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Semantic profiles of *dark* and *blak* in *The Canterbury Tales*

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The aim of the present paper is to analyse the semantic profiles of *black* and *dark* in *The Canterbury Tales*. The analysis will approach in detail the literal and metaphorical senses instantiated by the two words. The study will aim to point to the semantic differences existing between them. To begin with, the paper will account for the differences on the literal plane between ME *blak* and *dark*, which affected the nature of the metaphorical senses developed by the two words. On the metaphorical plane, *blak* will be shown to be a word that did not develop abstract, evaluative senses that could be projected via a mapping of the concrete onto a more abstract layer of conceptualisation. In other words, the study will emphasise that the metaphorical senses of *blak* were just symbolic associations of a colour rather than abstract senses separated from the concept of a colour. As for *dark*, the paper will reflect on its semantic flexibility on the metaphorical plane and will attempt to provide a hypothesis for why it happened so.
Key words: epistemic, conceptualisation, association, binary, symbolism.

1. Introduction

The present paper offers semantic profiles of the central and metaphorical senses projected by *dark* and *blak* in *The Canterbury Tales*. It should be emphasised that scarcely any linguistic research has been devoted to the study of the concepts of 'black' and 'dark'. The concept of 'dark' has been often analysed together with 'light' (Kövecses 2002; Lakoff and Johnson 1980). As for the cognitive analyses of colours, works by Barley (1974), Biggam (1997) and Mac Laury (1992) to mention but a few, have contributed to the conceptualisation of colours not as fixed categories but as constantly changing ones, and contingent on culture and a system of beliefs. The aims of the present paper are the following:

To begin with, the study will focus on the existing differences between the two apparently related words on both the literal and metaphorical planes. On the literal plane, the paper will show what *blak* and *dark* actually meant and what shades they stood for in the medieval period. Moreover, the analysis will

investigate whether *blak* and *dark* were equally correlated with the concept of a colour. In other words, the analysis will aim to show whether the concept of a colour constituted a primary or a secondary association in the conceptual framework of the two lexemes. Furthermore, the paper will also draw upon the symbolic and cultural associations evoked by the two lexemes. On the metaphorical plane, *blak* and *dark* will be illustrated as source domains used to conceptualise target domains of an abstract nature. Additionally, the analysis will also attempt to show which of the two lexemes developed more metaphorical senses.

Secondly, the emergence of new abstract senses can be analysed in parallel with the tendencies of unidirectionality (Traugott 1989), according to which change always proceeds from the objective to the subjective proposition. Thus, the initial, concrete meaning from the real–world domain becomes the basis for the emergence of the epistemic, abstract, logical sense, which focuses on the internal world of the speaker's belief state. The study will illustrate that the semantic paths of *blak* and *dark* did not overlap to the same extent with the development of the abstract senses reflected in the tendencies of unidirectionality. In other words, the paper will point to the lexeme which, in the metaphorical context, preserved the link with the initial, root sense, as well as to the one which severed the link with the early basic sense.

The analysis utilises Caxton's *The Canterbury Tales*: The British Library Copies (ed. 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*. The semantic analysis focuses on all the contexts and phrases in which the two words were recorded, and views them from a cognitive perspective.

2. The analysis of *dark*

Dark (CEDEL, sv. dark) originated from PGmc *derkaz*, 'to hide, conceal'. According to the *Middle English Dictionary* (MED, sv. dark), *dark* contained the following senses in the Middle English period:

1)
a) of a room, the underworld, the grave etc: lacking illumination: dark, dusky, dismal
b) of the atmosphere, the weather, etc; dark (night), lowering, threatening (clouds, weather)
c) of a luminous body: dim, obscured, and inconspicuous
d) of various things: lacking brightness; dark, dull, murky

2)
a) of a colour; not bright, dull, dark
b) of the skin or complexion: pallid, wan

3)
a) obscure or unclear (statement, word)
b) hard to understand, mysterious
c) unaware, unperceptive, ignorant, unenlightened

4) intentionally obscure, deceptive, malicious

One can view these stages as a path to the development of greater subjectivity. The senses covering stages 1 and 2 are literal or less metaphorical. The concept of a colour is central in their conceptual framework. The senses in stages 3 and 4 encode an increase in the level of abstractness and subjectivity. They are more personal and the link with the literal darkness is either barely noticeable or bleached from their conceptual framework.

2.1 Literal and less metaphorical senses of dark

According to the corpus, when related to literal and less metaphorical contexts, *dark* was recorded in the following contexts:

Places

(1) *Myn is the prison in the derk cote* (The Knight's Tale 1599).
(Mine is the prison in the dark cell).

(2) *And nyste neuer where she was for it was derk* (The Reeve's Tale 305).
(And she never knew where she was for it was dark).

Dark renders the attribute of a place, which is dismal, dusky and lacks illumination. *Dark*, then, applies to places, in which there is no light.

Hell

The other place projected by the source domain of darkness was Hell. When describing Hell, *dark* was more metaphorical than *dark* when it pertained to other places. It did not describe a place that is merely devoid of light, but primarily implied religious undertones, and hence an atmosphere of sin and depravity. The literal absence of light was a starting point for further associations with Hell, such as misery, evil or torture.

Darkness that projected the concept of Hell can be exemplified by the following contexts:

(3) *But in helle her sight shal be* ***ful of derkness*** *of smoke and ful of teris* (The Parson's Tale 134).
(But in Hell her sight will be full of darkness of smoke and full of tears)

(4) *All the horrible devylles that hem tormente coverd with the* ***derknes of deth***
That ben the synnes that the wrecched man hath don. (The Parson's Tale 109–111)
(All the horrible devils that torment him covered with the **darkness of death** that is the sins that the wretched man had done).

In (3), the domain of 'darkness' is used to structure the target domain of misery. On the literal plane, 'darkness' is illustrated as an attribute which precludes vision. The eyes full of tears and the dark smoke around are factors which make it hardly possible for the man to see. Yet, connected with Hell, 'darkness' also evokes further metaphorical associations. First and foremost, 'darkness' creates an atmosphere of sin and depravity; hence a consequence of life in sin without life and God. 'Darkness' becomes the reflection of the sins committed by humans. Juxtaposed with tears, it evokes a state of melancholy, anguish and grief. 'Darkness' is then often experienced in Hell, and is thus linked with annihilation and torture. In (4), it corresponds to a lack of life, and thus to death.

Moreover, *dark* could also function as part of descriptive phrases that refer to Hell indirectly, as in (5, 6):

(5) *I may go retornyng to the* ***derk erthe*** *and* ***coveryd with derknes***, ***the land of***
Miserye and of derknes *where ther is shadow of deth wher ther is non other ordenance but grisly drede that shal euer laste*. (The Parson's Tale 102–103)
(I may go and return to the **dark earth covered with darkness**, **the land of misery and of darkness** where there is shadow of death where there is no other order but terrible dread that shall ever last).

(6) *And for that faith is ded withoute werkis*
So forto werkyn yeue me witte and space
That I be quyt from thens ***that most derk*** *is*. (The Second Nun's Prologue 64–67)
(And as faith is dead without deeds
So for to work give me wit and space
So that I will be set free from **the place that most dark is**).

It should be emphasised that in medieval times, Hell was a taboo subject. Consequently, people avoided talking about Hell openly and used neutral, indirect descriptive phrases instead, namely, the metaphorical expressions containing the adjective *dark*, such as *dark earth*, or *dark place* (Wawrzyniak 2012). A closer look at the indirect expressions suggests that in medieval times (covering the time-span recorded in *The Canterbury Tales*) Hell was considered as taboo and that it may have evoked fear and a feeling of uncertainty. People,

therefore, may have believed that by articulating this word aloud, they would attract evil powers and draw the attention of the adversary. Therefore, they preferred to refer to Hell in a roundabout way rather than directly. The recorded circuitous, indirect phrases, like *dark place* or *dark earth* performed, thus, the role of euphemisms; hence they were substitutions for an expression that might have been regarded as offensive to the receiver. They were conventional expressions used on an everyday basis. Though they initially sounded metaphorical, the phrases gradually lost their metaphorical status and became conventionalised, deeply entrenched in the speakers' conceptual system. In other words, they started to be perceived as ordinary expressions. Such was the perception of the phrases *dark earth* or *dark place*, which did not sound odd to speakers of Medieval English and constituted a set of agreeable and less offensive expressions related to religious concepts.

Moreover, the expression *dark earth* can be considered as a semi-metaphor based on metonymy rather than as a pure metaphor. The metonymic basis that constitutes the basis for the metaphorisation is one attribute of Hell, hence the part ('darkness' or 'lack of light') that stands for the whole, hence for the entire concept associated with Hell. The semi-metaphor, or the half metaphor can be explained on the grounds that the link with literal 'darkness', that is, with the lack of light, is still preserved.

Atmosphere, weather

Dark pertaining to weather was recorded in the following contexts:

(7) *Derk was the nyght as piche or cool* (The Miller's Tale 543).
(Dark was the night as pitch or coal).

(8) *Night is dark and rude* (The Merchant's Tale 554).
(Night is dark and rude).

(9) *A derk cloude between vs and the sonne* (The Parson's Tale 111).
(A dark cloud between us and the Sun).

When referring to the atmosphere or weather, *dark* could be a descriptive element highlighting a lack of light (7). Additionally, it could imply threatening undertones (8), as it describes a place that is literally dark and thereby creates an atmosphere of danger and unpredictability. Moreover, *dark* could be a purely figurative element (9). The expression *a derk cloude* 'a dark cloud', is a metaphor that refers to sins committed by humans. Those sins 'give rise to a cloud' that makes it almost impossible for humanity to see the light.

2.2 Metaphorical senses projected by dark

Evil deeds, actions

'Darkness' could also denote *evil*, perceived in terms of *evil deeds* or *actions*, which can be exemplified by the context:

(10) *Now cristis owen knyghtis leef and deer*
Cast al awey the workis of derknesse. (The Second Nun's Tale 383–384)
(Now Christ's own beloved knights cast away all works of darkness).

Evil nature

The concept of 'darkness' associated with the human psyche can be noticed in the following contexts:

(11) *And thus they her sorowes for to slake*
Prayde her on their knees for goddis sake
To come and rome her in company
Awey to druyen her ***derk fantasie***
And finally she grauntid that request
For well she saw it was for the best (The Franklin's Tale 136)
(And thus in order to assuage her sorrows they prayed for her on their knees for God's sake *to* come accompany her to drive away her dark fantasy; and finally she granted that request for she saw it was for the best).

(12) *Ther the body of man, that whilom was foul and dark,*
Is moore cleer than the sonne. (The Man *of* Law's Tale 382–383)
(There was the body of a man that at some point was wicked and dark, is more clear than the Sun).

(13) *The derk ymagnynge of felonye, and al the compassynge* (The Knight's Tale 1137)
(The dark image of felony, and all its dimensions).

The analysis of the contexts shows no physical, literal image of 'darkness'. Consequently, when referring to the human psyche, *dark* is a metaphorical element with no literal sense behind it. *Dark* was an abstract, epistemic and subjective element as it could evoke the features of evil and cruelty in contexts where the link with the literal 'lack of light' was cut off. At that point the notions of subjectivity and abstractness require some clarification.

As for subjectivity, *dark* referring to 'lack of light' and *dark* applied to human psyche are, to some extent, subjective. Both 'psychic darkness' and

'physical darkness' can be viewed as a matter of human subjective perception. Consequently, both senses could be viewed as, to some extent, subjective.

The notions of epistemicity and abstractness are used in the present paper with a view to showing that *dark*, when used with reference to human psyche or any other non-physical objects, is all about abstract values, such as evil or cruelty, while the notion of the 'physical lack of light' recedes into the background. *Dark* then becomes more abstract as it pertains to values and not to the physical lack of light. One could, however, argue that whenever the word *dark* is used to characterise the human psyche or any other non-physical object, it cannot denote the objects' physical darkness as such objects are not physical objects. The interpretation of *dark* is then contingent on the object it is linked with. Physical objects rely on the concept of the 'lack of light', whereas the application of this concept to non-physical objects seems a negligible and unnecessary tool. From this perspective, different contexts accompanying *dark* require different interpretations. However, a different analysis of *dark* could also be drawn. This approach will show that different senses in *dark* are interconnected and that there is not such a sharp difference in the interpretation of *dark* modifying physical and non-physical objects. Before illustrating the approach, a few issues should be illustrated.

As the data from the corpus indicate, *dark* was a polysemous adjective. Firstly, it could be a descriptive element of objects lacking light. Secondly, *dark* could also apply to objects devoid of light, but which additionally evoked the features of evil (e.g., Hell). In such contexts, *dark* was more than just a descriptive element. It referred to objects which were literally dark, but which were also imbued with values associated with a lack of light.' Thirdly, *dark* could be associated with the attributes of evil rather than with any 'physical lack of light'. These senses reflect the gradual increase in the level of abstractness. *Dark* could be conceived of as an element highlighting a lack of light or just a lack of positive values. Yet, a close correspondence between a more literal sense 'lack of light' and a more abstract one 'lack of positive values' should be emphasised. The latter (a lack of positive values) could be the result of the metaphorical application of the former (a lack of light). Therefore, the notion of the 'physical lack of light' recedes into the background, yet it does not entirely disappear. The aspect of 'a lack of light' is not a literal element present in the interpretation of an expression, but an element salient on some abstract layer of conceptualisation needed to interpret *dark* in terms of negative values. Hence, the literal sense 'a lack of light' does not disappear once the context is changed, but acquires a new interpretation tightly linked with values. Consequently, different contexts do not require distinct and unconnected interpretations, but only slight modifications.

Moreover, to put it metaphorically, 'dark' creates a binary opposition with 'light'. The concept of 'light' gives rise to the metaphor LIGHT IS GOODNESS, NOBLENESS, whereas 'darkness' creates the opposite, namely

DARKNESS IS EVIL AND DEPRAVITY. The abstract and epistemic senses of *dark* are a subject to Tendency I (Traugott 1989), which states:

Meaning based on the external described situation > meaning based on the internal situation.

At this point, *dark* is an abstract, epistemic element, which evokes the association of evil, even if analysed out of context. According to Traugott, the notion of an 'external described situation' applies to the way a situation or an object is perceived by most people. People rely on their senses in describing the so called 'external reality'. Consequently, if an object is perceived as black or dark, it cannot be referred to as yellow or red. We take it for granted that our sight is objective and thus it lets us view the world in which we live in a very similar way. Therefore, the description of external properties of objects is not based on evaluative judgements, but rather on the way things are accessible to our eyes. For cognitivists, sight is believed to be the most reliable of all human senses (Traugott 1989; Sweetser 1990, Krzeszowski 1997). In short, an external situation or reality is referred to as the reality that can be described in a roughly similar if not same way as it reflects the way things are accessible to human senses. The internal situation or reality, however, is associated with human subjective, evaluative judgement, and thus its perception varies among people. It is based on the way humans perceive reality and judge it rather than just physically see it. Such an approach, though it may seem simplified, is frequently adopted in order to show semantic changes occurring in a diachronic perspective in lexemes. Therefore, given the adjective *dark*, the sense standing for 'lack of light' is referred to as 'external reality' as it captures the description that would be shared by people. Contrariwise, *dark* applying to evil is viewed as the internal reality as it involves the individual, subjective approach which reflects one's experiences shaping the perception of reality. As already mentioned, the approach advocated by Traugott may seem simplified once one approaches more philosophical views on objective and subjective reality. Accordingly, there is no such a thing as an 'objective proposition' because there is always an individual standing behind each proposition, hence it is always subjectively marked. Likewise, the notion of 'a real world domain' may also seem meaningless because we as humans do not have access to 'the real world'. What is, in a simplified way called the real world, is the world AS IT IS PERCEIVED by people, which again entails the notions of subjectivity rather than objectivity or impartiality. Nevertheless, the present paper, whose aim is to deal with profiles of *dark* and *blak*, is more cognitivist than philosophical. Therefore, it adopts the approaches to internal/ external reality advocated by the above mentioned cognitivists.

Hard to understand, mysterious

(14) *Bet certayn menys as knowen clerkis*
Doth thingis that for certeyn ende ful derk is
to mannys wit that for our ignoraunce (The Man of Law's Tale 382–384).
(But certain men as clerks know; do things that at some point are obscure to man's wit; due to our ignorance).

Likewise, in this context 'light' and 'darkness' form binary oppositions. The concept of 'light' gives rise to the metaphor LIGHT IS WISDOM, whereas the concept of darkness instantiates the opposite, namely DARKNESS (or LACK OF LIGHT) IS OBSCURITY, IGNORANCE. 'Darkness' is here an abstract domain, which is cut off from the concrete sense.

3. Analysis of *blak*

Following *The Etymological Dictionary of English Language* (CEDEL, sv. *blak*), *black* originated from PGmc *blakaz* 'burned'. In Old English *blæc* denoted 'dark', whereas its cognates were ON *blakkr* 'dark', OHG *blah* 'black', Swed. *black* 'ink', and Du. *blaken* 'to burn'. According to the Middle English Dictionary (MED, sv. *blak),* ME *blak*—PDE 'black' contained the following senses:

1) of a black colour
   – it was applied in similes: *black and blo* 'black and livid', *black or whit* 'black or white'; of any colour or kind, *black as col* (*blacche*, crove, inde, mode, pich), *blacker than pich*
   – armed in black, clothed in black, bound in black
   – the colour of sin, sorrow, e.g., *black berd*—the Devil, *black in his eye*- 'he is guilty'

2) inclining to blackness, dark, discoloured
   – of eyes: dark, brown
   – of persons: swarthy, dark, brunette, black-haired
   – of colours: dark, deep

3) without light
   – dark, gloomy, murky
   – fierce, terrible, wicked

4) in compounds and combinations:

black frères 'the Dominican friars', *black monk/none* 'a Benedictine monk/nun, *black smith* 'a smith who works in iron', *black mondai* 'Easter Monday', *black order* 'the Benedictines', *black rent* 'a type of blackmail', *black moneie* 'coins of cropper or brass', *black poding* 'a kind of pudding', *black sop* 'a dark colour of soup', *blak ston* 'a kind of a dark stone', *black sugar* 'brown sugar', *black berie* 'a black berry', *black brid* 'the English blackbird', *black mint* 'pepper mint', *black pepper* 'black pepper', *black poppi* 'a variety of red poppy with black seeds', *black thorn* 'the shrub blackthorn', *black jaunes* 'jaundice with deep discolouration, *black colre* (*galle*) 'black bile, the humour melancholy'.

3.1 Literal senses of *blak* in The Canterbury Tales

Blak related to the body

Blak was, to a large extent, related to the body:

(15) *His nostrelis blak were and wyde* (The General Prologue 559).
(His nostrils were black and wide).
(16) *Black was his berd and manly was his face* (The Knight's Tale 1272).
(His face was black and his face was manly).
(17) *His longe heris were kempt behynd his bak*
As ony rauen fethir it shoon for blak (The Knight's Tale 1258–1286).
(His long hair were combed behind his back; as any raven feather, it shone black).
(18) *His browis two were bent and blak as ony slo* (The Miller's Tale 59–60).
(His two eyebrows were bent and black as any plum).
(19) *Blake yen* (The Knight's Tale 925).
(Black eyes).
(20) *A few frakelis in his face were spreynt*
Betwix yellow and somdeel blak meynt (The Knight's Tale 1311–1312).
(A few freckles were scattered in his face; mingled between yellow and somewhat black).
(21) *And Saint Iherome sayde*
Whan he long tyme had dwelllid in desert
(..)
Where as he no mete but herbes and water to drynk
Ne no bed but naked erthe.
For whyche his flesh was blak as an Ethyope for hete and destroyde for colde (The Parson's Tale 271).

(Where as he had no meat but herbs and water to drink; no bed but naked earth; because of which his flesh was black as an Ethiope due to heat and destroyed because of cold).

The above contexts illustrate literal senses of *blak* (either black, dark or inclining to blackness) with no metaphorical undertones behind them. The data from the corpus show that *blak* was frequently linked with parts of the body (eyes, eyebrows, nostrils, beard, hair, freckles) or the whole body. In such contexts, it was used purely with reference to one's appearance. The range of references *blak* could be linked with was wide. Moreover, the entities described as *blak* did not evoke negative associations, but rather neutral or even positive ones. Furthermore, in most contexts *blak* did not evoke the equivalent of PDE black, but was mostly a colour that could be classified as dark as it only approximated black. It was only in context (18) that *blak* corresponded to the PDE sense of black. *Blak* here was used in the simile in which the shade of *blak* was compared to a raven. In other contexts, ME *blak* was largely related to dark. In (19), *blak* is juxtaposed with a plum, thereby evoking the association of a dark purple colour. In (21), freckles are described as yellow and *somehow blak*. Consequently, *blak* was more of a mixture, containing even dark yellow in its framework. Additionally, *blak* could describe eyes, body or nostrils, a meaning which is closer to dark brown rather than black. As for hair, *blak* could correspond to PDE black, but also to *dark*. The context does not specify what colour was meant. In other words, the recorded contexts show that the range of shades embraced by *blak* was wide. ME *blak* could apply to a pure black approximating a coal, but also to brown or even to a dark shade mixed with yellow. Consequently, *blak* can be considered a macro-colour term for dark colours. Therefore, the application of *blak* with no modifying elements could evoke the idea of both dark or black. The similes often specified which particular shade of *blak* was intended.

***Blak* related to clothes**

The literal sense of *blak* was also related to clothes, which can be exemplified by the following contexts:

(22) *A companye of ladies (…)*
Eche aftir other clothed blake
But such a cry and such a woo they make
That in worlde nys creature lyuynge
That herde suche an other weymentynge (The Knight's Tale 40–45).
(A company of ladies; each after another clothed in black; but they made such a cry and such a weep; that in the world there is no living creature that heard such a lamentation).

(23) *In clothis blak dropped al with teris* (The Knight's Tale 2020).

(In black clothes all dripped with tears).

(24) *But in his blake clothis sorrowfully*
He cam at his comaundement an hye (The Knight's Tale 2114–2115).
(But in his black clothes full of sorrow; he followed his commandment from Heaven).

(25) *Ne wolde he that she were loue ne wyf*
But euer lyue in clothis blake
Sool as the turtyl that hath lost his make (The Merchant's Tale 834–836).
(He did not want her to be love nor wife; but that she ever should live in black clothes; alone as the turtle that lost his mate).

The analysis shows that *blak* was also extensively used with reference to clothes. Black clothes were highly symbolic and evoked unbearable sadness and mourning. *Blak* was thus conceived of as a colour of sorrow.

Other literal contexts of blackness

***Blak* linked with a surrounding reality**

Other elements from the corpus described as *blak* can be exemplified by the following contexts:

(26) *The smyler with the knyf under the cloke*
The shepen brennyng with the blak smoke
The treson of the murdryng in the bed
The open werris with woundis alle bled (The Knight's Tale 1141–1144).
(The murderer with the knife under the cloak; the shed burning with black smoke; the treason of murder in the bed, the open wars with wounds all bleeding).

(27) *This grisly rockis blake*
That sownen rather vnto foul confusion
Of wreke than to ony maner creation (The Franklin's Tale 160–162).
(These awful black rocks; that seem rather a foul confusion of work rather than of any good creation).

In these contexts, *blak* is a describing element of smoke (27) and rocks (28), hence objects of a surrounding reality. It approximates dark rather than PDE *black*. Moreover, in literary and figurative contexts *blak* could also be used to draw an atmosphere of evil, unpredictability and danger. Nevertheless, it should be emphasised that *blak* evoked only the associations of evil when it was put in

contexts evoking an atmosphere of evil. In other words, collocations such as *blak smoke*, or *blak rock* did not evoke the sense of evil when they were approached as isolated entities separated from a particular context. Used out of context, the expressions *black smoke* or *black rocks* were neutral and connected with the every-day, external reality, rather than evaluative, abstract senses pertaining to subjective judgments or attitudes.

The juxtaposition of *blak* and *dark* reveals some striking differences between the two words. Both *blak* and *dark* could evoke a sense of evil and unpredictability bordering on danger. Nevertheless, in the case of *blak*, the sense of evil was just one of the associations of the colour rather than an abstract, epistemic sense. This connotation was tightly bound with the concept and visual image of a colour. Hence, rocks or smoke had to be literally black (or dark) in order to evoke the atmosphere of terror. Therefore, *blak* does not mark the completion of Traugott's Tendency I, as the image of a colour is still imprinted in the conceptual framework of *blak* referring to evil or danger. The sense of evil, however, developed by *dark* was not one of the associations evoked by the literal sense, but an abstract, epistemic layer developed via a mapping of the concrete upon the abstract. The sense of evil could thus be considered one of the polysemous senses developed by *dark*. The expression *dark fantasie* evoked abstract, epistemic, evaluative senses even when approached out of context. Moreover, this expression was perceived as conventionalised and ordinary, with no metaphorical colouring behind it. Similarly, when applied to actions, or knowledge, *dark* was only an abstract term, cut off from its literal sense.

***Blak* linked with devil**

ME *blak* was recorded in the collocation *blak devil*, where it evoked the concept of evil. In such contexts, *blak* is imbued with the concept of sin. Nevertheless, the concept of evil projected by *blak* is only partially abstract, as the link with the literal blackness is also preserved. In other words, blackness constitutes a literal meaning upon which metaphorical associations are projected. The devil was not conceived of in light colours, but as black or as dark. Therefore, the concept of a colour is not bleached from its framework. In other words, the new layer in *blak* is not an independent concept cut off from the colour term, but a new symbolic association entirely related with the colour. The idea of evil implied by *blak* can be seen in the following contexts:

(28) *I telle yow trouthe ye may trust me (…)*
Of arowes and of fyre with rede lemys
Of grete bestes that wole hym byte(…)
For feer of grete bolis and blake beris
Or ellis ***blake deuylles*** *wol hem take*. (The Nun's Prologue 107–116).
(I will tell you the truth you can trust me (…) of arrows and of fire with red limbs of great beasts that will bite him(..). For fear of great bulls and black bears or else black devils that will take him).

It should be emphasised that *blak* evoked an association with evil, but not because this lexeme was abstract enough, but because it was juxtaposed with the devil, which was viewed as an embodiment of evil. The devil was literally visualised and portrayed as *blak*. Moreover, it also evoked the connotations of evil and cruelty. The juxtaposition of *blak* and evil in the mind of the conceptualiser might have led to the gradual association of *blak* with evil. In a similar way, bears were viewed as black and, thus evil. Consequently, in such contexts *blak* was not a neutral colour term, but a descriptive element marked by evil. In other words, the connection of *blak* with evil could be a consequence of an identification and perception of the devil in black colours, and a subsequent transfer of values linked with devil upon the element modifying it. Consequently, from a purely descriptive element, *blak* develops a more abstract layer and becomes more than just a descriptive element related to the appearance of a devil. Yet, *blak* is not an evaluative, epistemic sense, as the concept of a colour is central in its conceptual framework.

The juxtaposition of *blak* and *dark* in religious contexts also reveals some differences. As has already been mentioned, *dark* was a part of circuitous phrases referring to Hell, namely *dark earth*, or *dark place*, which originally were associated with Hell due to the scarcity of light. It should be emphasised that *dark* is not linked with the lexeme Hell directly. *Blak*, however, collocates with the devil and not with any other creature that could only stand for or symbolise the devil. *Dark* then allowed for a variety of understatements unlike *blak*, which was more concrete, and thereby needed a proper context and clearly identified entities.

4. Conclusions

To conclude, the paper aimed to show the existing differences between *blak* and *dark* in *The Canterbury Tales* on both the literal and metaphorical planes.

On the literal plane, *dark* could be paraphrased as ‘deficient in light’. The concept of a colour played a secondary role in its conceptual framework. It was merely a colour that resulted from a lack of light. Moreover, the range of entities *dark* was linked with was rather limited. The lexeme was mostly used with reference to places and weather, and thus entities that could be characterised by a small amount of light. Additionally, *dark* functioned as a euphemism for Hell, which was considered a taboo. It constituted a part of conventional phrases used automatically to avoid direct references to Hell.

On the metaphorical plane, *dark* could refer to evil, as well as to obscurity or ignorance. In these applications, *dark* was an autonomous, subjective element with no literal sense behind it, thereby marking Traugott’s Tendency I (1989):

Meaning based on the external described situation > meaning based on the internal situation

The semantic flexibility of *dark* measured by means of the variety of its metaphorical senses could be explained on the grounds of the literal sense of

dark, namely the 'lack of light'. In other words, the literal sense 'lack of light' was conducive to the further emergence of metaphorical senses, as the concept of 'darkness' and of 'light' could complement each other. 'Dark' and 'light' formed binary oppositions, giving rise to similar abstract values in spite of being on opposite poles.

The analysis of *blak* has shown that it did not evoke the equivalent of PDE black, but was primarily a colour term, which could stand for black, dark, brown, or even a dark shade mixed with yellow. The similes often specified which particular shade was intended. Nevertheless, although broad and including different shades, the idea of a colour was central in the conceptual framework of *blak*. The lexeme was used mostly with reference to body parts, where it evoked neutral or positive associations, as well as to clothes, where it possessed the attribute of unbearable sadness and mourning.

Furthermore, *blak* could also be used to evoke an atmosphere of evil, unpredictability and danger when it modified every-day objects. Yet, unlike *dark*, these senses did not mark the completion of Traugott's Tendency I, as the sense of evil was just one of the symbolic associations of the colour, rather than an abstract, epistemic sense. Consequently, contrary to *dark*, *blak* in *The Canterbury Tales* did not develop abstract, evaluative senses that could be projected via a mapping of the concrete on a more abstract layer of conceptualisation.

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