LINGUISTIC MODALITY AND FEMALE IDENTITY IN CHAUCER'S
CLERK'S TALE

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ABSTRACT

While exploring the situated nature of conceptual knowledge, the paper investigates the linguistic construction of identity relative to the language user's sociocultural situatedness, which is regarded as a derivative of the continuity of language and culture. In this functionally-oriented study, we examine how the situatedness of the language user affects their expression of the selves, which in the article we construe in terms of social roles performed by men and women in a specific cultural community. Importantly, we claim that, although the data are historical in nature, they nevertheless help us address the problem of the elusive nature of human identity, a theme recurring in the linguistic study of subjectivity. We seek to explore the general question of experiential motivation behind the frequency patterns of linguistic usage. We illustrate the issue by referring to the historical data taken from Geoffrey Chaucer's *Clerk's Tale*. The poet's use of selected modal verbs is contextualized in relation to the late medieval community of his present. We account for the poet's usage of *shul, mot-* (in the sense 'must'), *o(u)ght(e)*, as well as *mouen* 'may', and *willen*, indicating the need for a more nuanced approach to the way in which the key modal notions of NECESSITY/OBLIGATION are applied in the study of linguistic modality. We thus advocate the adoption of a situated view of the abstract concepts. Furthermore, we argue that the usage patterns concerning the frequency with which the selected modal verbs are used in specific contexts of Chaucer's narrative might be indicative of the ways in which the identity of a community member was negotiated in the late medieval society of the poet's present. In conclusion, we indicate the challenges to present-day pragmatic research into the linguistic construction of identity. Specifically, the emphasis is laid on how findings from recent research into situated and social cognition can inform a pragmatic investigation of linguistic subjectivity.

Keywords: culture, identity, linguistic modality, linguistic subjectivity, sociocultural situatedness

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1. Situating pragmatic investigation

In this section, we discuss the possible contributions of the situated cognition approach to the study of language. Of special importance is the question of how pragmatic investigation can be informed by research into the sociocultural situatedness of the language user. Recent advancements within the frameworks of Cognitive Linguistics (CL) and Cultural Linguistics (CultL) substantiate the claim of the necessity to study linguistic usage relative to the sociocultural context.[1] Our stance is that of Cultural Linguistics, but due to the correlation and significant overlap between the two linguistic fields, we draw on many theoretical and methodological assumptions adopted in CL.

In the linguistic research on the sociocultural situatedness of the language user and social cognition, attention is paid to the significance of the sociocultural contexts in which the interaction of community members takes place. In the words of Frank & Gontier (2010: 47–48), notions such as "situated cognition" or "collective cultural conceptualization" assume growing importance in usage-based strains of CL investigation. In psychology, the error of platonic blindness, or essentialism, consisting in reducing the subject matter to essentials while ignoring the influence of the context (Barrett et al. 2010), has lately been criticised for the fragmentation of research into the human mind, and for the corresponding neglect of interdependencies between various aspects of human cognitive activity.

The shift of emphasis in the investigation of human cognition from the cognitive activity of the individual onto the situated view of cognitive processes may be linked to the development of the conception of situated cognition. One interpretation of the situated nature of human cognition has been provided by Robbins & Aydede (2009).[2] In their view, the term *situated cognition* comprises three theses concerning the nature of human cognition. Thus, while the embodiment thesis posits that cognition entails not merely the brain, but also the body, the embedding and extension theses expand it even further. Cognition is viewed as embedded insofar as "cognitive ability routinely exploits structure in the natural and social environment" (Robbins & Aydede 2009: 3). The

[1]   The notion of cultural linguistics may be theorized in different ways. We follow Farzad Sharifian's definition of linguistic study and underscore the close relationship between CL and CultL. As Sharifian (2015: 473) explains, "Cultural Linguistics explores the interface between language, culture, and conceptualization … . Cultural Linguistics explores, in explicit terms, conceptualizations that have a cultural basis and are encoded in and communicated through features of human languages. The pivotal focus on meaning as conceptualization in Cultural Linguistics owes its centrality to cognitive linguistics, a discipline that Cultural Linguistics drew on at its inception."

[2]   Cf. Gallagher (2009) on the philosophical antecedents of situated cognition. Cf. Barwise & Perry (1983) on situations as a philosophical construct.

extension thesis seems most radical insofar as it assumes that "the boundaries of cognitive systems lie outside the envelope of individual organisms, encompassing features of the physical and social environment" (Robbins & Aydede 2009: 7–8). Frank & Gontier (2010) observe that human cognition may be seen not only as involving "coordination between internal and external (material, environment) structure", but also as "distributed through time, so that the products of earlier events can transform the nature of later events" (Frank & Gontier 2010: 48).

The study of linguistic usage situated in the sociocultural context is connected with the problem of delimitating pragmatic investigation. "Obviously", Verschueren (2009: 1) observes, "using language involves cognitive processes, taking place in a social world with a variety of cultural constraints." One important consequence of using the context principle involves the need to consider the role of situations as "extensions of the culturally shaped mind", which "in turn shape it" (Barrett et al. 2010: 10). The lack of precise distinctions between the mind and the sociocultural situation and the import of this interdependence for pragmatic investigation may require some elucidation. It seems useful to clarify that situations can be described in terms of what is significant for the individual (cf. Barrett et al. 2010). Increased attention should be paid to the individual's unique point of view. Mischel & Shoda (2010: 150) note that "not all individuals give the same meaning to a situation because of their individual learning history, their culture, and perhaps their unique genetic makeup" (Mischel & Shoda 2010: 150). Hence, the scholars propose the conception of "the situated person as a meaning-maker" (Mischel & Shoda 2010: 150).

The above observations may shed light onto the conception of linguistic subjectivity, indicative of the manifestation of the socioculturally embedded identity of the community member in language use. In Pishwa's (2009: 5) words, "[t]he self becomes particularly significant when opposed to other person categories in communication, when people seek to discover each other's feelings, wants, intentions and goals with the objective of sense-making for proper responses." One useful definition of subjectivity is offered by Lyons (1982). It has been embraced by Elizabeth Traugott in her research into semantic change. When discussing her view of subjectivity in language, Traugott refers directly to Lyons's definition:

> "[t]he term subjectivity refers to the way in which natural languages, in their structure and their normal manner of operation, provide for the locutionary agent's expression of himself and his own attitudes and beliefs" (Lyons 1982: 102). This "expression of self" may be instantiated lexically or grammatically, for example, by deictics, performative uses of speech act verbs, choice of aspect, or of discourse markers like *after all*.
>
> (Traugott 2004: 550)

Traugott's main concern is with "linguistic MARKERS and EXPRESSIONS that index subjectivity … and how they arise" (Traugott 2010: 32; capitals retained). The scholar's emphasis laid on the semanticization of pragmatics entails narrowing the scope of analysis to "'co-text', broadly defined as linguistic context" (Traugott 2012: 550). As the author herself admits, "[o]ne of the challenges for historical linguistics is how to determine what is context-dependent or not, and what is meant beyond what is said. This is because, absent speakers with whom to check intuitions, almost all data other than dictionary entries occurs in the linguistic context ("co-text") and we can construe what is meant only from what is said" (Traugott 2012: 551).[3]

While Traugott (2010: 33) makes it clear that she views her work as "potentially providing the linguistic underpinning for … large-scale studies of the relationship between language, culture and cognition", including, for instance, "culturally driven shifts in stylistic preferences", recent advancements in the field of pragmatics confirm the need for a broader research scope. "Identity … is no longer perceived as something inherently given, static and unchanging. Rather, it is seen as emerging in social action and interaction and as negotiated in everyday practices of communication" (Kurteš & Kopytowska 2014: 3). If so, the speaker should be considered as a member of a cultural community, and that the expression of their self is regarded as a function of the individual's situatedness. For Frank (2008: 1), sociocultural situatedness consists in "the way(s) in which individual minds and cognitive processes are shaped by their being together with other embodied minds, i.e., their interaction with social and cultural structures, such as other agents, artefacts, conventions, etc. and more particularly … with language itself." From this perspective, the issue of identity construction by means of linguistic usage may necessitate reference to the trajectory of the development of the individual's self: the continuity of the individual's interaction with the existing social and cultural structures, including the community's collective identity.

It is thus suggested that the issue of human identity is interwoven with the question of what constitutes culture. We view culture as an idealised cognitive system, that is, "a system of knowledge, beliefs, and values – that exists in the minds of members of society" (Casson 1999: 120). Hence, the verbalisation of conceptualisations is, at least in part, derivative of the sociocultural situatedness of the language users. Since language can be seen as an aid to cultural transmission, i.e., a repository of the community's knowledge that accrued and evolved over time, its continuity provides the community member with an ever-

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3   With respect to Traugott's research, particularly Traugott & Dasher's (2001) Invited
     Inferencing Theory of Semantic Change, we address the scholars' findings concerning the
     development of the verb *mot-* in Stadnik (2015). While discussing their treatment of
     Chaucer's usage of *mot-* in *Boece*, we elaborate on the need to contextualise the historical
     data relative to the poet's sociocultural situatedness in the late medieval community.

evolving conceptual framework within which one can express their "selves" emerging in different contexts across space and time. The sociocultural situatedness of the language user derives from the present state of the community's culture, as well as its historical development and projected future.

2. Contextualising meaning negotiation in the spatiotemporal continuity of culture

Since CL holds the view that the study of language enables the investigation of knowledge representation and the process of meaning construction (Evans & Green 2006: 54), a cognitively-oriented investigation of linguistic usage may inform the analysis of reasons behind patterns of usage embedded in specific sociocultural contexts, revealing how the interlocutors negotiate the status of reality. The CL background provides us with the methodological principle of converging evidence so as to ground linguistic theorising in empirical data from the akin disciplines in cognitive science (cf. Geeraerts 2006).

    Smith & Collins (2010: 139–140) clarify the significance of situatedness for establishing the conceptual order shared within a cultural community,

> it seems appropriate to ask whether there are any instances when cognition is *not* situated. In one sense, the answer is clearly affirmative. There is some discussion in the situated cognition literature ... of types of cognition that are nonsituated and hence must rely more heavily on inner representational resources, such as thinking about things not currently present (in fictional worlds, counterfactuals, future plans, daydreams). But even these forms of cognition do not completely evade situational constraints. First, we conceptualize counterfactual worlds or future plans in major part by flexibly recombining elements of the world we have concretely experienced ..., for our representational abilities remain grounded in sensorimotor systems. Second, even when reminiscence, planning, or storytellings free our cognition from the constraints of the immediate situation, cognition is still shaped by elements of our social context: our personal self-identities (gender, occupation, nationality, etc.), the nature of our bodies, and our socially constrained life experiences and personal relationships.

This perspective on human cognition corresponds to the idea that conceptual knowledge may be viewed as situated. This framework is based on the premise that "the conceptual knowledge that is called forth in a given instance is tailored to the immediate situation, is acquired from prior experience, and may be supported by language" (Barrett et al. 2010: 11). As Barrett et al. (2015: 91) explain, "[a]ll mental states are, in fact, *conceptualizations* of internal bodily sensations and incoming sensory input. These conceptualizations are *situated* in that they use highly context-dependent representations that are tailored to the immediate situation." The scholars exemplify the situated nature of concepts referring to concepts for emotion,

> [n]o single situated conceptualization for the concept *anger* need give a complete
> account of your category for *anger*. There is not one script for *anger* or one abstract
> representation for *anger*. Consider the actions you might take upon experiencing
> anger in the following situations. When another driver cuts you off in traffic, you
> might shout as you slam on the breaks. .… When a colleague criticizes you in front
> of a group, you might sit very still and perhaps even nod your head and smile. You
> may tease a friend who threatens your view of yourself, and so on.
>
> <div align="right">(Barrett et al. 2010: 95)</div>

If the construal of the situation can be specific to the individual, and thus it should not be seen as separate from the community member, what linguistic structures can be used by community members as cues for the negotiation of the status of reality? "Communication", Radden & Dirven (2007: 171) argue, "is about situations, i.e. about events that happen and states things are in." We suggest that one type of linguistic markers for social functions (cf. Pishwa 2009), including the contextualization of identities vis-à-vis the negotiation of the status of reality; can be found in the domain of linguistic modality.

In CL, the umbrella term *modality* is argued to be "concerned with the speaker's assessment of, or attitude towards, the potentiality of a state of affairs" (Radden & Dirven 2007: 233). It is customary to characterise modality using two general notions of necessity and possibility (e.g., Traugott & Dasher 2001). Yet, while modal markers are used to indicate the speaker's assessment of potentiality, modal expressions are used in existing sociocultural contexts which derive from the continuity of culture, hence the evolution of the community's conceptual knowledge. This may mean that the conceptual tools used in historical-pragmatic research into modality, the abstract concepts of (deontic/epistemic) NECESSITY and POSSIBILITY, are decontextualised, thus too coarse-grained to help the researcher avoid falling into the trap of essentialism, and consequently result in the failure to pay sufficient attention to the frequently subtle and nuanced construal of what community members used to find possible and/or necessary.

Narrog (2010: 414) provides a useful illustration of the above problem. While discussing the multifarious nature of deontic necessity, the author indicates that "obligation is a notion which is apparently extremely sensitive to the social and cultural background, and may differ substantially from language to language." Using as an example the development of *shall/ should,* the author explains,

> different conceptualizations of deontic necessity may lead to different diachronic
> pathways of change, or, more generally, that the way deontic necessity is
> conceptualized is reflected in the way it changes semantically. .... Our use of
> obligation markers is bound to a specific social and cultural background, which in
> the case of modern Western societies is based in the idea of rights and obligations
> of the individual human being. ... This world-view, however, is not common to all

> societies, and even in our own cultures, a look into older texts, particularly those up to the middle ages, reveals a rather different world view, which may be just as exotic for us as that of non-Western cultures. Few people had much choice over how to conduct their lives, and what futures to choose, and in addition to heavy social constraints, Christian doctrine and faith reigned people's thinking to an extent that is difficult to imagine in modern society.
>
> (Narrog 2010: 415)

What interconnects deontic and epistemic (future) meaning of *shall* pertains, in the author's opinion, to "a specific cultural conceptualization of deontic necessity and future", whereby a future event is seen as "fated or divinely decreed" (Narrog 2010: 416). That is, in the case of *shall,* applying the present-day concept of OBLIGATION might result in an analysis distorted by blindness to the effects of contextualisation not only in space, but also in time.

How can we situate concepts in the spatiotemporal continuity of culture? We suggest that situated cognition need not consist in situation-bound cognitive activity (cf. Wilson 2008). As Barrett et al. (2015) demonstrate in their discussion of experiential blindness, the past and present intertwine to help us construct meaningful experience. "Without prior experience", the scholars say, "sensations are meaningless, and you would not know how to act in the world" (Barrett et al. 2015: 88). Consequently, in the study of historical data, one should be careful not to uncritically adopt the time-frame of the present-day conceptual order deriving from our contemporary outlook to investigate how community members from previous generations construed various situations. We suggest that situating concepts in the historical context of the language user's sociocultural situatedness might help not only investigate historical records of what was said, but also establish what kind of sociocultural information the records fail to provide the researcher with and, if possible, why.

In what follows, we focus on the issue of contextualisation viewed as situating language use relative to the spatiotemporal continuity of culture. While this approach is meant to dovetail with a view of pragmatics as a general functional perspective on language, it is hoped that it facilitates a better understanding of conceptual motivation underlying historical data.

3. Chaucer's Griselda: A paragon of dubious virtue

In this section, we contextualise Chaucer's *Clerk's Tale* (*ClT)* relative to the broader cultural landscape of his time. We offer a cognitive-cultural perspective on the issue of social cognition in interaction, during which negotiating one's social status is achieved by means of language, used to convey social-cognitive information. In short, we focus on the cognitive-cultural underpinnings behind pragmatic investigation of socio-culturally situated usage.

What may require elucidation is our selection of Chaucer's *Clark's Tale* as the main source of historical samples of modal usage. Firstly, we regard Chaucer's use of modal markers as testifying to his sociocultural situatedness, the latter being an issue already explained in the opening section. Secondly, the reference to linguistic modality is based on the assumption that linguistic modality is correlated with pragmatic aspects of discourse (cf. Nakayasu 2011). Whereas we address this point in the subsequent section of the article, we first clarify the reasons for selecting Chaucer's version of the story of the patient Griselda and her domineering husband as the source of linguistic data.

The issue of the medieval woman's social status helps us exemplify how the legacy of the community's past (its beliefs and values in particular) may affect the mental construction of social reality, and its verbal expression by members of a given cultural group. In our discussion, we can only focus on but a fraction of the problems involved. As argued by Jackson (2015: 7), "[o]nce ignored or relegated to the periphery, women are no longer absent from studies of the life and culture of the Middle Ages." Drawing on evidence in medieval manuscripts, the scholar contends that the lives of women in the Middle Ages were "[s]haped by geographical, political, legal and religious factors", as well as "defined by [the woman's] family background, marital status, number or lack of children, age, health, wealth and class" (Jackson 2015: 7). It is outside the scope of this paper to address all of these points. This stipulation is pertinent insofar as a more comprehensive investigation of the medieval woman's status would require accounting for both linguistic, and non-linguistic data (cf. e.g., Jackson 2015 on the significance of visual culture for this kind of research).

Since we treat historical data as a lens on the function of language as a repository of a cultural community's collective memory, we need to situate *Clerk's Tale* within the background of Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*. In so doing, we indicate that his *Parson's Tale* (*ParsT*), a prose sermon on the seven deadly sins, contains a number of remarks, which can illuminate our contemporary understanding of the medieval outlook on marriage, and the power relations therein. Indeed, "[m]edieval writers challenge many of our assumptions, and even a cursory survey of medieval art and literature shows how futile it is for us to try to impose our own values and distinctions on the past" (Jackson 2015: 8). McCarthy (2004: 1–2) further explains that

> [p]ersons in the twenty-first century, or the eighth, or the fifteenth, might carry out similar actions: a declaration of love, an act of sexual intercourse, a marriage ceremony. But although the acts in different centuries might resemble one another, the understanding of what takes place through these actions, the cultural construction of their meaning (both to the persons concerned and to the wider culture that they live in) might vary significantly across time. Familiar actions in these texts may be accompanied by very different mindsets.

For instance, the bond between man and woman was said to have been created in paradise, *er that synne bigan, whan natureel lawe was in his right poynt* [true state] *in paradys* (*ParsT*, l. 921). It was believed that the equilibrium of power in a marriage could be achieved when the wife did not have the dominant position, for *ther as the womman hath the maistrie* [control]*, she maketh to muche desray* [disorder] (l. 927). It seems that the deeply engrained beliefs did not need to be substantiated at all:

> Ther neden none ensamples of this; the experience of day by day oghte suffise.for she kan nat paciently suffre. But God made womman of the ryb of Adam, for womman sholde be felawe unto man
>
> (*ParsT*, ll. 927–928)

As we gather from Sakowska (2006: 332–333; translation K.S.), medieval misogyny can be traced back to the Church Fathers, but the antifeminist ideology has its roots in ancient Greek and Roman ideas on the inferiority of the woman, including the Aristotelian legacy, because of the enduring influence of classical texts. Furthermore, "a cornerstone of Christian thinking about marriage and sexual behaviors" was St Paul's text on the issue of marital sex in 1 Corinthians (McCarthy 2004: 27). Although one source of medieval misogyny was the Bible, it was the interpretation of the historical legacy contained in the Scripture that seems to have been the prime factor for the development of antifeminist ideology in medieval theoretical debates (cf. Minnis 2016). Furthermore, it does not seem unreasonable to mention that literary works denigrating the woman were popular, the notorious classic example being *The Romance of the Rose*, a major source of Chaucer's inspiration. Despite this gloomy picture, one should not oversimplify the problem. For instance, Sakowska (2009) offers a catalogue of medieval female writers, elucidating their contribution to the culture of the Middle Ages and beyond.

The social status of the medieval woman was correlated with the social rights and duties afforded to man and woman in marriage. When discussing medieval views of power and gender in Eden, Minnis (2016: 99) observes that Eve's "natural inferiority remains a fact." That is, "gender inequality was the norm in our original paradise – there in the beginning, it evermore shall be, until the end of the world" (Minnis 2016: 99). Put succinctly, "man is more worthy (*dignior*) than woman, because he is the head (*caput*) or ruler" (2016: 102–103). One might thus pose the question of "which body expresses more clearly, or better represents, the image of God" (Minnis 2016: 104). It does not come as a surprise to learn that "the male body wins, since, as the head of woman, man presides over her; she originated from Adam's rib and was made "for the sake of man," as his helpmate" (Minnis 2016: 104). "The male form rightly signifies freedom and preeminence, while the female form signifies subjection" (Minnis

2016: 105). Overall, "woman's inferiority to man was believed to have originated in Eden, and hence was *paradigmatic* for every subsequent exclusion of the female sex from power over men" (Minnis 2016: 105; emphasis added).

In our analysis of cognitive-cultural motivation behind linguistic usage, we consider the sociocultural situatedness of Chaucer as a member of the late medieval community of his age. This means that our investigation of historical samples ought to account for traces of the antifeminist ideology discernible in linguistic data taken from the poet's works. His *Clerk's Tale* constitutes a medieval writing perfectly illustrating the problem of female subjection in general and the unequal status of the spouses in particular. Chaucer's story draws (primarily) on Petrarch's version of the tale about the obedient Griselda, but, as Sakowska (2006: 249) stipulates, Boccaccio offered his own rendering of the story as well. Our selection of Clerk's narrative is motivated by the fact that it affords us the opportunity to investigate how the notion of OBLIGATION in the social realm was understood in the late medieval community of the poet's present by showing how social roles/identities can be construed in language use, and how they affect the negotiation of the status of reality.

In the narrative, Walter, Griselda's husband, wants to put the woman's wifely virtues to mock tests of perseverance such that she believes in what she perceives and her anguish is genuine.[4] As a result of Walter's mischievous scheme, she unwittingly consents to enter the virtual world based on her 'trouthe'[5] and his 'governaunce'. The marquis does not explain the reasons for his demand that she should obey all his whims and desires without giving any indication of what she really thinks or feels. Griselda's perspective is to be perfectly aligned with Walter's viewpoint. Therefore, the linguistic construction of Griselda's identity is crucial to Chaucer's version of the story. We contend that this construal is motivated by the poet's sociocultural situatedness.

More to the point of values cherished in the Middle Ages, it was the continuity of ideological heritage, including the already mentioned Greek, Roman, and Christian influences that had affected the situation of the medieval woman (cf. Amt 2010). Christianity laid emphasis on exercising virtues such as obedience, humility, and patience.[6] For instance, the Psalter of Robert de Lisle in the British Library (MS Arundel 83 II), one of the magnificent examples of

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[4]   It is beyond the scope of this article to pursue the issue of truthfulness. Cf. Marrelli (2002) for an overview of the problem.

[5]   As we read in the MED, *trouthe* meant *inter alia* 'fidelity', 'faithfulness', 'promise', 'commitment', 'honour', 'integrity', as well as 'honesty' and 'goodness of character', to mention but a few. http://quod.lib.umich.edu/cgi/m/mec/med-idx?type=id&id=MED47016 (accessed 29 February 2016).

[6]   Cf. Hume (2012) on advice literature and the obedient wife ideal, and Cooper (1996) for the genre and sources and analogues of the tale.

fourteenth-century English illumination, contains the image of the Tower of Wisdom, the foundation of which is Humility, "the mother of the virtues" (Sandler 1983: 84). However, the ideological underpinnings sanctioned social malpractice. It must be mentioned that "the abuses arising from the Church's sweeping institutional authority in matters of sexual and marital behaviour" (Blamires 2010: 6) had challenged the Christian ideological foundations on which the model of wifely submission was based. It is not irrelevant to the *Clerk's Tale*, since Walter "has the power, money and influence to obtain forged papal 'bulles' [edicts] authorizing a divorce and remarriage on the pretext of pacifying his people's discontent at his marriage to a commoner (IV 736–49)". What appears to have secured the implementation of the perfect wife ideal was violence against women (cf. Federico 2005). Christianity seems to have been compromised inasmuch as selected Christian ideals were distorted beyond proportion so as to sanction male domination in marriage.[7] Chaucer's *ClT* may thus dispel any illusions as to easy reassurances concerning the social status of the medieval woman, revealing implicitly the mendacious aspects of the ideology behind holy matrimony uniting fallible humans.

There exists a tacit tension between the allegorical reading espoused by the Clerk himself and the real-world consequences embedded in the narrative context of Griselda's plight. On the one hand, while her patience is *inportable* 'unbearable', or 'intolerable', the exemplary status of the story created to edify and exemplify "God's treatment of the soul" seems dubious in that Chaucer challenges parallels between Walter and God, as well as Griselda and the Virgin or Christ (cf. Cooper 1996: 190–191). Commenting on the clash of female submissiveness and male coercion in *ClT*, Langdon observes:

> [a]lthough Petrarch asserts the essential, transcendent truth of Griselda's constancy, Chaucer questions the ethical validity of the vow that secures that constancy to begin with, especially in light of the consequences that follow. Can we really praise such constancy when it supports something reprehensible and immoral? For many medieval theologians, the answer is a resounding "No." Thomas Aquinas explains that a promise is a conjunction of reason and will, expressed through language.
>
> (Langdon 2010: 69–70)

If evil consequences may follow, one should feel discouraged to keep their promise. Importantly, in the opening lines, Chaucer makes it clear what the limits of wifely obedience are. In the Prologue, the Clerk says,

> "Hooste", quod he, "I am under youre yerde;   *authority;control
> Ye han of us as now the governance,   *authority

> And therfore wol I do yow obeisance,   *obey
> As fer as resoun axeth, hardily…."   *demands
>   (Prologue to *ClT*, ll. 22–25)[8]

On the other hand, if one may consider it as an exemplum, *ClT* seems more likely to exemplify imperfect human nature, including vices such as excessive submissiveness to the other in cases where it should only be reserved to God, and failure to see reason while exercising freedom of choice. Pointing at the inadequacies, Mann (2002: 121) discusses the scene in which, when addressing her children, Griselda thanks "God of his mercy" and Walter, their "benyngne fader",

> Griselda's dignified speeches of resignation to Walter's will are, we are told, appropriate for the deity, but inappropriate for her husband. But it is this very inappropriateness that raises the question of their appropriateness for God, the question that orthodox piety effectively suppresses; it forces us to experience just what is asked of human beings in their submission to the divine will.
>   (Mann 2002: 122)

In plumbing the nature of the human struggle to remain virtuous at one's own cost, Chaucer paints a bleak portrait of a woman whose free will is conspicuously absent. Even though in her integrity she surpasses Walter, and in her role as nobleman's wife exceeds his expectations (cf. Hume 2012), as a mother Griselda fails to protect her children against the purported cruelty of their father, emerging as a dehumanised, impossibly passive creature. As Hume (2012: 65) puts it, "Chaucer's emphasis on Griselda's humiliation and circumscription achieves the opposite effect, revealing the problems with the ideal instead." "Although the fantasy of the totally obedient wife seems to have afflicted many medieval minds", the author notes, "the discomfort it provoked was equally widespread, and is evoked with new power in the exquisite horror of the *Clerk's Tale*" (Hume 2012: 68). Indeed, when the Clerk finishes the tale, there follows a debate among pilgrims concerning the demise of the wifely ideal. Yet, no pilgrim joins in to bewail the demise of the perfect husband.

Our historical data contain selected occurrences of *shal*, *mot-*, and *o(u)ght(e)* so as to investigate how the medieval conception of marriage and wifely submission are treated by Chaucer in his *ClT*. Our analysis addresses the problem of the modal markers used by the poet to conjure up the virtual world of wifely submissiveness based upon the agreement between Griselda and Walter. Chaucer shows how the spouse with weaker social status can be abused. As Collette (2001: 73) notes, the marquis's is a case of "an uncontrolled will within the specific context of power relations that medieval marriage provides."

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[8]   All quotations are taken from Benson (ed.) (1987). **Bold** is sometimes added for ease of reference.

This means that in the case of *ClT* the investigation of what is necessary and for whom is highly contingent on the context of the medieval narrative.

Since Chaucer's linguistic choices are shaped by the sociocultural framework of his time, it is useful to view the abstract concept of OBLIGATION as situated. Specifically, using the decontextualised notion of OBLIGATION (deontic necessity) as a conceptual tool in our analysis may result in filtering out sociocultural details permeating *ClT*, which contain cues for the experiential motivation behind Chaucer's linguistic choices that shaped his version of the story. How he shaped the feminine identity of Griselda is, in turn, important for our investigation of the ways in which influenced the negotiation of the status of reality between Griselda and her husband.

In conclusion, we suggest a shift in research perspective. Rather than analysing occurrences of selected modal verbs conveying the sense of deontic necessity, we focus on the late medieval (entrenched) situated conceptualisation of (wifely) OBEDIENCE related to Griselda's promise to remain an obedient wife across all the trials.

4. The virtual world of wifely obedience in Chaucer's *Clerk's Tale*[9]

As already mentioned, the reference to linguistic modality is based on the assumption that it can be correlated with pragmatic aspects of discourse. It can be claimed that

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[9]   That the world of social rights and duties is virtual insofar as it is based on what members of a given society agree to find right/proper/appropriate, etc. can be gleaned from Chaucer's *Franklin's Tale* as well. In this narrative, Dorigen, "of … heigh kynrede" (*FranT*, l. 735), consents to marry Arveragus, a man of inferior social status, but who has served his lady "in his beste wise" (l. 730). The element of testing the person with a weaker social status before marriage is also present: "many a greet emprise he for his lady wroghte er she were wonne" (ll. 732–733). In other words, social advance was possible, albeit it came with a price. Another similarity between the tales told by the Clerk and the Franklin pertains to the idea of consent given before marriage to set the rules governing the relationship between the spouses. It seems useful to quote an excerpt from *FranT* so as to illustrate the correspondences between the narratives in greater detail: "But atte laste she, for his … for his meke obeysaunce, / Hath swich a pitee caught of his penaunce / That pryvely she fil of his accord / To take hym for hir housbonde and hir lord, / Of swich lordshipe as men han over hir wyves. / And for to lede the moore in blisse hir lyves, / Of his free wyl he swoor hire as a knight / That nevere in al his lyf he, day ne nyght, / Ne sholde upon hym take no maistrie / Agayn hir wyl, ne kithe hire jalousie, / But hire obeye, and folwe hir wyl in al, / As any lovere to his lady shal, / Save that the name of soveraynetee, / That wolde he have for shame of his degree. / She thanked hym, and with ful greet humblesse / She seyde, "Sire, sith of youre gentillesse / Ye profre me to have so large a reyne, / Ne wolde nevere God bitwixe us tweyne, / As in my gilt, were outher werre or stryf. / Sire, I wol be youre humble trewe wyf - / Have heer my trouthe" (*FranT*, ll. 738–759). However, whereas in *FranT* the pledge is mutual, in *ClT* it is imposed upon Griselda by Walter.

> [d]eontic modality relates to social interaction. It is concerned with the speaker's directive attitude towards an action to be carried out. It mainly comprises the notions of 'obligation' and 'permission', i.e. speech acts in which the speaker invokes her authority or a general rule to have another person (or herself) carry out an act. Expressions of deontic modality thus can convey similar meanings as directive speech acts, in which the speaker "directs" the hearer to perform, or refrain from performing, a certain action, as in requests, orders, prohibitions, warnings, etc. … A directive speech act and deontic modality are also similar in that they are made at speech time and refer to actions that are to be carried out later than speech time. Deontic modality is thus future-oriented but the outcome of an obligation imposed or a permission granted is only judged to have potential reality.
>
> (Radden & Dirven 2007: 236–237)

Our main concern is to justify the need for adopting the situated cognition approach in the study of language, the particular objective being that of enabling the researcher to fully contextualise a pragmatic investigation relative to the sociocultural situatedness of the language user. It is suggested that the patterns of modal usage may be culturally-based insofar as they might correspond to patterns of conceptualisation reflecting the mental construction of social reality in Chaucer's times.

   The poet endows his characters with the prevalent medieval outlook on the status of the woman in society, and her inferior position in marriage. The social status of Griselda and Walter (a peasant marrying her lord) and the power relations within their marriage (Griselda's status being that of the equal-but-inferior spouse) provides the socio-cultural context relative to which their communicative intentions are expressed. Since the *Clerk's Tale* is a late medieval narrative, accounting for presuppositions and implicatures may well require the reconstruction of the (medieval) cognitive-cultural basis motivating Chaucer's modal choices. We indicate the need to situate the pragmatic notion of implicitness relative to in the continuity of a specific community's culture. Since "it is not sentences which presuppose, it is speakers: presuppositions are something like the background beliefs of the speaker, propositions whose truth s/he takes for granted, or seems to take for granted, in making his/her statement" (Papi 2009: 147), a pragmatic analysis of historical usage should be founded on the prior investigation of the cultural common ground (cf. Tomasello 2014), shared by community members in the past. While Chaucer had direct access to the cultural common ground of his late medieval community, for the present-day researcher the ground remains accessible indirectly. Overall, what is implicit and for who (cf. Dirven & Verspoor 2004) depends on the perspective we adopt to account for the continuity of language across space and time. While the main focus of our study remains fixed on the three modals *mot-*, *shul*, and *o(u)ght(e)*, the references to the selected

occurrences of *mouen* and *willen* are seen as having further explanatory potential. Specifically, accounting for selected occurrences of *willen* may complement the discussion of Walter's disturbing tendency to torment his innocent wife by abusing power to his own advantage so as to create a virtual world in which Griselda is to be entrapped as long as he wishes.

To substantiate the above assumptions, we precede the analysis proper with a short investigation of selected occurrences of *willen*. There are *ca.* 73 occurrences of the (modal) verb in *ClT*. The need to analyse its selected occurrences derives from the fact that it is the marquis's will that frames the development of the story. As a male with a high social position, Walter makes no attempt to conceal his superiority, manifesting it in his conduct ("he nolde – and that was worst of alle – wedde no wyf, for noght that may bifalle", *ClT*, ll. 83–84), and his words. When considering the subjects' request to get married, the marquis says:

> …. At youre requeste, as evere moot I thryve,
> Ther as myn herte is set, ther **wol** I wyve;
> And but ye **wole** assente in swich manere,
> I prey yow, speketh namoore of this matere"
>
> With hertely wyl they sworen and assenten
> To al this thyng - ther seyde no wight nay -
> Bisekynge hym of grace, er that they wenten,
> That he **wolde** graunten hem a certein day
> Of his spousaille, as soone as evere he may;
> For yet alwey the peple somwhat dredde,
> Lest that the markys no wyf **wolde** wedde.
>
> He graunted hem a day, swich as hym leste,
> On which he **wolde** be wedded sikerly,
> And seyde he dide al this at hir requeste.

<div align="right">(ClT, ll. 172–185)</div>

Despite Walter's explicit declaration of accepting their plea, the subjects cannot be sure whether he meant what he said, their use of *willen* indicating the source of their worry:

> The day of weddyng cam, but no wight kan
> Telle what womman that it sholde be;
> For which merveille wondred many a man,
> And seyden, whan they were in privetee,
> **"Wol** nat oure lord yet leve his vanytee?
> **Wol** he nat wedde? Allas! Allas, the while!
> Why **wole** he thus hymself and us bigile?"

<div align="right">(ClT, ll. 146–152)</div>

It appears that Walter's freedom of choice has never been constrained by anyone and anything. As we read elsewhere in the tale, the marquis is accustomed to exercising free will whenever he pleases,

> Somwhat this lord hadde routhe in his manere,
> But nathelees his purpos heeld he stille,
> As lordes doon, whan they **wol** han hir wille.
>
> (*ClT*, ll. 579–581)

Regarded in terms of speech acts, Walter's subsequent utterances containing *willen* provide linguistic evidence of a series of actions in which the marquis explicitly flouts the norms of politeness when talking to his prospective father-in-law.[10] Rather than requesting anyone for their consent, Walter implies a threat/warning to anyone wishing to oppose the lord's will. Janicula's and Griselda's responses assert their subjection to the master's will. Janicula's short answer shows how perplexed he feels as to the lord's request.

> Janicula, I neither may ne kan
> Lenger the plesance of myn herte hyde.
> If that thou vouche sauf, what so bityde,
> Thy doghter **wol** I take, er that I wende,
> As for my wyf, unto hir lyves ende.
>
> "Thou lovest me, I woot it wel certeyn,
> And art my feithful lige man ybore,
> And al that liketh me, I dar wel seyn
> It liketh thee, and specially therfore
> Tel me that poynt that I have seyd bifore,
> If that thou **wolt** unto that purpos drawe,
> To take me as for thy sone-in-lawe."
>
> This sodeyn cas this man astonyed so
> That reed he wax; abayst and al quakynge
> He stood; unnethes seyde he wordes mo,
> But oonly thus: "Lord", quod he, "my willynge
> Is as ye **wole,** ne ayeynes youre likynge   *wish, want
> I **wol** no thyng, ye be my lord so deere;
> Right as yow lust, governeth this mateere."
>
> "Yet **wol** I", quod this markys softely,
> "That in thy chambre I and thou and she
> Have a collacioun, and wostow why?

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10   Relative to the study of Chaucer's use of *willen* (and *shul*) in *ClT*, it seems useful to hint at the somewhat fuzzy boundary between politeness and impoliteness. Although the problem of (im)politeness lies outside the scope of this paper, we suggest that it should be discussed relative to the spatiotemporal continuity of the community's culture (but cf. also Culpeper (2012) for a cross-cultural viewpoint).

> For I **wol** axe if it hire wille be
> To be my wyf and reule hire after me.
> And al this shal be doon in thy presence;
> I **wol** noght speke out of thyn audience."

<div align="right">(ClT, ll. 304–329)</div>

Janicula appears well aware of the necessity to resign himself to this fate because of his inferior social status. Saying to his lord "my willynge is as ye wole", Janicula seem to convey a hint of bitter irony concerning the social distance between them.[11]

Griselda's response is one of perfect alignment with Walter's will. She swears obedience to her lord and husband-to-be: "heere I swere that nevere willyngly, in werk ne thoght, I nyl yow disobeye", and the multiple negation enhances the idea of her total wifely subjection. Her utterance, however, can be construed as both a pledge of wifely obedience, and as a vow of blind submission to her lord. In itself, the utterance appears somewhat self-contradictory inasmuch as Griselda underscores her free choice to subjugate her free will to both her present lord and the prospective husband:

> "Grisilde", he seyde, "ye shal wel understonde
> It liketh to youre fader and to me
> That I yow wedde, and eek it may so stonde,
> As I suppose, ye **wol** that it so be.
> But thise demandes axe I first", quod he,
> "That, sith it shal be doon in hastif wyse,
> **Wol** ye assente, or elles yow avyse?
>
> "I seye this: be ye redy with good herte
> To al my lust, and that I frely may,
> As me best thynketh, do yow laughe or smerte,
> And nevere ye to grucche it, nyght ne day?
> And eek whan I sey 'ye', ne sey nat 'nay',
> Neither by word ne frownyng contenance?
> Swere this, and heere I swere oure alliance."
>
> Wondrynge upon this word, quakynge for drede,
> She seyde, "Lord, undigne and unworthy
> Am I to thilke honour that ye me beede,
> But as ye **wole** youreself, right so **wol** I.
> And heere I swere that nevere willyngly,
> In werk ne thoght, I **nyl** yow disobeye,
> For to be deed, though me were looth to deye."

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11 Cf. Boccaccio's version of the story, which merely hints at the meeting of the lord and Griselda's father ("without looking any further, he decided to marry her, and sent for his father, who was extremely poor, and made arrangements with him to take her as his wife") (Boccaccio 2005: 400, in Kolve & Olson 2005). For a more detailed treatment of Boccaccio's Griselda *vis-à-vis* Marie de France's *Le Fresne*, cf. Sakowska 2006.

"This is ynogh, Grisilde myn", quod he.
And forth he gooth with a ful sobre cheere
Out at the dore, and after that cam she,
And to the peple he seyde in this manere:
"This is my wyf", quod he, "that standeth heere.
Honoureth hire and loveth hire, I preye,
Whoso me loveth; ther is namoore to seye."

                                                                  (*ClT*, ll. 344–371)

Yet another aspect of the situation requires some comment. When their lord suddenly announces his whim, Griselda and Janicula seem perplexed and frightened. Janicula's face goes red with embarrassment, and his daughter quakes with fear.[12] Whereas their words are consistent with their actions, Walter feels free to violate the norms of politeness, having no scruples about manipulating others with his ambiguous words and mysterious behaviour. For instance, when testing Griselda, he tends to make his requests purposefully vague:

Nat as I **wolde,** but as my peple leste.
"And yet, God woot, this is ful looth to me;
But nathelees withoute youre wityng
I **wol** nat doon; but this **wol** I", quod he,
"That ye to me assente as in this thyng.
Shewe now youre pacience in youre werkyng,
That ye me highte and swore in youre village
That day that maked was oure mariage."

                                                                  (*ClT*, ll. 490–497)

What may remain unclear is the extent to which the marquis falls victim to his own uncontrollable will. As the story develops, the reader learns more about the marquis's true feelings (especially his *routhe* 'pity, compassion' towards Griselda, and a sort of admiration for her unbending will). However, Chaucer does not reveal Griselda's mental states after she becomes Walter's wife. Her mind resembles a "black box", as the co-text does not provide the reader with any obvious answers.[13]

Chaucer's use of *shul* and *mot-* 'must', *o(u)ght(e)*, and *mouen* 'may' facilitates the construal of the realm of potentiality of the narrative insofar as the story of Griselda's marriage is based upon the agreement, the parties of which are Walter and Griselda. Thus, the potentiality of the story stems from the constant need for the negotiation of the status of reality, as the marquis arranges for the marriage at

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[12]   Cf. Barrett et al. (2014) on the role of situated conceptualisation in emotion regulation. This point concerns negative emotions (e.g., anger) arising when one is treated impolitely (cf. Barrett et al. (2015), mentioned earlier in the article, and also, e.g., Culpeper et al. 2014).

[13]   The issue of *entente* 'purpose; will' was one that Chaucer also pursued in his "Boethian" narratives, *Troilus and Criseyde* and the *Knight's Tale*.

the request of his people prior to his repeated tests inflicted on his wife. From the marquis's viewpoint, Griselda's 'trouthe', her integrity, the essence of which is her commitment to the promise to obey Walter in all circumstances at all costs, is negotiable as well, as each test may disprove her loyalty.

What calls for some comment is the prevalence of occurrences of *shul* (ca. 51 occurrences in total), the relatively small number of occurrences of *mot* (ca. 10 occurrences in total), and the scarcity of instances of *ouen* (ca. 4 occurrences in total), all of which could be used to convey various situated conceptualisations of OBLIGATION. It seems that the main contrast is that between *mot-* and *shul*, both of which may convey necessity. Whereas *mot-* conveys the idea of necessity occurring against the individual's will, and/or overwhelming reason, in Chaucer's usage it seems to underscore the need to suppress one's desires, limiting the freedom of choice and suppressing rational judgment of the situation.

In the following excerpt, Walter gives his consent to arrange for a wife, stipulating that he will choose the one he likes, whether of noble origin or not,

> .... I me rejoysed of my liberte,
> That seelde tyme is founde in mariage;
> Ther I was free, I **moot** been in servage.   *bondage
> "But nathelees I se youre trewe entente,   *purpose
> And truste upon youre wit, and have doon ay;
> Wherfore of my free wyl I wole assente
> To wedde me, as soone as evere I may.
>
> (*ClT*, ll. 145–151)

Here, *mot-* underlines his recognition of his people's need to live a stable and affluent life ensured by the steady political situation in their country. Yet, it also highlights the ruler's unwillingness to marry, and, as the representative of the people puts it, the need to bow his neck under "that blisful yok of soveraynetee … which that men clepe spousaille or wedlock" (*ClT*, ll. 113–115). Thus, the scene is set for Walter's scheme to take a poor girl as his wife so as to have the possibility to test the quality of her womanhood, as he himself asserts at the end of the tale,

> "… I have doon this deede
> For no malice, ne for no crueltee,
> But for t' assaye in thee thy wommanheede**,**
> … Til I thy purpos knewe and al thy wille."
>
> (*ClT*, ll. 1073–1078)[14]

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[14]   Cf. Ginsberg (1987) on Chaucer's use of *ye* and *thou* in *ClT*. This applies also to our analysis of Walter's uses of *willen* in his conversation with Janicula, discussed earlier in the paper.

The idea of *servage* recurs when Walter intends to carry out another severe test, and thus he indicates the necessity for his people's will to obey. Accordingly, in the excerpt below occurrences of *mot-* are intertwined with occurrences of *mouen* 'may', making room for the negotiation of what is likely to happen. Both spouses agree that their wills are to be subjugated in a hierarchical manner, Walter's to his subjects and Griselda's to her husband,

> …. They seyn, to hem it is greet shame and wo
> For to be subgetz and been in servage
> To thee, that born art of a smal village.
>
> "And namely sith thy doghter was ybore
> Thise wordes han they spoken, doutelees.
> But I desire, as I have doon bifore,
> To lyve my lyf with hem in reste and pees.
> I **may** nat in this caas be recchelees;   *careless
> I **moot** doon with thy doghter for the beste,
> Nat as I wolde, but as my peple leste.
>
> (*ClT*, ll. 481–490)

As we read further in *ClT*, Griselda, "whan she had herd al this, she noght ameved (moved), neither in word, or chiere [facial expression], or contenaunce [not revealing her emotions by any expressive movement]", "for, as it semed, she was nat agreved [distressed]" (*ClT*, ll. 498–500). Her response is calm, and full of submissiveness:

> …. My child and I, with hertely obeisaunce,   *obedience
> Been youres al, and ye **mowe** save or spille
> Youre owene thyng; werketh after youre wille.
> "Ther **may** no thyng, God so my soule save,
> Liken to yow that **may** displese me;
> Ne I desire no thyng for to have,
> Ne drede for to leese, save oonly yee.
> This wyl is in myn herte, and ay shal be;
>
> No lengthe of tyme or deeth **may** this deface,
> Ne chaunge my corage to another place."
>
> (*ClT*, ll. 502–511)

Walter's trusted servant also justifies his evil intent by saying that he acts under obligation to carry out Walter's orders: there is simply no room for negotiating the scope of free choice:

"Madame", he seyde, "ye **moote** foryeve it me,
Though I do thyng to which I am constreyned.
Ye been so wys that ful wel knowe ye
That lordes heestes **mowe nat** been yfeyned;   *evaded
They **mowe** wel been biwailled or compleyned,
But men **moote** nede unto hire lust obeye,
And so wol I; ther is namoore to seye.

"This child I am comanded for to take" …
Grisildis **moot** al suffre and al consente.

<div align="right">(ClT, ll. 526–537)</div>

Mot- also occurs in the scene where Griselda is utterly humiliated by Walter, who demands that she give everything back to him, including even her clothes. Her response echoes Job's resigned patience (*Job* 1, 21) (cf. Ginsberg 1987),

"... Naked out of my fadres hous", quod she,
"I cam, and naked **moot** I turne agayn."

<div align="right">(ClT, ll. 871–872)</div>

By using *mot-* in the extracts above, Chaucer indicates that Walter sees himself as the master to the will of whose others, including his subjects and his wife, are to succumb their freedom of choice. This pertains to situations in which the servant or Griselda may see reason and protest against evil or harmful consequences of Walter's decisions, although he sees his actions as meant "for the beste". By imposing his will on others, he fashions himself into a quasi-divine source of other people's fates: Griselda is intentionally kept in the dark about the ultimate fate of her daughter. While in Christianity the faithful undergoing hardship are encouraged to take a leap of faith in God's benevolent providence, Griselda is to remain patient and virtuous despite severe adversity as well. This parallel seems to indicate the unease about the harsh treatment of the woman, which was apparently widespread among medieval audiences of stories from the Griselda tradition.[15] What is particularly disturbing is the fact of empowering males by investing so much social power in their hands owing to women's weaker social status, which resulted from the contemporary sociocultural practices and structures.

With respect to the occurrences of *shul*, it must be noted that, according to the MED, it was used primarily to convey that which was conceptualised as obligatory, appropriate, reasonable, right, prudent, commanded, certain, destined, etc. The verb *shul* could thus be used to convey social norms. It might be suggested that the potentiality of events arises from the negotiation of what

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15   Cf. Ginsberg (1987), Minnis (2014).

community members so conceived. We focus on those occurrences of the verb which testify to the negotiation of the status of reality between the characters of the narrative, and provide some selected examples.

The first excerpt is conspicuous for the repeated use of *shul* when Walter stipulates the conditions of his submission to the yoke of marriage:

> "Lat me allone in chesynge of my wyf ....
>
> "And forthermoore, this **shal** ye swere: that ye
> Agayn my choys **shul** neither grucche ne stryve;
> For sith I **shal** forgoon my libertee
> At youre requeste, as evere moot I thryve,
> Ther as myn herte is set, ther wol I wyve;
> And but ye wole assente in swich manere,
> I prey yow, speketh namoore of this matere."
>
> (*ClT*, ll. 162–175)

From this moment it is Walter's will that delineates the scope of the potential course of events by imposing his will on everyone with superior social status. The marriage bonds which tie the spouses derive from a form of contract concerning the performance of their social roles,

> "Grisilde", he seyde, "ye **shal** wel understonde
> It liketh to youre fader and to me
> That I yow wedde, and eek it may so stonde,
> As I suppose, ye wol that it so be.
> But thise demandes axe I first", quod he,
> "That, sith it **shal** be doon in hastif wyse,
> Wol ye assente, or elles yow avyse?
>
> "I seye this: be ye redy with good herte
> To al my lust, and that I frely may,
> As me best thynketh, do yow laughe or smerte."
>
> (*ClT*, ll. 344–355)

Griselda is told not to show her disobedience "neither by word ne frownyng contenance" (*ClT*, l. 356). Although it seems that Walter's will is the supreme source of authority, the marquis is well aware that much depends on the identity of his wife. Her social standing as a commoner's daughter thus influences the range of potential events. "No likerous lust was thurgh hire herte yronne" (*ClT*, l. 214), because she used to live in poverty. The transformation into the marquis's wife comes as a shock to the people: "Unnethe [scarcely] the peple hir knew for hire fairnesse whan she translated [transformed] was in swich richesse" (*ClT*, ll. 384–385). Certainly, this construal of wifely submissiveness

cannot be applicable to the fates of all medieval noblemen's high-born wives (cf. Hume 2012).

On the one hand, the allegorical (universal) reading is enabled by malpractice engendered by social inequality between men and women in medieval communities, deemed justifiable due to the underlying ideological tradition. On the other, *ClT* is full of sociocultural and historical details that render the allegorical reading less explicit.[16] It thus seems reasonable to argue that, obedient to her poor father, Griselda sees reason in being submissive to the marquis, her former lord. This commitment, hence affirmation of the negotiated scope of potentiality, she clearly embraces, saying: "This wyl is in myn herte, and ay shal be" (*ClT*, l. 509).

The point at which Griselda's virtue begins to shade into shocking mindlessness is the moment when she decides to sacrifice her child:[17]

> "Fareweel my child! I **shal** thee nevere see.
> But sith I thee have marked with the croys
> Of thilke Fader – blessed moote he be! –
> That for us deyde upon a croys of tree,
> Thy soule, litel child, I hym bitake,
> For this nyght **shaltow** dyen for my sake."
>
> (*ClT*, ll. 555–560)

These words might be indicative of Griselda's anguished self, as submissive as Christ's will to remain obedient to the Father (*ClT*, ll. 557–558). What is unclear, however, is the extent to which Griselda models her "self" on the figure of the Son. If she does so purposefully, Chaucer seems to indicate the distortion of medieval piety, which should be guided not by blind faith, but ought to be enlightened by reason. The trial is repeated when Walter wants to dispose of their son. Although this should give Griselda an opportunity to rethink her motivation, she chooses to be stuck in the world of her wifely submissiveness,

> "Now sey they thus: 'Whan Walter is agon,
> Thanne **shal** the blood of Janicle succede
> And been oure lord, for oother have we noon.'

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16 Ginsberg (1987: 881) notes that the story is set in *Lumbardye*, which was not mentioned in Chaucer's sources. This region of Italy was "infamous for its tyrants" (Ginsberg 1987: 881). Furthermore, Chaucer gives a detailed description of Griselda's poverty, and refers directly to papal bulls and the related institutional malpractice within the Church.

17 Importantly, Hume (2012: 55) indicates that "it was by no means universally agreed that a wife had no responsibility for her own sin if she was just following orders."

> ... This warne I yow, that ye nat sodeynly
> Out of youreself for no wo **sholde** outreye;
> Beth pacient, and therof I yow preye.”
> “I have”, quod she, “seyd thus, and evere **shal**:
> I wol no thyng, ne nyl no thyng, certayn,
> But as yow list. Naught greveth me at al,
> Though that my doughter and my sone be slayn –
> At youre comandement, this is to sayn.”
> ... “Ye been oure lord; dooth with youre owene thyng
> Right as yow list ... .”
>
> (*ClT*, ll. 631–653)

Griselda’s subdued verbalisation of her “self” is consistent with her outward behaviour, since she verbalises her “self” as an extension of Walter’s will: “to deny [her] promise is to deny [herself]” (Mann 2002: 115). As Griselda says, “as I lefte at hoom al my clothing whan I first cam to yow, right so lefte I my wyl and al my libertee” (*ClT*, ll. 654–656). We suggest that Chaucer takes the Christian marital doctrine of submissive wives (cf. e.g., *Corinthians* 1, 7; *Timothy* 1, 2) to the extreme so as to show the extent of social evil and moral corruption it may bring when applied without the exercise of reason. The echoes of medieval debates concerning God’s foreknowledge and human free will are also discernible in *ClT* (Brown 2011; Stadnik 2015). In Griselda’s own words

> And certes, if I hadde prescience   *foreknowledge
> Youre wyl to knowe, er ye youre lust me tolde,
> I wolde it doon withouten necligence.
>
> (*ClT*, ll. 660–662)

We thus suggest that what Griselda verbalises is her awareness of her social standing: the gap between her position and her husband’s social role is such that, for her, it remains unbridgeable even by imposing marital bonds. Griselda considers herself not as a proper wife, but Walter’s servant,

> “My lord”, quod she, “I woot, and wiste alway,
> How that bitwixen youre magnificence
> And my poverte no wight kan ne may
> Maken comparison; it is no nay.
> I ne heeld me nevere digne in no manere
> To be youre wyf, no, ne youre chamberere.
>
> “And in this hous, ther ye me lady made –
> The heighe God take I for my witnesse,
> And also wysly he my soule glade –
> I nevere heeld me lady ne mistresse,

> But humble servant to youre worthynesse,
> And evere **shal,** whil that my lyf may dure,
> Aboven every worldly creature."
>
> (*ClT*, ll. 814–826)

Nevertheless, it is not clear to what extent the verbalisations of Griselda's obedience correspond to her true feelings about Walter, the extent to which she dreads him as her master. Whether she thinks she can conceive of herself as potentially anything else than "humble servant to his worthynesse" (*ClT*, l. 824) we cannot tell. In *ClT*, the selected occurrences of *shul* convey what the characters find reasonable, hence right and proper, and thus inevitable relative to their contemporary sociocultural framework. Chaucer's use of *shul* suggests that the social inequalities and their evil consequences are unlikely to change unless reason is applied to the exercise of free will. Human pious desires, however, should be more modest; since the ideal of Christ's perfect obedience to His Father's will is unattainable for mere mortals, as their reasoning can be skewed by mindless distortion of the divine logic.

According to the MED *ouen* conveys moral or legal obligation, necessity, propriety, duty or right. It seems significant that the two relevant examples of the use of *ouen* appear at the end of the tale. The first concerns the restoration of Griselda as Walter's proper wife:

> Thise ladyes, ... [h]an taken hire and into chambre gon,
> And strepen hire out of hire rude array,
> And in a clooth of gold that brighte shoon,
> With a coroune of many a riche stoon
> Upon hire heed, they into halle hire broghte,
> And ther she was honured as hire **oghte**.
>
> (*ClT*, ll. 1114–1120)

This corresponds to the initial impression Griselda made on Walter, when he saw Janicula's daughter

> [h]is eyen caste on hire, but in sad wyse
> Upon hir chiere he wolde hym ofte avyse,   *countenance; *ponder
> Commendynge in his herte hir wommanhede,
> And eek hir vertu, passynge any wight
> Of so yong age, as wel in chiere as dede.   *appearance
> ... he considered ful right
> Hir bountee, and disposed that he wolde   *goodness
> Wedde hire oonly, if evere he wedde sholde.
>
> (*ClT*, ll. 237–245)

Obedient as a daughter, she proves submissive as a wife. Griselda gets the award for proving her 'buxomnesse' in Walter's eyes. Chaucer indicates the dangers of living in the world of social inequalities where it is the husband that is the ultimate source of authority of decency and morality of his wife's conduct. Given the status of the medieval woman, inferior to that of man, the real-world ramifications of the story cannot go unnoticed: the woman can only be praised if she fits the ideal of the submissive wife.

The second occurrence of *ouen* concerns the parallel made by the Clerk himself between the world of the narrative and the world of the pilgrim going to Canterbury,

> This storie is seyd nat for that wyves sholde
> Folwen Grisilde as in humylitee,
> For it were inportable, though they wolde,
> ... For sith a womman was so pacient
> Unto a mortal man, wel moore us **oghte**
> Receyven al in gree that God us sent;
> For greet skile is he preeve that he wroghte.
>
> (*ClT*, ll. 1142–1152)

This excerpt indicates the potentiality of the story told in the Clerk's narrative in that it is possible to treat it as an exemplum. Given the real-world implications this allegorical reading may have, this explicit correspondence suggests that the value-system of the cultural community appears to have been permeated by the corruption of the ideological heritage. While some Biblical allusions made throughout the story, including Job, the Virgin, and Christ (cf. *oxes stalle* in *ClT*, ll. 207, 291–294)[18] indicate the underlying Christian background, they remain in sharp contrast with the erosion of the morality, and distortion of true Christian virtues. Human identities constructed within such a sleazy cultural framework may well be corruptible too, as best exemplified by Walter's wicked desires and actions.

5. Conclusion

In *ClT*, Chaucer reflects on the virtues of human reason and the vices of wifely obedience to the husband, as the poet's situatedness can be traced back to the medieval conception of the limits which free will and reason impose on a promise. What the characters of *ClT* find obligatory (and why) is seen through the lens of the late medieval world of personal rights and social duties ascribed

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[18]   Ginsberg (1987) indicates the connection of the figure of Griselda with the tradition of "mulier fortis" (woman of valour) (*Prov.* 31,103–31).

to men and women. In our analysis, this has meant the need to contextualise OBLIGATION (deontic necessity) by tailoring it to the context of the medieval narrative. As culture entails the spatiotemporal continuity of the community's conceptual order, what appears to be contextually relevant is the late medieval construal of wifely OBEDIENCE. That is to say, displaying wifely submissiveness is valued and expected within a culture based on ideological foundations that foster gender inequality.

In the same cultural context, the same situation can be conceptualized differently by different individuals. Chaucer's usage patterns of *mot*, *mouen*, *shul*, *willen*, and *o(u)ght(e)* suggest that Griselda's understanding of Walter's demands stems from the continuity of her identity. Whereas Walter wants to test her wifely submissiveness, she seems to view the trials as a matter of compliance to the marquis's 'lordshipe' or 'governaunce'. Thus, patterns of Chaucer's usage indicate that the underlying conceptual motivation stems from the poet's situatedness. Specifically, reconstructed on the basis of *ClT*, the medieval concept of OBEDIENCE emerges not as stable, decontextualised, but as flexibly tailored to the contexts of various situations described in the narrative, as indicated by the significance Chaucer attached to the divergent construals of identities of Walter and Griselda due to the differences in their situatedness. The potentiality of various ways in which the story might have unfolded, as well as the real-world implications of the narrative, suggest Chaucer's mastery in conjuring up a world of male fantasy that derives from the culturally conditioned weaker status of the woman in the medieval world. That is, the conceptualisations of this potentiality underlie usage patterns of *mot-*, *mouen*, *shul*, *willen*, and *o(u)ght(e)*, their frequency of occurrence indicating the medieval understanding of the social roles and identities of men and women. Overall, Walter's uses of *willen* indicate the imposition of his will on others. However, it appears significant that *mot-* expressing the necessity to suppress one's personal wishes and desires is used by Walter himself, as well as his sergeant, and Griselda, albeit the motivation behind their uses changes, depending on the person. In effect, the notion of necessity becomes negotiable as well. Furthermore, the marquis frequently manipulates his spouse, her father, and the subjects by declaring he knows what they should want, implicitly commanding the people to subjugate their will to his own. This idea also underlies Walter's uses of *shul*. In Griselda's case, the same modal verb is employed to convey the inevitability of events, founded on her unshaken commitment to the pledge of wifely obedience in spite of seemingly insuperable obstacles put by Walter in her way. This seems to be correlated with Griselda's inability to question the social inequality she has been the victim of. The picture that emerges is one of social bonds and interdependencies that match the medieval conception of hierarchy as the organising principle of God's creation.

It has been shown that the idea of the linguistic construction of subjectivity may be a problematic conception, if it is assumed that the expression of the self can only occur in language. From this perspective, it is problematic particularly with respect to historical records treated as indicative of the language user's self, since, on this interpretation, it is reconstructed on the basis of written sources containing utterances and the co-text. Chaucer's *ClT* provides a good illustration of some potential pitfalls of this approach. While Griselda's self seems to remain intact across all the trials, it is marked with subjection to such an extent that it is no longer clear how much of her "self" is not expressed, hence the question concerning deception in the linguistic construction of the self. Certainly, it cannot be suggested that Griselda is a "self-less" creature, for she adamantly resists Walter's temptations to weaken her will. Likewise, the poker-faced marquis proves an equal challenge for Griselda. Still, while the servant might know some of Walter's intentions, Chaucer makes it clear that Griselda's linguistic expression of her "self" derives from the continuity of her identity as a commoner's daughter who happened to advance up the social ladder thanks to the marquis's whim. Chaucer seems to tinge his *ClT* with a touch of irony inasmuch as Walter's and Griselda's viewpoints might not be perfectly aligned, contrary to the marquis's wish. That is, while he wants to test her 'wommanheede' as his wife, she remains obedient to him as her true master. If this might be the case, then her outward behaviour and words do not prove what Walter intended to put to test. Furthermore, the issue of Griselda's bearing indicates another crucial aspect of identity construal. "Although emotions are an inherent part of our cognition and communication", Pishwa (2009: 9) says, "they are not necessarily expressed by verbal means." The point we make is that facial, vocal, physiological cues (Pishwa 2009: 9) may be misleading as well, which indicates the need to contextualise identity, since its expression can be implicit in the individual's sociocultural situatedness, that is, primarily their interaction with other community members.

Related to this problem is the issue of politeness. Griselda's polite behaviour towards the marquis can be viewed as a cover for her true feelings about Walter's conduct and her own situation. That she must have felt conflicting emotions during the series of distressing trials is obvious from the scene in which she faints on hearing the news about being restored as the marquis's proper wife. Still, her true emotions and thoughts remain unspoken throughout the whole narrative. Even on occasions when Walter abuses her verbally in many speech acts that threaten her self-image, her replies are subdued, as she never fails to maintain her composure. This behaviour is in stark contrast to the impression Griselda gives before marriage, as she trembles with fear when talking to Walter. In her spouse, however, Griselda finds an equally gifted actor. Whatever the true motivation behind Griselda's sangfroid, her utterances and

conduct towards Walter offers an illustration of human power games, in the case of which the possibility of discrepancy between the hidden agenda and the content of the utterance cannot be excluded. Although this issue is beyond the scope of this paper, it seems worth indicating that a pragmatic analysis of such games of politeness might be contextualised relative to the interlocutors' situatedness.

We have offered a view of language use, according to which situated usage is integral to the gestalt of human experience. It is suggested that the contextualisation of the linguistic construction of identity relative to the individual's sociocultural situatedness may inform the study of linguistic cues for identity. One of the main concerns for future linguistic research remains the question of the situated nature of the processes in which humans read and share each other's minds. The pragmatic investigation of the problem may be informed by interdisciplinary research into the human mind in context.

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