

A SOCIO-LINGUISTIC EVALUATION OF THE GREAT MODAL SHIFT: AN OVERVIEW OF THE FEMALE APPROACH

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ABSTRACT

The great modal shift is a semantic drift that took place in the Late Old English period and continued up to the Present-day, even though the official dates to its end are set in the 15th century. A group of Old English verbs undergoes a semantic colision leading to changes in their meaning as well as their syntax, since they are no longer full verbs, but auxiliaries. The contextual and situational factor that effected this process have not been thoroughly studied. Gendered relations within society and within the religious institutions prove relevant for the abovementioned shift, such as the Benedictine reform. Women as audience, as speakers and as producers (both economic wealth and written material —though women as authors and audience are now just beginning to be the subject matter of many studies. The literary voice of the Anglo-Saxon woman and her indirect role as audience led to changes in the modes of expression. There are, however, earlier periods with similar conditions and the study of possible copies of these early texts will lead us to a better knowledge of the female voice in this period.

KEY WORDS: Old English, Great Modal Shift, Benedictine reform, female voice, women as audience.

RESUMEN

El gran cambio modal es una colisión semántica entre varios verbos del inglés antiguo que continúan desde el 900 hasta el siglo xv. La colisión semántica da lugar a cambios en su significado y en su sintaxis de tal manera que se convierten de verbos con pleno significado en auxiliares. El entorno contextual y situacional tiene que ver con las relaciones de género, tanto socialmente como institucionalmente dentro de la iglesia; un ejemplo es la reforma benedictina. La mujer como parte del auditorio, como hablantes y como productoras (económicamente y literariamente —su autoría de libros siempre en duda). La voz literaria de la mujer anglosajona y su papel indirecto como auditorio causaron cambios en los modos de expresión. Períodos más tempranos contextualmente similares no han sido estudiados a este respecto.

PALABRAS CLAVE: inglés antiguo, gran cambio modal, reforma benedictina, voz femenina, mujer as auditorio.



The study of Old English in all its aspects is not exclusively dependent upon the observation of strictly or internal linguistic issues. Its linguistic contextualization as well as its historical background offers as much information on its structure, communicative patterning and evolution. In order to study any Old English linguistic change, we must always resort to a profound historical knowledge of the period and a contextualization of the particulars that exert a pressure upon those language patterns, be they morphological, syntactic or semantic. This will provide us with the reasons for language change. No change in language takes place in isolation (Milroy) but within a complex set of relations; social, political, and others. Several are the linguistic trends that make an emphasis on this, but this point of view is not restricted to the study of language, other disciplines such as history and economic history relate the progress of human interaction to feature other than those strictly within the limits of the discipline, not being exactly a positioning in favour of an interdisciplinary approach; one example is M. Bloch's definition of mental climate (qtd. Farmer and Rosenwein 3), which is developed out of the study of economic history.

A. Harbus, positioned on the cognitive approach, quotes E. Spolski in observing that one of the most relevant subject matters for the study of Old English literature is based on the change of the literary artifact as regards both "production and interpretation." The disclosure of the text depends "on culturally determined mental patterns [which] are nevertheless intelligible beyond that immediate context of textual creation and reception (166)." Later on she makes reference to Richardson and Steen (6) in that students of Old English texts consider the possibility of "delineating the models of mental operations that influenced writers working in earlier historical periods." The relevance of these points of view can be examined in the study of the literature of the period. Changes in modes of expression and language stylistics are, obviously, directly connected to those "culturally determined social patterns." One pertinent issue is to what extent our reception of literature in its historical context allows the disclosure of the text and opens up our knowledge, even unconsciously, of the textual creation, leading us to a more intuitive associated with cultural and contextual premise. She further gives an estimate on Turner's as to the relevance of "creativity, invention, language and visual representation, and the construction of meaning" (18). This is particularly valuable for our study, since the semantic changes to be studied in this paper are an exponent of this "construction of meaning."

Other approaches on the development or understanding of contextual and situational standpoints in disciplines such as history and historical/philological research have been written by Patterson, Spiegel, Fleischman and others. These perspectives are appealing for the history of the language and the relationship between cultural and historical events and changes on the linguistic structure and the linguistic behaviour of a speech community. Spiegel (3) makes reference to concepts that, even though subjacent in historical revisions, have not been explicitly taken into account for historical research, and the same could be said of the history of the language: "causality, change, authorial intent, stability of meaning, human agency, and social determination." The contextual/situational analyses provide informa-

tion about the linguistic state of affairs and interaction, but most of all, they account for the socio-linguistic explanation of both changes and patterning. This contextual/situational course of action (evaluation process in Labovian terminology) has been primarily studied by socio-linguistic perspectives, but if the historical setting is not well accounted for, much information will be lost in a historical study of the language or any study on medieval philology.

From the viewpoint of New Philology, Patterson, quoting Derrida, believes that:

Deconstruction is not a presence but an effect of presence created by textuality. There is no *hors texte*, and in trying to discover the historically real we enter a labyrinthine world that not only forecloses access to history in its original form but calls into question its very existence as an object of knowledge. For Deconstruction, writing absorbs the social context into a textuality that is wholly alienated from the real. (59)

The opposite can also be said. The textualisation of the study of history and language evolution leaves out information that is so relevant that an explanation of linguistic change is not only limited, but also partial. Language is not used in isolation and the impact exerted upon it throughout its interaction will always have a profound effect on the direction of change.

From the historical point of view, the first, and probably germane, trait to be deemed correlates with the settling of Anglo-Saxon missions on the continent in order to propitiate the Christianization of German heathen nations, even though many of those missionaries lacked formal education. Eckenstein (1-8) comments on the moving of the Anglo-Saxon church to the continent, where Boniface, self-appointed Bishop¹ (Wynfred), and other members of the church set missions by the 6th and 7th centuries among the non-Christian Germans. The areas in which Boniface's missions settled run from the areas leading to the Rhine, Bavaria and Switzerland. Areas which, as we will see later on, could have been motivated by certain heretic movements² and ideas whose introduction in England could have

¹ "They were liberal in tolerating heathen practices, and ignorant of matters of ritual and creed which were insisted on in the Church of Rome. The bishops, who were self-appointed, were won over by the promise of recognising the title to which they laid claim, but the difficulty remained of weaning them from their objectionable practices. Efforts were accordingly made to reconvert the converted districts and to bring some amount of pressure to bear on the clergy" (Eckenstein 119).

² These seem to have been related to the role of women in religious practices. Vasiliev: "The Bogomil myth contains some remote echo about a bigger sin of the woman during the fall: women have incarnated the souls of the angels of second heaven /angelo secundi coeli/, while men have incorporated the souls of the angels of the first heaven /angelo primi coeli/. This theologically motivated equality in the material life was supported by an equality in ritual —women had the right to be ordained and shrive. Some visible changes that had occurred in the image of the Holy Virgin in the Orthodox and Catholic interpretation were provoked by the Bogomil consideration of the woman:
– full participation in religious ritual,



taken place by means of the correspondence among Boniface and several nuns, abbesses and other religious women. This implies that they were literate, learned women, who had access to knowledge³ and an important question arises in this context regarding modes of expression and communicative interaction, both as interlocutors or as audience, since these letters and the interaction they represent must take into account that the interlocutors were women, and it is a well-known linguistic canon that the message is dependent on the interlocutor as well as other constituent such as topic, context, and so on.

It is important to keep in mind that, even though Rome did not commune with these missionaries' custom to accept heathen practices; however, the rejection of some of these nation's kings, distrustful of Christianity,⁴ shut down many missions,

Two years later Boniface went on a pilgrimage to Rome, where the idea of bringing his energies to assist in the extension of Papal influence originated. The Pope furnished him with a letter in which he is directed to reclaim the faithless, and armed with this he travelled in the districts of the Main. But as soon as the news of the death of Radbod the Frisian reached him he went to Utrecht, where Willibrord [his pupil] had returned. (Eckenstein 719)

His trip to Rome gained him Rome's favour, and this will ultimately lead to the abandonment of the Irish religious tradition and the rise of a new institutional relation within the church.

As mentioned before, he had extensive correspondence with several nunneries in England, due to the problematic situation they were going through. Only his letters are preserved, but from them we can extract what the situation was for many women, nuns in the present circumstances, though it must not be forgotten that the cognitive, social or political role of these women also implied that women themselves had a part in matters recurrently excluding them and restricted to men.⁵ In some of the letters, the condition of female religious, mostly in those kingdoms

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- the right to engage in literary activities,
 - a changed attitude of the official church regarding women, brought about by their emancipation in Bogomil communities" (325).

Later on (1143), he comments on the 10th century: "The heretics absolve themselves, though they are tied up with devilish fetters. This is done not only by the men but also by the women which is worthy of castigation."

³ He requests the works of Peter to be sent to him by them, and this implies that they were either economically prominent or that they could actually copy them themselves. Theories supporting the latter have come out lately.

⁴ One example is the King of Frisia, Radbod, who closed down many missions and expelled the missionaries. Many documents were lost in this manner, and this might be the reason why only Boniface's letters are preserved and not his interlocutor's. Though we know about them.

⁵ Many of these religious women were learned women, he asked from one of them Eadburg "“Often,” he says, Gifts of books and vestments, the proofs of your affection, have been to me a consolation in misfortune. So I pray that you will continue as you have begun, and write for me in



in which heathen kings ruled (northern counties), their distrust towards Catholicism led them to set regulations forbidding female travel. Sexual harassment within convents and nunneries was common and they were defined as objects of sexual “nature.” One recurrent topic in many letters is the necessity for these nuns to leave England, which led them to resort to the authority of bishops of the English church, in this case Boniface, who could give them permission to go abroad.

Eckenstein (716-756) remarks on the position of women following Boniface correspondence:

The desire to go southward was strengthened among religious women by the increasing difficulties of their position at home. Monastic privileges were no longer respected by the kings of Mercia and Northumbria, and the Church lacked the power of directly interfering in behalf of monks and nuns. (125)

In view of this, by the 6th and 7th centuries, religious women were in an extremely complex state of affairs, one that would go on to have a resolution only through the 8th century internal turmoil and warfare. King Ælfred’s wars in the 9th century and his daughter Æðelflæd’s later on. The result of these wars was not just one of christianizing. The loss of men in war and the need for women to take part in the political, social and economic matters probably led to novel guiding principles position, which would be reverted afterwards, as a historical constant with their inclusion or exclusion of concrete settings, which had political interests as the only motive, but many moral excuses as explicit explanations.

716 Her Osred Norþanhymbra cyning wearþ ofslægen, se hæfde .vii. winter rice æfter Aldferþe; þa feng Coenred to rice, 7 heold .ii. gear; þa Osric 7 heold .xi. gear; 7 on þam ilcan gear Ceolred Miercna cyning forþferde, 7 his lic restep on Licetfelda, 7 Æþelrædes Pendinges on Bearddanigge; 7 þa feng Æþelbald to rice on Mercium, 7 heold .xli. wintra Æþelbald wæs Alweoing, Alweo Eawing, Eawa Pybing, þæs cyn is beforan awriten; 7 Ecgbyrht se arwierþa wer on Hii þam ealonde þa munecas on ryht gecierde. þæt hie Eastron onryht heoldon, 7 þa ciriclecan scare. (*Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*)

716 At this point Osred, King of the Northumbrians, who ruled for seven winters after Aldferþe was murdered; then Cenred succeeded to the kingdom and ruled for two years; then Osric and ruled for seven years; then Osric ruled for nine years; and that same year Ceolred, king of the Mercian died, and his body rests in Licetfelda, and Æþelræd’s of the Pendinges in Bearddanigge; and Æþelbald succeeded to the kingdom of Mercia, and ruled for forty one winters, Æþelbald was followed by Alweoing, Alweo Eawing, Eawa Pybing of this king has been written before; and Ecgbyrht the revered man who quarrelled with them and the monks

gold characters the epistles of my master, the holy apostle Peter, to the honour and reverence of holy writ before mortal eyes while I am preaching, and because I desire always to have before me the words of him who led me on my mission...” (Eckenstein 123).

over the right of the land. So that they held Eastron unrightfully, and the clerics ploughshared. [My own translation]

By the year 900, a semantic change started to materialize, probably due to pioneering circumstances, at least for religious and aristocratic women in the country. The Great Modal Shift, as hypothesised by E.C. Traugott, was the result of a semantic clash among several Old English verbs, all of them belonging to the anomalous or irregular groups. In a previous paper (Expósito), a connection was established between this semantic change and changes in the cultural context and the situation in which it initiated. A historical background does not just imply the event that ensues at the moment in which a specific linguistic change occurs, but also other less tangible effects that are the result of the human decisions being taken when such a shift is generated. Thus, related to the construct of the subject in Late Anglo-Saxon England, a phenomenon known as the Great Modal Shift emerges in such a background in which, despite arguments towards the existence or not of such a concept in this period (it was obviously there), such situational/contextual affairs that were not part of the social reality for the historical and communicative act (Bloch's "mental climate"), are left out. The Anglo-Saxon human being does feel as individual as any other subject and is aware of identity and self.

Three main aspects should be born in mind *a propos* The Great Modal Shift: the construct of the subject, observed linguistically in the ways and manner of expression, the gendered relations within society, including power relations, and, finally, the changing political situation which opens up new cultural contexts for women both as thinkers and active producers. They are a new kind of audience and they produce and read literature, an activity that, solely based on traditional literary standards on the role of the Anglo-Saxon woman, both as passive and active participants in their society (as peace-weaver, mother, and ring giver, but most of all as listener and speaker of the voice of their world's society, not their own), would completely take us by surprise. When we read Anglo-Saxon literature, the most salient characteristic of the female persona is that she has to speak in order to keep peace, though the term peace —weaver does not make reference to this, but to the fact that they were married to opposing nations in order to prevent war, they were hostages. Their speech is the one expected of them by their social group and, even though, at times they have been considered some kind of "councillor"; the role of their speech seems more biased towards the preservation of the status quo as queens, *Wealtheow* is one example, whose speeches introduce good advice, concern for her future and are structurally related to the passages in which *Grendel's* mother appears. She represents the opposite role to that of *Grendel's* mother or *Judith*. These are not peace-weavers and their behaviour is inclined to spaces traditionally restricted to men. They are warriors, they fight and take revenge, unlike *Wealþeow*, and there are sexual overtones in their behaviour in battle. *Wealþeow* is not the only woman evidenced as having attained a certain degree of political power in Germanic societies, so far *Æðelflæd* has been mentioned. She could have influenced a more modern construction of the Anglo-Saxon woman's role, dissimilar from the didactic ones taught through the extant texts and historically attested, as well.



Gardner (2), in dealing with Wealpeow's character, quotes several studies as regards the female voice. Marijane Osborn remarks about the Earlier Germanic literary conspectus exhibiting the idea that one of the social responsibilities of women was to speak (in the manner of a councillor) to her husband in the marital setting as well as it was their duty to do so within the family and to each man within their environment (58), her active role is in any case that of peace-weaver within the group (Butler 779); this role is not so dependent upon trust in their words, but rather a means to spread their social status. Frederic Amory and Pat Belenof note that "The reason that the primitive Germans attended the counsels and sayings of their women (as *Tacitus* reports) was presumably that the women's utterances were regarded as inspired rather than as especially 'intelligent'" (533). Marilyn Desmond further comments that "standard literary histories for the Anglo-Saxon period do little to acknowledge the presence and tremendous importance of women in Anglo-Saxon culture, as authors, characters, or voices" (575); the social role of women within the social construct has been studied by Jenny Jochens, Marijane Osborn, Gillian Overing, Helen Damico, and others. Desmond adds that "every member of Anglo-Saxon culture was measured by his or her social bonds within the kinship networks of the community" (584).

Miranda Green, as regards water, refers to the fact that it is "seen as the foci of the life-force," and that "Water represented liminal space, locations at the interface of earthly and supernatural worlds" (89). Craig Davis comments that water is a representation of the underworld (Davis 93) and it is only natural to wonder whether its connection to the female world is another means to relate women to *Yfel*, since associations with the female art of prophecizing are constantly made. *Wealtheow* in *Beowulf* is considered a visionary spirit; however, whether *Wealtheow*'s speech about new disasters on Heorot or her concern for the future of her offspring's inheritance does not come out of fear of powerlessness, or even the awareness that her failure as peace-weaver will be her own failure and a subsequent return to her people, as in the Hildeburh episode. Another relevant question is related to her position of power. *Wealtheow* is not the first woman attested as having political power in certain Anglo-Saxon kingdoms.

At the turn of the 10th century, as a result of social and religious changes, the Benedictine reform brings back up a completely innovative state of affairs for women, thus accounting for the continuation of a linguistic change such as the Great Modal Shift. The possible impact in England due to the contact with the continental missions could have brought about the previously mentioned significance of women as early as the 10th century and even later. Obviously, this did not ensue in isolation, but within a social context, such is the aforementioned Benedictine Rule, which obviously brought about changes for the Church and its people; one of considerable relevance is the role of women in the reformation (Robertson) and women's role as audience (Jayatilaka), which implies an altogether dissimilar position for the role of women in the Church. *The Rule of Benedict* was translated into Old English ca. 960-70 by the Bishop of Winchester, Aethelwold, and he includes a feminine version (not extant, though a Middle English 13th-century version is preserved) as well as a masculine one. Layers of socio-cultural mixture emerge giving rise to the construct of the female subject, which will not turn out to



be uninterrupted, with regular and constant drawbacks, socially and politically stimulated. A significant outcome was precisely the higher social emancipation of women. A linguistic proof of this is that the translations introduce feminine or gender neutral components as regards the addressed audience.

E. Treharne comments on Ælfric's misogyny, and, most outstandingly on the way in which he changes his translations of the *Saints' Lives* to fit a socio-political rejection of women as well as an individual one; women are considered the incarnation of all evil, and even in those cases in which the original Latin text offers a positive view of the female saint or observer of the miracle, he adapts it, either as a result of observance to patronage or as his own individual point of view. This is at least surprising, since *Saints' Lives* tended to be contextualised in many ways in Anglo-Saxon England (Damico, Expósito, Treharne) in order to get closer to the audience, after all the northern territories were not at all completely christened. What sort of mental climate produces such an opposite reaction to the textualised one, pagan or christened? Is it Ælfric's own attitude for the the male patron's need? This is in complete opposition to the fact "that women could bequeath land in this period" (Treharne 204, note 23) "in spite of a common association of land and wealth with men" (Treharne 194). The wars Ælfric had to face against his pagan adversaries would raise economic need, mostly in the hands of men, and this could be an answer to Ælfric's attitude towards women, an obvious intention to obtain sympathy and wealth from his male audience. However, by the 13th century literate women still existed, despite the fact that several nunneries had been closed down.

The progress of this semantic change materialized from OE to PDE through the three main periods traditionally mentioned as relevant for the development of the construct of subject. In the late Old English and early stages of Middle English, there was constant grammatical and lexical-semantic variation, however, the study of the semantic values of these verbs correlating with the socio-historical situation has never been noticed.

The drift indicates that the cultural trends that were to come were closely connected to the progression of this construct. The commutability of perspectives defined by Patterson (367 ff) and Aers in their accounts of subjectivity in the late Middle English Period and the early Modern one is also recalled by Rumsey and Benveniste as crucial to the subjective construct, which they believe to be founded first in language (Rumsey 172) rather than in human linguistic interaction. Benveniste, in any case, "presupposes that the incumbents of those roles have wants and desires" (qtd. Rumsey 172) but he also states that the speaker role is more relevant than the hearer's, even though, the role of the audience is relevant in Old English texts, since this is not a speaker oriented language.

The role of the audience in a language such as Old English will differ, since it is not speaker-oriented.⁶ The abovementioned facts are unluckily the outcome of

⁶ A listener oriented language has specific features such as the presence of declensions, a listener oriented language is characterised by aspects that make the message clearer for the listener.

a research that has lacked a deep observation of the speech interaction under study, lack of attention to several variables and most important of all, lack of attention to contextual and situational issues, such as emotional ones, as those defined by Milroy as network ties, mental constructs and cultural climates. Erussard quotes Patrick Diehl's comments (67-72) in relation to the use of singular and plural first person pronouns and viewed their function as related to the orality of the text and to the amount of reading public. A. Rumsey considers the utilization of pronouns as marker of the personal awareness of the individual; in child psychology, the development of their role leads to the distinction between the I (first person singular) and others. Rumsey remarks, following Piaget, that the child's interaction with the physical world is prior to interpersonal awareness. The next stage is relevant for the construct of subjectivity in several languages, all of which signify the development of several modal constructions and meanings, such as imperative, locative, hortative, jussive, present progressive and others: "amodal" perception (Stern qtd. Rumsey 174) to participate in a process of mutual "attunement" with others (Stern, Trevarthen, and Aitken quoted Rumsey 174).

[...] the new research supports a more layered model of senses of self, and of self-with-other, in which both of these are present at every phase of growth, and develop simultaneously in relation to each other, so that, for example, when language and verbal skills begin to develop, it opens up a radically new domain of relatedness to others and of self-reflexivity, and also new kinds of gaps between self and other, and between different aspects of the experience of self. (Stern qtd. Rumsey 174)

Subjectivity is expressed linguistically by means of modality, lexico-grammatical categories and semantic distinction of various types in the case of English⁷: "emphasis" ("do"), "obligation" ("shall"), "point of view" ("may," "might," "would" and "should") are late Old English developments. The main verbs involved in the Great Modal Shift are *sceal* and *willan*, *magan* and *motan*. *Sceal* and *motan* begin their evolution by the year 900 and that by the 15th and 16th centuries had lost the meaning of "obligation" with a whole restructuring of the system. Thus "shall": "obligation," "necessity" > "promise," "resolve" > "prediction"; and for "will": "want," "desire" > "volition" > "promise," "resolve" > "prediction." As a matter of fact, the "compulsion" meaning in "shall" and "will" in the 16th century has been frequently related to the religious domain. And this may also be so in earlier periods such as the 10th century when a new social situation arises for women. This historical

⁷ And these categories in the form of these verbs or other means is a relevant factor to the study of women's voice during the Anglo-Saxon period (a project on its way) in which the starting hypothesis might be whether the use of these patterns varies between male and female characters, via the narrator's voice, as a sort of anchor modes of expression. Are there semantic gendered related differences among these verbs in the Old English translation at earlier stages? Hopefully, an oncoming project will tell.



moment gave women a much more important role in religion and society in general, as well as a rise to a new position for women, who would now, as in the 6th and 7th centuries be members of the scribal status. This gives way to a new understanding of women's role on the part of the official church. Nunneries are set up and a considerable compendium of literary works addressed to women is written; such are "Hali Maidhad," "Seinte Margarete," "Sawles Warde," "Ancrene Wisse," etc, written in the A-B language (the only "standard" of the Early Middle English Period).⁸ This may be considered one of the standpoints for the development of The Great Modal Shift, since this effect is dated earlier in England. Thus, this will lead to the need of new ways of expression from the linguistic point of view.

Vasiliev concludes on Bella Millet's and Jocelyn Wogan-Browne's commentaries on two facts related to later texts and the need for new ways of expression. These innovative linguistic interaction correlates with a novel role of women within the church and has certain connections with French and Latin more contemporary styles:

they placed women in an equal position. On their part, the cultural activities of women brought about more mildness, mercy, elegance, psychological depth, a deeper interest in literature. Modes and behaviour become milder, to be elegant in manners was a fact of prestige could lead to a greater understanding of the social interaction in those societies and this to a better knowledge of linguistic interaction. (Vasiliev 332)

The aim of this work is to give an insight of the contextual situational factors that led to the Great Modal Shift.⁹ In this case, the analysis of these features is historically linked to ongoing religious institutionalisation and, significantly on the role of women within society. Lees and Overing refer to the concept of misogyny (21) and the role of women is based on the maxim "*mulier est traditio*," and this implies the use in Old English of a series of verbs concerning the social duties of women in the Anglo-Saxon society. These are represented by "sceal" and its counterparts.

Some female characters have been viewed as representing a negation of the negation of the self in the Old English literary texts. Erussard comments on *Elene*

⁸ It is important to keep in mind that textual production in Old English was still taking place in the North by the 12th century (Swan and Treharne).

⁹ Impersonal constructions of the type *me þuhte*, *me semed*, and their evolution can be considered another linguistic structure closely related to the evolution of speakers attitudes in their communicative interaction. From the historical point of view, these constructions date from the Old English period, and they undergo a historical process of profound interest that lasts until the Early Modern English Period and later disappear. It is obvious that these constructions are related to the direct expression of thought. Therefore, the fact that they are left out of the linguistic schemata will probable be related to political situations in which freedom of speech was not so much within the reach of the common speaker, as well as discussions about the correct manner of expression, which could develop a weak tie within the community, from the sociolinguistic point of view.

that both stylistic and language structures employed by Cynewulf are a way to characterise the literary persona towards a negation of the self. As he introduces her status rather than her name in mentioning her, he seems to reproduce, as the heroic epithet does, a means to bring her features to the fore: “Elene is called a modor (mother) only once” (45). The duality between her character and Judas’s through their speech style proves impersonality and negation of self, she elicits “elaborate, impersonal use of paronomasia” (54), Judas, on the other hand, expresses himself as personal even with his treatment of pronouns, her character tends to include the imperative as a queen by ordering and commanding, he, on the contrary, begs. This negation of the self expressed by Cynewulf through the omission of personal pronouns and an impersonal speech style is a sign of saintliness. These features served the diffusion of the ideal image of royal saints (as opposed to martyrs and hermits), conspicuous by this period. The twofold facet of the female roles to be noted in both stereotypes is ever present in the cultural background and will influence language, both in literary characterisation and also as a meaningful semantic expression.

In earlier literature Grendel’s mother is an example of change in the construct of female identity. She is an outsider in the Germanic societies, and at the same time she is a female undertaking tasks generally restricted to men in that society (Chance). There are other female characters in the Junius MS that break those apparent rules in which the female role was that of “mulier-est” (*sceal*), such as Judith, who took revenge on Holofernes. Gilchrist comments as regards the ability of women to bring about change:

Discourse analysis (Foucault 1979) considers the social construction of femininity and masculinity, for example, through classifications of the body, and gender as a relationship structured by power. This approach has been criticised for under-emphasising the role of individual agency and the ability to bring about change (Komter 1991) [...] (16) Hence the “duality of structure” links material culture with structure, agency, and the potential for social change. (13-14)

The categories of mood and modality are then relevant for the evolution (in language acquisition contexts) as well as part of the evolution of the subjective concept in a language. These are not the only relevant elements “demonstratives, adverbs, and adjectives, which organize the spatial and temporal relationships around the “subject” taken as referent... the I which is proclaimed in the discourse” (Benveniste, qtd. Rumsey 175). The concept of self is then defined as one in which individual awareness is a growing feeling among human beings. This is not a material concept but one in which the self could be understood rather as the stage of transcending the physical into the psychological or even religious correlation of being.

Both hypotheses are formulated by Farmer and Rosenwein as autonomous and at a time unitary, since they both flow within the same conceptual paradigm and place the self within a complex of language and space, a non-autonomous unit in this respect: the interaction of elements that take part in a complex relationship that gives form to the text, the fact that the medieval mentality did not conceive space within its understanding of the world. Spence, on the contrary, establishes a



close connection between textual realities and emotional development. This construct of the subject has an important influence on the way they communicate, though it also seems clearly related to the social and political role of women throughout the period; they correlate with each other, one is related to the contextual/situational world, and the other to the mental states founded in such historical changes. The evidence that the roles of women and the construct of the subject have proved relevant for constant modification in the society of the period as well as in their modes of expression, both structurally and thematically is undeniable, and these facts have served as the trigger for several linguistic changes, that up to now had been only explained from the internal linguistic point of view, leaving aside the component and interactions that led to them. The effect on language is not just sporadic, since these transformations take place through considerable historical periods. The need to adapt modes of expression to new contextual and linguistic processes is natural to any adjustment within human interaction, social, political, historical or emotional, if awareness of self can be considered so. A further study, as mentioned above of the semantics of these verbs at earlier stages is needed in view of the social position of women in many circumstances.

From the 6th century onwards the settlement of mission on the Continent by English priests brought into contact perspectives as to the role of women in society. In the northern areas the circumstances were not easy for religious women, first due to the distrust of the kings of those parts of the country, and secondly because these imposed rules and harassed them. In any case, these are the areas in which much of the correspondence with Boniface could have introduced heathen customs and practices. One of them could have been the ones mentioned by Vassiliev as regards the role of women within church and within society, pertinent to the study of a Late Old English semantic change: the Great Modal Shift. The evolution of the English Modal has been studied from the 900 up to the present, however, there is one field that in view of this historical/contextual information could be of great interest and this is the study of these verbs at those earlier stages. Erussard mentions the “mulier est” Latin tradition, translated *sceal* in Old English, but this has not been studied in earlier texts and translations in order to observe the actual semantic values that *sceal* and the other verbs included in the Great Modal Shift since they underwent similar contextual/situational conditions. The Great Modal Shift was also affected by the agency of the female role as regards the concept of self. Since both aspects necessarily implied the need for modes of expression that included women, not only as participants in communicative interaction, but also as the audience and producers of many of those texts. The question of authorship at this stage is not clear, but there may be means to at least begin such studies, both from the linguistic, thematic and stylistic point of view. There are ways to listen to the female voice in Anglo-Saxon texts, and maybe even corroborate female authorship by means of these characteristics if those linguistic, thematic and stylistic components operate as a sort of anchor set of features. Obviously, a thorough study of these issues will be needed, and the relationship between authorship and audience might not end up in a clearcut boundary; however, the different female voices, those that were used as a didactic means and the real ones can still contain at least



stylistic and thematic elements of relevance for this study. On the other hand, a text produced by a man but directed to a female audience will also contain constituent hinting to the female voice, and finally those texts written by women will come to the fore. It is not an easy task, but not an impossible one and worth trying. Historical events and their consequences must never be forgotten when dealing with this topic.

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