

FEMALE DISCOURSES: POWERFUL AND POWERLESS SPEECH IN
SIR THOMAS MALORY'S *LE MORTE DARTHUR*

By

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This work provides a sociolinguistic discourse analysis of female discourses in Sir Thomas Malory's *Le Morte Darthur*. Discourse analysis of power relations in female speech incorporates the methodology of Ethnography of Communication, as well as the Discourse-Historical method of critical text analysis, adopted for literary discourses. Various approaches to discourse analysis, initially designed for the analysis of spontaneous "live" conversations, were found applicable to the analysis of literary discourses. Malory's style of narration differs from the story-telling tradition of his time in that the emphasis is shifted from description to conversation. Contrary to the assumption of marginality of literary discourses as invented rather than spontaneous, discourse analysis of literary conversations contributes to the understanding of literary meaning. In addition, the present analysis contributes to a better understanding of gender differences in discourse and the role of power in female interactions through historical perspective. Power relations, both implicit and explicit, are a driving force in all kinds of

verbal interactions in *Le Morte Darthur*. Powerless and powerful speaking styles are used interchangeably by the female characters throughout the sequences of speech events. Thus, powerless style of discourse is by no means typical of Malory's female characters, unless used strategically in order to assert power.

Verbal interactions of female characters of *Le Morte Darthur* are analyzed in various instances of speech behavior, such as advice, apology, conflict managing, complaining, nagging and teasing. In mixed-gender communications, the patterns of interaction frequently conform to the patterns established for modern male/female communications by the studies on gender and language. This phenomenon attests to the stability of the patterns through times and cultural variations.

Finally, the comparative analysis of female discourses, particularly the discourses involving the concepts of earthly life and earthly love, reveals Malory's philosophy and the profound message of *Le Morte Darthur*.

CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

Overview

This dissertation provides a sociolinguistic discourse analysis of the speech of female characters in Sir Thomas Malory's *Le Morte Darthur*. In particular, the present study reveals and examines powerful and powerless features in the discourses of Malory's female characters. The perception of women's speech by their interlocutors in *Le Morte Darthur* is also analyzed in this dissertation.

A historic outlook on gender roles allows for a comparison of the uncommon roles of Malory's heroines, as revealed by their verbal behavior, to the portrayal of women in other literary texts from medieval era. Thus, this research incorporates the historic perspective on gender roles, as well as the discussion of the concepts of power and gender differences in language, and applying the methodology of discourse analysis, attempts an in-depth analysis of the interplay of speech behavior, gender and power in *Le Morte Darthur*.

Although there has been a great deal of work written on Malory in the field of literary criticism as well as dialectology, there has not been a study that looks at *Le Morte Darthur* from the point of view of discourse analysis. The importance of such analysis becomes evident from even a brief examination of the misconceptions surrounding Malory's work for over 500 years.

A Historical Outlook on *Le Morte Darthur*

Le Morte Darthur has received diverse and drastically disparate opinions and interpretations since the time it was first published in 1485, fourteen years after Sir Thomas Malory's death.¹ Even Malory's first publisher William Caxton² seemed uncertain what to make of the book, as evident from his introduction/preface, in which he instructed the reader to "Doo after the good and leve the evyl, and it shall brynge you to good fame and renomnee" [do after good and leave the evil and it shall bring you good fame and reputation] (cited from 1899 edition: 2). Caxton cautiously added that "for to pass the tyme this book shal be plesaunte to rede in, but for to gyve fayth and byleve that al is trewe that is contayned herein, ye be at your lyberte" (Ibid.: 2) [meaning that the book is pleasant to read, but if you want to believe everything in it, you are at your own risk].

One of the early critics, Roger Ascham, was less benevolent, stating that "in this book those counted the noblest knights that do kill most men without any quarrel, and commit foulest adulteries by subtlest shifts" (Ascham, 1570, cited in Strachey, 1899: 21). Strachey (1899:23), praising the poetic qualities of the book, commented: "despite a really different standard of morals from any which we should now holdup - the writer does for the most part endeavor, though often in but imperfect and confused manner, to distinguish between vice and virtue, and honestly reprobate the former; and thus shows that his object is to recognize and support the nobler elements of the social state in which he lived."

Strachey does not elaborate on what he means by a "*different standard of morals*," but to give some idea of Strachey's own concept of moral standard, in his 1899 edition of *Le Morte Darthur* he abridged all the scenes containing sexual connotations. Such

treatment of a literary masterpiece is a graphic example of what Cook (1994: 2) calls an “unpleasant reduction of literature to the role of moral tutor or vicarious experience.”

Although moral tutorship was a main purpose of western literature from the beginning of Christianity to the XVIII century at least, it must be admitted that this function became less prominent with time (Cook, 1994). It seems that modern readers, as well as film-makers, still struggle to understand the moral principles behind *Le Morte Darthur*, though moral dilemma is seen mostly in the adulterous affair of Lancelot and Guinevere, rather than in the sexual content as a whole.

Eugène Vinaver (1954), in his unaltered edition of Malory’s book, described *Le Morte Darthur* as the revival of the heroic ideal of loyalty to a great cause³. He rejected Walter Scott’s widely known verdict of Malory’s work as “extracted at hazard, without much art or combination, from various French sources” (7). While most of the modern literary analysts lean towards Vinaver’s evaluation of the book in general, the female characters and their roles in *Le Morte Darthur* still receive disparate, sometimes incompatible interpretations. Malory’s heroines are seen as either a threat to spiritual endeavors (McInerney, 2001), or an embodiment of weakness and infidelity (Edwards, 1996; Wheeler and Tolhurst, 2001), or as destroyers of knights and the order of knighthood (Fries, 1980; 1994), or else as mere witnesses of the deeds of honor (Armstrong, 2003). It seems that the verbal behavior of the female characters is the main source of the contradictory interpretations.

Male and female roles in *Le Morte Darthur* are seen as antipodal (LaFarge, 1992; Armstrong, 2001; Gibson, 2001), with extreme masculinity of the knights and ultimate

femininity of the ladies, while any deviations from such formula are treated as a reversal of sex-roles (LaFarge, 1992; Fries, 1996; Gibson, 2001).

The purpose of this dissertation, in addition to conducting a sociolinguistic discourse analysis of the female speech behavior in *Le Morte Darthur*, is to address the misconceptions concerning the roles of the female characters therein. Ultimately, the findings of this study may contribute to the understanding of meaning of *Le Morte Darthur*, in particular, the roles of women as revealed through the analysis of female discourses.

Methodology

The present analysis of powerful and powerless attributes in the speaking style of Malory's female characters incorporates methodologies of sociolinguistics and discourse analysis.

Various approaches to discourse analysis are discussed and applied to the text analysis, with a main focus on the methodology of ethnographic approach, which emphasizes settings, contexts and social conventions, as components of discourse analysis (Gumperz and Hymes, 1972; Hymes, 1974; Saviile-Troike, 1982; Coulthard, 1985).

The **historical** context of interaction, introduced by Habermas (1970, 1971) and incorporated into Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), in particular into the **discourse-historical** method (Wodak et al., 1990; Titcher et al., 2000, and references therein), is relevant to the present analysis. The historical approach to discourse analysis includes not only an accurate record of settings and contexts, but also a requirement for the content of the discourse to be confronted with all relevant historical facts and events (Titcher et al., 2000: 159).

The methods of linguistic discourse analysis have been initially developed in respect to conversational communication, while their applicability to literary discourses was for a long time put to doubt by the speech act theorists (Austin, 1962; Searle, 1975). Structural analysis of narrative as a form of discourse, the **narratology** (Todorov, 1969; Greimas, 1970), emerged at the interface of anthropology, formal logic and cognitive psychology as “the integrated study of all levels of narrative phenomena” (Pavel, 1985). Pivotal for the narratology was the analysis of **literary meaning**. Derivable from abstract description of intertextual structures, this analysis was first applied to folktale and myth structures (Propp, 1928; Lévi-Strauss, 1958). It was discovered within this line of research that narrative could be understood as interaction of semiotic levels by discovering the operations of transfer from deep structures to surface structures (Chomsky, 1965; Greimas, 1970; Courtés, 1976).

Chomsky’s (1965) concept of deep and surface structures, applied to the study of literary meaning, plays an important role in the present analysis.

Another consequential theory for the literary discourse analysis is the structural concept of mode and voice (Genette, 1972, cited in Pavel, 1985) referring to the narrative distances, perspectives, and points of view (“who sees?” “who speaks?”). These concepts presuppose that speech event is not a matter between speaker and addressee, but involves, to various degrees, other components and participants. This approach provides for recognition of variously distanced and focused narrators and hearers, such as the author, the implicit or explicit narrator, the implicit or explicit reader, spectator and reflector (Stanzel, 1979). From the point of view of this analysis, Malory’s narration can be seen

not only as literary discourse between the author and the implicit reader, but also as an implicit debate between Malory and his sources.

William Labov (1999: 231) also emphasized the **reflexive** nature of literary meaning, stating that “pointless stories are met (in English) with the withering rejoinder; ‘So what?’ Every good narrator is continually warding off this question; when the narrative is over, it should be unthinkable for a bystander to say, ‘So what?’”

It has also been argued that the original intentions of the author do not constitute the full meaning of a literary work, which is not solely created by the author, but supplied by the reader (Beardsley, 1958). As such, the meaning depends on the current conventions and changes in these conventions. In effect, the meaning evolves from one generation of readers to another. This theory may explain the changing perceptions of morality in *Le Morte Darthur* that vary according to the moral standard of the readers’ era.

As mentioned before, theories of discourse analysis appearing under the influence of, or in parallel with, the structuralist narratology, pertained in the first place to conversational communication. Their pragmatic objective has been the effectiveness of verbal interaction in respect to the fore-planned purposes and the emergent goals of individual speakers and the interactive system as a whole. Accordingly, Speech Act Theory emphasized appropriateness (Austin, 1962, 1975; Searle, 1975) as a critical evaluative variable for which a set of principles and maxims have been formulated (Grice, 1975). Critical evaluation of this approach to the literary discourse analysis can be found in Levin (1976) and Pratt (1977).

A supposedly alternative, but in many aspects complementary approach commences, as Dell Hymes (1974:VIII) indicates, with the ideas of Sapir (1929), stating that linguistics is in danger of becoming scholastic if not vitalized by the interests that lie beyond the formal interests in language. One such vitalizing interest was found in the application of linguistics to the study of human behavior, as a link between anthropology, ethnography, sociology and psychology, known as the Ethnography of Communication. In listing a number of “orientations toward language” that are essential for the Ethnography of Communication, Hymes (1974:9) designates “the appropriateness of linguistic elements and messages” to be added to the multifunctional concept of language and “the community or other social context as starting point of analysis and understanding.” Returning to the appropriateness later in the discussion, Hymes (1974:156) states that this property is, in fact, a relation between **sentences** and **contexts**, requiring analysis of both. Moreover, the communicative conduct of community is seen as a starting point of ethnographic linguistic analysis.

This approach is essential for understanding the meaning of the discourses in *Le Morte Darthur*, as these discourses are rooted in the cultural and historic context. For instance, the phrase “Keep thee” (or “Keep thee away”), frequently uttered by the knights in Malory, and signaling the beginning of a joust, is entirely unintelligible without the knowledge of the norms of interaction within this particular cultural event (i.e., the joust). Without knowing the cultural and social norm of interaction, in this case, of the relevant historic timeframe, it is impossible to determine whether the discourse participants are violating these norms or adhering to them.

Another method of discourse analysis, the elements of which are incorporated in this work, is Critical Discourse Analyses (CDA), a method of text analysis that identifies literary meaning with social meaning, postulating a correlation between social and linguistic structure (Fairclough, 1989, 1992, 1995; an overview of philosophical and sociological works that contributed to CDA can be found in Titscher et al., 2000). Fairclough (1995) convincingly demonstrated interrelation and the reciprocal methodological impacts of intertextual analysis and discourse analysis.

A less politically committed, but more conscious of historical components branch of CDA, the discourse-historical method (Wodak, 1990; Wodak and Reisigl, 1999) develops the concept of discourse as a complex cluster of simultaneous and sequential thematically interrelated linguistic events occurring within a specific social field. This methodology presupposes interconnectedness of discursive and other social practices, giving a due attention to speech situations, the professional and social status of participants, as well as their political commitments. It requires an accurate recording of settings and contexts, a precise description of text at all linguistic levels, and, above all, a comparison of the utterances with historical events and facts as well as their intertextual analysis. Although the methodology of discourse-historical method is usually applied to the studies of modern texts of political significance, the above mentioned techniques are also applicable to the present analysis of historical novel, such as Malory's *Le Morte Darthur*.

Literary meaning emerges at transition from deep to surface structure, for which a variety of devices are used, among them structural and/or semantic reversals (Zholkovsky, 1985). A reversal at the surface level becomes meaningful at the deep-

structure level. For example, Gibson (2001) interprets the tale of Gareth (Bewmaynes) and Linet as a carnival reversal of male and female speech style, assuming that the overpowering and derisive language of Linet is characteristic of masculine speech. However, this interpretation only functions if derisive language is seen as an exclusive feature of male language (see Chapter 4 for the discussion on gender and language).

In my view, powerful/powerless speaking styles are sometimes reversed in Malory in order to reveal the deep structures of interpersonal relationships. In other words, Malory's characters alter their verbal behavior, switching between powerful and powerless styles, depending on the situation of the speech event, configuration of participants, including the author, the reading audience and other factors, as demonstrated in the following chapters of the present work.

Chapter 2, entitled "Application of Discourse Analysis to the Discourses of *Le Morte Darthur*," demonstrates how different approaches to discourse analysis can be combined and applied to the analysis of powerful and powerless female discourses. The chapter aims to show that a combination of different approaches to discourse analysis is beneficial to the present study. Chapter 3 discusses the issue of powerful and powerless discourses in *Le Morte Darthur* in relation to gender differences in speech, and within the framework of sociolinguistics and gender and language. Finally, Chapter 4 is a comparative analysis of powerful and powerless female discourses in Malory's *Le Morte Darthur* and the sources.

The dissertation concludes with an overview of the analysis herein, and offers directions for further research, as well as a discussion of the limitations of the study.

Notes

1. Malory's work is entitled *Le Morte Darthur* in Caxton's first edition (1481), as well as in Oscar Sommer's first complete modern script edition (1891), which is the exact replica of Caxton's edition, except for the original Gothic script that has been substituted by Sommer for modern script.
2. In this dissertation I quote from E. Vinaver's 1970 edition of Malory's book, entitled "Malory." This edition slightly differs from Sommer's, as it is based not on Caxton's first edition, but on a recently found Winchester manuscript of Malory's work. The Winchester manuscript and Caxton's edition exhibit slight discrepancies that are, in our opinion, unessential for this work.
3. Vinaver's edition differs from Sommer's, as it is edited by Vinaver in a way of inserting punctuation marks and adding additional chapter titles. In my view, it is important to use both editions for reference.

CHAPTER 2
APPLICATION OF DISCOURSE ANALYSIS
TO THE DISCOURSES OF MALORY'S *LE MORTE DARTHUR*

*Than the quene seyde, 'I will take with me
suche knyghtes as lykyth me beste.'
'Do as ye lyste', seyde kynge Arthure.¹
Le Morte Darthur*

Introduction

In this chapter I apply the analytical frameworks of the Ethnography of Communication and Conversation Analysis to the discourses of Malory's *Le Morte Darthur*. I also incorporate in the analysis the elements of Speech Act Theory and Interactional Sociolinguistics.

It must be noted that the analytical frameworks I refer to have been designed for "live" discourses rather than for the analysis of literary text. Nonetheless, Fairclough (1989) argues that textual analysis involving a simultaneous analysis of content and form or "texture" of the text is, in fact, a part of discourse analysis. While analyzing Shakespearean literature, Coulthard (1985) also suggested that a detailed analysis of *authorial* technique and stylistic features can be more successfully achieved within a rigorous linguistic framework. Indeed, it is important to consider the role and participation of the author in verbal interactions of the text when applying discourse analysis to the analysis of literary text. The methodology of Ethnography of Speaking defined by Hymes (1962) may be particularly effective in analyzing the author's participation in literary discourses, as ES framework recognizes five major participant roles: addresser, addressee, speaker, hearer and audience. While the literary characters

are engaged in the addresser – addressee interaction, the author and the reader assume the respective roles of a speaker (or “speaker for another”) and the audience. In a relevant argument Pratt (1977) notes that Grice’s (1975) co-operative principle (which includes the maxims of relation, quality, quantity, and manner, requiring the speaker to be relevant, clear, consistent and parsimonious in keeping with the purposes of conversation) can be applied to both author – reader interaction and to the interactions of discourse participants of the literary text. Just as “live” participants of discourse often violate Grice’s cooperative principle, so do the participants of textual discourses. As Pratt (1977) and Coulthard (1985) have shown, such violations are crucial for discourse analysis, as they are often intentional. In Coulthard’s example from *Othello*, while being interrogated by Othello, Desdemona systematically violates the maxims with an “off-record” purpose of acquitting Cassio.

Literary texts are dependent on social and historical resources, which are defined by Bakhtin (1986) as genres, a mixture of which often occurs within a text. In the case of a historical novel, it is inevitable that the discourses are created by the author or borrowed from the period sources or a mixture of sources relevant to the described events. In Malory’s case, there are virtually no authentic sources of the period to which his heroes are assigned (that is the 5th or 6th centuries, known as the “Dark Ages”). The earliest historical or pseudo-historical accounts of these periods of time appeared in the 12th century, while their allegedly Celtic sources are either lost or non-existent. The literary sources from which Malory drew his material were mostly of Armorican Briton or Norman origin (Bruce, 1987). However, the contents of the above sources, particularly the discourses, were greatly altered or composed in their entirety by Malory (who thereby

became a participant in these discourses). It seems likely that Malory also adopted the communication styles of his 15th Century contemporaries for the verbal interactions of his characters, thus adding a distinguishable historic timeframe to their discourses. It is a situation similar to what Kristeva (1986) describes as “the insertion of history into a text and of the text into history.”

The application of the modern methods of discourse analysis to the verbal exchanges of *Le Morte Darthur* reveals the use of verbal contextualization cues, identity display, face-work, conversational competence of the openings, sustenance, and other discourse features addressed in this chapter.

Power is another phenomenon “brought into play through discourse” (Hutchby, 1999). According to Foucault (1977), power is an interactive concept, a potential that is not merely possessed by an agent, but reinforced, accepted or resisted by the others. In Medieval society the distribution of power was largely determined by the social status. Those of noble status were instantly recognized by their dress or heraldic bearings and treated accordingly. Perhaps for that reason, or rather in spite of it, Malory (himself a nobleman) seemed to be in favor of the situations in which the knights of noble birth (such as Sir Gareth) would disguise their identities, thereby choosing to take no advantage of their high social status.² Such masquerades allow for various instances of miscommunication, numerous misunderstandings, jokes, and arguments.

Moreover, on the level of author – audience communication, the masquerades could be Malory’s way of hinting to the reader that true identities of the historical persons depicted in the novel are hidden behind the masks. In the words of Helen Cooper (1996: 265), “there is more going on in *Le Morte* than meets the eye.” Thus, for diverse reasons,

Malory's characters at times display their identities, while at other times find it best to conceal them. In a similar way, the social status in *Le Morte Darthur* can be displayed or downplayed, depending on the purpose of the interaction and the participants.

King Arthur in *Le Morte Darthur* is the founder of the Round Table, the symbol of equality; hence, Arthur often downplays his royal status in the verbal exchanges with the knights of the Court to demonstrate his equality with the knights. In contrast, the principal female characters, such as Queen Guinevere (King Arthur's wife), Queen Morgause of Orkney or Dame Linet frequently display their high social status in their interactions. Yet another heroine, Queen Isode of Ireland, renounces her royal status for the sake of her lover Trystram, but maintains a high position in society due to her extraordinary communicative competence (as discussed in the following section, entitled "Speech Acts and Interactional Sociolinguistics"). Thus, Malory's characters exhibit differences in verbal behavior that are not only gender-related, but also idiosyncratic.

Speech Acts and Interactional Sociolinguistics

Speech act theory stems from philosophy of language. It was initiated by J. Austin in *How To Do Things With Words* (1962). Austin distinguished constative utterances from the performative ones. Unlike the constatives that simply provide information, the performatives create a world, in which a certain action can be performed by the speaker or the hearer. The truth/falsity criterion is applicable to constatives, because they describe world with words, but not to the performatives, which create world with words. The theory was further developed by J. Searle in "Speech Acts" (1962) and subsequent work. Searle has defined speech acts more broadly as basic units of communication. Central to the theory, as expounded by Searle, is the principle of expressibility: whatever can be meant can be said, while the intention of an utterance can be deciphered by a hearer who

has a sufficient linguistic competence. Speech acts provide information (words relate to world), impose directives on the hearer (words create world, in which the hearer is expected to perform an action), or commit the speaker to a certain action. The speech act taxonomy is based on these functions with a set of rules defining each class of speech acts. By applying the taxonomy of speech acts and the rules of defining individual speech event, Schiffrin (1994) showed that the speech act methodology is a powerful tool for analyzing multifunctional utterances. Questioning, for example, elicits the addressee to provide information that creates a “preparatory condition” for an action or a sequence of verbal responses committing the conversationalists to perform an action. As Austin (1962) has asserted, “it is always necessary that the *circumstances* in which the words are uttered should be in some way, or ways, appropriate, and it is very commonly necessary that either the speaker himself or other persons should also perform some other actions.” Austin viewed *locution* and *illocution* as abstractions only, stating that “every genuine speech act is both,” thus, in a way, linking Speech Act theory to Interactional Sociolinguistics. However, Searle’s expressibility principle presupposes that with a proper *illocutionary force* any intention can be made explicit.

In his pioneering work on application of linguistic discourse analysis to literary discourse, Ohmann (1971) has claimed that Speech Act theory does not apply to literary “quasi speech acts,” because literary speech acts lack the illocutionary force attached to spontaneous speech acts. Yet verbal exchanges of *Le Morte Darthur* often include performative and even constative speech acts in which *locution*, the actual words used by the speaker, differs from *illocution*, the speaker’s intention behind the utterance, which to Austin (1962) constitutes a definition of *illocutionary force*. In the following

example a knight called Sir Bendaleyne initiates a verbal exchange with a passing knight by a performative speech act in which the force of the utterance does not fully correspond to the literal meaning of its components.

"Thau shalt nat passe this way, for other thou shalt juste with me othir ellys be my presonere."

[You shall not pass this way, for either you shall joust with me or else be my prisoner.]

Sir Bendaleyne seems to be offering his opponent (Sir Gareth of Orkney) a choice between jousting and becoming a prisoner; however the illocutionary force of his performative utterance is that of a challenge to a joust. It is perfectly clear to both the speaker and the hearer that the alternative – voluntarily becoming a prisoner – is unacceptable and, moreover, offensive to any knight. Thus, *or else be my prisoner* is not a valid alternative, but more of an insult or a threat. The entire utterance is multifunctional as it contains a challenge and a provocation by way of insult and/or a threat.

Only two lines of text describing the course of the joust separate the above performative speech act from the *constative* speech act informing us that mortally wounded Sir Bendelayne “rode forth to his castell there beside, and there dyed” [rode to his castle and there died]. This constative is short and precise; it is entirely unambiguous and there is no situation in which it can be misinterpreted. Nevertheless, in discourse there is scarcely an utterance that is “just said” in a way of description without any implicit meaning behind it. A rapid transaction from Bendelayne’s insolent challenge to the author’s brief description of Bendelayne’s impending death may be Malory’s way of telling us that Bendelayne got what he deserved (Bendelayne insulted the other knight for no reason, challenged him to a fight and, subsequently, suffered a disastrous defeat).

De Capua and Boxer (1999) describe a pattern of male interactional behavior, which is realized in insults, put-downs and one upmanship, as *verbal dueling* or *jousting*. This pattern is well pronounced in the text of *Le Morte Darthur*, where male characters often participate in verbal jousting that transgresses into physical combat. Of course, it is usually the counter-heroes rather than the heroes that initiate confrontational behavior, as shown in the above example.

Verbal jousting for the sake of jousting, or in other words, insulting a stranger with a sole purpose of creating a conflict, is a concept entirely alien to the female characters of *Le Morte Darthur*. The women often seek to *recommend* themselves to others, impress each other favorably and achieve **solidarity** through discourse (on solidarity in discourse see Wolfson, 1988, Coates, 1993, Boxer, 2002).

Isode, the Queen of Ireland, wishes to “recommunde” herself “into quene Gwenvere” and introduces herself to Guinevere with the following words,

(2) “There be within this lond but four lovers, and that is sir Lancelot and dame Gwenvyer, and sir Trystrames and quene Isode”(267).

[There are within this land but four lovers and that is sir Lancelot and dame Guinevere and Trystram and quene Isode].

From the point of view of Speech Act theory, Isode’s constative utterance fails the truth criterion (because there are bound to be more than four lovers in the land). Yet it is not Isode’s purpose to inform Guinevere of how many lovers are there; her utterance has a *symbolic* meaning as a component of socializing behavior. Isode wishes to demonstrate her solidarity with Guinevere, the Queen of England by pointing out the similarity of their situation: both queens are in love with their knights. But as far as power is concerned, the two queens are not on equal terms. Isode renounced her royal status when she left her husband King Mark for Trystram, and now she finds herself in a powerless

situation, which makes her turn to powerful allies. Isode seeks Guinevere's acceptance and approval by showing her own acceptance and approval of the English Queen. In that sense, Isode's message may also be considered a *positive politeness* strategy, a concept described by Brown and Levinson (1989) as a desire to project a positive self-image and to be treated as a member of an "in-group." In this case, the speaker's own words define the desired *in-group* as the group of four lovers of high social status, in which the speaker wishes to be included. Thus, Isode's utterance (2) exemplifies verbal behavior the meaning of which can only be decoded through its contextualization.

Contextualization of discourse is the focal point of Interactional Sociolinguistics initiated by John Gumperz's work on conversational inference as a situated (context-bound) process and by Goffman's analysis of discourse as a form of social interaction (Goffman, 1967 and subsequent work cited in Schiffrin, 1994; Jaworski and Coupland, 1999; Boxer, 2002).

This approach draws from anthropology and sociology, emphasizing the roles of prosodic and paralinguistic *contextualization cues* (Gumperz, 1977).

Speech Act Theory also recognizes indirect speech acts (as those in which form does not match the intention), but does not fully account for symbolic value of speech. It considers *situational cues* (Ibid.) as marginal to what is said. In contrast, Interactional Sociolinguistics deals primarily with these aspects of verbal communication. Insofar as any speech act intention is modified in respect to anticipated behavior of other participants, all speech acts are multifunctional and are to a certain degree indirect. Their multiple meanings are revealed by relating them to a linguistic system of social interaction. The interpersonal conventions, ambiguity, avoidance devices, face saving and

risk taking aspects of linguistic behavior are the means by which the discourse participants are aligned (or realigned) according to their roles in defining the conversational framework and accepting it. For instance, interrogative form can be employed in directives, reminders, in nagging, and in other speech acts widely different from information requests (Boxer, 2002). The differentiation of meaning depends on contextualization cues: the non-verbal signals that are intuitively decoded, as well as the verbal signals, such as the details of intonation, and also lexical and syntactic choices. Errors in decoding of the meaning lead to miscommunication as in the exchange between King Arthur and Sir Lancelot, which concerns the undiscovered identity of a knight in disguise. Arthur guesses that Lancelot knows who the mystery knight is, when Lancelot remarks:

“Have ye no mervayle, for ye shall ryght well know that he is com of full noble bloode—“(200)

[Do not be surprised, for you shall right well know he is of noble blood].

Arthur misreads the contextualization cues of the above remark and expects Lancelot to reveal the identity of the knight. But Lancelot is bound to keep the secret and only wishes to state that soon the knight’s identity will be revealed to Arthur by the knight himself.

In further construction of the dialogue between Arthur and Lancelot, the two speakers participate in “face work,” i.e. the participants desire to save one’s own face or the face of the others and to avoid committing a “face threatening act” (Goffman, 1967; Brown and Levinson 1987). *Face work* is often realized through the language of hint, innuendo and ambiguities, which gives the participants a choice “to act as if they have not received the message contained in a hint” (Goffman, 1967).

(3) “Hit semyth by you,” seyde kynge Arthure, “that ye know his name and frome whens he com”

[It seems by you, said King Arthur that you know his name and from where he came].

“I sippose I do so, seyde sir Launcelot, “or ellys I wolde not have yeffyn hym the hyghe Order of Knyghthode, but he gaff me suche charge that I woll never discover hym—“

[I suppose I do so, said sir Lancelot, or else I would not have given him the high Order of Knighthood, but he gave me such a charge that I will never discover him]. (210)

Arthur’s statement “It seems by you that you know his name” is not interrogative by form, yet it contains 1) an implicit question, which would be analogous to “do you know his name?”, 2) a request for information “what is his name?” and, considering that Arthur’s royal status gives him power over his interlocutor of lesser social status– 3) a directive “tell me his name.” There is also something of an embedded reproach “you know his name but you would not tell me.” In his reply Lancelot addresses all aspects of Arthur’s multifunctional utterance. “*I suppose I do so,*” answers the question “do you know his name,” which was implied but never actually asked. “*Or else I would not have given him a High order of Knighthood*” is a clarification of “*I suppose I do so.*” What follows next “*but he gave me charge not to discover him*” diverts Arthur’s implicit directive (3). A direct refusal to satisfy Arthur’s curiosity would have constituted a face-threatening act. Therefore, Lancelot is using an oblique face-saving form of denial. In his turn, Arthur chooses to withdraw his inquiries before a potential threat to Lancelot’s face occurs. Both interlocutors are performing an *avoidance ritual* (Ibid.) in which a great deal of face-saving work is involved. Refusals are not likely to be considered a solidarity-establishing speech behavior, yet they “can serve to affirm or reaffirm a relationship” (Boxer, 2002, p.52, see also Beebe, et al., 1985). In this case, King Arthur and Lancelot

are friends both of whom possess an extremely high, yet not entirely equal, social status. An imbalance of status creates a delicate situation in which it is easy for one speaker to cross the boundaries by imposing on the other. Their friendship largely depends on the recognition of each other's face needs, which is why Arthur takes no advantage of his own more powerful status but chooses an indirect form of questioning over an explicit directive. Thus, even though refusal is a speech act that generally carries a negative semantic label (Ervin-Tripp, S. 1976, Beebe, et al., 1985, Boxer, 2002), a carefully worded refusal reaffirms Lancelot's friendship with Arthur.

Notice also the informal nature of the conversation: Arthur addresses Lancelot simply as "you" and Lancelot uses no elaborate forms of address such as "My Lord" or "Fair Sire" that were commonly used when addressing the King. Coulthard (1985) notes that in Shakespearean time, 16th century, "you" was the form of address of equals, while "thou" was usually reserved for addressing a person of inferior status. It is evident that in Malory's time, a century before Shakespeare, the distinction between the two pronouns has already acquired its social significance. Lancelot forgoes the formalities when addressing the King, while Arthur displays the social equality of the two of them by his choice of "you."

Queen Guinevere, in a dialogue with her lover Lancelot, begins her speech by addressing Lancelot as *you* (*ye*), thus treating him as equal in status, as in "but ever **ye** ar oute of thys court" [you are always away from this court]. Yet as the conversation progresses she switches to calling him *thou*. This alteration is not accidental; in the course of the conversation the Queen becomes angry with Lancelot, and wishes to display the social distance between herself and her knight.

(4) “Sir Launcelot, now I well understonde that **thou** arte a false, recrayed knight and a comon lechourere, and lovyste and holdiste othir ladies and of me **thou** haste dysdayne and scorne. For wyte **thou** well, now I undirstonde thy falsehede I shall never love **the** [thee] more, and loke **thou** be never so hardy to com in my syght. And ryght here I dyscharge **thee** thys courte, that **thou** never com within hit, and I forfende **thee** my felyship, and uppon payne of **thy** hede that **thou** see me nevermore!” (612)

[Sir Lancelot, now I understand that **thou** art a false knight, who loves and holds other ladies. Now I understand your falsehood I shall never love **thee** again, do not come in my sight. I discharge **thee** from this court, never come within it, and upon pain of **thy** head **thou** see me never more].

Guinevere consistently uses “thou” to emphasize the superiority of her royal status by addressing Lancelot as inferior. Moreover, there are no face-saving strategies in the Queen’s speech, which is extremely direct and face threatening to Lancelot. He produces no reply and, although not at fault, makes no attempt to explain himself. The direct nature of the interaction (4) is in sharp contrast with Arthur’s dialogue with Lancelot (3) where the participants manage to avoid confrontation by speaking the language of innuendo. Yet in both examples the participants use no cooperative strategies to sustain the conversation that ends abruptly, while the matter is left unresolved. The maintenance of conversation is the point of interest of Conversational Analysis discussed in the next part of the chapter, where it is compared to the ethnographic approach to discourse.

Ethnography of Communication and Conversational Analysis

The methodology of ethnographic discourse analysis aims to discover how communicative competence (part of it accomplished through language) is embedded in culture, our most comprehensive communication system. The analytic grid for Ethnography of Communication founded by Dell Hymes (1962) is known as SPEAKING, which is an abbreviation for setting, participants, ends (goals), act sequence, key, instrumentalities (forms of speech and non-verbal accessories), norms (of social

interaction), and genre. These items of ethnographic discourse analysis are perceived as categories existing prior to the beginning of discourse and, subsequently, reflected in the *text* of discourse (Schiffrin, 1994).

In contrast, the approach known as Conversational Analysis (CA) does not accept anything as pre-existing categories (*being there* before the beginning of discourse), focusing instead on organization of the talk as a creative process in which the context emerges from the text (Schegloff and Sax, 1969). CA reflects on subtle conversational features that bear on unfolding of the talk, while the participants' competence is manifested in the managing of the process itself. CA methodology highlights the problem-solving activity related to opening, sustaining (turn-taking, topic change/repair) and closing of discourse. From a CA point of view the sociolinguistic variables that existed before the conversation has begun, such as extralinguistic factors, are irrelevant.

Although CA and Ethnography of Communication are commonly presented as alternative approaches to discourse, they may not be mutually exclusive (Schiffrin, 1994; Boxer, 2002). The techniques of opening and closing formulas, turn-taking, construction of adjacency pairs revealed by CA are of considerable importance as elements of communicative competence grounded in cultural environment.

In *Le Morte Darthur* the conversation openings, for instances, are often inquiries, such as (4):

“What is his name,” seyde sir Tristram, “and of what bloode he come?”

[What is his name and of what blood he came?].

The inquiries may also contain a reprove (6):

“What, sir, know ye nat me?”

[What, sir, don't you know me?],

or they may constitute an insult or provocation (7):

“A, sir Beawmaynes! Where is thy corrayge becom?”

[Ah, sir Beuwmaynes! What happened to your courage?].

Forms of address used in an opening of conversation depend on the extent of politeness the speakers wish to express towards each other. In a mixed gender conversation, polite forms of address are the ones combined with a compliment, as in the following exchange (8):

“Fayre damesel’, seyde sir lancelot, ‘know ye in this contrey ony adventures nere hande?’”

[Fair damsel, said sir Lancelot, know you in this country any adventures in hand?].

A complimenting epithet “**fair**” added to a form of address “damsel” or “madam,” is a common formula for addressing women in a mixed gender interaction. Men use “fair” when addressing each other as well, as in “Fayre Syre,” “Fayre brother” (when talking to a brother), or even “Fayre fellow” (when talking to a commoner, not a nobleman). Women also use this formula (fayre Madame, fayre sir or fayre knight); however they seem to use the compliment “fair” less frequently in mixed gender exchanges. In a conversation between an unnamed woman and Lancelot – where nearly each conversational turn begins with a form of address by the convention of the time – forms of address used throughout the conversation form a peculiar pattern.

(9) “**Sir**, she seyde, ...but and ye woll be ruled by me I shall helpe you out of this dystresse, and ye shall have no shame nor velony, so that ye wol my promise.

Fayre damesel, seyde sir Lancelot, I grante ye; but sore I am of thes quenys crauftis aferde, for they destroyed many a good knight.

Sir, that is soth, they here of you and they woll have your love. And **sir**, they sey youre name is sir Launcelot du Lake, the floure of knyghts and they be passyng wroth with you that ye have refused hem. But, **sir**, and you wolde promise me to

help me my fadir that hath made a turnemente betwyxt hym and the kynge of North Galys... I shall delyver you.

Now, **fayre damesel**, telle me your fadirs name, and than shall I gyff you an answer.

Sir Knyght, my fadyrs name is kynge Bagdemagus that was foule rebuked at the last turnemente.

I knowe your fadir well, seyde sir Launcelot, for a noble kyng and a good knyght, and by the fayth of my body, your fadir shall have my sercysse, and you both at that.

Sir, gramercy, and tomorne loke ye be redy betymys and I shall delyver you....

Damesel, I shall nat fayle, by the grace of God. (152).

[**Sir**, I shall help you out of this distress if you make me a promise.

Fair damsel, I grant you, but I am afraid of these queens' crafts, for they destroyed many good knights.

Sir, that is so. They heard of you and they would have your love. And **sir**, they say your name is sir Lancelot of the Lake, the flower of knights and they would be very angry because you refused them. But **sir**, if you promise me to help my father at the tournament between him and the king of North Galis... I shall deliver you out of prison.

Now, **fair damsel**, tell me your father's name, and then I shall give you an answer.

Sir Knyght, my father's name is king Bagdemagus who lost at the last tournament.

I know your father well, said sir Lancelot, he is a noble king and a good knight, and by the faith of my body, your father shall have my service, and you both at that.

Sir, thank you, and tomorrow be ready and I shall deliver you....

Damsel, I shall not fail, by the grace of God].

The forms of address in the above dialogue are the following:

Damsel: Sir-

Lancelot: Fayre damesel-

Damsel: Sir- Sir –Sir-

Lancelot: Fayre damsel-

Damsel: Sir knight-sir-

Lancelot: Damesel-

The damsel does not use the epithet “fair,” though the nature of her talk with Lancelot is quite friendly. Lancelot is, at first, consistent in adding ‘fair’ to the form of address, but in the closing of the conversation he abandons the compliment part of the formula and simply addresses his female interlocutor as “damsel.” In this case the damsel is in a more powerful position than Lancelot because he is imprisoned (by the “queens’ crafts”), while the damsel has the power to release him. Even though the damsel and Lancelot begin the conversation as strangers, during the course of the exchange they find common ground for interaction and develop a *relational identity* (Boxer, 2002) which facilitates the process of building solidarity. The rapport between the two speakers develops with every conversational turn. They express their mutual dislike of the villainous queens, as well as their good opinion of the damsel’s father “a noble kyng and a good knyght” and, finally, they agree on helping each other. The damsel asks the knight only to help her father, but sir Lancelot demonstrates his good will towards the damsel by offering to be of service to her as well as to her father, “your fadir shall have my sercyse, and you **both** at that.” The bonding of Lancelot with the damsel may be reflected in the change of Lancelot’s form of address: an inadvertent adjustment to the speech of the interlocutor, known as *convergence* (Giles and Robinson, 1989). According to the *accommodation theory* (Ibid.) the participants may *converge* with each other during their interaction by altering their speech behavior and adopting the speech behavior of the interlocutor, as in the case of the damsel and Lancelot.

In the analysis of the above conversation I combined the techniques of CA with the ethnography of communication concepts including the cultural norms for addressing an interlocutor.

Critical Discourse Analysis

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) sees language as an instrument of various social practices (ideological, political, racist or sexist). Insofar as unequal power relations established in various spheres of social life are reproduced in discourse, CDA addresses the instances of discursive display of power. The approach is similar to the Ethnography of Communication, but the focus of CDA is on the ideological or political content of the text (Foucault, 1971, 1979; Wodak, 1992; Van Dijk, 1993).

The sociolinguistic characteristics of the participants (their gender, social status, etc.), as well as the setting and cultural norms of behavior are relevant to the understanding of the next extract from *Le Morte Darthur*. In addition, certain ideological standpoints of the author emerge in the analysis of the next example, (9). Prince Gareth of Orkeney in disguise is mistaken for a kitchen servant by his traveling companion Dame Linet. When a knight (their host) is about to seat the two travelers at the dining table, Linet objects to sitting next to Gareth:

(9)“Fy, fy’, than seyde she, sir knyght, ye ar uncurtayse to sette a kychyn page afore me“ (183). [Fie, fie, sir knight, you are uncourteous to seat a kitchen servant in front of me].

Linet accuses the host of being uncourteous to her and objects to what she perceives as a serious violation of social conventions. In medieval society the seating arrangement at a dining table was a status-reinforcing procedure. A 14th Century poem *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* provides a detailed account of the order and place that each knight occupied at King Arthur’s dining table. The Round Table is not mentioned in the poem, whereas in *Le Morte Darthur* it plays an important role as a symbol of equality. For the Arthurian knights in the poem their place at the dining table corresponds to their ranking at the royal court. According to the same custom, Dame Linet insists on

her high status being observed by the proper seating at dinner. The story of Linet and Gareth may have appeared in Malory's sources as an episode in the genre of *Amour Courtois* (courtly love), by the rules of which a chivalric lover endures insults and humiliation from his lady to prove his love for her. However, Malory, an obvious proponent of the Round Table concept, turned the story into a social satire in which he mocks certain medieval customs, such as the seating ceremony – a display of social inequality.

It is not clear if Malory's patronage of the Round Table equality extended to the ideas of social equality, because his hero Gareth is not an actual servant but a knight of royal lineage, King Arthur's own nephew. Notably, Malory must have been on good terms with the working classes, when he was imprisoned his bail was paid by a London tailor and a saddler (from the records in Hicks, 1928) ³.

In another exchange from the same episode, Linet and Gareth meet a knight in black armor, who insults Gareth the moment Linet points to the low social class of the latter (10).

“Damsell, have ye brought this knight from the courte of kynge Arthure to be your champion?”

“Nay, fayre knyght, this is but a kitchen knave that was fedde in kyn Arthurs kychyn for almys.”

Than sayde the knight, ‘Why commyth he in such aray? For hit is shame that he beryth you company.’

[Damsel, have you brought this knight from the court of King Arthur to be your champion?

No, fair knight, this is but a kitchen knave that was fed in King Arthur's kitchen.

Than said the knight, why comes he in such aray? For it is shame that he bears you company.]

Linnet humiliates Gareth by calling him “kitchen knave,” while the Black Knight exhibits an equal amount of prejudice towards the lower classes by his words, “It is shame that he [Gareth] bears you company.” Though, in fact, Linnet and the knight merely follow the conventions of the medieval society to which they belong.

Conclusion

In the above analysis I attempted to show to what extent various approaches of discourse analysis can be applied to the study of the discourses of *Le Morte Darthur*. Speech Act theory does not account for the symbolic value of speech, which presents the same difficulties for the analysis of the literary discourses as it does for the analysis of spontaneous speech. Interactional Sociolinguistics studies the meaning created in the process of interaction (Thomas, 1995), which is relevant to the interactions of *Le Morte Darthur*. However, certain non-verbal contextualization clues, such as the details of intonation and tempo of speech are unavailable in this case. Conversational Analysis takes no account of the sociolinguistic variables, which are in a case of a historical novel inseparable from the content of the conversations. Nonetheless, CA can be successfully applied in combination with Ethnography of Communication, the latter approach being, perhaps, the most equipped for the analysis of the literary text of historical significance. The verbal interactions in Malory are deeply grounded in sociocultural context of a wide historic timeframe from the Dark Ages to the late medieval era. Critical Discourse Analysis can only be applied with that timeframe in view. For instance, the distribution of power in the Middle Ages corresponded to the social stratification by class; thus it would unrealistic to expect the literary discourses of that time period to reflect any different model of society. As asserted by Fairclough and Wodak (1997) “utterances are only meaningful if we consider their use in a specific situation, if we understand the

underlying conventions and rules, if we recognize the embedding in a certain culture and ideology, and most importantly, if we know what the discourse relates to in the past.”

Taken out of context, the episode of *Le Morte Darthur*, in which Lancelot is wounded by a huntress, is interpreted (LaFarge, 1992; McInerney, 1996) as an allegorical conflict, signifying Lancelot’s and the author’s fear and hatred of women, combined with suppression of femininity on the author’s part (see more on the Huntress in Chapter 5). Yet such view of female/male relationships in *Le Morte Darthur* is based on a one-page scene of Malory’s work, while completely disregarding hundreds of pages upon which the relationships of the principal characters, such as Guinevere and Isode, are traced through their interactions with male characters. That is not to say that the Huntress episode is entirely unimportant, but in order to draw patterns of gender roles in Malory, it hardly suffices to take just one example of mixed-gender interaction into consideration. It is perhaps not incidental that Malory himself, in his postscript to *Le Morte Darthur*, urged his audience to read the book “from the begynnynyng to the endyng” [from the beginning to the end], as if predicting that passages of his book taken out of context could be severely misinterpreted.

Notes

1. The epigraph translates:
Then the Queen said, ‘I will take with me such knights as I like best.’
‘Do as you wish’, said King Arthur.
2. In addition to the story of Bewmaynes (Sir Gareth), there is a somewhat similar tale of a young nobleman who keeps his identity a secret and consents to be called Le Cote Male Tayle (the ill-shapen coat). Lancelot and Trystram also frequently disguise themselves for diverse reasons but typically to prevent their fame from preceding them at jousts.
3. In Malory’s time it was uncommon for a nobleman to find such devoted friends in the lower classes. If Malory harbored any ideas of social equality, such ideas would have certainly been strongly opposed by the ruling classes.

CHAPTER 3
GENDER AND LANGUAGE IN *LE MORTE DARTHUR*

*“I suppose that we were sente for that I shold be dishonoured. Wherefor, husband, I
counceille yow that we departe from hens sodenly....”*

Le Morte Darthur

Introduction

This chapter focuses on the concepts of power and gender differences in language and provides a sociolinguistic analysis of the speech of female characters in Sir Thomas Malory’s *Le Morte Darthur*. In particular, the study examines to what extent the discourses of Malory’s heroines fall into the category of powerful or powerless speaking style. It also looks into the way women’s speech is received by their interlocutors in *Le Morte Darthur*.

The historic events of Malory’s lifetime are closely associated with two remarkable women, Joan of Arc and Margaret of Anjou, who became the Queen of England and reigned during the War of the Roses¹. Though Malory wrote about much earlier times, the intrigues and battles of the War of the Roses transpire through the pages of *Le Morte Darthur*. In a similar way, Malory’s unconventional and controversial portrayal of female characters may reflect the powerful presence of the above mentioned historic heroines of Malory’s time.

Many scholars see *Le Morte Darthur* as a “masculinist work” (Armstrong, 2003). Edwards (1996) asserts that Malory failed “to treat the feminine” content of his French sources (see discussion on sources in Chapter 4). Noguchi (1981) notes that women of *Le*

Morte Darthur sound manly and defiant. The speech style of both female and male characters is described as terse, dignified and restrained (McCarthy, 1988). These features of speech are perceived as masculine, which allows for the common assumption that Malory disregarded the feminine way of speaking. LaFarge (1992) speaks of the “repressed femininity” in *Le Morte*, and describes Malory’s text as “something of a rearguard action in defense of the wholeness, the public, the masculine” (1992:18).

However, in modern studies on Gender and Language the question of what constitutes women’s speech as opposed to men’s speech is an issue of continuous debate. Robin Lakoff in her pioneering work “Language and Woman’s Place” (1975) suggested that man’s language is forceful, assertive and direct, while woman’s way of speaking is unassertive, immature, less direct and more polite. Subsequent studies, (such as O’Barr and Atkins, 1980) argued that the true distinction lies in the distribution of power, and it is a matter of powerless vs. powerful language rather than women’s or men’s language (on power and gender issue in discourse also see Bergvall, 1996, Boxer, 2002). Furthermore, Freed (1992) and Troemel-Ploetz (1994) have asserted that the view of “*cultural differences*” (Maltz and Borker, 1982, Tannen, 1990) in mixed-gender conversations disregards the issue of patriarchy. The *cultural differences* point of view has been disputed by many feminist linguists, who assert that society subjects women to subordinate roles, which affects their use of language.

Fishman (1983) notes that women who take control of conversation are often “derided and doubt is cast on their femininity.” They are often considered “abnormal” and terms like “castrating bitch,” and “witch” may be used to identify them (Fishman, 1983: 99).

When I compare the findings of modern gender studies like Fishman's to references from medieval texts, a strong similarity emerges revealing a consistency in attitudes to women in powerful roles. Meekness and obedience were encouraged in women of Middle Ages (Bornstein, 1978). Women were expected to speak the powerless language and act accordingly. Deeply rooted stereotypes of gender-appropriate behavior addressed by modern scholars of Gender Studies are often seen in their extreme form in medieval texts. Words like "abominable," "witch" and "manly" were used by medieval historians (Hall, 1548) to describe Joan of Arc. The following reference to Joan from Holinshed (1577: 134) condemns her "man-like" behavior,

"...shamefullie rejecting hir sex, abominable in acts and apparell, to have counterfeit mankind, and to be an instrument of witchcraft and sorcerie."

Queen Margaret, who possessed strong leadership skills, was also compared to a man, "This woman was of stomach and courage more like a man than a woman" (Hall, 1548: 68).

It is clear that having courage or "haute stomach" (having guts, as we would say now) was considered a man's priority. Another quote from Hall describes the uncommon personality of Queen Margaret, and also reveals a strong prejudice against women of unyielding temper,

"The Queen was a woman of great wit and yet of no great wit, of haute stomach, desirous of glory, covetous of honor and of reason, policy, council, and other gifts and talents of nature belonging to a man. But yet she had one point of every woman: for often when she was vehement and fully bent in matter, she was suddenly like a wethercock, mutable, and turning" (79).

The heroines of *Le Morte Darthur* are likewise controversial but no judgement is passed upon them. Malory assigned complex and controversial roles to his female heroines, whose speech is often perceived as masculine. Conventional gender roles also exist in *Le Morte* but the conventions are challenged by the female characters. I assert that Malory empowered the speech of the female characters, and it is their uncommonly powerful speaking style that is at times mistaken for the suppressed femininity. As Bergvall (1996) states, women who display assertive and forceful speech behavior, by a notion of gender dichotomy, would be considered “less feminine, and thus, aberrant or deviant” (1996:192).

The Oath that the Knights of the Round Table take before entering into the Order states that the knights are “allwayes to do ladies, damsels and jantilwomen, and widowes socour.” This (Malory’s) version of the Oath, notably different from the Oath of the sources, is often seen as a representation of Malory’s own view on gender roles. However, the meaning of the Oath, as well as Malory’s conception of gender roles that the Oath possibly entails, has received disparate interpretations. According to Armstrong (2003), the word *always* in the Oath implies that ladies are *always* in need of knight’s succor, which makes women of *Le Morte Darthur* helpless and vulnerable, and reinforces the masculinity of the knights. Armstrong’s view of polarized gender roles in Malory, in particular the ultimate femininity of women, somewhat contradicts the previously mentioned opinions stating that female characters of *Le Morte Darthur* appear manly and defiant and speak the way men do.

Yet, this study challenges both Armstrong’s view of ultimately feminine women in *Le Morte Darthur*, as well as the opposite view that sees Malory’s heroines as perversely

masculine (discussed above). In fact, in his treatment of the Oath, Sir Thomas Malory engages in direct dispute with his sources. In the sources, the protection of the *Church* is the core purpose of Knighthood. Sir Thomas radically changes the Oath, making the protection of *women* the main reason for joining the Order. As I see it, the emphasis of the oath is on the concept of *women*, whereas *always* is used to enhance the permanent nature of the Oath, rather than the condition of women.

The present analysis leads to the conclusion that female personages in Malory are neither deprived of femininity, nor are they 'damsels in distress'. They are strong women struggling against the conventionally powerless position assigned to them by their gender. The combination of powerful and powerless speaking styles of women in *Le Morte Darthur* occurs in various types of speech behavior. This chapter analyzes the verbal behavior of Malory's heroines in situations of conflicts, confrontations, apologies, advice-giving, nagging, and arguing.

The following section, focusing on conflict discourse, is divided into two subsections: Defensive Language and Confrontation.

Conflict Discourse

Defensive Language

One of the favorite topics of medieval literature is a helpless damsel in distress rescued by a chivalric knight (Bruce, 1958). The female characters in Malory, however, are capable of defending themselves. Their speech disarms their opponents, resolves conflicts and dismisses potentially dangerous animosities. At the same time, every one of Malory's heroines (Igrayne, Isode and Guinevere) has her own distinct style of resolving potential or actual conflicts.

A better understanding of the discourse of conflict comes from the field of psycholinguistic research. A study of conflicts between people of diverse cultural backgrounds has revealed eight styles of conflict management: dominating, integrating, compromising, avoiding, obliging, emotional, neglecting and “third party help” (Ting-Toomey et al., 2000; Hamford, 2003). A choice of one or another style depends on such psychological variables as independent versus interdependent behavior and the interrelated face concerns, including the concerns of self-face, other-face and mutual face (Goffman, 1967). It is found by Hamford (2003) that persons with a tendency to act independently prefer direct, as well as integrating conflict management, whereas those tending towards interdependent behavior are inclined to use an indirect style in addition to integrating and compromising. Face concerns are most important for the interdependent behavior category. In particular, a concern for others face may result in conflict avoidance, while the concern for self face is related to integrating and compromising.

These factors play their roles in conflicts the participants of which are Malory’s leading female characters: Igrayne, Isode and Guinevere. The narrator’s voice hardly describes the personalities of these heroines directly (with few exceptions, such as a “little mention” about Guinevere that she was a “true lover” (609). Their characters emerge through sequences of speech events, but perhaps most expressively, through speech behavior in the events of conflict and confrontation. For example, Igrayne and her husband are invited to King Uther’s court, when Igrayne uncovers the true purpose behind that invitation:

“I suppose that we were sente for that I shold be dishonoured. Wherfor, husband, I conceille yow that we departe from hens sodenly” (3).

[I suppose that we were sent for that I should be dishonored. Therefore, husband, I council you that we depart from here suddenly].

In terms of conflict managing, Igrayne's words may be described as the conflict avoidance style, which is characteristic of a person with a strong tendency to act interdependently.

In the following example, Queen Igrayne, King Arthur's mother, is true to her conflict avoidance style when she has to defend herself against unjust accusations.

When Igrayne, comes to court for the first time, Arthur wonders why his mother abandoned him in his infancy and never came forth to reveal his true lineage. Knight Ulphuns accuses Igrayne of being treacherous and dishonest; her reaction is as follows,

“I am a woman and may nat fyght; but rather than I shoulde be dishonoured, there wolde [would] som man take my quarell. But’, thus she seyde, ‘Merlion knowith well, and ye, sir Ulphuns, how king Uther com to me into the castle of Tyntagyl in the likeness of my lorde that was dede three oweres [hours] tofore, and there begate a chylde that night uppon me... And I saw the chylde never aftir, nothir wote [knew] nat what ys hys name; for I knew hym never yette.”(31)

Igrayne's first utterance, “I am a woman and may nat fyght,” emphasizes her compliance with the era's expectations of female weakness. However, not all heroines of *Le Morte Darthur* would agree with Igrayne's statement (that women may not fight). For instance, Isode's mother, who disliked Trystram, at the sight of him “gryped that swerde in hir honde fersely [gripped the sword fiercely], and with all hir myght she ran streyght upon Trystram” (238). This warlike mother is very different from Arthur's mother, Igrayne. The difference can be explained by Igrayne's powerless position in life. King Uthur, Arthur's father, makes Igrayne his wife after killing her husband, and gives Igrayne's infant son Arthur to Merlin. Yet Igrayne endures it all with honor and dignity, which indicates a considerable strength of character.

In her next utterance, “but rather than I should be dishonoured,” the use of the word *dishonour* is noteworthy, as it signifies the beginning of powerful discourse. The conception of honor is usually applied differently to women and men. Woman’s honor is associated with chastity, while men’s honor has to do with character. In the same way, to dishonor a woman implies a sexual assault, but man’s dishonor is damage to his image. For instance, in Shakespeare’s *Henry VI*, Bedford says, ‘Lord Talbot do not so *dishonour* me’, when Talbot hints the former is too old to fight. In Malory, Launcelot exclaims, “What have I done? For now I am *dishonoured*,” as he finds himself fighting his best friend. In the beginning of *Le Morte Darthur*, Igrayne is, in fact, in danger of rape, and back then she says, “I suppose that we were sent for that I should be *dishonoured*.” But in the episode with Arthur mentioned above, Igrayne speaks of dishonor in a “masculine” sense: she is in no sexual danger but she is unjustly accused.

Thus, the latter use of the word *dishonour* signals a turning point in Igrayne’s speech from powerless style of speaking to powerful language. Yet her plea for a knight to fight for her brings her back to the powerless role of a damsel in distress. After what seems like a short pause, where the author’s words are inserted, Igrayne resumes powerful speech: she is assertive, direct, informative, and she defends herself so well that an assistance of a knight is no longer needed – the case is closed.

Of all Malory’s heroines, Igrayne, the woman of the older generation in *Le Morte Darthur*, seems closest to the stereotype of weak women victimized by powerful men and obedient to their will. Yet her verbal behavior in a situation of a conflict gives evidence of a complex personality, and a strong capacity for resolving conflicts. Interestingly, Igrayne manages to defend herself without offending anyone or assigning a direct blame

to anyone, which shows concern for the others face – a distinct characteristic of a conflict avoidance style.

Conflict discourse

Confrontation

As mentioned in the previous section, studies on conflict (Ting-Toomey et al. 2000; Hamford, 2003) distinguish several distinct styles of conflict management, which are interrelated with other behavioral characteristics, such as dependant/independent behavior.

In the following example of conflict discourse in *Le Morte Darthur*, a confrontation occurs when Queen Guinevere, the wife of King Arthur, is attacked by the army of Prince Mellyagaunt, who claims to be in love with the Queen. At the time of the attack the Queen is “on Mayinge” (meaning she is taking part in May festivities), while the knights that accompany her are unarmed and, therefore, unprepared for the defense. The Queen takes it upon herself to manage the unavoidable conflict.

Guinevere’s style of conflict managing, remarkably distinct from that of Queen Igrayne’s, can perhaps be described as the *direct* conflict managing style. This is a **dominating**, forceful and emotional style, characteristic of a person with highly independent nature.

It is indicative of Guinevere’s tendency to act independently that neither her husband, King Arthur, nor any other principle male character, but the Queen herself organizes and manages the festivities. Guinevere’s desire to stay in charge is in accordance with her dominating conflict managing style. Even though, in this case, the Queen finds herself in a powerless position, she manages to regain her power by means of powerful discourse.

Thus, when the attack occurs, Guinevere instantly decides to confront Mellyagaunt,

“Traytoure knight,” seyde Gwenyver, “what caste thou to do? Wolt thou shame thyselff?...Thou shamyst all knighthood

and thyselffe and me. And I lat the wyte [I let thee know]

thou shalt never shame me, for I had levir kut myne owne throte in twayne [rather cut my own throat] rather than thou sholde dishonoure me!” (650).

The Queen begins her speech by accusing Mellyagaunt of treason and uses no polite forms of address or any other strategies that would soften the impact of her speech. Her language is strong and assertive. She batters her attacker with questions and accusations: her utterance “*Wolt thou shame thyselff?*” is an accusation in a form of a question. Yet, as if feeling that the question form is not direct and assertive enough and might lessen the power of her utterance, she rephrases the same accusation, which is now in a form of a statement, “*Thou shamyst all knighthood and thyselffe and me.*”

Mellyagaunt, enraged by her powerful language (perhaps he expects her to act more like a helpless damsel in distress), retorts “*I have loved you many a yere, and never as now cowde [could] I gete you at such avayle [get you at such disadvantage]. And therefore I woll take you as I fynde you [I will take you as I find you]*” and proceeds with the attack. The Queen decides to negotiate,

“Sir Mellyagaunt, sle nat [slay not] my noble knights and I woll go with thee upon thys covaunce [I will go with you upon this condition] that thou save them and suffir hem no more to be hurte, wyth this that they be lad [led] with me wheresomever thou ledyst me...[wherever you lead me]” (651).

Here Guinevere uses a more polite form of address, but her language is still powerful. She makes it clear that she negotiates not because of weakness, but in order to save her knights from being killed, “*sle nat [slay not] my noble knights.*” By her strong language she manages to convince Mellyagaunt that she is in a powerful position: she is

the one who dictates the conditions, “*I woll go with thee upon thys covenauce* [condition].” Guinevere becomes a prisoner in Mellyagaunt’s castle; nonetheless, she manages to maintain her powerful status, as seen from her dialogue with Launcelot (below).

When Launcelot comes to Mellyagaunt’s castle to fight for Guinevere, she once again refuses to play the part of damsel in distress. She greets Launcelot with a question, “*Sir Launcelot, why be ye so amoved [distraught]?*” (655). Guinevere’s question implies that she is in no distress, but it is Launcelot who is in distress. Moreover, it implies that there nothing to be distressed about. Launcelot is bewildered by her question and its implications: he answers her question with a question, “*A! madame, why ask ye me that questyon?*” Guinevere makes it clear that she has the situation under control, “*all thynges put in myne honde [hand].*” What Launcelot does not know is that just as he entered the castle, Mellyagaunt panicked and surrendered to Guinevere (“*holy I put me in your grace*”), begging her to “*rule*” Launcelot. Thus, Guinevere is now in a complete charge of the situation, having power to rule both her enemy and her defender.

The Queen never admits to Launcelot that his arrival had any effect on the events because that would shift the power from her to Launcelot. When Launcelot tells her that his horse was killed by Mellyagaunt’s archers, Guinevere softens her speech and thanks him heartily, “*Truly, seyde the quene, “ye say throuthe, but heartely I thanke you.*” As for the enemy, Guinevere uses her power to the uttermost. In the subsequent scene she urges Launcelot to fight Mellyagaunt to the death. Queen Margaret too was merciless to her enemies in the War of the Roses. She had the rebellious Duke of York beheaded and

his severed head brought to her on a lance (see also Chapter 5, for the comparison of Guinevere's speech/role in this episode and its sources).

Thus, Guinevere's powerful verbal behavior, exhibited throughout the above confrontation sequences is consistent with her direct and dominating style of conflict management.

Women's Talk and Triviality

Women's talk has been often regarded as trivial (Coates, 1993). In medieval literature such a stereotype was frequently reinforced by the female characters who spoke in clichés and offered advice by quoting familiar proverbs. A woman in the *Book of the Knight of LaTour* advises her daughters against being amorous by citing a proverb of the time, "kysynge is nyghe parente and cosyn vnto the fowle faytte or dede" [kissing is a parent of foul deed]. Of course, not every proverb is a cliché, but the fact is that original comments are often reserved for the male characters, while the female characters only get to *repeat* what was said by someone else or recite common sayings, which reinforces the stereotype of triviality of women's speech.

In Malory's work female characters possess an uncommon wisdom; however, their good advice is often disregarded by their male interlocutors. Thus, the intellectually empowered women of *Le Morte Darthur* do not conform to the stereotype of being trivial, yet they have to struggle against that stereotype.

Advising discourse

Isode's Advice

Advising discourse is an interactive communicative process (DeCapua and Dunham, 1993), as it involves a person giving advice and advice seeker. However, within the speech event of advice-giving, advice is often unsolicited, or in other words, proffered

without having been asked for (Boatman, 1987; Banerjee and Carrell, 1988). Even the studies on *solicited* advice (DeCapua and Duham, 1993: 521) show that more usual than specific requests for advice are *vague* requests, or *implicit* requests that are expected “to be evident from the description of the problem.” It may be inferred from these findings that *problem-telling*, which can also be considered a form of *indirect complaining*, is a type of verbal behavior that prompts the offering of advice. But it is not always the case, as studies reveal evidence of distinct gender differences (Boxer, 1993), as well as differences related to social distance (Wolfson, 1988) in responses to troubles-telling and indirect complaining. Boxer’s (1993) study indicates that women are far less likely than men to respond to an indirect complaint with advice.

In the example below, Malory’s heroine Queen Isode offers advice to her lover Sir Trystram in response to his indirect complaint, though it is clear from the context of the exchange that her behavior is more of an exception than the rule. The conversation between Isode and Trystram occurs when the latter comes back from the tournament and notices that something is wrong with Isode.

“Madame, for what cause make ye us such chere? We have bene sore travayled all this day. [had a difficult day]”

“Myne owne lorde, seyde Le Beall Isode, For Goddys sake, be ye nat displeased wyth me, for I may none othirwyse [otherwise] do. I sawe thys day how ye were betrayed and nyghe brought unto youre dethe...[nearly brought to your death] And therefore, sir, how sholde I suffir in youre presence suche a felonne and traytoure as ys sir Palomydes? [how should I tolerate in your presence such a felon and traitor as sir Palomydes?]” (460).

Trystram asks Isode what is the matter, and without waiting for her answer reproaches her, as he expects a cheerful greeting after a hard battle. His inquiry

“Madame, for what cause make ye us such chere? We have bene sore travayled all this day. [had a difficult day]” contains an indirect complaint (about having a difficult day

and not receiving a proper greeting). But Isode is anxious because she single-handedly uncovered an intricate plot concocted by a false friend Palomydes to kill Trystram. She starts with an elevated form of address and an extensive apology: these features belong to the powerless language. ‘*Myne owne lorde*, is a form of address more appropriate for a person of a higher status, yet on a social scale Isode ‘outranks’ Trystram, for he is a knight and she is the Queen of Cornwall. Likewise, her apology is unnecessary, as she has done nothing wrong. Perhaps Isode is being excessively polite to erase the status difference between her and her beloved Trystram. She seeks to express her love and appreciation for her interlocutor by using overly polite language, which can be considered a “positive politeness” strategy (on positive politeness see Brown and Levinson, 1987). Her warm, gentle words, “*Myne owne lorde, be ye nat displeased wyth me, for I may none othiwyse do,*” emphasize her soft and wise nature; and they also signal the beginning of powerless discourse. Yet what follows next are strong words of condemnation for Palomydes (“*felonne and traytoure*”) pronounced with great courage in the very presence of the treacherous knight. Isode’s speech becomes direct and straitforward, “*I sawe thys day how ye were betrayed,*” (like Queen Margaret she could probably be described as a woman of ‘haute stomach’), as she switches to powerful discourse. The combination of soft, overly polite language that occurs in the beginning of Isode’s speech and the powerful style of the main part of her message conveys her conflicting emotions. Indirectly, she advises her knight to get rid of the “*traytoure Palomydes.*” But Trystram pays little attention to Isode’s words (could it be that the powerless start weakened the total effect of her revelations?). He quickly accepts

Palomydes' apology and says, "*No forse!* [=It does not matter] *All ys pardoned as on my party.*"

It is possible that Isode's important speech does not receive the attention it deserves because of the triviality stereotype mentioned above: woman's speech is stereotypically regarded as trivial. It is evident from the author's comment, "*Than La Beall Isode hylde downe her hede and seyde no more at that tyme,*" that Isode (and the author) is not satisfied with the outcome of the exchange, (she "*seyde no more at that tyme*" implies that there was more to say on the subject and "*Isode hylde downe her hede*" means she was not satisfied with the outcome of the conversation).

Malory's intelligent Isode is also a complex and unconventional character: "the fayrest and pyerles of all ladyes" [the fairest and peerless of all ladies] she denounces her royal status and leaves her husband King Mark of Cornwall for her lover sir Trystram. Her verbal behaviour is equally unsterotypical. As Trudgill (1972) suggests, women display their social status through signals of status in their speech. However, in this case, Isode downplays her social status for the sake of achieving solidarity with her interlocutor.

Nagging

Diana Boxer's (2002) in-depth analysis of nagging in regard to power relations describes nagging as a complex verbal behavior including elements of griping, complaining, reproaching and scolding. The prevalence of one or another element, as well as the frequency of nagging in general, depends on such sociolinguistic variables as gender, social distance and a degree of certainty of relationships between the participants of a speech event. Nagging, presupposing a certain degree of intimacy between the

interlocutors, often occurs in *couples* talk, as in the following sequence taking place between Isode and Trystram,

“I mervayle me muche [I am much surprised] that ye remembir nat youreselff how ye be here in a straunge contrey [that you do not remember yourself that you be here in a strange country], and here be many perelous [perilous] knightes, and well ye wote [you know] that kinge Mark is full of treson [treason]. And that ye woll ryde thus to chace and to hunte unarmed, ye myght be sone [soon] destroyed.”

“My fayre lady and my love, mercy! I woll [will] no more do so” (416).

Isode’s form of address “*ye*” is informal and not overly polite as in the previous dialogue. However, her utterances are indirect and wordy, possibly undermining the importance of her speech. Her ‘indirectness’ makes her speaking style powerless. It is possible that Isode intentionally weakens the force of her utterances so that they would not sound like orders. By downplaying her royal status (out of consideration for Trystram’s lower status) she undermines the power of her utterances. However, Isode starts her speech with “*I mervayle me muche* [I am much surprised]”; she does not use any terms of endearment or elevated forms of address in the beginning of this talk, as she did in the beginning of the previous ones. Perhaps Trystram senses the lack of positive politeness in her speech. His response is peculiarly emphatic: he is jokingly using two forms of address at once (“*My fayre lady and my love*”), and an exaggerated apology (“*Mercy*”[pardon me]) before agreeing to do what she asks. It seems he perceives her speech as a sort of *nagging*. Nagging, presupposing a repeated request and a reminder, may take a form of an interrogative, though its illocutionary force is that of a directive (Boxer, 2002). Isode’s utterance includes request and a reminder “*I mervayle me muche that ye remembir nat youreselff...* [I am much surprised that you do not remember yourself...],” and certainly has the force of a directive. Trystram clearly does not perceive her speech as a mere request or he would not have offered her an apology.

By definition, nagging is a sequence starting with a request, followed by a reminder or more than one reminder, and, if the goal is not achieved, ending in reproach or scolding. In Malory, the narrative never presents a **complete** nagging sequence. However, it is mentioned on more than one occasion by the author that Trystram found himself in dangerous situations because of his habit of not wearing armor and, eventually, that habit costed him his life. Thus, it seems as if on the level of “deep structures” the author nags his hero through the words of Isode, as both the author and Isode wish to prevent the forthcoming tragedy. In what can perhaps be called *implicit nagging*, the author transfers his own knowledge of the pending events to his heroine, yet leaving Trystram entirely oblivious of what is to come. Later in the narrative we find that Trystram once again neglected to wear armor, despite of his agreeing with Isode’s advice (“I woll [will] no more do so”) in this episode.

Isode’s advice in this case, however sound and useful, can have the illocutionary force of nagging if it was perceived as such by Isode’s interlocutor (Boxer, 2005: personal communication). Trystram’s resistance to following Isode’s advice may not be accidental. In couples talk it is women who are frequently naggers (Boxer, 2002), possibly because men are “inclined to resist even the slightest hint that anyone, especially women, is telling them what to do” (Tannen, 1990: 31). Isode resorts to nagging probably because her requests are too easily dismissed. The triviality stereotype plays its role here: women’s speech is expected to be trivial, and men are not expected to take woman’s words too seriously, thereby confirming Zimmerman and West’s assertion that men often “deny equal status to women as conversational partners” (1975:125).

Advice and Compliments

DeCapua and Dunham in their “Strategies in the discourse of advice” (1993) ascribe to the advice givers three major goals: to help the receivers clarify their problems, to assist them in exploring their options, and to offer directions in regard to their future actions. These strategies and goals are, in fact, complementary, and they are all present in the next advice given by Isode to Trystram. In this exchange between the two lovers, Isode points out to Trystram the potential consequences of missing Arthur’s feast,

“Ye that ar called one of the nobelyste knightys of the worlde and a knight of the Rounde Table, how may ye be myssed at that feste [feast]? For what shall be sayde of you among all knightes? A! See how sir Trystram huntyth and hawkyth, and cowryth wythin a castell wyth hys lady, and forsakyth [forsakes] us.”

“So God me helpe,” seyde Trystram unto La Beall Isode, “hyt ys passyngly well seyde of you [it is very well said of you] and nobely counseyled [advised]. And now I well undirstonde that ye love me.” (506).

Isode starts her speech with the compliment “*Ye that ar called one of the nobelyste knightys of the worlde*” and Trystram responds by complimenting her on both her speech “*hyt ys passyngly well seyde of you*” and on her advice “*and nobely counseyled [advised]*.” As often before, Isode gives Trystram thoughtful advice, but in this case her words are uncommonly well received. Trystram not only praises her speech but also suddenly realizes that Isode loves him “*And now I well undirstonde [understant] that ye love me,*” even though no words of love were spoken in this case. Isode’s suggestions are not dismissed: they are taken seriously and appreciated. Her words are not perceived as trivial. It seems that the compliment, which Isode paid to Trystram, played a crucial role in his perception of the entire message of her speech.

Various studies on compliments have concluded that women give and receive more compliments than men (Wolfson, 1983, Holmes, 1988). The subjects of compliments also

vary according to gender of the speakers: women tend to compliment each other on appearance, while men prefer to be complimented on skill or possessions (Wodak, 1981, Tannen, 1991, Coates, 1993 and references therein). Isode's compliment to Trystram "*the nobelyste knightys of the worlde*" touches upon his knightly *skills*; thus it is well received in concordance with the compliment theory.

Guinevere's Advice

Isode is not the only female in *Le Morte Darthur* who possesses a talent for advice giving. There are the three wise women who "teche"[teach] the knights "unto stronge adventures" and many other episodic female characters with problem solving abilities. The knights often have a problem recognizing each other when in armor, but the women can always tell who is who. Are these women more intelligent or simply more observant?

In a relevant example, Queen Guinevere gives her lover Launcelot an advice, but her advice sounds more like a warning. Queen Guinevere advises Lancelot to identify himself to his kinsmen at the tournament to avoid any mistaken identities. Her advice, however, is given in the form of a royal command:

"I warne you that ye ryde no more in no justis nor turnementis but that youre kynnesmen may know you, and at thys justis that shall be ye shall have of me a slyeve of gold." [I am warning you not to ride to any jousts or tournaments unless your kinsmen know you and at these jousts you shall have my sleeve of gold].

"Madam," seyde Launcelot, "hit [it] shall be done" (642).

Guinevere uses no politeness strategies or terms of endearment to downplay her superior status. On the contrary, she emphasizes her dominant position by the commanding manner of her speech. *I warne you*, sounds almost like a threat. Yet the triple negation that follows adds emotional overtones to her utterance making her true feelings transpire through her seemingly cold and hard language. She is seriously worried

about Launcelot, who at a previous tournament fought nearly to the death with his own cousin without knowing it. She also offers Launcelot her sleeve, a common token of affection in chivalrous world, though Guinevere bestows her favor in an uncommonly forceful manner. It is obvious from Launcelot's reply that he is not too pleased with her speech – he does not thank her for the offer but his reply is courteous as always. Queen Guinevere has no wish to reduce the status difference between herself and her knight Launcelot; because of her powerful position her advice is unquestionably followed. Guinevere would not allow her speech to be perceived as trivial or to be disregarded.

Arguing and the Triviality Issue

(Guinevere – Lancelot)

As mentioned before in this chapter, the discourse of arguing is now a thoroughly studied field of psycholinguistic research. However, in this case, the verbal behavior of arguing is analyzed in connection with the concepts of triviality and women's speech.

One aspect of interest for my analysis of Guinevere's argument with Lancelot is conflict behavior in regard to face maintenance: the self-face, others face and mutual face concerns. It has been found by Hamdorf (2003) that such concerns are correlated with the direct/indirect conflict management styles that include dominating, compromising, emotional re-enforcing, as well as with psychology of independent versus interdependent personalities. Face concerns are crucial for the conflict situations, in particular for the persons with a tendency to act interdependently, owing to their sensitivity not only to their self-face, but also to the others face (Hamdorf, 2003).

Guinevere's speech behavior gives an impression that the psychology of conflict has scarcely changed over 500 years. It seems Guinevere possesses a distinct **direct** (dominating and emotional) conflict managing style. Her speech shows a complete

neglect of the mutual face, disregard of the face needs of the others, and little concern of self-face, which can be expected of a person with a strong tendency to act independently.

In the following episode, arguing occurs because Guinevere is jealous as Lancelot spends less time with her, since he is fighting for other women's causes. In return, Lancelot reminds the Queen how much he has sacrificed for her, how often he fought for her and how he has lost the Grail Quest ("*I was but late in the quest of Sankgreall*") because of her. Yet all this is clearly not what the Queen wanted to hear, as evident from her subsequent verbal behavior.

She "braste oute wepynge...and when she myght speke she seyde [and when she might speak she said],

"Sir Launcelot, now I well understonde that thou arte a false, recrayed knight and a comon lechourere, and lovyste and holdiste othir ladies, [love and hold other ladies] and of me thou haste dysdayne and scorne. For wyte thou well, now I undirstonde thy falsehede I shall never love the [thee] more, and loke thou be never so hardy to com in my syght [never come in my sight]. And ryght here I dyscharge thee [from] thys courte, that thou never com within hit [never come within it], and I forfende thee my felyship, and uppon payne of thy hede [upon pain of your head] that thou see me nevermore!" (612)

Because of Guinevere's angry words and powerful (though groundless) accusations, "false, recrayed knight," she, perhaps, would have been called manly, vehement, and mutable, like Queen Margaret. Her speech is extremely powerful, yet she shows an unlikely weakness and breaks into tears, "braste oute wepynge" (perhaps it is something of a stereotype that a woman displays her emotional state of mind by weeping). The Queen struggles to regain her strength by using her entire artillery of orders when in five different ways she forbids Launcelot to see her (e.g. "I dyscharge thee [from] thys courte," and "I forfende thee my felyship"). Though by her repeated use of negation (never is used four times in one sentence) she seems to be negating her own words. No one, with the exception of Launcelot, believes that she meant it all. One of the

knights comments, “Women in their hastynesse woll [will] do oftyntymes that aftir hem sore repentith [they do what they afterwards strongly regret].” Though Launcelot does not share that knight’s opinion, it seems Guinevere’s weeping makes her lose some of her powerful status: the knight’s comment “Women in their hastynesse” refers to her gender, not her royal status. The imbedded message of the knight’s comment is that Guinevere’s speech is not important, because it is tentative (her decision is not definite, she is going to change her mind later on). In the words of West and Zimmerman (1987) gender is a “master status,” which explains why Guinevere’s power is constantly questioned, despite of her royal status. Once the Queen loses some of her power by showing weakness (her tears), her speech is perceived as insignificant and *trivial*.

Conclusion

This chapter’s analysis of powerful and powerless speech incorporated the historic perspective on gender roles, as well as the strategies and methodology of discourse analysis and sociolinguistics, allowing for an in-depth study of the interplay of speech behavior, gender and power in Malory’s *Le Morte Darthur*.

The main female characters of *Le Morte Darthur* possess unique and complex personalities; strong, passionate, defiant of conventions, they are, at the same time, vulnerable. They are vulnerable not because they are weak but for the very reason of being too strong, too proud and unconventional. The conflict between their personalities, their roles, and the social constraints of their gender is reflected in their language, particularly in the interchangeable use of powerful and powerless speech styles. Much like historical characters of Malory’s time, Joan of Arc and Queen Margaret of Anjou, the women of *Le Morte* struggle against the age-old stereotypes and conventions.

Meekness was commonly encouraged in women of Middle Ages. In marriage, women often had no say in choosing their marriage partners. Igrayne's forced marriage to king Uthur, who killed her husband, is the invariable beginning of the Arthurian legend (because King Arthur was born out of that union). Igrayne's powerless position in the beginning of *Le Morte Darthur* is a reflection of the unbound repression of women during the Dark Ages and in the early Middle Ages. For instance, in 13th century German Romance "*Lanzelet*" (in Paton, 1929)

The hero consecutively marries Iblis, Ade, Galagadreiz and other maidens, and overtakes their castles after killing their fathers or uncles. In *Le Morte Darthur*, Isode rebels against the forced marriage by leaving her husband for Trystram; and Guinevere chooses Launcelot as her love interest. The rebellious nature of Malory's heroines is realized in their rejection of a common medieval model of feminine verbal behavior, consisting of meekness and *silence* (as "silence was synonymous with obedience," Coates, 1993: 35).

Thus, a historic outlook on gender roles also allows for a comparison of the unique roles of Malory's heroines, as revealed by their verbal behavior, to the stereotypical portrayal of women (and their language) in medieval era.

Notes

1. Margaret of Anjou (often considered the successor of Joan of Arc, who was burnt at the stake in 1431), married King Henry VI, and thereby became the Queen of England in 1445. Margaret's marriage entailed a treaty between England and France, upon the conditions of which several French provinces (owned by England before the treaty) were restored to France. Subsequently, it was Queen Margaret who governed the Lancastrians in the defense of the throne against the Yorkists, as King Henry lost his mind, perhaps by the influence of horrific events preceding the War of the Roses.

CHAPTER 4
THE COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF POWERFUL AND POWERLESS SPEECH IN
MALORY AND THE SOURCES

*Thus, angel or demon, virgin or whore, Mary or Magdalen,
woman is the stage on which the age enacts its
own enduring morality play.
Angela Leighton, **Because men made the laws.***

Introduction

Medieval Arthurian literature gave the evolution of women's role a truthful rendering, as it incorporated the spiritual life of ten centuries. The ancient Arthurian legends were created by the Celtic tribes of the British Isles, and spread over Europe by the Armorican Britons who fled to the continent in 5th and 6th centuries under the pressure of Anglo-Saxon invaders (reviewed in Bruce, 1958). These legends have inspired the 12th century masterpieces of Geoffrey of Monmouth, Wace and Chrétien de Troyes, as well as the 13th century poems by Robert de Boron and the French prose cycle (the Vulgate), the 14th century "Morte Arthure," "Sir Gawain and The Green Knight" and other romances. The voluminous Vulgate Cycle contained the most comprehensive anthology of Arthurian sources from which Sir Thomas Malory has drawn most of his material. Yet Malory replaced the accumulative style of the Vulgate by the dynamic narrative style of his own. Moreover, he made countless additions and alterations to the source material, thereby creating the great Arthurian epic, "which, but for Malory, would not have been." (Vinaver, 1970: 5). The alterations made by Malory are particularly important to the present analysis as they allow for a comparison of Malory's portrayal of female characters to their counterparts in the Vulgate Cycle and their prototypes in the

earlier Arthurian literature. The focus of this chapter is on the changing role of women in Malory's *Le Morte Darthur*.

Femininity and Gender Stereotypes

Lynch (1995) claims that Malory denied women any role except as spectators. The role of the heroines of *Le Morte Darthur* was also described as passive by Fries (1996), who argues that only the *counter*-heroines are active, pervasively assuming a male role. Elizabeth Edwards in her article "The Place of Women in The Morte Darthur" (1996) suggests that Malory failed "to treat the feminine" content of his French sources. In this she echoes LaFarge's (1992: 76) assertion of Malory's repressed femininity, the "leakage" of which is embodied in the Lady Huntress (who accidentally wounded Lancelot). But did Malory suppress the femininity of his characters or did he, in fact, empower them? Guinevere of the prose *Lancelot* might seem more feminine (in comparison to Malory's Guinevere) but she is just an object of chivalrous adoration in the tradition of French medieval romance. Malory's powerful female characters challenge the deeply rooted stereotypes of gender-appropriate behavior. In the same way, the conventions were challenged by the *historic* heroines of Malory's lifetime, Joan of Arc and Margaret of Anjou, who became the Queen of England and reigned during the War of the Roses. These women's powerful presence may have had an influence on Malory's unconventional and controversial portrayal of women in "Le Morte Darthur." Assigning Arthurian times to the 5th century, in his book Malory drew illicit parallels with his own time, the 15th century. Malory's words "I wolde lever than have haffe of France" alludes to the crucial argument of the War of the Roses – Margaret's of Anjou marriage to King Henry VI on the condition that several provinces will be restored to France (Seward,

1996). In the 15th century this event was often referred to as the loss of the half of France (Hall, 1548, Holinshed, 1577).

Malory might have developed solidarity with Joan if only because of the role the Duke of Buckingham played in her and his own trials. By one source, the Duke was enraged at Joan's interrogation and was about to strike her while she was in chains (Hicks, 1928). This same person (i.e. Buckingham) accused Malory of making an attempt on his life and presided over the jury at the hearing of his case, thus impeding an objective judgment. Malory could have seen the Lancastrian Queen Margaret when he was a member of Parliament for Warwickshire. Some biographers (Griffith, 1974) argue that Malory might have been a Yorkist rather than a Lancastrian, which would place him on the opposing side of Margaret in the War of Roses. However, Malory's name appeared next to Queen Margaret's on the list of persons excluded from pardon by the Yorkist King Edward IV (see the list in Field, 1993). Like Margaret, Malory's Queen Guinevere was eventually deprived of her royal status.

Powerful and Powerless Speech

Within the Theme of 'Damsel in Distress'

As mentioned in the previous Chapter, one of the favorite medieval topics was damsel in distress saved by a chivalric knight. Armstong (2003) argues that Malory's women are always in need of succor. Edwards (1996) also insists that damsels of "Le Morte Darthur" are constantly in distress, "associating with delusion, lostness, enchantment." They dwell in forests, those regions "structurally equated of with disguise and disappearance and peopled by hermits and women" (Ibid.). Certainly, the forest is one of the most powerful symbols of the Middle Ages. In the opening lines of the "Divina Commedia," Dante confesses that in the middle of life he found himself in a thick forest,

the *silva oscura* that made him tremble for he lost his way. Three of Malory's knights felt much the same when they wandered through the wilderness of Cornwall, until they met three damsels with whose sure hands they (or at least two of them, because one damsel was disappointed in her knight) were led to great worship. In this episode, the source of which is unknown, the knights, rather than ladies, are in need of succor.

In Malory's version of the "The Knight of the Cart" episode, Queen Guinevere finds herself in a powerless position, but manages to gain control over the situation, whereas, in Malory's source of this episode (on sources see Sommer, 1891), the French prose "Lancelot," Guinevere plays the conventional role of 'damsel in distress'. This episode deserves a close attention as it exemplifies the empowered role of Guinevere in *Le Morte Darthur*.

In the French prose (translation by Paton, 1929), Prince Meleagant of Gorre comes to Arthur's court and challenges the King with the following proposition, "If ye dare give the quene to one of these knights [Arthur's knights] to lead into the forest, I will do battle with him [for the queen]. If I win the queen, I will lead her away to my country" (255). Sir Kay urges Arthur to accept the dare and volunteers to take Guinevere to the forest to meet the Prince's challenge. The Queen has no say in this matter, though she "grieved beyond measure that she had been given to Kay the seneschal" (258). She "swoons" out of distress. Guinevere's role in this scene is decidedly powerless. She becomes a trophy in a doubtful contest that must be conducted in the forest.

In Malory, the situation is quite different. Meleagant's arrival at Arthur's court is omitted, but in the scene unparalleled in the French source, Guinevere and her unarmed knights are "Mayinge" in the woods, when they are attacked by Meleagant and his army.

The Queen instantly confronts Meleagant battering him with accusations and strong words of condemnation (see also Chapter 3 on Guinevere's confrontation style):

“Traytoure knight,” seyde Gwennyver, “what caste thou to do? Wolt thou shame thyselff?...Thou shamyst all knighthood and thyselffe and me. And I lat the wyte [I let you know] thou shalt never shame me, for I had levir kut myne owne throte in twayne [rather cut my own throat] rather than thou sholde dishonoure me!” (651).

Meleagant retorts “I have loved you many a yere, and never as now cowde [could] I gete you at such avayle [get you at such disadvantage]. And therefore I woll take you as I fynde you” [I will take you as I find you] and proceeds with the attack. The Queen decides to negotiate,

“Sir Mellyyagaunt, sle nat [slay not] my noble knights and I woll go with thee upon thys covenauce [this condition] that thou save them and suffir hem no more to be hurte, wyth this that they be lad [they be led] with me wheresomever thou ledyst [wherever you lead] me...” (651).

Guinevere makes it clear that she negotiates not because of weakness, but in order to save her knights from being killed. She becomes the one who dictates the conditions, which Meleagant accepts. Thus, from the very beginning the Queen acts very unlike the damsel in distress by taking the situation into her own hands. In the events following Meleagant's first appearance, the Queen's role is once again much more powerful in *Le Morte Darthur* than in the French prose.

In the French “Lancelot,” Lancelot ambushes Sir Kay, who has the Queen with him in the forest, questions him, “Sir knight, who is this lady that ye lead here?” and attempts to stop him, “Ye will lead her no farther” (260). But when Sir Kay explains the rules of Meleagant's challenge, Lancelot decides to participate in the contest, “And he thought within him that he would watch how Kay sped. For the honour would be greater if he [Lancelot] won her from the knight that had won her from Kay” (260).

Hence, Lancelot too sees Guinevere as a trophy that can be won in a joust. The French prose makes no mention of Guinevere's reaction to Lancelot's move. She remains

entirely passive as she is led away by Kay, and subsequently, led away by Meleagant, who wins her from Kay.

In Malory, the Queen's negotiations with Meleagant allow her enough time to send for Lancelot. However, when Lancelot comes to Meleagant's castle to fight for Guinevere, she once again refuses to play the part of damsel in distress. In a scene, which can only be found in Malory (but in none of the sources), the Queen greets Lancelot with a question, "Sir Launcelot, why be ye so amoved?" Guinevere's question implies that she is in no distress, but Lancelot is in distress. Lancelot is bewildered. He answers her question with a question, "A! madame, why ask ye me that questyon?" Guinevere makes it clear that she has the situation under control, "all thyng ys [is] put in myne honde [in my hands]" (655). What Lancelot does not know is that just as he entered the castle, Meleagant panicked and surrendered to Guinevere ("holy I put me in your grace"), begging her to "rule" Lancelot. Thus, Guinevere is now in a complete charge of the situation, having power to rule both her enemy and her defender. She never admits to Lancelot that his arrival had any effect on the events because that would shift the power from her to Lancelot. When Lancelot tells her that his horse was killed by Meleagant's archers, Guinevere softens her manner and thanks him heartily, "Truly, seyde the quene, "ye say throuthe, but heartely I thanke you." As for the enemy, Guinevere uses her power to the uttermost. In the subsequent scene she urges Lancelot to fight Meleagant to the death. Notably, Queen Margaret too was merciless to her enemies in the War of the Roses. She had the rebellious Duke of York beheaded and his severed head brought to her on a lance (Seward, 1996).

In the French “Lancelot,” when Lancelot arrives at Meleagant’s castle, he mostly converses with King Baudemagus, Meleagant’s father, who also plays the role of the negotiator between his son and Lancelot. Malory omits Baudemagus entirely; Guinevere herself does all the talking (above), in sharp contrast to Guinevere of the French romance, who plays no part in her own rescue.

The kidnapping and rescue of Queen Guinevere is an essential part of the Arthurian Romances: in a slightly different form this episode appears in both Vulgate “Lancelot” and in Chrétien de Troyes. Malory’s endeavor was to preserve the Arthurian legends, however he changed the episode considerably by assigning a powerful role to Guinevere through her use of powerful discourse. In the French “Lancelot” and in Chrétien, it is King Bademagus who prevents his son from raping Guinevere, and then talks Lancelot into sparing Meleagant. In Malory, Guinevere herself suppresses Meleagant’s advances, and she is also the one who submits Lancelot into acting according to her own plan.

In Chrétien’s version of the story, Guinevere is extremely demanding of her lover Lancelot, and her ambiguous verbal behavior sends him away in despair. Yet the Queen’s role in the resolving of the conflict with Meleagant is utterly passive. It just was not in the tradition of *amour courtois* for a romantic heroine to orchestrate her own rescue mission.

Thus, Guinevere’s powerful role in *Le Morte Darthur* makes her more similar to Queen Margaret of Malory’s time than to Queen Guinevere of the earlier Romances.

Powerful and Powerless Speech Within the Theme of Healing and Seduction

Knepper (2001: 9) ascribes to Malory’s women a fiendish power of intrigue and seduction – they are the “bad girls” who “will love you to death.” It is true that in Malory

and his sources, a number of heroines are endowed with the gift of healing wounds, while some of them are also seducers. The coincidence is not accidental, because both healing and seduction are related to sorcery. As Cook (1995) notes, magical forces are most frequently called for in matters of healing and love, the areas in which power over physical and psychological circumstances is most desperately needed.

The most famous of the enchantresses, Morgan Le Fey, first appeared in Geoffrey Monmouth's *Vita Merlini* (ed. 1929) as one of nine sisters living in Happy Island, the Celtic Otherworld. She is named as a healer of King Arthur's wounds in the Isle of Apples (Avalon). In Layamon's *Brut* she is Agrante (an anagram of Moregante) of whom King Arthur says: "And I will fare to Avalun, to the fairest of all maidens, to Agrante the queen, an elf most fair, and she shall make my wounds all sound, make me all whole with healing draughts" (Paton, 1903). Chrétien de Troyes made her Arthur's sister in "Erec." She then appears in the French prose *Merlin* as Viviane, who deceived Merlin and shut him forever in a cave. It is perhaps worth mentioning that Morgan has been once identified with Morrigan, Irish battle-goddess (Benson, 1976). In Malory, Morgan Le Fey, King Arthur's sister, at one point seizes Lancelot and offers herself to him as his "peramour" [paramour]. In the corresponding scene of the French prose *Lancelot*, Morgan Le Fee and her ladies encounter sleeping Lancelot and, even though they do not recognize him, they are so struck by his beauty that they decide to enchant him and carry him off to Morgan's castle. Only later they learn that their prisoner is Lancelot, which makes them alter their plans for him, as they add Guinevere to the targets of their evil plot. In Malory, Morgan and her companions, who are also queens-enchantresses, express

no admiration for Lancelot's beauty but recognize him immediately and make their intentions very clear to him from the start.

“Sir knyght, the four quenys seyde, ‘thou muste undirtsonde thou art oure presonere, and we know the well that thou art sir Lancelot du Lake, kynge Banis sonne. And because that we undirstonde youre worthynesse, that thou art the noblest knyght lyvyng, and also we know well there can no lady have thy love but one, and that is quene Gwenyvere, and now thou shalt hir love lose for ever, and she thyne. For it behovyth the now to chose one of us four, for I am quene Morgan le Fay, quene of the londe of Gore, and here is the quene of North Galys, and the quene of Estlonde, and the quene of Oute Iles. Now chose one of us, whyche that thou wolte have to thy peramour, other ellys [or else] to dye in this prison. (152).

Initially, the author introduces the **four queens** as the speakers (i.e. “the four quenys seyde”), but the later part, “for I am quene Morgan le Fay,” makes it obvious that Morgan is the main carrier of the message. It is in vain to search for magical incantations or chants in Morgan's speech; nevertheless, in its **form** Morgan's language does resemble a charm. It seems that with her words “and now thou shalt hir love lose for ever, and she thyne” [and now you shall her love lose forever and she yours], Morgan is attempting to cast a spell on Lancelot. The charms or spells are defined as “very practical formulae designed to produce definite results” (Cavendish, 1977: 62). Cook (1995) also notes that many charms contain clear and explicit language, and their intent is frequently to either banish or bind. Perhaps Morgan's words intend to bring a result of banishing Lancelot's love for Guinevere and binding his affections to one of the four queens. Yet the Sorceress does not fully rely on the power of her magic spell, or there would be no need to threaten Lancelot with long-term imprisonment: a non-magical attempt to overpower him.

As mentioned before, Morgan's message is clear and explicit; moreover, her speech is powerful and assertive, as it is loaded with threats, directives, and ultimatums. Morgan gives Lancelot an ultimatum to either accept her or one of her female companions as his

“peramour” [paramour], or else to die in prison (“other ellys to dye in this preson”). The other ultimatum is to forsake his love for Guinevere and, once again, to bestow his love on one of Morgan’s party (“and now thou shalt hir love lose for ever, and she thyne. For it behovyth the now to chose one of us four”).

Fries (1994) suggests that the counter-heroines, such as Morgan le Fey, pervasively assume male roles in *Le Morte Darthur*. Yet, Morgan’s actions are very similar in *Le Morte Darthur* and the French source; the difference lies mostly in her verbal behavior, which is more forceful in Malory. Thus, it must be due to the powerful nature of Morgan’s language that her role is perceived by Fries, and some other literary analysts, as that of a male character. However, I argue that directness and assertiveness of speech do not necessarily constitute the attributes of male verbal behavior. It is likely that Morgan of the French prose, who declares her admiration for Lancelot’s beauty (even compares him to an unearthly being) and whose actions are initially driven only by her desire for him, seems more feminine in comparison to Malory’s Morgan, who instantly defines her plan of actions while making no notice of Lancelot’s beauty.

Thus, Morgan’s speech is considerably altered and made more forceful and decisive in Malory, though her evil role in this episode is similar to that of the prose. Nevertheless, in the final scenes of *Le Morte Darthur*, Morgan Le Fey is one of the four queens who accompanied Arthur on his last journey to Avalon. Malory alters Morgan’s evil role by merging her at the end with the fair Agrante of Avalon, or the healer of Arthur’s wounds in Monmouth, thus making Morgan’s role more complex in its duality.

The mighty knights are defenseless against the warlike enchantresses, another one of which is Lady Huntress that shot “slepyng and slumberynge”[sleeping and

slumbering] Lancelot “in the thyke of the buttock” with her arrow. Notably, in the Vulgate cycle it is a male hunter that wounded Lancelot. A short scene describing the unfortunate meeting of Lancelot and the Lady-Huntress, with a conversation between them created solely by Malory, has lately attracted a good deal of attention from literary critics. Maud McInerney (2000: 91) considers the episode central to the whole story, signifying a gruesome view of a woman as “the greatest threat to chivalry,” which she ascribes to Malory.

But let us examine the verbal exchange that takes place between Lancelot and the Huntress. When sir Lancelot sees the woman that wounded him, he says:

“Lady, or damesell, whatsomever ye be, in an evyll tyme bare ye thys bowe. The devyll made you a shoter!

[Lady, or damsel, whoever you may be, in evil time bare you this bow. The devil made you a shooter].

“Now Mercy, fayre sir!’ seyde the lady. I am a jantillwoman that usyth here in thys foreyste huntynge,” she explains to Lancelot, “and God knowyth I saw you nat.”

[“Forgive me, fair sir’, said the lady. I am a gentelwoman that hunts here in the forest and God knows I did not see you] (643).

In this incident Lancelot is so angry and frustrated that he has trouble using a polite form of address for the Huntress. Hence, he is addressing her as “Lady, or damesell, whatsomever ye be.”

Next, the Huntress offers Lancelot an apology (“Now Mercy, fayre sir!’ seyde the lady”) and also an explanation for what has happened:

“I am a jantillwoman that usyth here in thys foreyste huntynge,” she explains to Lancelot, “and God knowyth I saw you nat but as here was a barayne hynde at the soyle in this welle. And I wente I had done welle, but my hande swarved” (643).

[I am a gentlewoman that hunts here in the forest and God knows I did not see you, but here was a deer at the well and I went for it. And I would have done well, but my hand swerved].

Although, the Huntress produces an apology and explains that she was aiming at the deer and not at Lancelot, she seems to be somewhat more interested in defending her shooting than she is in her victim's condition. Her words (I would have done well, if it were not for my hand swerving) aim to negate Lancelot's assertion, "Devil made you a shooter." But perhaps the lady's verbal behavior, betraying little compassion for her victim, is in accordance with her personality of a huntress. Her speech reveals no fear, little emotion, and she explains herself with great confidence. Her apology¹, followed by her well-composed explanation, convinces Lancelot that the shooting was accidental, which eliminates any animosity between the Huntress and Lancelot.

Yet what follows next are Lancelot's lamentations for which Malory finds language that is strikingly powerless. In this situation, Lancelot's powerless language possibly reflects the powerless nature of the situation in which he finds himself:

"A, mercy Jesu' seyde sir Lancelot, "I may calle myselff the moste unhappy man that lyvyth, for ever whan I wolde have faynyst worshyp there befallyth me ever som unhappy thyng" (644).

[I may call myself the most unhappy man that lives, because ever when I would have had worship (i. e. honor, recognition, glory) there befalls some unhappy thing].

Lancelot's speech is uncommonly powerless, as he is complaining and, moreover, exaggerating the gravity of his situation. His utterance "for ever whan I wolde have faynyst worshyp there befallyth me ever som unhappy thyng," is a considerable exaggeration because there have been many occasions in which Lancelot gained the desired "worship," even more so as he is called the world's best knight.

Sir Lancelot is not addressing his complaints to the Huntress: he begins his complaining after the lady has already departed, as the author informs us. Thus, Lancelot is complaining to himself, or rather he is addressing his complaints to God, ("A, mercy

Jesu”). Lancelot’s speech may be considered an indirect complaint, where addressee is not held responsible for a perceived offense. This type of complaining is also referred to as “griping” or “troubles-telling” (Katriel, 1985; Jefferson and Lee, 1981; Tannen, 1990; Boxer, 1993). As there is no expectation of receiving a response, Lancelot’s complaint may also be classified as *rhetorical indirect complaint*, a way of ‘letting off steam’ (Boxer, 1993) or in Goffman’s terms, an elaborated ‘*response cry*’ (Goffman, 1978, in Boxer, 1993). A ‘response cry’ can simply be a cry in direct response to pain, and in this case Lancelot is in a considerable physical pain, though it is not the physical pain that upsets him, but the fact that the injury may hinder his success at the future tournament. Therefore, he produces a rhetorical indirect complaint or an elaborated response cry that goes beyond a pain cry.

More indirect complaints are exchanged among women than among men, possibly because men are reluctant to display vulnerability or weakness often inherent in the telling of troubles (Boxer, 1993: 392). Interestingly, Lancelot allows no mortal communicator to witness his griping, nor is he looking for commiseration in his moment of weakness. Yet the author lets the audience in on the vulnerability display of his principal male character, possibly eliciting the audience’s commiseration for the latter.

Catherine LaFarge (1992) attempted a Freudian interpretation of this episode as a reversal of sex roles revealing Lancelot’s (and Malory’s) repressed femininity. The unusually powerless verbal behavior and powerless role of Lancelot in this episode appears to be in contrast with the powerful role of the Huntress who speaks and acts with self-confidence and determination. LaFarge (1992) speaks of the reversal of sex roles (meaning that the Huntress assumes a male role, while Lancelot takes a female role in

this scene) undoubtedly due to such unlikely distribution of power. However, LaFarge's theory would only work if powerful verbal behavior were indeed an exclusive characteristic of male speech, and powerless behavior were reserved for female characters. Of course, in this work I have been continuously building an argument against this assumption. Lancelot's griping and complaining, however excessive, does not transform him into a female, nor does the Huntresses' power and communicative confidence turn her into a male because both female and male characters exhibit occurrences of powerful and powerless verbal behavior in *Le Morte Darthur*.

Ultimately, the role of the Huntress in *Le Morte Darthur* could only be fully understood in conjunction with other episodes of the kind. Such episodes are insertions from the literature of much earlier periods of time. Like the fiery damsels who in the scene with Marhaus "spette uppon" [spat on] the knight's shield and "threwe myre" [threw mare] upon it, then "fledde [fled] as they were wyldre that som of them felle by the way," these wild 'women of the woods' bring with them the chaos and raw passions of the Dark Ages.

Of course, the Lady Huntress originates from ancient mythology, but she also has something in common with the fiendish wood fairies of Celtic folklore (she came as if out of the woodwork – the sounds of the hunt and the barking of the dogs did not wake Lancelot). Whether inspired by the ancient legends or the historic heroines of Malory's time, the Lady Huntress is partially transformed by Malory from a hunting deity into a not so unearthly woman, who is simply capable of taking care of herself.

La Belle Isode of *Le Morte Darthur* also still bears a slight resemblance to her prototype of a warlike enchantress of the ancient Celtic legends: she is skillful at healing,

and she at one point volunteers to “purvey horse and armoure” for Trystram’s battle with Palomydes. Yet in French romances Isode’s role is decidedly powerless. Even her love for Trystram is not her own choice but the result of a magic spell². In contrast, Isode of *Le Morte Darthur* is a woman of wisdom who makes her own choices in life. Although Malory preserves the theme of the magic love *drynke* [drink], which is present in all of the older versions of the Trystram and Isode legend, the author of *Le Morte Darthur* makes it very clear that Isode and Trystram fell in love long before the magic drink was ever made. Moreover, Malory portrays the love story of Isode and Trystram in its progression, beginning from their first meeting, when Trystram taught Isode to play the harp and “*she began to have a grete [great] fantasy unto hym*” (239). Immediately after this sentence, in which the word *began* signals the beginning of the relationship, we learn how Isode tells Trystram that another knight (Palomydes) has done a great deal for her sake, thereby making Trystram jealous of his competitor (“*Thus was there grete envy between Tramstryste [Trystram] and Palomydes*”). Next, Isode encourages Trystram to enter a tournament as her knight and supplies him with horse and armor. Thus, in Malory the magic drink plays little role, while Isode’s relationship with Trystram is neither the result of enchantment, nor is it a matter of chance. In fact, the development of this relationship is strongly facilitated by Isode herself (this was before she married King Mark).

Malory empowers Isode by disassociating his heroine’s wisdom from sorcery, as well as by emphasizing Isode’s sensibility and making her an excellent judge of character. She knows she can trust Dame Brangwayne, who is always loyal to both Trystram and Isode in *Le Morte Darthur*, whereas in the French *Tristram*, as Helen

Cooper (1996) notes, Brangwayne tries to kill Isode. Moreover, Isode is the one who uncovers an intricate plot to destroy Trystram, concocted by Palomydes (who at that time pretends to be Trystram's friend):

“I sawe thys day how ye were betrayed and nyghe brought unto youre dethe...And therefore, sir, how sholde I suffir in youre presence suche a felonne and traytoure as ys sir Palomydes?” (460). [I saw this day how you were betrayed and nearly brought to your death...And therefore, sir, how should I tolerate in your presence such a felon and traitor as sir Palomydes?].

Isode's intellectual superiority is not always accepted by the male characters of *Le Morte Darthur*. Palomydes disregards Isode's comment entirely, while Trystram pays little attention to her revelations. The latter quickly accepts Palomydes' apology and says, “No forse! All ys pardoned as on my party.” It is evident from the author's comment, “Then La Beall Isode hylde downe her hede and seyde no more at that tyme,” that Isode (and the author) is not satisfied with the outcome of the exchange.

The Celtic Isode could have had the same prototype as her contemporary and compatriot Grainne from the “The Reproach of Diarmaid,” an Irish saga telling a similar story of a queen that ran to the forest with a nephew of her husband, the king (Schoepperle, 1913). After making Diarmaid her lover, Grainne by no means felt obliged to be faithful to him and, while in the forest, had affairs with passing knights.

Such women made medieval historians and some Arthurian scholars equally indignant. Sexual behavior of the Celtic heroines was described as “gemein,” shameless, vulgar, abandon (Zimmer, 1911: 167). With general prejudice against women being so strong, it is remarkable that Malory was enforcing such a display of power and determination in women. In spite of the common practice of his time and perhaps remembering that both Joan of Arc and Queen Margaret were accused of witchcraft, Malory greatly reduced the theme of enchantment by women.

In *Le Morte Darthur* the intelligence of the heroines of Arthurian legends, and their struggle to gain and maintain power (as seen through their language), are no longer seen as the unnatural phenomena to which the works of magic and sorcery are the only explanation.

Powerful and Powerless Speech

Within the Theme of Adultery

Medieval literature leaves one with an impression that adultery was fairly common. In addition to the adultery of Guinevere and Isode in Malory, and Guinevere's affair with Mordred in Monmouth, there was the unfaithful Scotch queen Ysaune from the "Livre de Caradoc," Fenis from Chretien's "Clidge," who feigned death in order to deceive her husband Alis for the sake of Clidge, and many others.

Malory applies no moralism to his adulterous queens, calling Guinevere a 'trew lover', and La Beale Isode, 'the fayrest' and 'pyerles of all ladyes'. Their adultery is often the result of the sexual misbehavior of the male characters. Uther Pendragon kills Gorlois, the Duke of Cornwall and, disguised as the latter, seduces his wife Igreyne, of which liaison King Arthur is born. The hero of Chretien's "Yvain" marries the widow of a knight he has slain and becomes the lord of her castle. Meleagant nearly rapes Guinevere, but is stopped by king Baudemagus, in the Vulgate Cycle. In Malory, the villainous Meleagant has similar intentions. Another one of Malory's villains, King Mark of Cornwall, gives Segwarydes' wife, the fairest lady of his court (this was before Mark married Isode) to Bleoberys de Ganys, the knight of the Round Table, who demanded from him "what giffte I woll aske in this country" (246) [what gift I will ask in this country]. It seemed to have been a common custom of the time for a king to promise particularly honored guests of the court any wish or any gift that they may ask for. In this

case, the wife of one of the King Mark's subjects, Sir Segwarydes, becomes the "gift" that is requested by Sir Bleoberys and granted by Mark. However, in Malory, King Mark's behavior is depicted in the most negative light. Even though the King's decision is accepted by Sir Segwarydes and other knights, an unnamed *lady* of the court speaks out and demands of Trystram, who is the court's best knight and King Mark's nephew, to remedy the situation:

"Than there was one lady that rebuked sir Trystrames in the horrybelyst wyse, and called hym cowarde knyght, that he wolde for shame of hys knyghthode to se a lady so shamefully takyn away fro hys uncklys courte..."(247).

[There was one lady that reproached/shamed sir Trystram in the most horrible way and called him coward knight, that he would, for shame of his knighthood, see a lady so shamefully taken away from his uncle's court (King Mark is Trystram's uncle)].

Malory retells the lady's speech in an indirect quote, but the emphatic expressions the author uses, "rebuked in the *horrybelyst* wyse [shamed in the most horrible way]," as well as "called hym cowarde knyght [called him coward knight]" give us an idea that the lady used very strong language to persuade Trystram to take action.

Thus, when a knight's wife is given away as a gift to a stranger, the men remain silent, but another lady protests in the strongest manner and seeks out a remedy for the situation. This episode is yet another example of the striking contrast that exists in *Le Morte Darthur* between the powerless position that the society assigns to women and the powerful roles those women struggle to undertake, as evident from their verbal behavior.

Furthermore, in Malory's "Trystram," King Mark receives as a gift a magic horn "that had such a virtue that there myght no lady nothir jantyllwoman drynke of but if she were trew to her husband; and if she were false she sholde spylle all the drynke" (326).

[that had such a vertue that there might no lady drink from it but if she were true to her husband; and is she were false she would spill all the drink]. King Mark tested his wife, La Belle Isode, and a hundred ladies with her, and only four of the latter could “drenke clene” [drink clean, i.e. without spilling]. The indignant king ruled all the adulteresses to be burned, but his subjects

“seyde playnly they wolde not have the ladies brente” (326)

[said plainly that they would not have the ladies burnt].

The author does not elaborate on whether the men of the court doubted the fairness of the test, or whether they found a different way of dealing with their wives’ adultery, other than burning the ladies. The only thing that the author finds worth mentioning in this case is that the men *plainly* refused to burn their wives. The word *plainly* here draws emphasis to the firmness and finality of their decision. Nonetheless, the wives themselves have no say in this matter.

There are however, episodes in the “Trystram” chapter of *Le Morte Darthur*, where Malory follows the source material with little alteration. The altered pieces (or the ones written solely by Malory) and the unchanged scenes often appear to be ages apart, especially, as far as the women’s roles are concerned. This is also the case in the following episode, where Sir Breenor sets up a beauty contest between his wife and La Belle Isode on the condition that the loser would be beheaded. Since it has been unanimously admitted that Isode was the “fayrer lady and the better made” of the two, “sir Tristram strode onto hym (Breenor) and toke his lady frome hym [took his lady from him], and with an awke stroke he smote of hir hede clene [and with one stroke cut off her head]” (259).

The last scene is particularly striking because Malory usually changes such blunders of his favorite knights. Eerie and savage, the beheading contest echoes the unbound repression of women in the Dark Ages; like a bad dream it can not be altered. Yet one can not help wonder at the real-life prototypes of those creatures who meekly married the killers of their husbands, who were taken by force as trophies, raped, given as gifts to strangers or fell victims to beheading games.

Powerful and Powerless Speech within the Themes of
Amour Courtois and Earthly Love

Malory's true knights are the ones who fight for "ladyes ryght" (238). But it was long debated whether the chivalric service to ladies existed in real life or it was merely an invention of minstrels (Benson, 1976). On historical evidence, in the 12th century when the chivalric love flourished in literature, jousting was essentially a commercial undertaking in which a landless knight could make a fortune (Ibid.). The chivalric ideal gradually penetrated from romance to reality, and in 14th – 15th centuries it became the foundation of the moral code. The newly found orders of knighthood took an oath to sustain widows in their right and maidens in their virginity, and help them and succor them. The oath impelled the knights not to take or touch any lady or damsel unless she consented to it. Moral writers endeavored to give such rules a historical validity by extending them back to the Arthurian time.

Minstrels were economically dependent on ladies for whom they wrote, which gave a reason to excessive flattery and declarations of ideal love. At the same time, their social status prevented anything but sexless relationship with those ladies.

A more fundamental reason for denouncing sexual love was religious: the earthly love was admissible as a parabola of the heavenly one. The code of chivalric love, the

“amour courtois,” was elaborated by Chrétien de Troyes, as well as Andreas Capellanus³, under the influence of their patroness Marie of Champagne who brought the concept from her native Provence. A chivalric lover avoids any direct contact with his lady, but he is infatuated with any object related to her. Thus in the French Prose, Lancelot swoons at the sight of Guinevere’s hair on a comb. Also in the prose “Lancelot,” the hero conceals his feeling until his friend Galehot arranges a rendezvous and Guinevere kisses him. Consummation of their love, taking place while Camille enchants King Arthur, is mediated by the Lady of the Lake by means of a magic shield.

Malory omitted most of this. His Guinevere is a proud woman of considerable wisdom, who would not swoon even at the sight of a knight carrying the severed head of his wife (Malory might have known how Queen Margaret handled the head of the Duke of York). Malory ignored the grandiloquent declarations of love and the first kissing of Lancelot by Guinevere, a key scene in the prose *Lancelot*. In the French prose, Guinevere debates whether she should kiss Lancelot, though not with Lancelot but with his friend Galahot. At first she is against the idea, “As for kissing, I see not that this is either time or place” (Paton 1903), but later on allows herself to be persuaded.

This easily manipulated Guinevere of the French Romance is very different from Malory’s Guinevere, who does not allow herself to be persuaded by others. Malory considerably reworked the story of Guinevere’s kidnapping by Meleagant (as previously discussed). In the Vulgate *Lancelot*, Guinevere is a victim in a deal between King Arthur and Meleagant. In Troyes, as the tradition of amour courtois requires, the Queen is helpless in the hands of men and for her escape is entirely obliged to Lancelot, with whom she is nevertheless angry for his trifle deviation from the rules of chivalry. In

Malory, at Guinevere and Lancelot's meeting at the window, Lancelot "wysshed that he myght have comyn in to her." And her response was, "I wolde as fayne as ye that ye myght come in to me." The directness and sincerity of their talk stands in sharp contrast to the artful intricacies of courtly love. In Malory love is as "earthly" as nature itself;

"For, lyke as trees and erbys burgenyth and florysshyth in May [like trees flourish], in lyke wyse every laste harte that ys ony maner of lover spryngith, burgenyth, buddyth, and florysshyth in lusty dedis [likewise every lover's heart flourishes] ...And therefore all ye that be lovers, calle unto youre remembrance the monethe of May, lyke as ded quene Gwenyver, for whom I make here a lyttyll mencion, that whyle she lyved she was a trew lover [while she lived she was a true lover], and therefor she had a good ende."

This "lyttyll mencion" [little mention] in which Malory calls Guinevere a true lover is very different from what was said of this queen before *Le Morte Darthur*.

Disloyalty is the essence of Guinevere in Geoffrey Monmouth's *Historia*. There she is a typical medieval adulterous *quene* supporting Mordred, a nephew of her husband, in his attempt to seize power over the Arthur's empire. She is primarily responsible for the eventual collapse of the Round Table. Legends say of her that she was bad when she was small but even worse when she grew up, and she met her end tied to wild horses and torn to pieces (Bruce, 1958). The 12th century sources tell of her capturing by king Melwas (*Vita Gildas*) or Meleagant (in Chrétien's *Lancelot*) whose kingdoms are described as places of no return, the Otherworld. She is rescued by either Arthur or, in the chivalric tradition, by her knight, initially, sir Kay who was then substituted, supposedly on advice of Marie de Champagne, (Kennedy, 2001) by a more chivalrous Lancelot. Under the pen of Chrétien de Troyes and his followers (the prose *Lancelot*) she became an ideal subject of chivalric love. Yet for Chrétien and the author of the prose *Lancelot* she had to be blamed for Lancelot's failure in the quest of Holy

Grail. Eventually, earthly love, even the chivalric one, was a sad impediment on the way to eternal heavenly love.

Malory admits that Lancelot was not the best in the Grail Quest, but Malory's conclusion is very different from that of his predecessors. Lancelot failed in the Grail Quest but he never failed in his love for Guinevere. When Guinevere was captured in the castle of Meleagant, Lancelot did not hesitate for a moment (compared to prose *Lancelot*, where he hesitated for a moment) to ride in a cart, as was the custom for those sentenced to gallows, to rescue his lady. Lancelot's love for Guinevere allows him to prove himself worthy of his status of the most noble knight, despite of his failure in the Grail Quest. In the episode succeeding the "Knight of the Cart," Lancelot cures sir Urry – the spiritual task that only "the moste nobelyste knight" could perform.

In the "Fair Maid of Astolat" episode, Malory once again departs from his sources to emphasize his own conception of love and morality. Elayne, the Fair Maid of Astolat, is one of the most modest and innocent of Malory's heroines. Yet she is the one to throw a serious challenge to the deeply rooted gender-based stereotypes. She falls desperately in love with Launcelot and asks him to be her husband. "Sir, I wolde have you to my husbnde," seyde Elayne" (638). But Launcelot can neither accept her proposal, nor admit to her that he loves Guinevere (because such confessions would compromise Guinevere, King Arthur's wife), so he politely refuses. "Fayre Damesell, I thanke you hartely," seyde sir Launcelot, but truly," seyde he, "I caste me never to be wedded man." Elayne's next request is even more unconventional, "Than, fayre knight," seyde she, "woll ye be my paramour?"

It is obvious from Launcelot's emphatic reply, "Jesu deffende me!" [Jesus defend me!] seyde sir Launcelot. "For than I rewarded youre fadir and youre brothir full evyll for their grete goodnesse" [for then I rewarded your father and your brother ill for their great good ness] that he is shocked by her direct and strait-forward proposition.

Elayne does not possess the powerful status of Guinevere or Isode; she is a simple woman, not a queen. Her words are plain and simple, "Sir, I wolde have you to my husbunde"; there are no elevated forms of address or elaborate expressions in her speech. Her language is simple but it is, nonetheless, powerful in its directness and clarity. Only in her last utterance does Elayne admit weakness; "I had no myghte to withstonde the fervent love, wherefore I have my deth [I have no might to withstand the fervent love, therefore I have my death]."

The author's sympathy is with Elayne, who has "no myghte to withstonde" the sorrow of unrequited love. In the *Prose Launcelot* Elayne makes bitter speeches after Launcelot's rejection, accusing him unjustly of her destruction. She begins to resemble other, not so virtuous, females (such as Morgan Le Fey) who try to trap Launcelot and fail. Once her character is undermined, so is the impact of her challenge of the assumption that a woman can not express her desire for a man and still maintain her good reputation. Again Sir Thomas Malory alters his sources to prevent the derogation of Elayne. In *Le Morte Darthur*, Elayne says, "Am I nat an earthly woman?" and then with crystal clarity she states, "my belyve ys [my believe is] that I do no offense, though I love an earthly man..." (639). Elayne's statement is powerful and meaningful. She commits "no offense" by offering her love to Launcelot; and her reputation is blameless.

Conclusion

Much like historical heroines of Malory's time, Joan of Arc and Queen Margaret of Anjou, the women of *Le Morte Darthur* struggle against the age-old stereotypes and the social constraints of their gender. These "earthly" women believe in the value of earthly life that includes the lusty month of May, the nakedness of Trystram in bed with Isode the Fair, the girlish pleasure of Isode the White Hands in "kyssynge and clyppynge," the innocent "love lettirs" written by young Keyhydins to Isode and by her to him, and the last order of Guinevere on her deathbed to her knight, sir Lancelot, bidding him "to fetche my corps, and besyde my lord kyng Arthur he shal berye [bury] me." This belief (in the value of earthly life) raised them far beyond the tenets of medieval moralism.

Thus, in the above analysis I have attempted to trace the origins and examine the transformations of Malory's female characters for a deeper understanding of their roles and, consequently, their utterances in *Le Morte Darthur*.

Notes

1. The word "mercy" in Middle English often served as a way to express an apology. Thus, in this case, saying "Mercy" does not equal begging for mercy.
2. Malory's intelligent Isode even has something in common with a character of Russian folklore, beautiful sorceress Vassilisa the Wise, who loves the simpleminded folk hero Ivan the Fool and guides him through a series of adventures. At times, Ivan disregards Vassilisa's advice, with dire consequences.
3. Andreas Capellanus was the author of *De Amore Libri Tres* (1196), in which the 12th century code of chivalric behavior found its most accomplished form.

CHAPTER 5 CONCLUSION

Overview

This dissertation presented a sociolinguistic discourse analysis of power relations in female speeches of *Le Morte Darthur*. The present study incorporated various approaches to discourse analysis and applied them to the analysis of female discourses in Malory's narrative, thereby contributing to the understanding of **meaning** in *Le Morte Darthur*.

In addition, an implication of the present study may be in contributing to a better understanding of gender differences in discourse and of the role of power in female interactions through historical perspective.

It has been suggested (Austin, 1962; Searle, 1975) that the methodology of discourse analysis, in particular, that of Speech Act Theory, is better suited for the analysis of spontaneous, rather than literary discourses (Chapter 1). Nonetheless, I found the methodology of **Ethnography of Communication**, as expounded by Dell Hymes (1974), to be ideally suited for the present analysis, especially, when applied in combination with the elements of **discourse-historical** method of text analysis (Wodak et al., 1990; Titsler et al., 2000).

For the present analysis it is important to distinguish between the **voices** (Pavel, 1985) of implicit narrator (the sources), personified narrator (the author), the hearers (readers/audience), and the participants (personages), as discussed in Chapter 1. In this case, the discourse participants who are the personages of *Le Morte Darthur* are frequently voicing the author's ideas, while, at the same time, acquiring their own voices.

The women's voices and, consequently, women's roles in *Le Morte Darthur* are currently a controversial issue (e.g., Wheeler and Tolhurst, 2001). It may be tempting to presume that the author's own male style of interaction has affected the language of Malory's female characters, making their speech more masculine or less feminine. It has even been suggested (e.g., La Farge, 1992) that it was Malory's intention to reduce or disregard women's part in the narrative. However, the present analysis has discovered overwhelming evidence contrary to such assumptions.

The true role of women in *Le Morte Darthur* could, perhaps, be most expressively exemplified by the speech of Elayne, the Fair Maid of Astolat (discussed in *Earhtly Love* section of Chapter 4). Elayne is a heroine brought up within the canons of the common medieval model of the silent and obedient woman, as evident from the advice she receives from her father to bear her grief in silence. Up to this point Elayne has been adhering to the powerless model of behavior, keeping quiet and frequently swooning, as it has been expected of a proper maiden. However, in sharp contrast to her traditional verbal behavior, Elayne rejects her father's advice, as well as the silent model, by verbalizing her complaints and making powerful statements not only to defend her own actions, but to speak on behalf of all women.

In fact, **contrast** is a marked feature in the speech of Malory's female characters, especially as far as power features in language are concerned. The women of *Le Morte Darthur* vary the way they talk, for strategic or personal reasons, depending on the situation, context and the discourse participants (as discussed in Chapter 2). The use of positive politeness strategies and an indirect way of giving advice can be found in the speech style of Isode. Yet, these face-saving strategies in Queen Isode's speech are

reserved exclusively for the conversations with her lover Trystram, while no hedging is used in Isode's interactions with the other participants.

Guinevere's dominating, direct and assertive speech in a conflict with Meleagant stands in sharp contrast to her verbal behavior in an argument with her lover Lancelot. During the course of the argument, Guinevere wavers from her well-composed powerful speech behavior, and breaks into tears, while abandoning all concerns for her own face-needs. In this case, Guinevere's tears can be seen as a contextualization cue, signaling the beginning of powerless discourse. By the time the argument of Lancelot and Guinevere occurs, the reader would have become accustomed to the commanding language frequently used by Guinevere in mixed-gender conversations, which is why a sudden loss of power in the Queen's speech drastically increases the dramatic effect of the scene.

There is, perhaps, an ever so slight influence of author's own gender on the speech of his female characters, which may be unavoidable in a case of any author or any literary text. An example of such influence could be rare use of compliments in the speech of female characters. In contrast, the females of the French sources of *Le Morte Darthur*, the prototypes of Malory's women, give and receive compliments in abundance. Yet the reduction of compliments could once again be seen as a deliberate technique employed by the author to emphasize the rare cases in which the compliments are used. Thus, Isode's compliment to Trystram, at a point of miscommunication in this couple's talk, brings Trystram to a sudden awareness of Isode's feelings for him, while at the same time dissipating a potential argument. On the other hand, Guinevere never compliments her lover Lancelot directly, yet in a conversation with one of her maids she calls him the "*moste noble knyght of the worlde*" (612). In this case, Queen Guinevere's indirect

compliment makes the reader aware of the Queen's true feelings for Sir Lancelot, as well as of her unwillingness to convey those feelings to the addressee.

Thus, the author's influence on his heroines by no means deprives them of femininity, but rather adds to the depth of these heroines, their intelligence and their strong, passionate, unyielding personalities that emerge in the course of their discourses.

Malory's narrative style contains few descriptions of his characters; their personalities unfold through their communications throughout various speech events. The present analysis examined the selected instances of speech behavior (in which female personages are involved), such as conflicts, confrontations, apologies, complains and advice (see Chapter 3).

Power relations, both implicit and explicit, are a driving force in all kinds of verbal interactions in *Le Morte Darthur*. Moreover, in mixed-gender interactions power relations are never absolute, but immensely fluid and flexible. The power display may be pronounced or subtle, sometimes taking a form of excessive politeness, as in Queen Isode's forms of address 'My awne [own] lorde' to her knight Trystram. Isode's conversations with Trystram present a contrast to her communication with the disfavored knight, Palamydes, in which power relations are conveyed by the adequately powerful language.

At the same time, powerless style by no means predominates among Malory's female characters and it is often used for strategic purposes and with an actual intent to assert power. Thus, when one woman finds herself in a hopelessly powerless circumstances (i. e. the wife of Segrawides, given as a gift to Sir Bleoberis by King Mark), another woman vocalizes her complains about the situation to the King's nephew.

A seemingly powerless speech act of indirect complaining turns into a power play, as it instigates a rescue mission, in spite of the King's orders.

Interestingly, in mixed-gender interactions such as advice, nagging or confrontation, the patterns of interaction frequently conform to the patterns established for *modern* male/female communications by the studies on Gender and Language (Tannen, 1990; DeCapua and Dunham, 1998; Boxer, 2000; Hamdorf, 2003). This phenomenon attests to the stability of the patterns through times and cultural variations. Even different types of conflict managing styles, established by modern analysts (Ting-Toomey et al., 2001; Hamdorf, 2003), are applicable in correlation with psychological variables, such as independence vs. interdependence and the notion of *face* (Goffman, 1967).

My identification of Queen Margaret, as a possible prototype of Malory's Queen Guinevere is another attempt to explain the strong differences between Malory's heroines and their prototypes in the sources. In this study, particular attention has been paid to the marked difference in verbal behavior of Malory's Guinevere and her literary precursor, Guinevere of Chrétien de Troyes (who almost certainly had a very different historical prototype in the person of Chrétien's patroness Queen Marie de Champagne). I have also suggested that not only Queen Guinevere, but to a certain extent all of *Le Morte Darthur's* heroines envelop the spirit of extraordinary and influential historical heroines of Malory's time (Chapter 4).

Malory might have the most controversial prototypes for his heroines, but what makes his female characters so intricate is superposition of different historical levels, from the remnants of matriarchal habits, through the unbound male dominance in the

Dark Ages, to the Christian doctrine of femininity and masculinity as parts of one spiritual body, to the chivalric tradition of adoration of woman, and finally, to the growing role of women in 15th Century political life.

Female personages of *Le Morte Darthur* convey these evolutionary sequences in their verbal behavior. The most archaic level is, perhaps, personified by Isode's mother, who "gryped that swerde in hir honde fersely" [gripped the sword in her hand fiercely] (238), and without any attempt to explain her actions attacked her daughter's lover Trystram. The victimized woman of the Dark Ages is Queen Igrayne, with abundance of powerless features in her communication with men of power. The chivalric idol is represented by Lyonet, silently waiting to be rescued from the besieged tower by a worthy knight. Yet Malory's principal heroines, Isode and Guinevere, with intricate combination of powerful and powerless features in their speech, are the embodiment of all these historic and cultural levels, from which their complex and versatile personalities emerge. These women were Malory's challenge to the long-standing tradition, in which these same literary characters were very differently assessed (as discussed in Chapter 4). In my opinion, Malory created female characters that, with the exception of perhaps, Tolstoy's Anna Karenina, have no rivals in either Medieval, or in modern literature.

Limitations of the research

Malory's voluminous *Le Morte Darthur* possesses a virtually inexhaustible supply of material for textual discourse analysis. The present study of powerful and powerless features in female discourses limits the discourses examined to the *selected* speeches of the female characters. The purpose of the selection is to present the examples of verbal behavior, in which the discursive features related to power appear to be most prominent. However, the delicate interplay of power relations in speech often becomes evident only

in the course of a methodical sociolinguistic discourse analysis. Thus, a detailed analysis of the entire content of female speeches from *Le Morte Darthur* might reveal new nuances of meaning.

Another limitation is perhaps in narrowing down the number of speech events examined to *selected* interactions, such as conflicts, advice, compliment and other events. Yet there appears to be some evidence of another kind of verbal behavior in some female conversations, and that is *teasing*, which has not been addressed in this analysis. This dissertation attempts to demonstrate that the methodology of discourse analysis and sociolinguistics can be successfully applied to textual analysis. Yet, there are a few exceptional cases of verbal behavior (e.g. teasing), where the knowledge of **paralinguistic** and **extralinguistic** cues (Boxer, 2002: 81), such as intonation and *eye gaze*, imperative for the analysis, is not available in this case.

Directions for Further Research

A promising direction for further research is in the analysis of male discourses of *Le Morte Darthur*. In this dissertation the speech of the male characters have only been examined in relation to that of their female interlocutors, as it has been extremely significant for the present study to assess the way female discourses are perceived by male participants of the interactions. However, in the course of the future study it would be possible to analyze male discourses with the purpose of revealing the patterns of male interaction in *Le Morte Darthur*. It would also be significant to compare the speech of male characters in Malory's work to the discourses of their prototypes in the sources.

It has been mentioned in this research that the women of Arthurian legends underwent amazing transformations and gained entirely new voices in the process of becoming the characters of Malory's *Le Morte Darthur*. A comparison of male speeches

in *Le Morte Darthur* and the sources is likely to reveal transformations of equal significance.

Another interesting area for the future research would be a study of *couples talk* (Tannen, 1990). The conversations of the couples (e.g. interactions between Guinevere and Lancelot, as well as between Isode and Trystram) in *Le Morte Darthur* has received attention in this work. However, these conversations were analyzed with the focus on female characters. A shift of focus from female discourses to couples talk would undoubtedly lead to other interesting findings concerning mixed-gender conversation and further contribute to the understanding of meaning of Malory's work.

Closing Remarks

In the process of conducting the present study, I came to a full realization of the significance of sociolinguistic discourse analysis in interpreting literary work. In Malory's work, discourse is the major, sometimes the only tool for conveying meaning. The true role of women in *Le Morte Darthur* (the subject of many misconceptions and erroneous judgements) became evident in the course of the analysis of their speech.

In Christian philosophy there existed a common concept of union of genders as the Head and the Body, in which woman was relegated to the latter role (Stephens, 1989). This concept dominated over Medieval life and literature. Yet Malory's granted his female characters the freedom of expression that defied relegation of women to the role of the Body. The women of *Le Morte Darthur* find solutions to problems, which men often find unsolvable, by advising, nagging, scolding, complimenting, threatening, conflict managing and compromising. The combination of powerful and powerless features in the speech of female personages reflects the struggle of Malory's heroines to gain and maintain power in a society that relegated them to powerless positions.

Another concept, introduced by Saint Paul and cherished by medieval literature, was that of earthly love as microcosmic reflection of macrocosmic heavenly love (Idid.). Malory structured his work as an antithesis of Saint Paul's concept, conveyed through the discourses of the principle female characters, Guinevere, Isode and Elayne, who thereby became the proponents of earthly love and earthly life.

Some critics accuse the author of *Le Morte Darthur* of rejection of the spiritual values, because Malory significantly reduced the theme of the Grail Quest and redefined the purpose Knighthood as the protection of Women, as opposed to the protection of the Church. Yet, in reality, these crucial alterations symbolize the elevation of the spiritual value of earthly love, and the elevation of the role of women. Thus, it is not accidental that Malory's philosophy, as well as the main message of his work are voiced by female characters.

Sir Thomas Malory, faithful to the Oath of Knighthood that he himself has written, protected the women of *Le Morte Darthur*, not by idealizing them, or turning them into moral tutors, but by empowering them, by letting them speak for all women and by immortalizing their speech.

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