THE HOST'S IDIOLECT

INTRODUCTION

Chaucer's characters are well drawn. Chaucer individualizes the speech of his charecters and, for many of them, he devised what have been called 'special languages'. These special languages may well be described as an idiolect, the term used to describe the speech-habits of an individual, in contrast with a dialect, which describes the speech-habits of a group.

Chaucer's interest in the accuracy of his characters' speech is clear in some parts of *The Canterbury Tales*:

> "For this ye knowen al so wel as I:
> Whose moot reherce as ny as evere he kan
> Everich a word, if it be in his charge,
> Al speke he never so rudeliche and large,
> Or ellis he moot telle his tale untrewe,
> Or feyne thyng, or fybde wordes newe."[1]

It shows that any characters speak as they like, according with the social class they belong, their own personalities, the people they address, etc. All of these characteristics in Chaucer's work let us to find idiolects. And we can find one of his best effects by contrasting two or more idiolects.

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[1] *The Riverside Chaucer*, edited by Larry D. Benson. 3rd edition. Oxford: O.U.P., 1991. *General Prologue*, I. 730-736. (p. 35). An important quotation confirming the same idea is in *The Miller's Prologue*, I. 3168-3186. (p. 67). All the following quotations are from the same edition of *The Riverside Chaucer.*

I am going to describe the Host's idiolect. He is a curious, interesting and relevant character in *The Canterbury Tales*. Many approaches can be done from different perspectives when someone studies this character, not only his idiolect but the Host as representative of an uncritical contemporary audience, the Host as *governour*, the relation of the Host to the narrator, and so on.

The aim of this article is to demonstrate the Host's idiolect existence and to describe it.

Following this hypothesis the work is divided into three main parts. First, an intent to demonstrate how Chaucer considers the Host a special character. The second part consists of a description of the Host's idiolet. The third and last part is dedicated to a brief summary of my hypothesis, suggesting the reader to be aware of the possible studies which can be made from Chaucer's work.

I. THE HOST, A SPECIAL CHARACTER

There is no doubt about the certainty in the title above. The readers only have to consider the Host's function in *The Canterbury Tales*. He appears in many prologues of the tales and he may be considered as the judge, the arbitrator. Let us read Chaucer's own words decribing the Host's function, when he is called by Chaucer "maister of ceremonies":

> "A semely man OURE HOOSTE was withalle
> For to been a marchal in a halle."
> (I. 751-752)

But there are more factors and textual references to strengh this idea: Chaucer's consideration of the Host. When the author has already mentioned all the pilgrims, he "has forgotten" the Host:

> "Ther was also a REVE, and a MILLERE,

A SOMNOUR, and a PARDONER also,
A MAUNCIPLE; and myself- ther were namo".
(I. 542-544)

Chaucer mentioned himself and did not speak about the Host. He said that there were nobody else. Why? Because he considered the Host not like a pilgrim but like "Our Host". That is relevant: Chaucer refered to the Host with these words: "OURE HOOSTE", whenever he is cited.

At last, Chaucer described the Host when the General Prologue is about to finish, but after saying:

"Also I prey yow to foryeve it me,
Al have I nat set folk in hir degree
Heere in this tale, as that they sholde stonde".
(I. 743-745)

And, at once, after these words, Chaucer described the Host:

"A semely man OURE HOOste was withalle
For to been a marchal in a halle.
A large man he was with eyen stepe-
A fairer burgeys was ther noon in Chepe-
Blood of his speche, and wys, and wel ytaught
And of manhod hym lakkede right naught.
Ekk therto he was right a myrie man."
(I. 751-757)

At the beginning, the Host is called "maister of ceremonies" and the whole following description is refered to the charecteristics of a good maister of ceremonies: strong ("large man"), rash speaker ("Blood of his speche"), a good man ("manhod"), polite ("wel ytaught") and glad ("a myrie man").

We can aply these characteristics to the Host's idiolect. Here there is no negative evaluation of the Host's character. Chaucer saw him just with posi-

tive values. Nevertheless, the reader can bring out some negative aspects reading the Host's swearings expressions and rude words. The author of *The Canterbury Tales* pampered this character. Indeed Chaucer's descriptions about the Host's speech are significative enough to belive that::

> "He gan to speke as lordly as a kyng."
> (I. 3900)

> "® and with that word he sayde,
> As curteisly as it had been a mayde,"
> (VII. 445-446)

Most scholars accept the theory where the Host is considered a real person who was named Henry Bailly as the Cook calls him in his prologue. This person appeared in the Subsidy Rolls for Southwark in 1380-81, list "Henry Bailif ostyer" (innkeeper) and his wife "Christian". He was a man of substance who represented his borough in Parliament in 1376-77 and 1378-79 and held other public offices. Although he refered to his wife as "Goodelief", in Southwark records the wife of the real Harry Baily (or Bailly) is named Christian. So it seems to be a chosen name from "ironic malice".

There are many evidences to demonstrate the Host is a special character in *The Canterbury Tales*. He, basically, is a special and particular maister of ceremonies who had the exacting task of managing protocol and directing the service at feasts. And this feast, if we take the allegoric interpretation considering the pilgrimage as our life itself, is our life and the Host is a mentor, a leader, a judge … But this is only one of the many interpretations.

What it is clear is that this special character shows a "special language" which can be described as an idiolect because the Host's speech-habits are well determined and individualized.

II.- THE HOST'S IDIOLECT

Some characters have distintive linguistic characteristics which are more subtle than habitual phrases but which serve the same purpose of individualizing the character in a way that is easy to recognize.

Some features of the Host's speech are shared by some other characters but no one of those characters is as well individualized as the Host.

The Host's idiolect has a powerful variety and an unusual contrast. All the linguistic qualities are heightened by this contrast and variety. Henry Bailly is cheerfully disrespectful to everybody and his speech is substandard and colloquial but he shows extreme courtesy towards some persons depending on the social class they belong and then his speech is almost painfully correct. All of these characteristics and more than these ones will be explained in the following chapters.

1.- FORMAL/INFORMAL SPEECH

The formal and informal speech depends on the persons the Host addresses. It is important to take into account two circumstances:

* The Host speaks in the prologues or epilogues. Although he does to stop the tale when Chaucer tells his tale.

* The Host's function in the tales as a maister of ceremonies and as an arbitrator or judge. Besides he is Henry Bailly, an innkeeper, a pilgrim.

These two considerations suppose a limitation or a condition to the Host's speech and they lead the Host to use formal or informal speech.

This pilgrimage is a competition and it implies rivality and fighting. So the arbitrator must be strong. On the other hand a pilgrimage is a trip: personal relations must be fluent and they must be kept within a bearable peace. The pilgrimage is a game by means of words. So words are very important because they are the substance. Speech is the heart of the matter. And the speech is the blood of life. And life is a game, a pilgrimage, a fighting, a competition and a trip. As life is variety, speech is variety: *The Canterbury*

Tales are a collection of different tales which are told by different players-pilgrims-beings-fighters using differents speeches.

1.1. Formal address

1.1.1. He addresses the group

When Henry Bailly addresses the whole pilgrims group he uses formal speech:

> "Now lordynges, trewely,
> ye been to me right welcome, hertely"
> (I. 761-762)

This is the first time he addresses the group to welcome them. "Lordynges" implies a formal address very suitable to speak to a numerous group of people.

> "Lordynges, quod he, "I warne yow, al this route,
> The fourthe party of this day is gon…"
> (II. 16-17)

At this situation he addresses the group to go faster not in the way but in telling tales. He prepares them to give a quotation by Seneca.

> "And seyde, " Goode men, herkeneth everychon!"
> (II. 1.164)

He addresses the group "good men" to give his opinion about the *Man of Law's Tale*. His words are deferential.

> "Seyde in this wise: "Lordynges everichoo,
> Now lakketh us no tales mo than oon.
> Fullfilled is my sentence and my decree;
> I trowe thatwe han herd of ech degree;

Almost fulfild is al myn ordinance."
(X. 15-19)

Here he finishes his task as maister of ceremonies. This is the last tale precisely because it is the Parson's tale.

Two outstanding ideas must be brought out from the above quotations, when the Host addresses the group:

* Formal speech is inevitable because the group is all the mankind and because, following the Host's function, a judge, an arbitrator must be polite with the players if he wants to be respected by them during the game.

* He is a maister of ceremonies in the pilgrimage. He addresses the group to:

  - open the game (welcome)
  -go faster (games rules)
  -give opinions (enlivening the game)
  -sermonize (his own participation in the game)
  -close the game (farewell)

1.1.2. He addresses persons individually

When the Host addresses individual characters there are two speeches: formal or informal speech, depending on the social class the person belongs, Chaucer's consideration and the situation.

There are three persons who represent their high social status and Chaucer holds them in high steem. The Knight, representing the values of honour, loyalty, nobility, courtesy, formal speech and gallantry. The Prioress who represented the Catholic Church in its virtues of spiritual values, no corruption, no business and the Christian tradition. The Man of Law who represented wise words, respect and legality. The Parson is pampered by Chaucer in the

General Prologue, but the Host has a trouble because of his swearwords and because he is not respectful.

All the Knight's characteristics have been taken from Chaucer's text in the *General Prologue* when he describes the Knight. But what is more important is to point out Chaucer's evaluation of the Knight's speech:

> "He nevere yt no vileynye ne sayde.
> In al his lif unto no maner withgt."
> (I. 70-71)

So the Knight's speech is a formal speech and this characteristic is associated to the Knight's social class as a high and positive value by Chaucer.

The Host addresses him:

> "Sire knyght, qod he, "my mayster and my lord,"
> (I. 837)

The Host's words are significant enough to avoid more explanations about the formal speech when he addresses the knight.

Another important and intersting character whose status obligues the Host to addresses him formaly is the Man of Law. Let us have a look to Chaucer's description in the *General Prologue*. It is very relevant to match the descriptions from the *General Prologue* and the Host's consideration to the same characters. We can find interesting similarities. Chaucer's portrait of the Man of Law can be summarized:

Chaucer describes him as a "Sergeant of Laws". It is important because Chaucer's intention is to high the character's status. A Sergeant of Law was a lawyer who belonged to the highest order in his profession. He is prudent, wise, well endowed with superior qualities, judicious and with much dignity. The Man of Law's speech is a formal and wise speech as Chaucer describes it:

> " He semed swich, his wordes weren so wise"

(I. 314)

The Man of Law's Tale has a highly elaborated style. Such a style is well suited to the Man of Law who uses all the devices recommended by the mediaeval rhetoricians to move our piety for the heroine, almost as if she were pleading her case in a court of law. The Man of Law, like the Knight, is concerned with the problem of the alternation of joy and sorrow in human life.

When the Host addresses him his speech is extremely formal:

"Sire Man of Lawe, quod he, "so have ye blis"."
(II. 33)

This address suggests that the Host does not recognize the special status of the Sergeant of Law, so the terms "sergeant" and "man of law" seem to have been interchangeable.

In addressing the Man of Law, the Host uses a number of legal terms: "froward, sumytted, cas, juggement, acquiteth, bibeeste, devoir". It shows the real consideration to this character's status. The Host tries to imitate his vocabulary. So Chaucer's opinion ("his wordes were so wise") and the Host's act of speech agree.

The Prioress is the only character with the Man of Law and the Knight, who is formally addressed by the Host in a special high consideration. The rest of the characters are considered colloquialy with familiarity or with informal address.

Chaucer's description of the Prioress in the *General Prologue* considers her good manners, her excellent department, her friendly bearing, the manners of the court, dignified in behaviour, worthy of respect, moral sense and solicitude and compassionate. Nevertheless, there is a litle touch of irony when Chaucer decribes her manner at dinner and her compassionate which is bordering on sentimentality.

The Host adresses her:

"As courteusly as it had been a mayde,
"My lady Prioresse, by you leve,
So that I wiste I sholde yow nat greve"
(VII. 446-448)

So there is no blunder for the Host's formal address. His words are so smooth that he tries not to make her the most subtle hurt with his words.

1.2. Informal Address

The Host has two different suitable styles to adress the pilgrims depending on the persons and the situations. When he addresses formally he uses a more distintive style which icludes even flattering and when he addresses informaly he uses a rude style which involves not only colloquial expressions but rude words, oaths and swearwords. He goes from the flattering to the insult.

The substandard nature of his speech is made clear quite widely when he addresses most of the characters. His informal speech is supported by the grammatical aspect represented by the second person singular ("Thou" or linked with a verb: "hastow") and his habit of adderessing people their names of occupations. Another way of informal addressing is calling people by their names, although it implies more a familiarity than infomality.

Sometimes, informal address has the proposal of involving people in a friendly atmosphere. We have all the aspects in the *The Miller's Prologue* when Henry Bailly addresses the Monk "Sir Monk" (I. 3.118), showing the formal address with "sir" and the same of the occupation"Monk". After that, because the Miller is drunken, the Host, trying to mantain a friendly relation addresses the Miller "Robin, my leve brother" (I. 3.129), and inmediately, when the Miller insists on telling a tale, the Host swore: "Tel on, a devel wey!, / Thou art a fool" (I. 3.134-3.135). Here we are the Host's variety, flexibility and versality to be able to cope.

Informal address is sometimes mixtured with an apparrent formal address, but it is all the cases a deceit to get irony. Apart from this aspect the Host's informal address can be characterized by:

a) an informal and derisive address, using the second person singular, the proper names or the occupations.

b) a familiarity atmosphere when he addresses people "Ye", "frend", proper names ("Roger", "John") or the occupations.

In addressing a single person, the forms historically appropiate to the second person singular, "thow, thee, thy(n)" are often replaced by the plural "ye, yow, youre(s) (and "ye" as subject takes a plural verb). This is a matter of social usage of some complexity, and a brief statement that would cover all occasions hardly possible.

It is approximately true that the plural forms imply greater fromality and politeness; yet they can be used even in intimate conversation, or within a family cultivated society. I am going to show those quotations I consider important for the Host's informal address. I will comment only all of those quotations which can add new contributions to those I have already explained.

"Now tellen on, Roger; looke that it be good,
For many a pastee hastow laten blood,"
(I. 4345-4346)

"Roger" is the Cook. The familiarity is a subtle strategy to critize him his petty theft. Here we have the Host's language in the address which is used to flatter the cook in order not to let him to be angry. The Host follows his slogan "Ful ofte in game a sooth I have herd seye".

But let us see what happens with this apparently formal o familiarity. We have the same character, the Cook, in another situation which makes the Host change his attitude and his speech. The Cook have drunk a lot, while they

have travelled along and many other pilgrims have already told their tales, and the Host tries to awake him.

> "Awake, thou Cook, quod he, God yeve thee sorwe"
> (IX. 14)

At this situation "thou", the second person singular shows us the informal and less respectful address.

> "Sir Parisshe Prest, quod he, "for Goddes bones"
> (II. 1166)

Here we have another similar situation. The Parson, a well admired character by Chaucer, is now highly esteemed by the Host, with a formal address. But the Parson gets angry because of the Host's habit of swearing. And then the situation and the speech change:

> "Oure Hooste answerde, "Oh Jankin, be ye there?
> I smelle a Lollere in the wind", quod he"
> (II.1172-1173)

There is an informal address. We can smell it. A powerful irony is present. "Jankin" is the diminutive of Sir John, a derisive name for a priest. "Lollere" means a heretical follower of Wyclif's doctrines. It is an insult because the real Lollards were almost unanimously opposed to pilgrimages. "Smelle" implies a gibe and a disdain. Humor, a bitter humor is used like a appropiate weapon to the Parson's status. Therefore, the Host addresses the Parson:

> "Sire preest, quod he, "artow a vicary?
> Or arte a person? Sey sooth, by thy fey!
> Be what thou be, nebreke thou natoure pley,"
> (X. 22-24)

He continues on swearing ("by thy fey"). Informal address is obvious with the usage of the second person singular "thou". It betrays the Host's strong personality and authority.

> "Oure Hoost tho spak, "A sire, ye sholde be hende
> And curteys, as a man of youre staat;"
> (III. 1286-1287)

Irony is under formality again. The Host with one of the worst loved characters for Chaucer. (We remember the biographical episode when Chaucer hit a friar with a stick). "Sire"is just pure irony. After this word the Host requests the friar to speak according with his status, that is to say, these words imply a social criticism against all those friars whose behaviors were not appropiate to his status because they had forgotten their vows of chastity and poverty.

I am going show a representative example of the Host's attitude of addressing people:

> "Where shal I calle yow my lord daun John,
> Or daun Thomas, or elles daun alon?
> Of what hous be ye, by your father king?
> I vouwe to God, thou hast a ful fair skin;"
> (VII. 1929-32)

Once again the "maister of irony". He plays with the proper names asking himself which one is the best one for the Monk.

He goes from the irony using formality ("my lord daun John") to the informal second person singular ("thou"). And after this mockery words he will make a picture of the Monk (which is a fright) comparing him with a strong cock in at subtle atmo sphere of sexual connotations.

2.- SWEARWORDS

Henry Bailly is the most enthusiastic swearer on the pilgrimage. Perhaps innkeepers were traditionally given to swearing. This fact does correspond to Chaucer's words describing the Host in the *General Prologue* ("Boold of his speche"). The maister of ceremonies pours out obscenities not only when he swears but when he is angry (as when the Pardoner finished his tale). "The Host is the most enthusiastic swearer on the pilgrimage": this sentence can be demonstrated by different ways: Chaucer's words and the opinions from two pilgrims (the Pardoner and the Parson). The first one is obviously easy to be illustrated. Two examples:

> "Oure Hooste lough and swoor, "So moot I goon,"
> (I. 3114)

> "Oure Hooste seyde, and swoor, "By Goodes bones"".""
> (IV. 1212a)

And there are more quotations which can be cited to show Chaucer's words describing the Host's swearwords.

The second one is supported by the Host's companions' opinions. The Pardoner refers to him:

> "I rede that oure Hoost heere shal bigynne,
> For he is moost envoluped in synne."
> (VI. 941-42)

considering he is the man who has more sins if anyone judges his speech.

Besides, the Parson's opinion is more evident when he censures Henry Bailly because of his swearwords in the Epilogue of *The Man of Law's Tale:*

> "The Parson him answerde, "Benedicite!
> What eileth the man, so synfully to swere?"
> (II. 1170-71)

Swearing was endemic, even among Church dignataries. But there were limitations. Here we have Chaucer's words when he describes the Prioress in the *General Prologue*; irony is present:

> "Hire gretteste ooth was but by Seinte Loy!"
> (I. 120)

Considering Chaucer's irony when he says that her greatest oath was "By Seinte Loy" Chaucer may be supposed to be fond of oaths. The reader must notice the contrast with Chaucer's description of the Knight:

> "He nevere yet no vileynye ne sayde
> In al his lyf unto no maner wight."
> (I.70-71)

In the description of the Knight there is no irony. The Knight has never said any swearword.

Let us comment the Parson's words again. The Host assumes that the Parson's objection to swear indicates he is a Llollard, but though the Llollards raised special objections to the taking of oaths, orthodox preaches were equally opposed to casual swearing and cursing.

Nevertheless, Henry Bailly has trouble with any oath involving "corpus" [1] and with saints' names [2]. So the Host has many malapropisms, mainly with "corpus" and the saints' names. It can be the result of an excesive usage of oaths or Chaucer's mis atributions.

There are many swearwords, some of them are meaningful and others are casual oaths. A more detail study of the vast usage of swearing by the Host will exceed the space of this work.

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[1] See: *The Monk's Tale,* VII. 1906; *The Physician's Tale*, VI. 314; *The Shipman's Tale*, VII. 435.

[2] See: *The Pardoner's Prologue ,* VI. 310.

3.- OBSCENE EXPRESSIONS. IRONY AND HUMOR

When Henry Bailly is angry the "maister of ceremonies" becomes a rude man. And when he is angry because someone picks a quarrel with him, he is another man. Then his speech changes into a weapon to hit against his enemy. He says in *The Prologue of the Monk's Tale*:

> "For I am perilous with knyf in honde"
> (VII.1919)

He is dangerous with his speech as I am going to show with his own words. Let us read the episode with the Pardoner:

> "But, by the croys wich that Seint Eleyne fond,
> I wolde I hadde thy coillons in myn hond
> In stide of relikes or of seintuarie
> Lat kutte hem of I wol thee helpe hem carie;
> Thet shul be shryned in an hogges toord!".
> (VI. 951-55)

The Host says to the Pardoner's he is going to cut his testicles and to put into a pig pat as they were reliquies to be kissed. "Coillons" is a French word very similar to another in Catalan language. The Host is neither the maister of ceremonies nor the "maister of irony": he is Henry Bailly, the innkeeper. He threatens with speech violence the Pardoner.

This episode shows the versatility of the Host's speech. He can speak as a king or as a maid (as Chaucer describes his speech) or he can speak as a muleteer.

Irony and humor are present when he describes people. Three significant examples are enough to show his irony and humor. All of them are related with women and sex and in all the descriptions the characters look like frights.

The first description is from Chaucer, as a pilgrim, in *The Prologue to Sir Thopas*:

> "He in the waast is shape as wel as I;
> This were a popet in an arm t'enbrace
> For any womman, smal and fair of face.
> He semeth elvyssh by his contenaunce,
> For unto no wight dooth he daliaunce."
> (VII. 700-704)

It could have been written by Valle Inclaån. Chaucer is a likely puppet ("popet") to embrace for any woman, small and fair of face. It is really a particular and special description. And it is not a casual description. The Host makes all of them similar, with the same style. These descriptions have nothing to do with Chaucer's descriptions. The Host's idiolect is well drawn.

The Monk is a cock ("corn"), and women are hens. The Monk is a fright, a sexual enemy for husbands.

> "Religion hath take up al the corn
> of tredyng, and we borel men been shrympes
> Of fieble trees ther comen wrecched ympes.
> This maketh that oure hennes been soskelendre.
> An feble that they may nat wel engendre.
> This maketh that oure wyves wole assaye
> Religious folk, for ye mowe bettre paye
> of Venus paiementz than mowe we;
> Good woot, no lusseburghes payen ye!"
> (VII. 1954-62)

The Host's wife is a wild animal. The description is made reproducing textual words form his wife and describing a situation:

> "And crieth, "False coward, wrek thy wyf!

By corpus bones, I wol have thy knyf,
and thou shalt have my distaf and go spynne!"
(VII. 1905-1908)

Henry Bailly's troubles with his wife affect his ideas about women. But any readers can notice an obvious contradiction here: the Host as a coward man has nothing to do with his brave speech and personality. We can read some lines and consider the episode between the Pardoner and the Host: a convincing explanation for this contradiction requires a deeper study, although it is clear this is a special language effect to emphasize the Host's wife malice giving her a masculine behaviour.

4.- THE HOST AS A PHILOSOPHER

Formal speech is relevant not only when the Host addresses someone but when he sets up as an expert in tales, philosophy, astronomy, women, wine, etc.

The readers can be surprised when they see that the Host does not like moral tales and he preaches the pilgrims with his "wisdom". He always wants people to tell a funny tale, he hates moral stories:

"Tel us a tale of myrthe, and that anon"
(VII. 706)

"For we schal han a predicacioun,
This Llollere heer wil prechen us somwhat"
(II. 1175.76)

"Telle us swich thyng as may oure hertes glade"
(VII. 2811)

The Host asks for funny tales nearly any time. But we can drawn the real Host's idea about tales reading some lines from two different passages. The first one is from the *General Prologue* when he shows his intention:

> "Tales of best sentence and moost solaas"
> (I. 798)

The second one expresses the same idea in *The Prologue of the Monk's Tale*, when the Host considers that his audience can be bored and sick of his sermons:

> "But be nat wroothm, my lord though that I pleye
> Ful ofte in game a sooth I have herd seyel"
> (VII. 1963-64)

"Teaching taking pleasure in it": that is his device. "Carpe diem" is another suggestion.

The Host preaches from two different proposals: scholarship and social criticism. The first one shows the following themes in the following parts. These references have the value of being representative texts of his more formal speech with a touch of false erudition. An erudite Host has nothing to do with the Henry Bailly descripted until now. The Host as a scholarship is an artificial character. It does not match:

* Quotation from Seneca: Time is gold. In *The Man of Law's Tale.*

* Quotations of wisers: Audience and opinions. *The Nun's Priest's Tale*.

* His own words: Natural gifts which cause death. *The Pardoner's Tale*.

* Quotation from Salomon: Everything has its time. *The Clerk's Tale*.

Social criticism always carries an ironic language and humor. The characters which are touched by this criticism are become into frights. These social criticism are from the following parts:

* About the Cook's pilfering: *The Cook's Prologue*

* About tales like sermons: *The Man of Law's Epilogue*

* About moral tales: *Prologue to Melibee*

* About wives like wild animals: *The Monk's Prologue*

* About clergymen's sexual attributes: *The Monk's Prologue*

* About moral tales: *The Nun's Priest's Prologue*

* About moral tales: *The Clerk's Prologue*

* About astute women: *The Merchant's Prologue*

* About vicies (wine): *The Manciple's Prologue*

All of these references suggest that the Host is a "wel ytaught" man and a critical observer of his society. This Host's role matches with this character, it is not false or articifial. He expresses his opinions with humor, sharpness, irony and bravery (brave deed and boast). He is not a shy man, on the contrary he is a glad and daring man who sometimes is insolent disrespectful, proud, bold and arrogant.

5.- METALANGUAGE

The best description, picture or definition about the Host's proposal when he speaks can be got from his own words. But before that, let us consider his companions' opinions about the Host's speech.

Chaucer, not as a pilgrim, but as a narrator describes his speech twice in two situations. Perhaps because the Host's speech is an unusual speech there:

"He gan to speake as lordly as a kyng"

(I. 3900)

"As curteisly as it had been a mayde"
(VII. 446)

On the other hand, there is one character with negative opinion of the Host's language: the Parson. He does not like the Host's swearwords:

"What eyleth, the man, so synfully to swere?"
(II. 1171)

After these declarations from the Host's companions about his speech, let us see the Host's own thought about the usage of language, his preferences and capability.

"Seyde I nat wel? I kan nat speke in terme;"
(VI. 311)

Henry Bailly recognizes his language limitations: he cannot speak in technical language ("in terme") when he speaks about the Physician's world. So he considers that he speaks in plain language and every pilgrim should do in that way. In *The Clerk's Prologue* the Host's words are significant:

" Telle us som murie thyng of aventures.
Youre termes, youre colours, and youre figures,
keepe hem in stoor til so be ye endite.
Heigh style, as whan that men to kynges write
Speketh so pleyn at this time, we yow preye,
That we may understonde what ye seye."
(IV. 15-20)

The Host uses the first person plural "we" as the majestic plural to involve the whole group in the request. This resort implies the Host's worry to

emphasize that they belong to a plain social class and any erudite speech will show the evidence of pompousness. Apart from this consequence on using the majestatic plural, one very important point can be pointed out: people must adapt his speech to his status but giving priority to the situation and to the audience. The Clerk (a student from Oxford) is supposed to be able of an erudite language but the Host asks for him to avoid figures of speech ("colours"), technical terms ("terms"), rhetorical devices ("figures") and a high style. They are pilgrims on the way, not kings in royal palaces.

These words which had been said by the Host himself lead us to understand more openly the Host's idiolect. He does not belong to a high social class but he can speak, in Chaucer's words, "as lordly as a kyng". He adapts his speech to the people and to the situations: he has a plain language with the pilgrims (formal or informal) and when the situations make him angry his speech goes down to the muleeter's quality and level. He is a maister of ceremonies, a "maister of irony and humor", but he is Henry Bailly, an innkeeper, a man, a pilgrim on pilgrimage.

6.- «WOMAN» IN THE HOST'S SPEECH

An important first consideration is the fact that the Host does not separate his opinion of his wife from his opinion of women.

Woman is a devil, a wild animal, a guilty being whose unic value is the sexual pleasure which must be taken out by men. They are dangerous puppets. There is one exception: the Prioress, but she is not a sexual being, she is only religion, spiritual values. My idea is supported by Chaucer's words in the prologue of *The Prioress's Tale* describing the Host's speech when he addresses the Prioress:

> "As curteisly as it had been a mayde"
> (VII. 446)

It is significant. Chaucer does not refer to the Host with the personal pronoun "it", it is applied to the Prioress; that is, a neuter pronoun: there is no sexual implication. And, indeed, she is a maid, a person who had not had sexual relations.

I am going to comment all the Host's references to women. All of them show that the above statements are true and not speculations:

> "This were a popet in an arm t'embrace
> For any womman, smal and fair of face"
> (VII. 701-702)

The Host describes Chaucer as a puppet in women's arms. So man is weak sex. In the same text Henry Bailly says that Chaucer's figure looks like his. This comparation suggests that my generalization has a real basis. The adjectives "smal and fair" have sexual connotations.

> "I hadde levere than a barel ale
> That Goodelief, my wyf, hadde herd this tale!"
> (VII. 1893-94)

His wife and, by extension, all women are compared with a barrel of beer. Of course, a barrel of beer is much more important for the Host. "Goodelief" is an ironic name meaning "good life", that is, the opposite for the Host's point of view. Henry Bailly's real wife was named "Christian".[1]

> "This maketh that oure wyves wole assaye
> Religious folk, for ye mowe bettre paye
> Of Venus paimentz than mowe we."
> (VII. 1959-61)

[1] See the chapter "The Host, a special character"

"Oure" and "we" are majestic plural to involve all women an men. Women are avid of sex and adultery.

> "Thee were nede of hennes, as I wene,
> Ya, moo than seven tymes seventewe"
> (VII. 3453-54)

Women are hens and men are semental animals (cocks). Numbers implie derisive sense, abuse: women are sexual objects. No comments.

> "Algale this sely mayde is slayn, allas!
> Allas, to deere boughte she beatee!
> Wherfore I seye al day that men may see
> That yiftes of Fortune and of Nature
> Been cause of deeth to many a creature"
> (VI. 292-96)

Although there are pagan references ("Fortune and of Nature"), this was the official doctrine of the Catholic Church in that time: woman was the dangerous object of desire, the guilty being because of her beauty. Beauty, as a antural feature, was a sin. It was cause of death.

> "And seyde, "Lat the womman, telle hire tale"
> (III. 851)

Although the determiner "the" exists, the word "woman" is a general statement. What is meaningful in this quotation is the address. The Host does not addresses the Wife of Bath's as he does with men. He does not address saying her name, occupation, etc. Why? Because she is representative of all women. When he addresses the Prioress "My lady Prioresse" he does not address a woman but a status.

> "Lo, whiche sleightes and subtilitees

In wommen been! For ay as bisy as bees
Been they, us sely men for to deceyver"
(IV. 2421-23)

"But of hir tonge, a labbyyng shrewe is she,
And yt she hath a heep of vices mo."
(IV. 2428-24)

Men are innocent creatures ("sely men") and women are gossip and vicious. Women deceive innocent and poor men. This is the Host's picture.

"Or hastow with some quene al nyght yswonke?"
(IX. 18)

These words are said by the Host to the drunken Cook. Relationships between men and women are bad or utilitary relationships, that is, the hell or the heaven (heaven for women, of course). Woman is a wife, that is, a wild animal; woman is a trollop, gossip, guilty of men's sins, because of their beauty…

The only positive consideration is for the Prioress because she is not a wife or a sexual object, that is, she is not a woman but a social and religious status: an idea without body (flesh).

The Host's diolect implies a sex differenciation in language. Answering to Chambers'question: "why do men and women play different roles in the spreading of linguistic changes?"[1], and aplying the anwswers to the Host's idiolect because he represents a well differenciated male speech I considered that all the factors which involve our actual society are the same for the Host's society:

[1] CHAMBERS, J. K. and TRUDGILL, P., *Dialectology*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980, p. 98.

* Women had fewer opportunities for achievement and they are therefore likely to signal their social status by how they appear and behave (including linguistically) than by what they do.

* Women tend, perhaps as a result of fewer occupational opportunities and a greater tendency to stayed at home, to participate in less cohesive social networks.

* Women (excepting the Wife of Bath) are encourage to a much greater extent to be correct, discreet, quiet and polite in their behaviour (only those who belong to a religious community). Pressures on women to use 'correct' linguistic forms are therefore greater than those on men. (This also manifests itself in different attitudes towards swearing by men and woman). Men, on the other hand, appear at some level of awareness to be favourably disposed than women to low status speech forms. This may well be because of the connotations of rougness, toughness and 'masculinity' (our Host) associated with working class language.

III.- CONCLUSIONS

> "When ways of speaking can be associated with groups of people, they constitue a dialect; when they can be associated with an individual, they form an idiolect".

Brook's[1] definition can be applied to the Host as a special character whose characteristics and individualized speech-habits form an ideolect.

The most important points can be summarized now:

* The Host is a special character for Chaucer assuming an important role not only as a character but as a device for the narrative structure. So, this differenciation implies individual chatacteristics not only in his

[1] BROOK, G.L: *The laguage of Dickens.* London: Andre Deutsch, 1970, p. 168.

function in the work, but in his speech. Chaucer's worry of the accuracy helps to develop a whole medieval world of different speeches.

* The function as a master of ceremonies does not imply a conventional courtesy. Sometimes, the Host is Henry Bailly, another pilgrim, a man, and his speech does not work as a functional element in the work (pilgrimage).
* Appropiateness of the style of speech to the occassion is a permanent characteristic. The Host's speech is characterized by flexibility and versatility to be able to cope.

  If he speaks formally and, suddenly, he gets angry, he changes his speech form the the flattering (speaking as a king) to the insult (speaking as a muleteer).
* Describing the Host's idiolect by means of adjectives may produce a final portrait of the character: strong, ironic fluenty speaker, well taught, masculine, glad, obscene, critic…
* The formal and informal speech is sometimes completely separated and somentimes these two ways of speech are mixtured because there are irony and gibe under the formal speech.
* Address makes up a relevant cue to study the Host's idiolect. Irony can blur the readers.
* A widely morphological and syntactic study may have provided more characteristics.

  - The personal pronouns can help to find out formal or informal speech: "Thou" for informal and "Ye" for formal.

  - The word "Now" is excessively used by the Host because of his worry for the present moment to control and organize the game-pilgrimage-life-trip-fighting-competition.

  - "I", the first person singular is excessively used by the Host to reafirm his authority and personality in the middle of a conflictive trip.

-Most verbs are: to tell, to say, to speak, to hear, to pray. The great aboundance of these verbs shows that the Host works following his function: a maister of ceremonies.

-Most adjectives are related with "good", indicating a positive meaning. It suggests a contrast with the apparent and continuous Host's blast. It would (as the usage of the verbs demonstrates) show that the Host succeded at his work as a maister of ceremonies.

* The Host as a philosopher does not match with the general portrait that the reader can bring out, although he cites some authorities (Seneca, Solomon). There is a contradiction between the Host's dislike of the moral tales and his "sermons" to the pilgrims.
* The Host is a "maister of irony" and a sharpen social critic.
* When the Host describes some characters (Chaucer, the Monk and his wife) he creates special descriptions which may be matched to Valle Inclan's frights.
* "Masculinity" is a suitable word to describe the Host's consideration of woman at his time. Woman, except when she belongs to a religious social status (the Prioress) is a wild animal, a sexual object, a dangerous puppet for men. The Prioress is not a woman but an idea without body, a social status.

I hope to spark off the readers' attention to these interesting aspects from Chaucer's work. Studying an idiolect reveals many secrets from the characters and it can help to know more about the author's language. This is just another starting point.

Jesús Serrano Reyes
University of Coårdoba

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