer to this concept, as suggested by its higher number of uses (ll. 448, 450, 1966, 1970, 2121, 2218, and 2341) and its lower alliterative rank (71.42%).[88] Other than a servant's use of the term (see below), all its occurrences are associated with the Green Knight and Bertilak, either because they utter it or because Gawain uses it in relation to Bertilak's words (l. 1966). Moreover, all its occurrences refer to the initial agreement between the Green Knight and Gawain, either directly or in connection with Bertilak's promise to show Gawain the way to the Green Chapel so that he can fulfil his part of the agreement (ll. 1960 and 1970). Similarly, only the Green Knight and Bertilak utter ME sikeren (ll. 394 and 1673), and, when the latter does so, it is also in his pledge to ensure that Gawain will make his way to the Green Chapel on time.[89] In both cases the pledge has to be done properly, on the basis of the pledger's treuth.

While ME hoten and sikeren are strongly associated with the Green Knight and his alter ego, Gawain seems to be very keen on ME sweren instead, for all its occurrences in the text bar one (see below) are attributed to him (ll. 403, 1825, 2051). Every time he is said to use this verb, through either direct or non-direct speech, it collocates with ME soth, a collocation, which takes one step further the more common pairing of seien and for sothe / sothli (cp. ll. 673, 1091 and 1222),[90] and helps to characterize Gawain is a "tulk of tale most trwe" (l. 638; man most true of words).

It is rather ironic that the servant leading Gawain to the Green Chapel is the only character in the text to use the expression I say as / for sothe (ll. 2094 and 2110), as well as the only character to provide an exception to the strong associations between ME sweren and Gawain (l. 2122), and between ME hoten and the Green Knight / Bertilak (l. 2121). His use of ME sweren, though, is very different from Gawain's, as he utters the term in a context where he declares his willingness to commit perjury:

> Forþy, goude Sir Gawayn, let þe gome one

And gotz away sum oþer gate, vpon Goddez halue!
Cayrez bi sum oþer kyth, þer Kryst mot yow spede!
And I schal hyȝ me hom aȝayn, and hete yow fyrre
Þat I schal swere "Bi God and alle His gode Halȝez",
"As help me God and þe halydam", and oþez innoghe,
Þat I schal lelly yow layne and lauce neuer tale
Þat euer ȝe fondet to fle for freke þat I wyst. (ll. 2118-25)
(Therefore, good Sir Gawain, let the man alone and go away some other way, for God's sake! Go through some other region, may God help you! And I shall hurry home again; and promise you moreover that I shall swear "By God and all His good saints," "as may God and the holy object help me," and many other oaths, that I shall faithfully keep your secret and never utter an account that you ever attempted to flee because of any man as far as I knew.)

This highly problematizes his attempts to present himself as a reliable servant who has Gawain's interest at heart and, indeed, we soon find out that his description of the Green Knight's bloodthirstiness is far from soth.[91]

b) The Green Knight and Bertilak also share a very strong legal concern with repeating time and again the terms of the agreements, ensuring that they are fully understood. Near-contemporary evidence suggests that this was an important element to make an agreement binding.[92] The verbs used in this respect are ME reformen (l. 378), rehersen (l. 392) and recorden (l. 1123). They act as near-synonyms whose choice does not seem to have been dictated by semantic nuances, with the possible exception of ME reformen. The latter, through its association with ME formen, brings to mind the idea of the shaping and reshaping of the agreement (cp. ME shapen in ll. 2328 and 2340), another manifestation of the physicality

attributed to speech. This time it is presented as a malleable substance, which, like clay, can be modeled to one's taste.[93] In the lines following 378, when Gawain finishes going over the terms of the agreement that the Green Knight has offered to Arthur, the challenger adds one more term, thus reshaping the original agreement: Gawain must seek him wherever he thinks he will be found.

These lexical clues should be incorporated into the idiolect shared by the Green Knight and Bertilak, and associated with the similarities in the descriptions that we are given for these two characters, such as their enormous height, big beard and stout legs (cp. ll. 136-98 and 842-49), as well as the fact that the girdle shares the colors of the Green Knight's attire and possessions (cp. ll. 151, 189-90, 211, and 1832). The clues, scattered across the text, are there for all of us to see; while Gawain cannot go through the whole experience again with the benefit of hindsight, the audience can, and spotting these clues makes subsequent encounters with the text all the more enjoyable, encouraging us to move from surprise to pride in our ability to solve the puzzle.

## 5. CONCLUSION

The vocabulary of SGGK and its connection with near-contemporary cultural practices has received significant scholarly attention. However, no other study has focused on the lexico-semantic field of SPEECH, in spite of the fact that previous work has recognized the generic, thematic and, to some extent, lexical significance of the spoken word in the text. By bringing together some of the principles of lexical semantics and stylistics, this article has made clear the central role that terms for SPEECH play in the construction of the story. We have seen that they are fundamental to create the sense of antagonism that dominates Gawain's interaction with the Green Knight and his alter ego's wife (and thus link the various challenges that he

faces), to make an unsuspecting audience see Gawain's activities in Hautdesert as unrelated to his initial quest, and to enable the knowing audience to continue enjoying the text. The exploration of the terms has also led us to discuss the poet's engagement with the performativity of speech, where performativity should be understood both in a pragmatic sense (speech is as a very powerful tool that can be used to fight, to develop social bonds and to dictate behavior, even if one had initially rejected that course of action because it is not advisable or even morally acceptable) and in a sociological sense (speech is a key part of one's self-presentation and a way to enact one's social identity). While these findings are particularly relevant to SGGK, they have wider implications for the study of medieval literary texts, both thematically, in terms of what they tell about the medieval conceptualization of the spoken word; and linguistically, as they exemplify the value of combining an onomasiological and a semasiological approach for our understanding of the nuances behind an author's lexical choices.

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[1] For helpful overviews of the formal principles governing Middle English alliterative poems, see Ad Putter et al., Studies in the Metre of Alliterative Verse (Oxford: Society for the Study of Medieval Languages and Literature, 2007); and Ian Cornelius, "The Accentual Paradigm in Early English Metrics," Journal of English and Germanic Philology, 114 (2014), 459-81.

[2] On the vocabulary of Middle English alliterative poems, see J. P. Oakden, The Alliterative Poetry in Middle English, 2 vols. (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1930-35), II,

chapter 8; Thorlac Turville-Petre, The Alliterative Revival (Brewer: Cambridge, 1977), chapter 4; and Hoyt N. Duggan, "Meter, Stanza, Vocabulary, Dialect," in A Companion to the Gawain Poet, ed. Derek Brewer and Jonathan Gibson (Cambridge: Brewer, 1997), pp. 221-42.

[3] See Marie Borroff, Sir Gawain and the Green Knight: A Stylistic and Metrical Study (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1962), chapters 1-4.

[4] See Thorlac Turville-Petre, "Alliterative Horses," JEGP, 112 (2013), 154-68.

[5] See Michael Lacy, "Armour I," in A Companion to the Gawain Poet, ed. Derek Brewer and Jonathan Gibson (Cambridge: Brewer, 1997), pp. 165-73.

[6] See Ralph Elliott, "Landscape and Geography," in Companion to the Gawain Poet, ed. Brewer and Gibson, pp. 105-17.

[7] See Ad Putter, "The Ways and Words of the Hunt: Notes on Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, the Master of Game, Sir Tristrem, Pearl, and Saint Erkenwald," The Chaucer Review, 40 (2006), 354-85.

[8] See Robert J. Blanch and Julian N. Wasserman, "Medieval Contracts and Covenants: The Legal Colouring of Sir Gawain and the Green Knight," Neophilologus, 68 (1984), 598-610.

[9] The forms of the lemmata presented here follow the Middle English Dictionary (MED), ed. Hans Kurath et al. (Ann Arbor: Univ. of Michigan Press, 1952-2001). On ME "luf-talkyng," see Thomas L. Wright, "Luf-Talkyng in Sir Gawain and the Green Knight," in Approaches to Teaching Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, ed. Miriam Youngerman Miller and Jane Chance (New York: Modern Language Association of America, 1986), pp. 79-86; and Conor McCarthy, "Luf-talking in Sir Gawain and the Green Knight," Neophilologus, 92 (2008), 155-62. On the multifaceted meaning of ME treuth in the poem, see Conor McCarthy, "Sir Gawain and the Green Knight and the Sign of Trawþe," Neophilologus, 85 (2001), 297-308.

[10] Michiko Ogura, The Syntactic and Semantic Rivalry of Quoth, Say and Tell in Medieval English (Hirakata: KUFS Publication, 1981), pp. 76-77 and 91-92. Besides SGGK, Pearl, Patience and Cleanness are also generally attributed to the same poet; see further Malcolm Andrew, "Theories of Authorship," in Companion to the Gawain Poet, ed. Brewer and Gibson, pp. 23-33; and A. V. C. Schmidt, "The Poet of Pearl, Cleanness and Patience," in A Companion to Middle English Poetry, ed. Corinne J. Saunders (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), pp. 369-384. St Erkenwald has sometimes also been ascribed to the same poet but the attribution is less secure (see below, note 61).

[11] The stylistic role of speech representation in the poem is the focus of my forthcoming paper "Speech Representation as a Narrative Technique in Sir Gawain and the Green Knight."

[12] Frank Brandsma, "Knight's Talk: Direct Discourse in Arthurian Romance," Neophilologus, 82 (1998), 513. See also Michael W. Twomey, "The Voice of Aurality in the Morte Darthur," Arthuriana, 13 (2003), 103. John Plummer, "Signifying the Self: Language and Identity in Sir Gawain and the Green Knight," in Text and Matter: New Critical Perspectives on the Pearl-Poet, ed. Robert J. Blanch et al. (Troy: Whitson, 1991), p. 195, goes perhaps too far when he suggests that "[t]he subject of Sir Gawain and the Green Knight is not deeds but words."

[13] See Jonathan Roper, "Synonym and Rank in Alliterative Poetry," Sign Systems Studies, 40 (2012), 86.

[14] Louise Sylvester, "Middle English: Semantics and Lexicon," in English Historical Linguistics: An International Handbook, ed. Alexander Bergs and Laurel J. Brinton (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2012), I, 451.

[15] Dirk Geeraerts, Theories of Lexical Semantics (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2010), p. 52.

[16] Geeraerts, Theories of Lexical Semantics, p. 56.

[17] For an analysis of these relations and their place in the relational approach to structuralist semantics, see Alan D. Cruse, Lexical Semantics (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1986).

[18] There are three versions of the HTE: (1) a print version: Historical Thesaurus of the Oxford English Dictionary, with Additional Material from A Thesaurus of Old English, ed. Christian Kay et al., reprinted with corrections (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014); (2) a version that is linked to the OED's online edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000-, available at <www.oed.com>, last accessed on 22/05/2018); and (3) an electronic version hosted by the University of Glasgow, available at <http://historicalthesaurus.arts.gla.ac.uk> (last accessed on 26/06/2018). The latter is the most up-to-date version (currently database version 4.21) and, therefore, it is the reference point for this paper. On the classification followed by the HTE's editors, see Christian Kay, "Classification: Principles and Practice," in "Cunning Passages, Contrived Corridors": Unexpected Essays in the History of Lexicography, ed. Michael Adams (Monza: Polimetrica, 2010), pp. 255-70.

[19] On these two approaches, see further Geeraerts, Theories of Lexical Semantics, chapter 5.

[20] See, for instance, Eleanor Rosch, "Principles of Categorization," in Cognition and Categorization, ed. Barbara B. Lloyd (Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1978), pp. 27-48.

[21] George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, Metaphors We Live By (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1980).

[22] Note that in cognitive semantics, conceptual metaphors are given in small capitals.

[23] Jan Mukarovský, "Standard Language and Poetic Language," in A Prague School Reader on Esthetics, Literary Structure and Style, ed. and trans. Paul L. Garvin (Washington: Georgetown Univ. Press, 1964), pp. 17-30.

[24] See further Anthony J. Sanford and Catherine Emmott, Mind, Brain and Narrative (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2012), chapter 4; and Christiana Gregoriou, "The

Linguistic Levels of Foregrounding in Stylistics," in The Routledge Handbook of Stylistics, ed. Michael Burke (London: Routledge, 2014), pp. 87-100.

[25] Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, ed. J. R. R. Tolkien and E. V. Gordon, 2nd ed. by Norman Davis (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967); The Poems of the Pearl Manuscript: Pearl, Cleanness, Patience, Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, ed. Malcolm Andrew and Ronald Waldron, 5th ed. (Exeter: Univ. of Exeter Press, 2007); The Works of the Gawain Poet: Pearl, Cleanness, Patience, Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, ed. Ad Putter and Myra Stokes (London: Penguin, 2014).

[26] Poems of the Pearl Manuscript, ed. Andrew and Waldron. Line numbers, quotations and translations referring to the texts attributed to the Gawain-poet (see above, note 10) follow this edition, unless otherwise stated. T in front of page numbers indicates that the latter belong to the translation that accompanies the printed edition in CD-Rom format.

[27] The OED, s.v. "lance," v.

[28] See C. A. Luttrell, "The Gawain Group. Cruxes, Etymologies, Interpretations II," Neophilologus, 40 (1956), 290-310; Ad Putter, "Review of Sir Gawain and the Green Knight by Paul Battles," JEGP, 113 (2014), 535-37.

[29] Andrew and Waldron, eds., Poems of the Pearl Manuscript, p. 329; Putter and Stokes, eds., Works of the Gawain Poet, p. 888; and the MED, s.v. "lōsen," v.3.

[30] See the OED, s.vv. "cast," n., "deal," v., "let," v.1, and "reform," v.2, sense 1; the MED, s.vv. "cast," sense 1.e, "lōte," sense 3.c, and "refōrmen," sense 3.a; Tolkien and Gordon, eds., Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, pp. 170, 175, 195, and 206; Andrew and Waldron, eds., Poems of the Pearl Manuscript, pp. 305, 313, and 341; and Putter and Stokes, eds., Works of the Gawain Poet, pp. 282, note to l. 378, 826, 839, and 892. For a near-contemporary parallel example of Medieval French refourmer meaning 'to rehearse, restate' in a legal context, see l. 1621 in Gillaume de Machaut's Le Judgement dou Roy de Navarre (an edition and translation

of the text are available online through the TEAMS Middle English Texts Series website at <http://d.lib.rochester.edu/teams/text/palmer-machaut-thedebateseries-navarre>, accessed on 31/01/2018); I am very thankful to Ad Putter for pointing this parallel use to me.

[31] On the differing concerns of dictionaries and glossaries to editions in relation to recording meaning as opposed to examples of specific usage, see Frankwalt Möhren, "Unité et Diversité du Champ Sémasiologique—L'Example de l'Anglo-Norman Dictionary," in De Mot en Mot: Aspects of Medieval Linguistics: Essays in Honour of William Rothwell, ed. Stewart Gregory and D. A. Trotter (Cardiff: Univ. of Wales Press, 1997), pp. 127-46. On the impact on the MED of these different approaches, see Louise Sylvester, "The Roles of Reader Construal and Lexicographic Authority in the Interpretation of Middle English Texts," in Historical Cognitive Linguistics, ed. Margaret E. Winters et al. (Berlin: De Gruyter Mouton, 2010), pp. 197-219.

[32] On ME breven, see the OED, s.vv. "breve," v., sense 2; and "recount," v., sense 1.a; and the entries for these two verbs in the HTE. On ME recorden, see the OED, s.vv. "nait," v.2, sense 2; "record," v.1, sense 1.a; "rehearse," v., sense 3; and "repeat," v., sense 4.a; and the entries for these verbs in the HTE. On the near-synonymy between ME recorden and rehersen, see further Putter and Stokes, eds., Works of the Gawain Poet, p. 699.

[33] See the MED, s.v. "carpen," sense 3. Consider as well OIc karpa 'to brag, boast'.

[34] On the common use of this verb in late Middle English alliterative texts, see Oakden Alliterative Poetry in Middle English, II, 176-83; and Turville-Petre, Alliterative Revival, pp. 73-74. On the tendency of terms commonly used in alliterative position to undergo semantic change, particularly generalization and melioration, see Borroff, Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, p. 81; Tolkien and Gordon, eds., Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, p. 139; and Roper, "Synonym and Rank," p. 87, who prefers to talk about "a non-prototypical sense (in a metaphorical, metonymic, or symbolic sense)," because words could also undergo pejoration.

For an alternative explanation about the semantic evolution of the term in English, see the OED, s.v. "carp," v.1.

[35] This should not be taken as an indication that the study of the interaction between terms whose choice depends, in the main, on formal factors can be ignored. For instance, for interesting insights into the differences between ME seide and quod in Piers Plowman in terms of the morphosyntactic structures and narrative levels where they occur, see Michael Peverett, "'Quod' and 'Seide' in Piers Plowman," Neuphilologische Mitteilungen, 87 (1986), 117-27; and J. A. Burrow, "'Quod' and 'Seide' in 'Piers Plowman'," Notes and Queries, 62 (2015), 521-24.

[36] For a study of late medieval England as a culture with what Ong refers to as a "strong oral residue," see, for instance, Michael Clanchy, From Memory to Written Record (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Press, 1979); Walter J. Ong, Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word (London: Methuen, 1982), pp. 96-101 and 119; and Jesse M. Gellrich, Discourse and Dominion in the Fourteenth Century: Oral Contexts of Writing in Philosophy, Politics and Poetry (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1995).

[37] Walter J. Ong, The Presence of the Word: Some Prolegomena for Cultural and Religious History (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1967), pp. 111-12.

[38] Ong, Orality and Literacy, pp. 43-44; see also p. 32.

[39] Robert E. Bjork, "Speech as Gift in Beowulf," Speculum, 69 (1994), 1008; cp. OE flitan 'to contend (in words or action); to strive'.

[40] Ong, Presence of the Word, p. 113.

[41] For an assessment of the universality of the ARGUMENT IS WAR metaphor, see James Howe, "Argument is Argument: An Essay on Conceptual Metaphor and Verbal Dispute," Metaphor and Symbol, 23 (2007), 1-23. The Mapping Metaphor with the Historical Thesaurus Project, led by Wendy Anderson (University of Glasgow; available at

<http://mappingmetaphor.arts.gla.ac.uk/>, last accessed on 26/06/2018), is an excellent tool to trace the wide-ranging metaphorical associations between the various lexico-semantic fields that have been established throughout the history of the English language. Particularly relevant for our purposes are the strong associations that it identifies between SPEAKING and WEAPONS AND ARMOUR, between SPEAKING and IMPULSE, and between IMPULSE and DISADVANTAGE AND HARM.

[42] On medieval flyting, see Carol J. Clover, "The Germanic Context of the Unferð Episode," Speculum, 55 (1980), 444-68; and Ward Parks, Verbal Dueling in Heroic Narrative: The Homeric and Old English Traditions (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1990). On the relationship between flyting and modern forms of verbal dueling, such as the practice of flaming among African-American adolescents, see Leslie Katherine Arnovick, "Sounding and Flyting the English Agonistic Insult: Writing Pragmatic History in a Cross-Cultural Context," in The Twenty-First LACUS Forum 1994, ed. Mava Jo Powell (Chapell Hill, N.C.: The Linguistic Association of Canada and the United States, 1995), pp. 600-19; and Andreas H. Jucker and Irma Taavitsainen, "Diachronic Speech Act Analysis: Insults from Flyting to Flaming," Journal of Historical Pragmatics, 1 (2000), 67-95.

[43] On ARGUMENT IS WAR as part of this broader conceptual metaphor, see Eve E. Sweetser, "Metaphorical Models of Thought and Speech: A Comparison of Historical Directions and Metaphorical Mappings in the Two Domains," Berkeley Linguistics Society, 13 (1987), 446-59.

[44] Cp. the oath "Godes halue" (God's half), which is particularly fitting for the overall theme of the poem and appears both in contexts where the idea of cutting is fully relevant (l. 326) and in contexts where it is less so (ll. 692, 2119, and 2149), although all of them are associated with Gawain's engagement with the Green Knight.

[45] On the connection of the episode with flyting, see Parks, Verbal Dueling in Heroic Narrative, pp. 152-60; Gellrich, Discourse and Dominion in the Fourteenth Century, chapter 6; and Harvey De Roo, "What's in a Name? Power Dynamics in Sir Gawain and the Green Knight," The Chaucer Review, 31 (1997), 232-55. On the structured nature of the 'request for action' verbal exchanges in Arthurian literature, see Marcel Bax, "Rules for Ritual Challenges: A Speech Convention Among Medieval Knights," Journal of Pragmatics, 5 (1991), 432 and 442.

[46] For an exemplification of the frequent use of the collocation, see the MED, s.v. "werpen," sense 6.a.

[47] It is then fully fitting that, when the Green Knight recounts their encounter, he should use ME casten to refer to the arranging of their agreement (l. 2242), although here alliteration might have been as important in its choice as the semantic associations of the term.

[48] See the MED, s.v. "casten," sense 12. Putter and Stokes, eds., Works of the Gawain Poet, p. 618, note to l. 249, suggest that ME casten here might be a scribal substitution for ME werpen, which would have alliterated with "wyȝe"; the use of ME werpen here would not require a significant change to my argument.

[49] See the MED, s.v. "frēke," sense 1; Borroff, Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, pp. 54-55; and the Dictionary of Old English: A to H Online, ed. Angus Cameron et al. (Toronto: Dictionary of Old English Project, 2016), s.v. "freca"; the dictionary is available at <http://tapor.library.utoronto.ca/doe/>, last accessed on 27/01/2018. See below, note 86, on the concept of alliterative rank.

[50] Borroff, Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, p. 65.

[51] On this ambiguity, see J. A. Burrow, A Reading of Sir Gawain and the Green Knight (London: Routledge, 1965), pp. 12-23; Larry D. Benson, Art and Tradition in Sir Gawain and the Green Knight (New Brunswick: Rutgers Univ. Press, 1965), pp. 61-93; Bella Millett,

"How Green is the Green Knight?," Nottingham Medieval Studies, 38 (1994), 138-511; and Rhonda Knight, "All Dressed Up with Someplace to Go: Regional Identity in Sir Gawain and the Green Knight," Studies in the Age of Chaucer, 25 (2003), 259-84.

[52] See the MED, s.v. "ginge."

[53] Outside SGGK, it is only found on three other occasions with this meaning in the poet's works: l. 716 in Pearl, and ll. 184 and 194 in Cleanness. See the MED, s.v. "rēsoun," sense 4, for a wider range of contexts where the noun is used as a near-synonym of ME word. On the historical trends of semantic change from mental state to speech, see Elizabeth Closs Traugott and Richard Dasher, "On the Historical Relation between Mental and Speech Act Verbs in English and Japanese," in Papers from the Seventh International Conference on Historical Linguistics, ed. Anna Giacolone Ramat et al. (Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 1987), pp. 561-73.

[54] See the MED, s.v. "rēsoun," n.2, senses 1a and 4.

[55] See, for instance, Patricia M. Kean, "Christmas Games: Verbal Ironies and Ambiguities in Sir Gawain and the Green Knight," Poetica (Tokyo), 11 (1979), 9-27; and S. S. Hussey, "Vocabulary in Sir Gawain and the Green Knight," Florilegium, 11 (1992), 22-31.

[56] Tolkien and Gordon, eds., Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, p. 192.

[57] Andrew and Waldron, eds., Poems of the Pearl Manuscript, T, p. 91.

[58] Putter and Stokes, eds., Works of the Gawain Poet, pp. 621-22, note to l. 307. See also the MED, s.v. "kēpen," sense 18.

[59] Cp. ME debat (ll. 1754, 2041, and 2248); the term means 'opposition, resistance' (see the MED, s.v. "dēbāt," sense 4.a), but the uses of ME debaten in the text (ll. 68 and 2179) make it clear that the audience is also supposed to associate the terms in this word field with verbal disputes.

[60] See Jucker, Andreas H., "Courtesy and Politeness in 'Sir Gawain and the Green Knight'," Studia Anglica Posnaniensia, 49 (2014), 5-28.

[61] Outside SGGK, ME losen means 'to utter' only in l. 178 of St Erkenwald, where it similarly emphasizes the power of speech and the physicality of the saint's words; see David K. Coley, The Wheel of Language: Representing Speech in Middle English Poetry, 1377-1422 (Syracuse: Syracuse Univ. Press, 2012), pp. 85-86. Even though Larry D. Benson, "The Authorship of St. Erkenwald," JEGP, 64 (1965), 393-405, put forward strong arguments against common authorship, the possibility that this poem might be attributable to the Gawain-poet has recently received some support. See Marie Borroff, "Narrative Artistry in St. Erkenwald and the Gawain-Group: The Case for Common Authorship Reconsidered," Studies in the Age of Chaucer, 28 (2006), 41-76.

[62] While comparing the temptation scenes to the hunting scenes that accompany them, Wright, "Luf-Talkyng in Sir Gawain and the Green Knight," p. 81, suggests that "the lady 'lauced' ('loosed') her jests as a huntress might loosen dogs on the scent."

[63] Given the likely association of ME leten lotes with the Norse phrase represented by OIc láta látum 'to make a(n ill-mannered) noise', it might be that, in his excitement, Bertilak utters not only words but also "cries and guffaws," as suggested by Putter and Stokes, eds., Works of the Gawain Poet, p. 694, note to l. 694. On the Norse phrase, see Richard Cleasby and Gudbrand Vigfusson, An Icelandic-English Dictionary, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1957), s.v. lát.

[64] Cp. the use of the ME bourden 'to joke, jest' word field in ll. 1212, and 1217.

[65] Putter and Stokes, eds., Works of the Gawain Poet, p. 340, note to l. 1291.

[66] See the MED, s.v. "cast," sense 1.e. Given the unusual sense of "castes" here, some editors prefer to emend it to "costes" (cp. ME cost 'manners, behavior'); see Israel Gollancz, ed., Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, with Introductory Essays by Mabel Day and Mary S.

Serjeantson, EETS o.s., 210 (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1940); and A. C. Cawley and J. J. Anderson, eds., Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, Pearl, Cleanness, Patience (London: Dent, 1991).

[67] See Ad Putter, An Introduction to the Gawain Poet (London: Longman, 1996), pp. 72-96.

[68] See Pons-Sanz, "Speech Representation as a Narrative Technique."

[69] Mark D. Johnston, "The Treatment of Speech in Medieval Ethical and Courtesy Literature," Rhetorica, 4 (1986), 32. For the original text, see *Le Roman des eles*, ed. M. Auguste Scheler (Brussels: Muquardt, 1868), p. 20.

[70] The Book of the Order of Chivalry, trans. Noel Fallows (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2013), p. 78. On the poet's familiarity with medieval manuals of polite behavior, see Jonathan Nicholls, The Matter of Courtesy: Medieval Courtesy Books and the Gawain-Poet (Woodbridge: Brewer, 1985).

[71] Susan Crane, The Performance of Self: Ritual, Clothing and Identity during the Hundred Year's War (Philadelphia: Univ. of Philadelphia Press, 2002), p. 3. Crane explores the significance of openly (and ritually) showing one's adherence to the courtesy code as a way of developing and maintaining one's identity in late medieval England.

[72] On these terms, see further Martin Stevens, "Laughter and Game in Sir Gawain and the Green Knight," Speculum, 47 (1972), 190.

[73] Andrew and Waldron, eds., Poems of the Pearl Manuscript, T, p. 104, prefer to translate "frenkysch" in this context as 'refined'; see also the MED, s.v. "Frēnsh," sense 1.a. On the stylistic use of French terms in the poem, see also Andrea Clough, "The French Element in Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, with Special Reference to the Description of Bertilak's Castle in ll. 785-810," Neuphilologische Mitteilungen, 86 (1985), 187-96.

[74] Louise Sylvester, "Middle English Style," in The Bloomsbury Companion to Stylistics, ed. Violeta Sotirova (London: Bloomsbury, 2015), pp. 583-606. See the Anglo-Norman

Dictionary Online, ed. W. Rothwell et al. (2017), svv. "daliaunce" and "dalier"; the dictionary is available at <http://www.anglo-norman.net>, last accessed on 22/05/2018. Interestingly, the Anglo-Norman noun is not associated with SPEECH, but only with TIME ('idle delay, time-wasting').

[75] The only other attestation of this word field in the poet's corpus can be found in l. 313 of Pearl, where the term refers to the solemn manner in which one should speak to God (see the MED, s.v "dālien," sense 1.b).

[76] On "luf-talkyng," see above, note 9.

[77] On this meaning, see Blanch and Wasserman, "Medieval Contracts and Covenants," pp. 599-600.

[78] On this meaning, see Joseph Allen Hornsby, Chaucer and the Law (Norman: Pilgrim Books, 1988), pp. 35 and 74-75.

[79] Cp. "þat I swere þe for soþe, and by my seker traweþ' (l. 403; that I swear you truly and by my firm word of honor) and the Green Knight's double reference to the promise that Gawain has just undertaken in ll. 448 and 450.

[80] On the use of various modes of speech representation to refer to the agreements, see Pons-Sanz, "Speech Representation as a Narrative Technique."

[81] Cecily Clark, "Sir Gawain and the Green Knight: Characterisation by Syntax," Essays in Criticism, 16 (1966), 361-74.

[82] On the absence of linguistic variation for the sake of characterization in Malory's work, see Twomey, "Voice of Aurality in the Morte Darthur," p. 104.

[83] On linguistic variation in The Canterbury Tales, see Sara M. Pons-Sanz, The Language of Early English Literature: From Cædmon to Milton (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), chapter 9 with references.

[84] On the development of a sociolinguistic use for the second person pronouns during the Middle English period, in imitation of the French distinction between tu and vous, and its stylistic exploitation in SGGK, see De Roo, "What's in a Name?"; Pons-Sanz, Language of Early English Literature, chapter 6; and Jucker, "Courtesy and Politeness."

[85] See *The Wars of Alexander*, ed. Hoyt N. Duggan and Thorlac Turville-Petre, EETS s.s., 10 (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1989), p. 10.

[86] This concept was initially developed by August Brink, Stab und Wort im Gawain: eine stilistische Untersuchung (Halle: Niemeyer, 1920), and refers to the frequency with which a term appears in one of the stressed alliterating positions in the long line. Borroff, Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, p. 60, argues in favor of including here as well their use in rhyming position in the wheels of SGGK because it is equally dictated by metrical reasons. Archaic, poetic or uncommon words tend to have a very high alliterative rank across various texts, while other terms that enjoyed wider use have a lower alliterative rank and often provide the final stress in the line.

[87] See the MED, s.vv. "frainen" and "nornen."

[88] Cp. the noun ME hot in l.1525, which refers to the assurances of knightly service that Gawain has offered to the Lady.

[89] The whole word field is more widely spread in the text, though: e.g. the adjective ME siker describes knights (e.g. ll. 96, 111, 115), Gawain's treuth (l. 403), his lodging at Castle Hautdesert (l. 2048), and the way that the Green Knight suggests his audience should feel regarding his lack of interest in fighting (l. 265).

[90] On the pairing of ME seien and for sothe / sothli, see further Oakden, Alliterative Poetry in Middle English, II, 303.

[91] On the role of Gawain's guide in the narrative as another tempter and tester of Gawain's courage and courtesy (he needs to deal with this "well-wisher" in a polite but firm manner),

see further Burrow, Reading of Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, pp. 119-21; Paul Delany, "The Role of the Guide in Sir Gawain and the Green Knight," Neophilologus, 49 (1965), 250-55; and George Sanderlin, "Who Was Gawain's Guide?," Studies in the Humanities, 8 (1981), 10-12.

[92] For an example of the legal language and rituals used in fifteenth-century oral agreements, see Frederick B. Jonassen, "The Law and the Host of The Canterbury Tales," John Marshall Law Review, 44 (2009), 92-93.

[93] See the Mapping Metaphor Project website for an overview of the metaphorical connections between SPEAKING and SHAPE throughout the history of English (see above, note 41).