# The Conceptual Construal of *Verry* and *Trewe* in *The Canterbury Tales*

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## 1. Introduction

The present paper explores the semantics of Middle English *trewe* (PDE 'true') and *verry* (PDE 'very'), thus lexemes which semantically differed from their Present Day English apparent equivalents. The aims of the paper are the following:

The present study is cognitively oriented, so the semantics of *trewe* and *verry* will not be separated from their etymological, cultural and semantic contexts. The paper aims to refer to the linguistic picture of the world, or to the linguistic interpretation of reality (Bartmiński and Tokarski 1986). According to Bartmiński and Tokarski (1986), literature and culture interpenetrate, hence culture highly affects the language and the linguistic type of discourse. In my study, I also refer to works by Wierzbicka (1992; 1997; 2006) and her notion of *key words* in an attempt to recreate a world out of words. For Wierzbicka, *key words* constitute special set of words, which echo cultural norms and values, and which are indispensible in the entire system of ideas of a particular society.

Secondly, the paper also aims to show that the concept of truth was the *key concept* for mediaeval society (Wawrzyniak 2016a; 2016b). Mediaeval people perceived this concept differently because their norms, values and beliefs differed when juxtaposed with norms, beliefs and priorities of contemporary Western European culture. In my earlier research (Wawrzyniak 2016a; 2016b; 2017), I have indicated that the concept of *truth* laid the foundation for the conceptualization of abstract concepts, such as wisdom, love, honour, fidelity, as well as joy. *Truth* was the concept that was highly lexicalized and pragmaticalized. In this paper, my intention is to show that the concept of *truth* affected the semantic construal of the two Middle English lexemes, namely *trewe* and *verry*, both of which differed when compared with their PDE "equivalents". Most of the senses developed by *trewe* reflected the central values attributed to ME *trouthe*, namely faithfulness, loyalty, honour and fidelity, while verry implemented the concept of *truth* in its emphatic function. Additionally, *verry* had centrally the function of an adjective, hence its distinct morphological function should be also taken into account in the attempt of the semantic reconstruction of the lexeme. The paper also aims to account for the smooth and semantically explainable shift from the function of an adjective to

the position of an adverb. All in all, my detailed analysis of the two lexemes will be conducted through the prism of culture, and the cultural values in which *truth* and faith were predominant. Consequently, the concept of truth influenced not only the metaphorical conceptualization of other abstract concepts, but it shaped the semantics of everyday lexical items.

Furthermore, in the second part of my paper, I will briefly indicate that the concept of the *truth* was the predominant element in discourse creation and organization. The mediaeval speaker constantly searched for the truth and referred to the truth while engaging in the discourse. Therefore, for that society it was quite essential and natural to prompt the expressions that codified *truth* in order to initiate the conversation, invite the listener to the discourse, make an interesting comment, or just to make the dialogue flourish.

The analysis utilizes Caxton's *The Canterbury Tales*: The British Library Copies (edited by Barbara Bordalejo), which is a CD-ROM containing the first full-colour facsimiles of all copies of William Caxton's first and second editions of Geoffrey Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales*. This is also the first-ever electronic publication of the full text of all copies of the Caxton editions. The study is based on all contexts in which *trewe* and *verry* were recorded. In order to achieve maximum accuracy, the data is also supported by the online *Middle English Dictionary* (MED), and by the *Oxford English Dictionary.*

## 2. The semantic analysis of ME *trewe*

Following *Oxford English Dictionary* (OED, s.v. *true*), Middle English *trewe* goes back to Old English *trȳwe* (West Saxon), *trēowe* (Mercian), which stood for 'faithful, trustworthy, honest, steady in adhering to promises, friends etc. The lexeme originated from Proto-Germanic \**treuwaz* - 'having or characterized by good faith'. Its cognates were Old High German *gatriuwu*, Old Norse *tryggr*, Goth *triggws*, Old Dutch *getrou* whose meaning was rendered as 'steadfast, loyal'.

## 2.1. Senses of ME *trewe*

The analysis records 63 instances that pertained to *trewe*.

| senses | tokens |
|---|---|
| faithful, loving, devoted, focused on fidelity in love or friendship | 26 |
| marital devotion, marital fidelity; consistent with faith and sacraments | 9 |
| honest | 8 |
| devoted to work, conscientious, honest in work | 7 |
| reliable to one's word, frank, honest in speech | 4 |
| devoted to God, consistent with faith, constant in belief | 3 |
| true (about art) | 2 |
| used descriptively about God | 1 |
| reflecting the reality | 1 |
| hidden (true) | 1 |
| legitimate | 1 |

## 2.1.1. Central senses of ME *trewe*

Out of 63 instances, 26 could be rendered as: faithful, loving, devoted, focused on fidelity and service in love, as in the following examples:

my *trew* careful hert (*The Knight's Tale* 707) 'my faithful, devoted heart'

*trew* loue (*The Miller's Tale* 506) 'faithful, devoted love'

be *trew* to X (*The Franklin's Tale* 716) 'be faithful/devoted to X'

yeue *trewe* herte (*The Knight's Tale* 1560) 'give faithful, devoted heart'

body *trewe* (*The Franklin's Tale* 320) 'faithful, devoted to one's body; chaste'

thy *trewe* seruant (*The Merchant's Tale* 54) 'your faithful, devoted servant'

*trewe* frende (*The Wife of Bath's Tale* 1216) 'faithful, devoted friend'

In other words, the sense 'devoted, faithful' is the most central in the semantics of ME *trewe*, which can be explained after the analysis of the etymology and the prevalent senses of ME *trouthe* 'truth'. Following *Oxford English Dictionary* (s.v. *truth*), Middle English *trouthe* goes back to Old English *triewþ* (West Saxon), *trēowþ* (Mercian), which denoted 'faith, faithfulness, loyalty, honour'. As I have already mentioned in my earlier studies (Wawrzyniak 2017: 51), Middle English *trouthe* was a significant element in the mediaeval concept of LOVE. The link between LOVE and TRUTH can be supported by such collocations as *breke trouthe*

'to be unfaithful, to *break word*', *hold trouthe* 'to be faithful', *keep and saue trouthe* 'keep and save one's given promise', *falle of trouthe* 'to break one's word, to commit adultery', whereas *vntrouthe* stood for 'adultery'. The concept of TROUTHE was thus the part and parcel of everyday collocations that pertained to LOVE or its lack. Hence, *trewe* in the sense of 'devoted, faithful' is the direct continuation of the prototypical sense that emerged in the noun - *trouthe*. Here, the attributes of faithfulness, love, devotion, fidelity and service in love merge. *Trewe*, however, could also refer to marital devotion. In this sense, the link with faith and sacraments is highlighted, as in the examples:

my owen *trew* wif (*The Wife of Bath's Prologue* 793) 'my own devoted wife'
thy *trewe* weddid wyf (*The Miller's Tale* 423) 'your devoted wedded wife'
*trewe* humble wyf (*The Wife of Bath's Prologue* 1194) 'devoted, humble wife'

The analysis shows that *trewe* could apply both to love and to marriage. When linked with love/lovers, *trewe* projected the connotations of commitment, service and pain. If, however, referred to spouses, *trewe* was synonymous of 'devoted and faithful to holy sacraments'.

   The analysis of *The Canterbury Tales* records also another extension of the sense 'devoted' in *trewe*, namely devoted to his/her work; conscientious; somebody who faithfully carries out duties (7 cases), as in *trewe* smith (*The Miller's Tale* 593) 'devoted blacksmith', *trewe* swinker (*The General Prologue* 533) 'devoted worker', *trewe* juge (*The Knight's Tale* 1799) 'devoted judge', or *trewe* seruant (*The Merchant's Tale* 54) 'good and devoted servant'. In these senses, *trewe* implies that a person faithfully carries out his/her duties and is honest in his/her work. The meaning emerged via the process of extension. In other words, the sense 'faithful, loving, devoted, focused on fidelity and service in love' acts as a basis for the sense 'somebody who faithfully carries out his/her duties and is devoted to his/her work'.

   *Trewe* could also refer to a person that is 'honest', and thus may stand for the feature of a character and a general attribute of a person. In other words, a person referred to as *trewe* follows norms, values and commonly cherished cannons of behaviour. It is the person that is honourable and does not break one's word. He or she is thus faithful to one's principles or priorities. Such associations could be observed in expressions, such as *trew* man (*The Knight's Tale* 468) 'honest man', a *trew* wight (*The Squire's Tale* 529) 'honest man, person', or *trew of condicion* (*The Canon's Yeoman's Tale* 320) 'honest'. The feature of honesty, also conspicuous in the previous senses, is more highlighted and generalized in this sense and is not narrowed only to a person or work. *Trewe* is just the abstract value in itself.

### 2.1.2. Rare senses of ME *trewe*

The analysis of *The Canterbury Tales* records also other rare senses related to *trewe*, namely:

(1) devoted to God, consistent with faith

(2) reliable to one's word, frank, honest in speech

(3) used descriptively about God

(4) true (with reference to art)

(5) reflecting the reality

(6) hidden, true (with reference to intention)

(7) legitimate

The first two senses, namely 'devoted to God, reliable to one's word, frank' should be considered as extensions of more central senses, namely devotion and honesty.

The central attribute of *trewe*, namely 'devotion' is extended and applied in the religious context, where the lexeme meant 'devoted to God, constant in belief', as in the examples: *trewe* seruant (*The Knight's Tale* 1377) 'devoted to (Virgin Mary) servant', be *trew* to God (*The Parson's Tale* 863) 'be devoted to God', *trewe* confession (*The Parson's Tale 908*) 'confession that is consistent with faith and reflects devotion to God', holy and *trew* (*The Parson's Tale* 71) 'holy and devoted'. In other words, the sense of devotion constitutes the super-ordinate sense for the various realizations of devotion, namely 'devoted to love', 'devoted to a spouse', 'devoted to work', or 'devoted to God', which on the horizontal axis occupy the same level.

The other sense, 'reliable to one's word, frank' can be conceived as a narrowing, or a specialization of the sense 'honesty'. Out of the sense 'honesty', perceived as an upstanding and a general value and pertaining to a general, holistic evaluation of the person, the new and narrower aspect emerges, which can be rendered as 'honesty in speech', or 'honesty in saying the right/the proper thing'. Such a sense could be exemplified by the collocations: *trew* and deboneir (*The Maniciple's Tale* 88) 'frank and courteous', be to me trewe (*The Merchant's Tale 925*), 'be honest to me', be *trewe* (*The Squire's Tale* 580; *The Franklin's Tale* 234) 'be honest'. Hence, the sense of 'honesty' acted as a foundation, or a reference point for the development of the sense 'honest in speech'. Yet, the sense of 'honesty', when juxtaposed with 'devotion', should not be perceived as a super-ordinate category, but rather as an indispensible aspect of a larger category of devotion, which separated and developed into an independent sense. This sense, in turn, served as a basis for an extension to just one sense, which is 'honest in speech'.

The other range of marginal, infrequent senses constitutes a separate block of meanings, which are not affected by the category of 'devotion', nor by the sense of 'honesty'. They are linked by the aspect of reality/factuality and include the following senses: 'true (about God; used descriptively about God'), 'true with reference to art', 'reflecting the reality', 'hidden, true (about intentions)', and 'legitimate' as in the following contexts:

**'used descriptively about God'**
God is *trew* (*The Miller's Tale* 71) 'God is true'

**'true with reference to art'**
*trew* story (*The Nun's Priest's Prologue* 391) 'true story'
book *trew* and correct (*The Tale of Melibee* 125) 'a true and correct book'

**'reflecting the reality'**
fals or *trew* (*The Maniciple's Tale* 256) 'false or true'

**'hidden, true (about intentions)'**
*trewe* entente (*The Clark's Tale* 148) 'true intention'

**'legitimate'**
*trewe* daughter (*The Squire's Tale* 457) 'real, legitimate daughter'

The analysis has shown that *trewe*, in its central senses, was associated with love, devotion, fidelity, pledge of loyalty and honour. As it has already been mentioned, the concept of *trouthe* was initially linked with such values as fidelity, devotion, honour among others. In other words, *trouthe*, perceived in terms of the absolute, functioned as *a key word* for the mediaeval society as it evoked the values of that society. In this regard, *trewe* echoed values linked with *trouthe*, such as fidelity, devotion, honour among others. Thus, semantically, *trewe* was in proximity to its prototype *trouthe*. The central attributes of Middle English *trouthe* were likewise expressed by its adjectival form *trewe*. Consequently, the prototypical sense of *trewe* was not 'real', or 'based on facts', but rather 'devoted' and 'faithful'. In the same vein, the aspect of factuality, or an overlapping with the reality is absent in the construal of Middle English *trouthe*. Yet, the semantics of *trewe* is not an isomorphic continuation of *trouthe*. The application of *trewe* is broader in the human sphere as *trewe* developed a rage of polysemous adjectives linked with humans, such as 'devoted to work', 'devoted to a person, as well as 'honest'. Moreover, *trewe* does not have a dimension of an absolute. The analysis has shown that *trewe* applying to God is hapax legomenon. In the religious context, *trewe* was frequently rendered as 'devoted, faithful'. In the context 'God is *trewe'*, *trewe* does not express the sense of devotion, but rather of existence, or factuality, which is a separate pole of senses linked with *trewe*.

## 3. The semantic analysis of ME *verry*

Following *Oxford English Dictionary* (OED, s.v. very), Middle English *verry* goes back to Anglo-French *verrai*, OF *verai* 'true, truthful, sincere, right, legal, and from Lat. *verax* 'truthful'. Its cognates (Old High German war, Dutch *waar*, German *wahr*) denoted 'true'. Moreover, *verry* is also related to Old Church Slavonic *vera* 'faith', and Russian *viera* 'faith, belief'.

### 3.1. Senses of ME *verry*

The analysis records 53 instances that pertained to *verry*.

| senses applied | tokens |
|---|---|
| with regard to the divine reality; used emphatically | 13 |
| in prepositional phrases to evoke the sense 's heer' | 14 |
| with regard to human experiences, events, conditions that were intensely experienced | 7 |
| with regard to the mental sphere, evaluation and judgement | 5 |
| as a modifier of an adjective 'in a high degree or measure; to a great extent' | 8 |
| positively to humans to emphasize their good nature | 2 |
| ironically to humans to emphasize their negative nature | 3 |
| to refer to the sense 'legitimate' | 1 |

### 3.1.1. Central senses of ME *verry*

From the etymological perspective, *verry* is related to the concept of truth and faith. In Chaucer's *Tales*, the lexeme is used mostly as an intensifier, or an emphasizer. In other words, *verry* emphasizes the 'true' nature of an item it modifies. The analysis shows that senses defined as central are the ones that are applied: with regard to the divine reality; in prepositional phrases; with regard to human experiences, events, conditions that were intensely experienced; with regard to the mental sphere, evaluation and judgement, and as a modifier of adjectives 'in a high degree or measure; to a great extent'. The subsections below contain examples of central senses in the analyzed lexeme *verry*.

### 3.1.1.1. The religious sphere

The analysis shows that *verry* was applied most frequently with the view to emphasizing the absolute in the religious sphere. Hence, it was used in descriptions of God, Christ, other religious beings, as well as in the religious events, which can be exemplified by the expressions:

*verry* trouthe (*The Nun's Tale 259; The Parson's Tale* 519) 'the very truth, the real truth, the only truth'

a *verry* aungel (*The Nun's Tale* 165; *The Wife of Bath's Prologue* 574) 'the very angel, the particular angel'

*verry* blod (*The Miller's Tale* 322) 'the very blood (of Jesus Christ); the particular blood'

*verry* confessyon (*The Parson's Tale* 924; *The Parson's Tale* 243; *The Parson's Tale* 907) 'the very confession, the right confession'

the *verry* god (*The Merchant's Tale* 1047) 'the very God; the only God'

*verry* feith (*The Parson's Tale* 971) 'the very faith, the right faith'

Yet, within the religious sphere, *verry* could also intensify entities conceived as adverse, evil, which shows that *verry* in itself was neither positive nor negative. In other words, *verry* could evoke both positive and negative readings, depending on the entity it emphasized, as in the examples:

*verry* deuyll (*The Pardoner's Tale* 152) 'the very devil, the particular devil'

*verry* pestilence (*The Nun's Prologue* 590) 'the very disease, the particular disease'

the *verry* serpent venemous (*The Monk's Tale* 107) 'the very serpent venomous'

*verry* purgatory (*The Wife of Bath's Prologue* 541) 'the very purgatory, the particular purgatory'.

### 3.1.1.2. The application of *verry* in prepositional phrases

ME *verry* was also applied in prepositional phrases. Following online *Middle English Dictionary* (MED), in prepositional phrases preceded by *for*, *of* and *by*, *verry* evoked the PDE sense 'sheer'. In such expressions, it qualified abstract nouns, especially those denoting emotions or conditions, as in the examples:

for *verry* loue (*The Merchant's Tale* 939; *The Franklin's Tale* 767) 'for the sheer love'

of *verry* peyne (*The Merchant's Tale* 531) 'of sheer pain'

for *verry* jealousye (*The Wife of Bath's Prologue* 488) 'for sheer jealousy'

for *verry* woo out of his wit (*The Franklin's Tale* 152) 'for the sheer madness out of his wit'

for *verry* feer (*The Franklin's Tale* 152) 'for the sheer fear'

by *verry* force (*The Wife of Bath's Tale* 862) 'by the sheer force'

### 3.1.1.3. The application of *verry* with regard to human events, experiences, conditions

Similarly, *verry* emphasized the utmost with reference to human events, experiences and conditions. Additionally, it never applied to neutral experiences, or events but to the intensely felt ones, as in:

the *verry* sorrow (*The Parson's Tale* 55) 'the very sorrow'

the *verry* lewdnesse (*The Tale of Thopas* 3) 'the very ignorance'

*verry* vengeance (*The Summoner's Tale* 296) 'the very vengeance'

*verry* turmentry (*The Wife of Bath's Tale* 251) 'the very pain'

*verry* pouerte (*The Wife of Bath's Tale* 1164) 'the very poverty'

that *verry* nede (*The Merchant's Tale* 5) 'that very need'

### 3.1.1.4. The application of *verry* to mental evaluation, judgement, logic

*Verry* is also recorded in collocations with abstract nouns that apply to mental evaluation, judgement and logic. In these expressions, *verry* emphasizes the noun it modifies as the only one and the most favourable one. Functioning as an emphasizer, *verry* excludes other alternatives, which can be exemplified by the expressions:

*verry* ground of x's prosperite (*The Merchant's Tale* 378) 'the very ground of someone's prosperity'

the *verry* proof (*The Nun's Prologue* 163)

*verry* definicion (*The Wife of Bath's Prologue* 163)

*verry* knowleche of hym self (*The Parson's Tale* 403)

### 3.1.1.5. The application of *verry* as a modifier of an adjective

*Verry* could be also applied as the modifier of an adjective. Following OED (s.v. *very*), *verry* in Chaucer's period could most frequently modify nouns (as listed in previous sections), and also less numerously adjectives. The analysis records no findings of *verry* modifying other adverbs. *Verry* as a modifier of adjectives could be rendered as 'in a high measure', 'to a great extent', which could be exemplified by expressions:

*verry* benigne feithful mayde (*The Clark's Tale* 343) 'to a great extent faithful maid'

*verry* trewe (*The Caxton's Introduction* 5) 'to a great extent devoted'

*verry* gentyl parfyght knyght (*The General Prologue* 72) 'to a great extent gentle perfect knight'

*verry* penitent (*The Parson's Tale* 53) 'to a great extent repentant sinner'

The analysis of the central senses of ME *verry* shows that in general the lexeme was used as an intensifier, or an emphasizer.

To begin with, it intensified the semantics of the lexeme it was juxtaposed with in a particular context. *Verry* was neither positive nor negative, as it only intensified the modified lexeme. Hence, its positive or negative mode was strictly in line with the lexeme that followed *verry*. With regard to central senses, *verry* was not used with regard to people. Rather, it was applied to a wide range of abstract nouns. It referred to the intensely felt emotion, an event, or to highlight the uniqueness of one's judgement. Moreover, *verry* was largely applied with a view to emphasizing the absolute. Additionally, *verry* could also intensify another adjective, but not an adverb.

Furthermore, because of its emphatic or intensifying function, *verry*, unlike *trewe*, did not co-occur with the conjunction 'and' followed by another adjective. Nor was it followed by the preposition *of. Verry* was not semantically independent, and thus had to be immediately followed by an adjective. In other words, *verry* constituted a unit only with a noun, or with an adjective. In contrast to *verry*, *trewe* was extensively used in the following structures:

(1) *trew* followed by the conjunctions *and/or* and another adjective (*trewe and wise, trewe and deboneir, trew and correct, fals or trewe*),

(2) *trew* followed by the preposition *of* (*trewe of body, trewe of condicioun*). Such structures were not recorded for *verry*, which could only precede a noun or an adjective.

Finally, the rendition of *verry* as an intensifier explains the smooth extension in the functions in the lexeme *verry* (from the modifier of nouns to the modifier of adjectives). In other words, the main semantic function of *verry* was 'to emphasize, to intensify, or to exclude other alternatives'. By evoking this type of meaning, it was possible for *verry* to gradually be juxtaposed not only with nouns, but also with adjectives, and thus to emphasize and intensify them.

### 3.1.2. Marginal senses of ME *verry*

The analysis shows that senses defined as marginal are the ones that applied positively to humans to emphasize their good nature, ironically to humans to emphasize their negative nature, and to refer to the sense 'legitimate'. Hence, marginal senses of *verry* did not refer to abstract concepts, but to people. Nevertheless, such senses were highly infrequent;

***verry* emphasizing the good nature in humans:**

*verry* frendis (*The Merchant's Tale* 58; *The Wife of Bath's Tale* 1177) 'the very friends'

***verry* used ironically to emphasize the negative nature in humans:**

*verry* knaue (*The Wife of Bath's Prologue* 253) 'the very boy'

*verry* fole (*The Knight's Tale* 748) 'the very fool'

a *verry* sleeper (*The Nun's Priest's Tale* 71) 'the very sleeper'

***verry* applying to the sense 'legitimate'**

*verry* marriage stablisshid by god (*The Parson's Tale* 847) 'the very marriage established by God'.

The juxtaposition of *trewe* and *verry* shows that the former one (*trewe*) was mostly applied to people, and gave rise to a positive sense as the central sense of *trewe* was 'devoted'. The semantics of *trewe* ran in parallel with the semantics of *trouthe*. Contrary to *trewe*, *verry* was marginally applied to people. Moreover, it was applied more frequently ironically rather than positively. *Verry*, related to the concept of the truth, had an emphatic function in the discourse. Hence, its function was not to refer to norms and values, but rather to intensify and emphasize. Mediaeval speakers whenever, they felt the need to overstate in the discourse or to make an emphasis, reached for the lexemes that belonged to the category of the *truth*.

## 4. *Verry* in discourse formation

The concept of the *truth*, as depicted in *The Canterbury Tales*, was the predominant element in discourse creation and organization. The mediaeval speaker constantly searched for the *truth* and referred to the *truth* while engaging in the discourse. Therefore, for that society it was quite essential and natural to prompt the expressions that codified *truth* in order to initiate the conversation, invite the listener to the discourse, or to make a remark that what has been said is unique and should not be denied or rejected. Hence, mediaeval speakers used to prompt *verry* or the morphologically related form *verily* in the discourse, which could be exemplified by the expressions:

That was *verry* trewe (*The Caxton's Introduction* 1) ' That was really true'

This is to say *verry* (*The Parson's Tale* 245) 'This is to say truly'

And it is *verry* soth that I you telle (*The Reeve's Tale* 4) 'And this is the real truth that I am telling you'

This is a *verray* soth withouten glose (*The Squire's Tale* 158) 'This is a complete truth without a gloss'

Hym thynkes *verily* (*The Miller's Tale* 429) 'It truly seems to him'

He knew *verily* (*The Miller's Tale* 956) 'He truly knew'

I *verily* suppose (*The Merchant's Tale* 787) 'I truly suppose'

For I wot wel and I knowe *verily* (*The Tale of Melibee* 790) 'For I know well and truly'

Wierzbicka (2006: 243) refers to the type of discourse that characterizes the mediaeval period. She claims that this is a pre-Enlightenment type of discourse:

> In the semantic universe reflected in this type of discourse, truth and faith reign supreme, and there is little concern indeed with the limitations of human knowledge or the need for modulating one's assent in accordance with the strength of the available evidence. It is definitely a pre-Enlightenment type of discourse.

Mediaeval society valued *truth* and made a frequent reference to it. Such expressions imply strong confidence on the part of the speaker related to rightness of his/her judgement and the aptness of evaluation. Wierzbicka also emphasizes how frequently the mediaeval speaker "vouches emphatically for the truth of what he/she is saying" using phrases that codify *truth*. Thus, in the mediaeval period, *truth* is a frequent and a dominant concept that affects concept formation and everyday

communication. In modern English, however, the frequency of using 'truth' in discourse highly diminishes. Wierzbicka also points to the modern use of epistemic expressions that imply lack of confidence, such as 'I expect', or 'I gather', which were not found prior to modern English. Likewise, she mentions the prevalence of epistemic adverbs in the discourse organization, such as 'presumably', 'apparently', 'allegedly', or 'evidently' (Wierzbicka 2006: 243), which imply hedging and which are typical of modern English discourse shaping. Consequently, a sharp distinction could be drawn between the mediaeval type of discourse and the modern one, which reflects distinct values and worldviews. In this way, Wierzbicka makes a distinction between "the Age of Faith" and "the Age of Reason".

## Conclusions

To conclude, the analysis aimed to explore the semantics of ME *trewe* and *verry* in order to reconstruct the norms and values of mediaeval society and to indicate that the concept of TRUTH was the *key word* for mediaeval society that affected the construal of *trewe* and *verry*.

The study showed that most of the senses developed by *trewe* reflected the central values attributed to Middle English TROUTHE, such as honour, faith, fidelity or loyalty. Yet, it was emphasized that *trewe* was not an isomorphic continuation of TROUTHE. The application of *trewe* was broader in the human sphere. Additionally, *trewe* did not have a dimension of an absolute.

Moreover, the semantic construal of *trewe* could be structured along two semantic poles, namely devotion and reality/factuality. The central senses of *trewe* centralize the blended concepts of devotion and honesty. The sense of devotion constitutes the super-ordinate sense for various realizations of devotion (e.g., devoted to love, work, God). Honesty, in turn, should not be perceived as a super-ordinate category, but as an indispensible aspect of a larger category of devotion, which by being independent, serves as a basis for an extension of one sense, namely 'honest in speech, frank'. The marginal senses of *trewe* are linked by the aspect of reality/factuality.

By contrast, *verry* implements the concept of the *truth* in its emphatic function as the lexeme emphasizes the 'true' nature of an item it modifies. Moreover, *verry* is neither positive, nor negative. It is in a way semantically blurred, or evaluatively neutral, unlike *trewe* which is easier to define and describe. Additionally, *verry* rarely modifies people. Rather, the lexeme emphasizes the absolute, or is applied to abstract nouns (emotions, events, judgement). Furthermore, *verry* is not semantically independent, but is contingent on the noun or the adjective it modifies. The

semantic character of *verry* affects also its syntactic patterns. The analysis recorded different syntactic patterns for *trewe* and *verry.*

Finally, *verry/verily* had also emphatic function in the discourse. The concept of *truth* was the predominant element in the mediaeval discourse creation and organization.

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