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TOWARDS THE SEMANTICS OF MID.E. SYNONYMS OF *MAN*[1]

While early students of linguistics such as Bechstein (1863), Paul (1880), Bréal (1879), Trench (1892) devoted much effort to the issue of diachronic semantic change, the second half of the 20th century was, until the 1980s marked by a particular dearth of publications on the problems of diachronic semantics. This overall picture started to change with the advent of cognitive linguistics as new ideas caught on and were put to the test by those who thought that cognitive linguistics offered the means by which historical semantic changes could be studied more successfully.

This preliminary analysis is concerned with meaning and change of meaning within a well-defined group of lexical categories that are – panchronically speaking – Mid.E. synonyms of *man* (cf. Kleparski 1996,1997).[1] Notice that this report merely signals a number of problems rather than satisfactorily solves any of them. Although I believe that no available theory is capable of encompassing all the facts concerning meaning and its development, the absence of a strict formal apparatus here does not mean that I am in favour of semantic botanising; the aim set to what follows is the exploration of the semantic status of a group of lexical categories during a strictly-defined historical period.

Hallig & Wartburg (1963) list three main conceptual macrocategories, i.e., **UNIVERSE**, **HUMAN BEING** and **HUMAN BEING AND UNIVERSE**, of which the conceptual macrocategory **HUMAN BEING** has undoubtedly drawn most attention and research in diachronic semantics. The preliminary analysis proposed here is a continuation of my long-lasting interest in historical semantics that started with the publication of Kleparski (1986), where an attempt was made to analyse pejorative developments in the history of English. In turn, Kleparski (1990) offers a study of evaluative developments in the

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conceptual macrocategory **HUMAN BEING**, while in Kleparski (1996) I narrowed my perspective to the conceptual category **BOY**. Finally, Kleparski (1997) carries out the analysis of semantic developments of Mid.E. and E.Mod.E. synonyms of **GIRL/YOUNG WOMAN**. Here, we are concerned with the semantic content of a large corpus of Mid.E. (1050–1500) synonyms of man which is, however, but a fragment of the onomasiological dictionary one could list for the conceptual macrocategory **MALE ADULT HUMAN BEING**. *Figure 1* lists the corpus of Mid.E. synonyms of *man*:
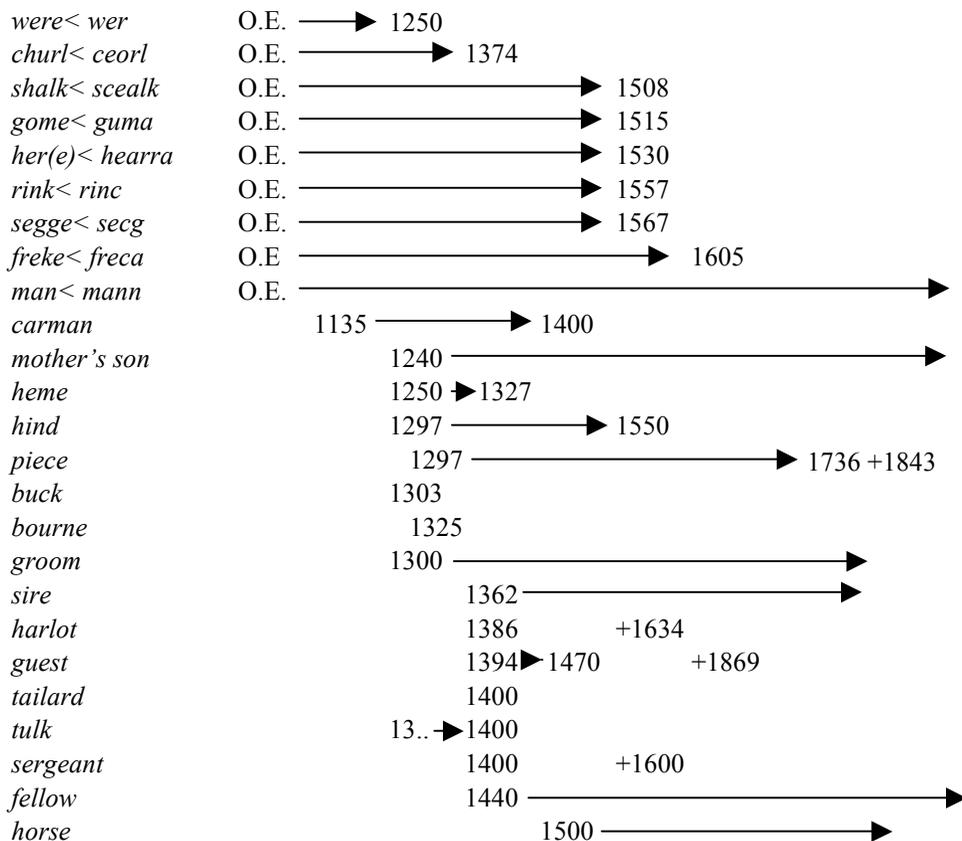
were< wer	O.E. ⟶	1250
churl< ceorl	O.E. ⟶	1374
shalk< scealk	O.E. ⟶	1508
gome< guma	O.E. ⟶	1515
her(e)< hearra	O.E. ⟶	1530
rink< rinc	O.E. ⟶	1557
segge< secg	O.E. ⟶	1567
freke< freca	O.E ⟶	1605
man< mann	O.E. ⟶	
carman	1135 ⟶ 1400	
mother's son	1240 ⟶	
heme	1250 ►1327	
hind	1297 ⟶ 1550	
piece	1297 ⟶	1736 +1843
buck	1303	
bourne	1325	
groom	1300 ⟶	
sire	1362 ⟶	
harlot	1386 +1634	
guest	1394►1470 +1869	
tailard	1400	
tulk	13..►1400	
sergeant	1400 +1600	
fellow	1440 ⟶	
horse	1500 ⟶	

Figure 1

O.E. Heritage

Notice that the use of several categories documented for the sense 'man' is restricted to the O.E. period and hence these lexical categories are not provided in *Figure 1*. This lot includes both morphologically simple lexical categories such as

beorn, carl, hæle, maga, wæpned, esne, as well as a substantial number of morphologically complex categories, such as *wæpnedmann, woruldman, carlmann, folcagende, folcbearn, folcwer, freomann, gum mann, gumrinc* and others. On the other hand, the Mid.E. body of synonyms of *man* comprises a body of lexical categories used in the sense already in Anglo-Saxon times. Thus, Germanic *wer* (cf. O.Fris. O.H.G. *wer,* O.N. *verr*) appears already in Beowulf alongside with the sense 'husband' documented from O.E. down to the middle of the 13th century (O.E.>1275). The lexical category *churl* was employed in the sense 'man' from O.E. until late 14th century. Like many other lexical categories associated with the core of the conceptual category **HUMAN BEING**, already in the E.Mid.E. period *churl* underwent the process of pejoration as it started to be used in the now predominant yet archaic sense 'base and low fellow'. O.E. *sc(e)alc* (cf. O.Fris. O.H.G. *scalc, scalh* 'servant'), was originally linked to the conceptual microcategory **SERVANT** as it was used in the sense 'serving man', while in alliterative poetry it acquired the status of a synonym of *man* documented from O.E. down to the beginning of the 16th century (O.E.>1508). The Germanic *guma* (cf. O.H.G. *gumo, gomo,* Goth. *guma*) in poetic use was from the O.E. times till the 16th century used in the sense 'man'. Another Germanic category is *here* (cf. (MDu. *herre,* Ger. *herr*), which was used in L.O.E. and Mid.E. poetry, in the sense 'man of high position or rank', and sometimes in the generalised sense 'man' (O.E.>1530). Likewise, Germanic *rink* (O.S. *rink,* O.N. *rekkr*) in poetry appears in the sense 'man', especially in the specialised sense 'warrior'. The word makes its first appearance in *Beowulf* and is documented in the sense 'man' down to the mid 16th century (O.E.>1557). O.E. *segge* (related to O.S. *segg,* O.N. *segg-r*), is documented in the sense 'man' from the O.E. times till the late 16th century, but in the 16th century it was merely used as a contemptuous appellation. O.E. *freke,* frequently appears in the sense 'warrior', though usually the category is used as a poetic synonym for 'man', first documented in *Beowulf* down to the early 17th century (O.E.>1605). Originally, the now central lexical category *man* was employed from O.E. times in the sense 'human being irrespective of sex'. Notice that in the surviving use, the sense 'person' occurs in general or indefinite quotations, for example, with such adjectives as *every, any, no,* and often in the plural, especially in the collocation with *all, any, some, many, few.* However, already during the L.O.E. period *man* is testified in the sense 'male person, man' with special reference to sex and this seems to have been the central sense of the lexical category for the Mid.E. period in question.

Mid.E. Acquisitions

O.E. *carman,* apparently related to N. *karmann,* is a variant form of an Anglo-Saxon compound *karlmann.* This lexical category is documented in the sense

'man' from the middle of the 12th century down to the beginning of the 15th century (1135>?a1400). One of the few Mid.E. compound expressions *mother's son* is a monosemous collocation appearing chiefly in the collocation *every mother's son* in the sense 'man' from the middle of the 13th century until the 20th century (1240>1896). Mid.E. *heme* is of unknown origin and is found only in two documented quotations in the sense 'man'. Mid.E. Germanic *hind,* present in English since the O.E. times, was originally linked to the conceptual category **SERVANT**, as it was used in the sense 'domestic servant' until the middle of the 19th century. During the course of the 13th century there developed the sense 'fellow, man', present in English till the 17th century. The Romance *piece* (cf. OF *pece* It. *pezza* 'piece of clothing'), appears in Mid.E. at the beginning of the 13th century in the sense 'a part, a bit', and is documented for this sense down to the present-day English (1225>20th). Interestingly enough, in the 13th century in absolute, elliptical, contextual, or conventional use *piece* started to be used in the sense 'an individual, man'. This sense is well documented for the Mid.E. period, and although the last *OED* quotation comes from the early 20th century, after the close of Mid.E. period the word seems to have been scarcely used in this sense, and the sense with which the word has come down to our times, that is 'girl, woman especially regarded as a sexual object' first appeared in the 14th century.

Mid.E. *buck* which goes back to O.E. *buc* (cf. Du *bok*, O.H.G. *bock* all meaning primarily 'he-goat'), has been used since Anglo-Saxon times in the sense 'male deer or the male of other related animals'. By the process of zoosemy, at the beginning of the 14th century the word started to be used with reference to man in various associations. Although the evidence for the Mid.E. period is relatively scarce the word has come down to Mod.E. in the sense 'dashing fellow; a dandy'. Mid.E. *groom* is of uncertain etymology, and on the basis of the *OED* data one may say that 'boy, male child' seems to have been its original sense documented from the beginning of the 13th century until the late 17th century (1225>1675). In the middle of the 14th century *groom* developed the sense 'man, male person'. Simultaneously, at the end of the 13th century there appears the sense 'servant' that has come down to our times (1297>20th). The Romance *sire* (cf. O.F. *sire* Lat. *senior*) was originally from the early 13th century placed before personal names denoting knighthood, or with common nouns in the sense 'sir' throughout the Mid.E. period. In the middle of the 14th century the word started to be used in the generalised sense 'man, fellow', frequently with the implication that the person referred to is of some importance (1362>19th).

The lexical category *harlot* is most probably a French borrowing (cf. O.F. *herlot*, *harlot*, *arlot* 'lad, vagabond', It. *arlotto* 'a lack-Latin or hedge-priest'). Originally, from the early 13th century onward the word was employed in the pejorative sense 'villain, low fellow'. At the end of the Mid.E. period *harlot* was occasionally used in the sense 'man, fellow', though the sense is poorly

documented. During the course of the 15th century *harlot* underwent the process of moral pejoration as it developed the present-day sense 'female prostitute'. The Germanic category *guest* (cf. Mod.G. *gast*, Sw. *Gäst*), from the O.E. period was used in its etymological sense, 'one entertained at the house or table of another person'. From the end of the 14th century until the close of the Mid.E. period *guest* was used in the generalised sense 'man, fellow'. The word *tailard* is a Mid.E. opprobrious epithet founded on a legend told first of St. Augustine at Dorchester (or Rochester), and later of Thomas Becket in Kent, in which the people of these places were said to be cursed with tails for indignities done by attaching a tail to these holy men. The word is documented in one Mid.E. quotation only.

The Germanic *tulk* (cf. Da., Sw. *tolk* 'translator', M.H.G. *tolc*, *tolke*, 'interpreter') was employed in the sense *man* during the late Mid.E. period. The Romance category *sergeant* (cf. Sp. *sirviente*, Pg., It. *servente* servant), started off in English in the sense 'a serving-man, servant', before it acquired the sense 'common soldier'. Again, the lexical category in question originally linked to the conceptual microcategory **SERVANT** at the end of the 14th century developed in alliterative verse the sense 'man' (?a1400>15..). Germanic *fellow* appears already in O.E. in the sense 'a partner, colleague'. During the course of the 14th century *fellow* underwent the process of degeneration as there developed a specialised sense-thread 'accomplice'. What is of primary interest to us is that at the end of the Mid.E. period fellow developed the sense 'man, male person', the sense that has survived till present-day usage, most frequently with such qualifying adjectives as *good*, *bad*, *brave*, *clever*, *foolish*, *old*, *young*, etc. (c1440>20th). Finally, the Germanic *horse* (M.L.G. *ros*, *ors*, Du. *ros*) has been present in its primary sense in English since Anglo-Saxon times. At the end of the Mid.E. period *horse* underwent a zoosemic development as it started to be applied contemptuously or playfully to a man, with reference to various qualities of the quadruped (1500>20th).

Preliminary observations

The corpus of Mid.E. synonyms of *man* presented here may be grouped into several subcategories, depending on the classificatory criteria adopted by the analyst. One of the yardsticks that may be applied for this division is etymology although – as has been observed – a surprisingly great number of Mid.E. synonyms of *man* are of uncertain provenance (*heme, groom*). A great share of Mid.E. synonyms of *man* are of Germanic origin (*wer; sc(e)alc, guma, here, rink, segge, freke, carman, mother's son, hind, buck, guest, fellow* and *horse*), though there is a substantial number of Romance importations, such as *piece, sire, harlot* and *sergeant*). This confirms the observations made earlier in the literature of the subject that during the Mid.E. period the conceptual category **HUMAN BEING** has attracted a great number of importations from French (cf.

Kleparski (1996,1997). Therefore, due attention should be paid to the role of borrowing in both the rise and the semantic development of Mid.E. synonyms of *man.* In particular, one may reasonably suppose that the Mid.E. influx of French borrowings into the field **HUMAN BEING** may have been largely responsible for either disappearance or change of meaning of a number of synonyms of *man,* both those inherited from the O.E. period and those that acquired the sense 'man' during the Mid.E. period.

When we apply the criterion of morphological complexity we see that – apart from the two categories *carman* and *mother's son* – all Mid.E. synonyms of *man* are morphologically simple forms. This observation is at odds with the observation made in Kleparski (1997) with respect to Mid.E. synonyms of **GIRL/YOUMG WOMAN** where almost one third of Mid.E. synonyms of *girl/young woman* are morphologically complex, as well as with the results of the analysis of Mid.E. synonyms of **BOY** where almost half of Mid.E. categories used in the sense 'boy, young man' are morphologically complex.

Beyond doubt, the most interesting of all is the question of semantic complexity of the analysed lexical categories. Notice that several Mid.E. synonyms of *man* are monosemous categories such as *guma, segge, carman, mother's son, heme,* employed exclusively in the sense 'man, male adult person' during the Mid.E. period. However, as *Figure 2* shows, the majority of Mid.E. synonyms of *man* are polysemous in nature. Significantly, the meanings of the great majority of polysemous categories do not exceed the boundaries of the conceptual macrocategory **MALE HUMAN BEING** (*wer, scalc, guma, here, segge, freke, carman, mother's son, heme, hind, groom, sire, guest, seargant, fellow*).

LEXICAL CATEGORY	PRIMARY SENSE	SECONDARY SENSE(S)	SENSE 'MAN"
Wer	'man'	'husband'	O.E.>13th
sc(e)alc	'servant'	'man' (poetical)	O.E.>16th
Guma	'man' (poetical)		O.E.>16th
Here	'man of high position' (poetical)	'man' (poetical'	O.E.>16th
Churl	'male human being'	'base and crafty man'	O.E.>14th
Rink	'man'	'warrior'	O.E.>16th
Freke	'warrior'	'man' (poetical)	O.E.>17th
Man	'human being'	'man'	O.E.>20th
Hind	'domestic servant'	'fellow, man'	13th>17th
Piece	'a bit, a fragment'	'man'	13th>17th
Buck	'male deer'	'dashing fellow'	14th>20th
Groom	'boy, male child'	1) 'man, male person' (poetical) 2) 'servant'	14th>19th

Harlot	'villain, low fellow'	'man, fellow'	14th
Guest	'one entertained at the house'	'man, fellow'	14th>15th
Sergeant	'a serving man, servant'	'man' (poetical)	14th>15th
Fellow	'partner, colleague'	1) 'accomplice' 2) 'male person, man'	15th >20th
Horse	'horse'	'man' (playful or contemptuous)	15th>20th

Another preliminary conclusion that may be formulated is that very frequently the historical appearance of the sense 'man' is either preceded or followed by the rise of the sense 'servant'. This observation confirms the results of the analysis carried out in Kleparski (1990) where the analysis of social pejoration of a number of O.E. lexical categories linked to the conceptual category **HUMAN BEING** is carried out. In other words, very frequently lexical categories that belong to the panchronic onomasiological dictionary of synonyms of *man* may and most frequently do belong to other onomasiological dictionaries of other concepts, in this case the panchronic dictionary of the conceptual category **SERVANT**. This fact simply represents the diachronic duality and relative independence of concepts and the expressions associated with these concepts (see Kleparski (1996:86)).

Another comment that can be made is that the Mid.E. body of synonyms of *man* contains two cases of zoosemic development, which merely signal a large-scale operation of animal metaphor in English at a later period. As convincingly shown in a number of works such as, Schreuder (1929), Hughes (1978), Kleparski (1990,2002), the animal kingdom is one of the most powerful centres of metaphorical expansion and perennial sources of imagery. The results of the studies carried out so far seem to point to the fact that most of the cases of animal metaphor are targeted at the conceptual category **HUMAN BEING**. The body of English animal metaphors analysed in the existing literature seems to point to a general tendency to form evaluatively and/or emotionally charged semantic extensions from the conceptual domains **MAMMALS** and **BIRDS** and not, for example, **AMPHIBIANS, FISH** or **INSECTS**. Notice that the zoosemic developments pertaining to the Mid.E. synonyms of *man* seem to confirm this tendency. The finding that man tends to apply to himself most often the names of those animals to which he is closest or which he is most familiar with seems only natural. As noted by Krzeszowski (1997:73), higher forms of animal life such as, in particular, mammals are more prototypical than other animals.

To conclude, this preliminary analysis poses more questions than it can possibly answer. One of the basic questions which remain to be answered is that of the Mid.E. systemically primary designating expressions used in the sense 'man'. It appears that certain Mid.E. categories may readily be discarded,

especially those that are poorly documented or chiefly poetical in character. One may reasonably suppose that it is Mid.E. *man* that could be ascribed the role of the primary designating category, but in order to verify this hypothesis one would have to engage in in-depth text and corpora studies.

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