From Evil Riches to Common Fertilizer: Mucking in with Semantic Change

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1. Introduction

> But first I pray yow, of your curteisye,
> That ye n'arette it nat my vileynye,
> Thogh that I pleynly speke in this mateere,
> To telle yow hir wordes and hir cheere,
> Ne thogh I speke hir wordes proprely.
>
> Geoffrey Chaucer, *The Canterbury Tales*, from "The General Prologue", ll. 725–729 (Robinson 1957; *CME*)

Since the advent of cognitive linguistics metaphor has been classified as one of the major cognitive processes in semantic change. Metaphorical mappings and conceptual metaphors have been investigated synchronically by various scholars (e.g. Lakoff/Johnson 1980, Lakoff 1987, Kövecses 2000), but 'only few people have shown an interest in […] [conceptualisation] in older stages of the English language' (Gevaert 2005: 198). The subsequent analysis shows the interaction of different factors in semantic variation and change and it emphasises the important role of cultural aspects.

In the following paper the semantic development of *muck* is discussed, in particular its metaphorical use with regard to the concept of wealth in Middle English, and its development after 1500. The present corpus-based study discusses the potential and limits of the cognitive metaphor approach in semantic change, proposing an integrative approach to semantic variation and change, which seeks to compensate weaknesses of three previous approaches: first, the cognitive metaphor approach (Sweetser 1990); second, the pragmatic (Traugott/Dasher 2002); and third, the socio-cultural (Hughes 1988) approach. A combination of these three different methods provides a more detailed analysis of diachronic semantic developments and the corpus-based results yield rich insights into semantic variation and change.

2. WORLDLY WEALTH IS MUCK: Motivations for a Conceptual Metaphor

Metaphorical expressions reflect the operation 'between domains' (Sweetser 1990: 19), i.e., the transfer from a source domain to a target domain. In the case of *muck* the meaning of (worldly) wealth was the only metaphorical use in Middle English, which seems to have started to become obsolete from the 16th century onwards (cf. subsequent sections 6 and 7).

The *MED* entry for *muck* lists the following definitions:
a)   '[a]nimal or human excrement; dung; manure […]'
b)   '*fig*. property, possessions, wealth, worldly gain'

Example 1 below illustrates the figurative sense in Middle English.

(1)   He that is knitte with loue to roten **mukke**..is..vnable to that clennest..loue of the holy gooste. (Love *Mirror* 298, Powell (1908), *MED*)[1]

Example (2) illustrates this metaphorical use in the novel *Can you forgive Her?* by the Victorian writer Anthony Trollope.

(2)   I remarked that his mind seemed to be intent on low things, and specially named the **muck**..'Money's never dirty,' she said. (Trollope, *Can you forgive Her?* I. xiv. 106, *OED*)[2]

The *OED* dates the first occurrence of the literal meaning of *muck* to 1250, while the metaphorical sense is first attested in 1300. First dates in the *OED* have to be taken with a pinch of salt, however. The *MED* dates the first occurrence of both the literal and figurative sense to 1325, while an earlier metaphorical usage of a derivational form *moker* is attested for 1250. Variation in dates of first occurrences is partly due to the fact that different manuscripts and/or editions were chosen in the two databases.

If we assume that the metaphorical sense developed later, the following questions arise:
- How is the metaphorical extension motivated and how can the possible mapping from source (MUCK) to target (WEALTH) domain be explained?
- What evidence does the data provide for a conceptual metaphor such as WORLDLY WEALTH IS MUCK?

Traditional cognitive metaphor theory seeks to explain mappings by looking for physical experience (cf. Lakoff 1987). This 'experientialist framework' (Zinken 2003: 507) does indeed provide several similarities between the two domains in question. The substance is a waste material and has rather negative associations: it is offensive and associations with dirt, worthless and unimportant things are obvious. While bodily excretion is a taboo in modern Western civilisation, scatological language was very common in the Middle Ages. Medieval Christian arts and architecture in particular made use of scatological representations in the form of grossly obscene figures, which were very popular (cf. gargoyles in Köster/Jeras 1997). With regard to language this expressive language of filth was used for comic and satiric purposes, on the one hand. It was a typical element of the so-called *fabliau* (cf. Chaucer's "Miller's Tale"). On the other hand, this type of language was used as invective in medieval religious texts. In particular, authors of the (pre-)reformation such as Wyclif in England employ such expressions of repulsiveness in their writings. Even PDE phrases and idioms such as *stinking rich* and *filthy lucre* for example, reflect this kind of usage as the connotations of these phrases imply negative judgements.

Textual evidence from the *MED* quotations database shows that the use of *muck* as a metaphor for wealth expresses a very strong and negative moral judgement of worldly wealth. Material possessions are very often contrasted with spiritual wealth and abstract qualities such as love and faith in God as illustrated in an extract from the 15th century penitential allegory *Jacob's Well* for example.

(3)   [Þ]ou settest more þin herte on þi good, þi catel, þi golde, þi syluer, & on þi **erthely muk** þan on þi god. [*Jacob's Well* 120/3, Brandeis (1900), *MED*]

Despite the similarities, the bodily framework as postulated in cognitive metaphor theory, however, does not provide sufficient *explanation*—if at all—for the motivation of the metaphor in question. It

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[1] Nicholas Love's *The Mirrour of the Blessed Lyf of Jesus Christ* is an early 15th century translation of the *Meditationes Vitae Christi* by Johannes de Caulibus. Both the Latin original and the vernacular translations must have been very popular as a large number of manuscripts have survived to the present day (cf. Salter 1974, O'Connell 1980, Twycross 1983, Sargent 1992). The bold-type emphases used in the examples of this paper have been added. The complete bibliographical references of all examples are listed in the Reference section under *Primary Sources* according to editor.

[2] According to Julie Coleman *muck* in the sense of money was commonly used in 19th century slang. She states that '[m]any [terms] imply that money is not important, […] by reference to refuse (e.g. *dust, muck, rubbish, rust* all for "money")' (Coleman forthcoming).

merely helps in attesting and describing metaphorical expressions. Therefore, the traditional approach has to be modified by the socio-cultural experience as 'the subject's cultural situatedness has hardly been modeled by cognitive linguists' (Zinken 2003: 507). This issue should play a more important role in metaphorical mappings and explanations of semantic change than has been attributed to it in recent analyses. This claim is supported by Gevaert's diachronic corpus study (2005), whose results reveal that the conceptualisation of anger in the history of the English language is culturally determined. Therefore, a speaker or writer is embedded in the socio-cultural context of the time and this will have an impact on linguistic performance (cf. Gibbs 1999; Deignan 2003; Zinken 2003).

Worldly wealth is considered a transitory good in contrast to eternal spiritual wealth. The transience of life and riches, as well as the ultimate decay of the human body and all worldly things are major subject matters in medieval literature (e.g., the Old English poems *The Ruin* and *The Wanderer* and the Middle English *Kildare poems* among various others). According to LeGoff (1990: 11), a pessimistic view of humankind prevailed throughout the medieval period. Medieval people were regarded as mere 'wanderers' or pilgrims on earth, temporary guests governed by the instability of fortune (cf. LeGoff 1990: 14). The sermon poem *Sarmun*, for example, from a collection of the so-called *Kildare poems* (Heuser 1965) by an unknown poet illustrates this picture of mankind as weak and governed by vice. Medieval people were also very much obsessed by the idea of sin. Sinful deeds were committed if people gave in to the devil or if they were seduced by vices (cf. LeGoff 1990: 36), as described in the poem *Sarmun* (ll. 81ff). In these lines greed and wealth are despised in a very expressive way and the poet shows his moral condemnation of worldly wealth by warning the rich man. Such warnings are commonly found in sermons (both prose and verse) and this medieval world view reveals insights into the society of that time.

Apart from this aspect, another socio-cultural issue seems to play a motivating role for the figurative uses of the lexeme in question. Agriculture was one of the main parts of the socio-economic structure in medieval society. In this context, *muck* could be used for its fertilizing function. Fertilizers contribute to increase in production and accumulation seems to be an important aspect which is linked to the concepts of avarice and covetousness. A muckrake is normally used as an agricultural tool and muck-heaps clearly belong to this domain. The Middle English data reveals the metaphorical uses of *muck-heap* and the verb *mukken*[3] with reference to avarice, misers and hoarders of wealth, while figurative uses of *muck-rake* and *muck-rakers* only occur in post-1500 data.[4] The immoral character of avarice evokes associations closely linked to the lexeme under investigation.

There are various converging tendencies motivating the conceptual metaphor WORLDLY WEALTH IS MUCK. The negative associations of physical substances such as *muck* for example are transferred to the abstract concept of wealth. Furthermore, this brief discussion illustrated the usefulness of combining both embodiment and culturally based aspects in the description of possible motivations. The socio-cultural context compensates for weaknesses and provides more sufficient insights into the moral perception of wealth as something evil within medieval society than merely cognitively based abstractions.

3. Data

The subsequent analysis is based on data culled from the following two electronic databases: the *Middle English Dictionary* (*MED*) and the *Oxford English Dictionary* (*OED*). The quotations databases are employed as historical corpora and have proven helpful because of their wealth of data. The online *MED* quotations database provides 11,856,248 words,[5] and the quotations database of the *OED* contains between 30 and 35 million words in total (Hoffmann 2004: 25). The *OED* data has to be interpreted carefully due to imbalance in the representation of quotations (see Brewer 2000) and over-

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[3] The *MED* attests the set phrase *mukken and cacchen penies* 'hoard one's wealth'. The actual forms found in the quotations database are *moke* and *mokre*, both attested in Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde* exclusively. The metaphorical use of *muk-hepyng* only occurs in one example, namely in Hoccleve' s *Ars Sciendi Mori*.

[4] According to the *OED* '[t]he source of the [post-1500] figurative use [of *muck-rake*] is Bunyan's description of "the Man with the Muck-rake", which was intended as an emblem of absorption in the pursuit of worldly gain'.

[5] Number provided by Christina Powell, Coordinator, University of Michigan (*personal e-mail*)

representation of particular authors (see Brewer 2000: 43, cf. Schäfer 1980). This is mainly the result of the method of compilation by voluntary readers (cf. Winchester 1999, 2003; Mugglestone 2005). To some extent the *OED* 'tells us about the lexicographers and the process of compiling the dictionary, rather than about the language itself' (Brewer 2000: 54). However, it does show general tendencies, which might well be confirmed in detail by historical text corpora of the appropriate time periods in future research.

A corpus-based approach has been chosen as the studies mentioned in the introduction are deficient in corpus evidence: Hughes (1988) restricted his study to the quotations of the lexicographical entries in the *OED*, while Traugott/Dasher (2002) and Sweetser (1990) merely provided individual examples which simply illustrated their claims. None of these recent investigations offered corpus-based quantitative evidence and distributional frequencies. While these three studies described semantic developments for a larger time span, the focus in the present paper is on the Middle English period; post-1500 developments are discussed on a more general level.

4. *Muck* in the *MED* Quotations Database

In section 2, possible motivations for the conceptual metaphor WORLDLY WEALTH IS MUCK were described. The following analysis will show the distribution of literal and metaphorical uses of *muck* across Middle English texts as represented in the *MED* quotations database (cf. figures 1, 2 and table 1). Restricting the search to the noun *muck* exclusively—verbs, compounds and agent nouns are not taken into account at this stage—the following distribution reveals a slightly more frequent use of the metaphorical sense than the literal meaning in the Middle English data.
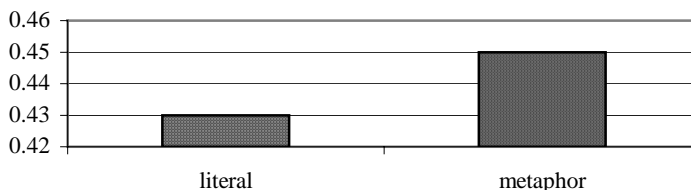

Figure 1. *Muck* in the *MED* quotations database.[6]

The category literal comprises the following different uses of *muck*: first, the literal sense of 'animal or human excrement; dung; manure; […] dirt, filth; sewage; putrescence' (cf. *MED*). An example of the agricultural sense manure is provided in an extract from the 14th century *Piers Plowman* in example (4).

(4)   […] Or helpe make morter or bere **mukke** afelde. [*Piers Plowman B*, Passus 6, l.144, Skeat (1869), *MED*]

Second, this literal sense is used with reference to the human body in 9.8% of all literal occurrences (absolute number of hits: 51) as illustrated in example (5) below.

(5)   I am bot **mokke** & mul among, And þou so ryche a reken rose. [*Pearl* l.905, Gordon (1953), *MED*]

Example (5) is taken from the *Pearl* poem (14th century) and describes a man talking to the innocent maiden, pointing to the vanity, inferiority and imperfection of humankind in general. The

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[6] Proportional frequencies per 100,000 words. All spelling variations as indicated in the *MED* and *OED* have been considered (*muk, muke, mukke, muc, muck(e), mouke, mok(e), mokke, moc, mock(e), mwk*). The column metaphor includes two occurrences of a derivational form *moker* meaning 'wealth, worldly possessions'.

comparison between the human body and a 'bag full of dirt and dung' (cf. *Kildare poems* (Heuser 1965),'Sarmun' l.30f) occurs very frequently throughout medieval literature and can presumably be related to the biblical story of God's creation of mankind.

Furthermore, 5.9% of all literal uses reveal a comparison or reference to worldly wealth, as shown in example (6).

(6)   Alle-swa alle ryches þat may here be sene War noght bot als **muk** þat es unclene. [*Pricke of Conscience,* l.9008, Morris (1863), *MED*]

The second category metaphor comprises the figurative uses 'property, possessions, wealth, worldly gain' (cf. *MED*). Two examples were given in section 2 (cf. Love's *Mirrour* (1) and Trollope (2)). Another example (7) is listed below, which is taken from a Wycliffite tract.

(7)   Þei loven more **worldly mucke** þen virtues and þo love of Jesus Crist. [Wyclif, *Fifty Heresies and Errors of Friars*, 399, Arnold (1871), *MED*]

An absolute number of 53 occurrences with regard to the metaphorical use of *muck* were found, of which approximately a third (roughly 34%) are modified by either the adjective *worldly* or the genitive singular of *world* such as 'worldly muk' (*Jacob's Well*, Brandeis 1900) and 'þis warldes mock' (*Body and Soul,* Linow 1889) respectively. The adjective *earthly* is attested only once in the phrase 'þin erthely muk' (*Jacob's Well*, Brandeis 1900 see example (3) of this paper), which makes up 1.9% of all occurrences.

Taking into account further parts of speech and derivational forms such as *muckerer* 'miser', compounds, agent nouns and the corresponding verbs, the distribution of literal and metaphorical uses in terms of frequency deviates from the one shown in figure 1. The subsequent figure (2) includes compounds describing agricultural tools as found in an inventory given in a will (see example 8), as well as agent nouns (cf. example 9) in the literal category.

(8)   ij **mukhakkez**, j **mukforke** [*Will Durham* 95, Raine (1835), *MED*]

(9)   A **Muker** […]: Eruderista, olitor [*Catholicon Anglicum* 83, *MED*]

Furthermore, the verb *mukken* in its literal meaning (cf. *MED* online (a) and (c) for definitions) is represented in the literal category (cf. example (10) below). The sense of 'clean out (one's) stables' (cf. sense (a) *MED*) is illustrated in the following example.

(10)   The fryday..at after none, **mokyd** our hors. [*Journal of Boys* 144, Tingey (1904), *MED*]

The category metaphor comprises further figurative uses as represented by *muck-heaping* in example (11) and the figurative sense of the verb *mukken* as illustrated in example (12) (cf. footnote 3).

(11)   The body bathynge in worldly swetnesse..and to greet greedynesse In **muk-hepynge** blynden many an herte. [Hoccleve, *Ars Sciendi Mori*, 587, Furnivall (1892), *MED*]

(12)   Lord, trowe ye a coueytous or a wrecche, That blameth loue and holt of it despit, That of þe pens þat he kan **moke** & kecche, was euere yet y-yeue hym swych delyt? [Chaucer, *Troilus and Criseyde* 3.1375, Furnivall, (1881–82), *MED*]

Other figurative uses are forms derived from the noun *muk*. *Moker*, a derivation of *muk* meaning 'worldly wealth, possessions' (cf. *MED*), reveals the corresponding verb form *mokeren* ['to heap up (money), hoard'] and the agent nouns ['one who hoards up wealth; a miser'] *mokerere*, *mokerard*. Example (13) is given for illustration of the agent noun.

(13)   Iche holde þis a badde store To vche **Mokerere** þat biddeþ more Of Catel þen he haþ to nede. [*Northern Homily Cycle (2)* 171/48, Horstmann (1892), *MED*]

Figure 2 below shows the proportional frequencies of both literal and figurative uses of *all* forms and parts of speech in the *MED* quotations database.
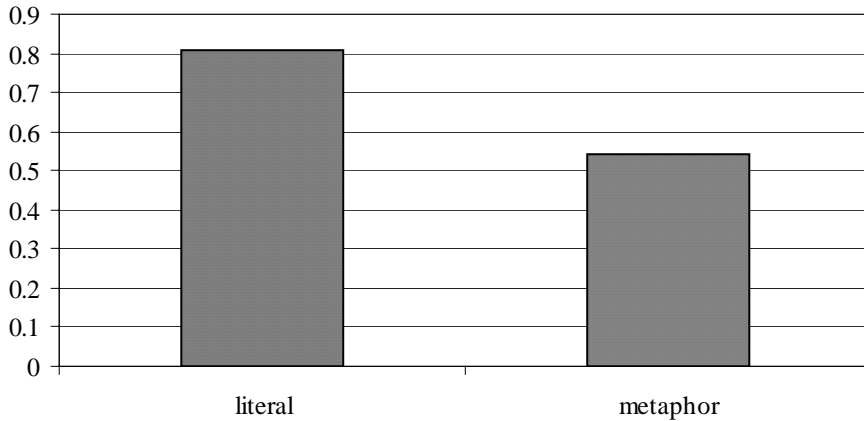

Figure 2. *Muck* and derivational forms in the *MED* quotations database.[7]

Ninety-six literal examples were found in the *MED* quotations database (60% of all occurrences), while the figurative sense was attested in 64 examples (40% of all occurrences). The higher frequency of the literal uses in this figure (2) has to be attributed to the fact that all parts of speech and derivational forms—in particular compounds—were included here.

The quantitative analyses revealed the distribution of literal and metaphorical meanings in terms of frequency. However, the use of *muck* in different text types is relevant for a qualitative analysis. The subsequent table summarises the distribution of *muck*[8] across the different text types as represented in the *MED* quotations database. The text types have been divided into two categories: religious and secular writings. The distinction between religious and secular is awkward, as a number of texts clearly represent a mixture of both. Therefore, many authors such as Langland, Gower and Hoccleve have been classified as secular, even though the texts are at the interface between religious and secular subject matters. Although drama (e.g. the *Macro Plays* and the *Towneley Plays*) served secular entertainment, the plays treat religious subject matters. This genre has therefore been included in the religious category.

Table 1. Distribution of *muck* across text types in Middle English.[9]

	religious	secular
literal	31.4%	68.6%
metaphor	84.9%	15.1%

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[7] Proportional frequencies indicated per 100,000 words. Spelling variations have been taken into account (cf. footnote 6). Place names and proper names, as well as *hokermoker*, denoting the hoarding of things, are excluded in this chart.

[8] Only the noun *muck* is taken into account here.

[9] Numbers indicated in percent (%) of all absolute occurrences (51 concrete and 53 metaphorical occurrences of the noun *muck*).

Despite the difficulty of classifying religious and secular texts, the majority of the metaphorical occurrences (84.9% of all occurrences) is found in religious texts, while 51.1% of these metaphorical uses are attested in Wycliffite prose. Neither specific secular texts of a legal and official nature (e.g., wills, leet books, manorial documents), nor glossaries and medical texts employ any figurative uses. Thus, the metaphor is restricted to religious contexts as illustrated in the table, although a number of secular authors do contain metaphorical uses relating to religious and moral subject matters. Consequently, I assume that this particular metaphorical use largely shows a religious motivation.

5. Some Further Examples of Metaphorical Expressions in Middle English

The Middle English data—as represented in the *MED*—reveals further metaphorical uses of words which denote worthless and dirty materials. Things or persons considered wicked, corrupt, vile or evil can be described by words such as *muddi,*[10] *dong*[11] or *roten*[12] for example. The meaning of wealth is also expressed by a few near-synonyms of *muck* such as *dirt* and *mull* with regard to worldly possessions.

Of all occurrences of *dirt*, 76.5% (absolute number 85 occurrences) are used in the literal sense, while 17% (20 hits) are used figuratively;[13] 13 examples (15.3% of all occurrences) are used in the figurative sense of wealth, while 12 of these hits are attested in Wycliffite prose exclusively. Another interesting metaphor which occurs in the Middle English data is *moldewarpis*, denoting a clergyman who is too much occupied with worldly things (cf. example 14 for illustration).

(14)   Þese **erthly moldy-warpis** take so grete burthen of **worldly dritte** upon hem. [*On the 25 Articles* [Wycliffite tract], 478, Arnold (1871), *MED*]

Metaphorical uses of *mull* in Middle English are highly infrequent. Only 5 figurative occurrences were found in the *MED* quotations database, of which only 2 are used in the sense of wealth as illustrated in example (15).

(15)   Þere þey fonde þe cofre ful Sperd, wyþ þe **deuylys mul** Of florens and of goldrynges. [*Handlyng Synne*, l. 6198; Furnivall (1901), *MED*]

Although the metaphorical uses of the two near-synonyms *dirt* and *mull* as attested in the *MED* quotations database are highly restricted in terms of frequency, they can be taken as further evidence of the attitude towards wealth as something degrading in specific (con-)texts. According to the *OED*, *dust* (first occurrence in the 16th century) and *rust* (19th century) for example are slang terms used for money (cf. also Coleman forthcoming). The religious motivation of the metaphorical use attested for *muck* is reflected to some degree in the use of lexemes related to moral and/ or negative judgements (cf. *OED filthy, blot, dung, muck*).

6. *Muck* in the *OED* Quotations Database

The metaphorical use of *muck* in the sense of wealth is investigated in the *OED* online quotations database to briefly survey the general development of this word after 1500. Figure 3 shows the two different senses per century. All spelling variations (cf. footnote 6) have been taken into account. The

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[10] *Muddi* is attested in two examples only, where it is used in a set phrase 'muddy erthe' (*The Pilgrimage of the Soul*, Clubb (1953), 4.2.57b) and 'muddy grounde' (*Boethius' De Consolatione Philosophiae*, Science (1927), p. 161). The context of the occurrences shows a juxtaposition of spiritual and worldly things.

[11] The figurative sense is attested only for the phrase 'dong of synne' (*The Pilgrimage of the Soul*, Clubb (1953), 3.8.54a).

[12] E.g., 'Alle we ben of o nature, roten and corrupt, bothe riche and poure' (Chaucer, *Parson's Prologue and Tale (exclusive of the Retraction),* Rickert-Manly (1940), I.461).

[13] Further metaphorical uses such as *devil's dirt* 'devil's filth', *dirt* referring to sin and meaning 'worthless fellow' are included here.

figure shows the noun *muck* exclusively, further parts of speech (adjective, verb), as well as compounds and derivational forms were excluded.
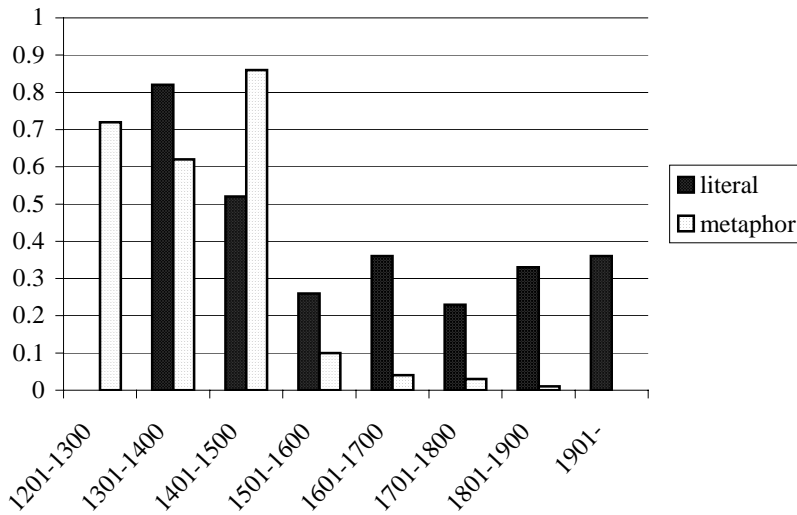

Figure 3. *Muck* in the *OED* quotations database.[14]

As illustrated in figure 3, the highest frequencies of the metaphorical use can be observed from the 13th to the 15th century. The metaphor is most frequently found in Hoccleve in the 15th-century quotations of the *OED*. There is a drastic decline in frequency from the 15th to 16th century, suggesting that the meaning of wealth seems to start to become obsolete in the 16th century. The metaphorical occurrences of *muck* steadily decline from the 17th to the 19th century. In these periods compounds such as *muckworm* for example are commonly used in a figurative sense ('miser'), while *muck* in the sense of wealth is only attested in isolated examples. For the 20th century, the meaning of wealth is no longer attested in the *OED* quotations database.[15]

7. Discussion

In recent studies, pragmatic, socio-cultural or cognitive models have served as separate, theoretical approaches to shed light on meaning changes. As semantic change is not the simple emergence and loss of meanings and by no means a one-dimensional affair (cf. Blank 1997: 131), it is necessary to provide a more detailed description of semantic changes which takes this multi-dimensionality into account. Multi-faceted diachronic semantic developments require multi-dimensional explanations. In order to explain the loss of the metaphorical meaning of wealth with regard to *muck*, an integrative approach is applied combining pragmatic, cognitive and socio-cultural aspects.

The discussion of possible motivations for metaphorical extension has shown the usefulness of the cognitive metaphor approach. Classic cognitive metaphor considers the motivation as a correlation between two domains (cf. Lakoff/Johnson 1980, Lakoff 1987). However, criticism (cf. Vervaeke and Green 1997, Haser 2005) has been raised as to the general value of correlations described in Lakoff/Johnson (1980) and Lakoff (1987). Furthermore, correlations between domains do not *explain*

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[14] The proportional frequencies (per 100,000 words) have been calculated on the basis of the average length of quotations suggested by Hoffmann (2004). Metaphors other than wealth have been excluded, as well as the use as an intensifier (e.g., *as drunk as muck*), the euphemistic use (instead of f***) and the phrase *muck sweat*.

[15] No metaphorical use relating to wealth is attested apart from the use of *money-muck* in the poem "Fight! O my young men fight!" by D. H. Lawrence (*Pansies*, 1929). The expression relates to wealth, *muck* seems to be used here in the general metaphorical sense of 'something bad or immoral', being modified by the word *money*.

patterns of change (cf. Sweetser 1990: 30). Conceptual metaphors such as WORLDLY WEALTH IS MUCK are mere starting-points for the analysis of particular sets of (linguistic) metaphorical expressions. The interpretation of the data allows further methods of explanation and should be supported by rhetorical and socio-cultural information on the contextual use of metaphors (cf. Ritchie 2003).

Pragmatic approaches, traditionally associated with grammaticalisation processes, are very helpful for explanations in lexical semantics. Discourse and discourse purposes in particular reveal insights into the communicative strategies of the writer. The relationship between author and audience, i.e., the communicative processes between writer and reader, seem to play an important role. According to Traugott and Dasher's framework, the writer 'evokes implicatures and invites [the reader] to infer them' (2002: 5). The religious texts of the 13th, 14th and 15th centuries are predominantly of a didactic nature (e.g., sermons, saints' legends, homilies, allegorical writings). Addressing their audience, the authors and/or translators probably chose this expressive vernacular word to show the despicable character of materialism. Wycliffite prose in particular revealed the most frequent metaphorical use of *muck*, emphasising provocative criticism and condemnation of wealth owned illegitimately by the Church.

Furthermore, the importance of a socio-cultural approach becomes obvious when encountering the cultural background of medieval society. According to Friedrich (1966: 159), external changes '[precede] and [predetermine] change in the corresponding semantic systems'. A correlation between external history and the (linguistic) metaphorical expressions encourages more detailed analyses of metaphors. As the corpus-based data has shown, the metaphor *muck* for the concept of wealth seems to be culture-specific. Pre-reformation stirrings, especially Wycliffite (or Lollard) attacks regarding clerical wealth, as well as socio-economic developments and secularisation processes could be correlated to ultimate diachronic semantic variation and change. Furthermore, attitudes towards wealth have changed and the medieval period was marked by great upheavals, both religiously and socio-economically. A vast literature has been published on medieval socio-economic and religious matters (cf. Lopez 1971, Little 1978, Cornwall 1988, Dyer 1989, Bridbury 1992, DuPlessis 1997, Marshall 1997, Kaartinen 2002, Wood 2002, Shagan 2003, for example).[16]

The semantic development of *muck* in particular seems to reveal the possible impact of socio-cultural changes, next to pragmatic and cognitive factors. Change in attitudes towards wealth—we generally consider it rather positive than negative today—seems to be an issue relating to the ultimate loss of the metaphorical sense of wealth.

Post-1500 *OED* data reveals specialised uses of *muck* and *mucker* in mining and sport in 19th and 20th century quotations respectively and a certain correlation between semantic development and culture can be assumed. Consequently, new literal and metaphorical meanings emerge because of socio-cultural changes.

8. Conclusion and Relevance

The analysis presented in this paper has shown the potential and usefulness of combining cognitive, pragmatic and socio-cultural aspects in the discussion of semantic variation and change. The metaphorical use of *muck* has served as an example to show the important but also restrictive role of cognitive metaphor in diachronic semantic variation and change. The data provided by the quotations databases of the *MED* and the *OED* revealed that the figurative use seems to be strongly influenced by cultural elements. Furthermore, this use of the word seems to be specific of Lollard or Wycliffite writings.

Future research on metaphor in semantic change has to consider both cognition and culture as complementary aspects in meaning change. It is hoped that the present study may encourage future research in diachronic semantics to apply approaches in an integrative way to provide a wealth of more detailed insights.

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[16] This list of course is by no means exhaustive. It merely gives a selection of the extant amount of literature published on external history.

Acknowledgements

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