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A Cultural Linguistics approach to the "discovery of childhood" in sixteenth and seventeenth century Britain

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ABSTRACT

This article addresses childhood as a culturally constructed life-stage in sixteenth and seventeenth century Britain from a Cultural Linguistics or Ethnolinguistics approach. Intended as a language-centred contribution to the interdisciplinary field of Age Studies, this lexicographical study intends to prove that a new modern intersubjective conceptualization of childhood emerges in English during the period under consideration, confirming what historians have called the "discovery of childhood". Using the *Oxford English Dictionary* and the *Historical Thesaurus of the Oxford English Dictionary* as data sources, a corpus of 103 new words and word senses appearing during the Early Modern English period and associated with the five 'child' meanings listed as [PERSON] was compiled and analysed through a purposely-created chart of 24 parameters. Quantitative and qualitative results obtained verify the corpus as a coherent set of terms providing cumulative evidence of a clear change in the perception and conceptualization of childhood, arguably organized around what we have called *anchoring words*.

Keywords: Age Studies, Cultural Linguistics, lexicography, childhood, life-stage, Early Modern English.

1. Introduction

This study sets out to verify whether there is *linguistic* evidence of any "discovery of childhood" in Britain during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, as apparently advocated by social and historical scientists. That is, the study aims at the identification and linguistic reconstruction of the

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subjective, but not individual, system of internalized structures, schemes of perception, conception and possibly action, common to members of the Early Modern English society regarding childhood. More globally, falling back on the idea that until now linguistic analysis has been very much underutilised in social and humanistic studies, this contribution intends to expand Cultural Linguistics tenets and methodology to the field of Age Studies (AS).[1]

Three ideas lie behind the theoretical framework of this contribution. First, the need to contribute linguistic thinking to the burgeoning field of AS; second, the need to concentrate on the apparently neglected notion of childhood as an age stage. And third, the claim that lexicographical approaches may prove adequate to reveal socially and culturally shared schemes of perception. In this introduction I will briefly address each of these guidelines.

As is increasingly better-known, AS constitute an interdisciplinary field where the cross-fertilization of concepts and methods from previously distinct research traditions has given way to a newly shared sensitivity about age and age-stages, revealing additional gaps of research (Charise 2014; Segal 2014). Oddly enough, linguistics has been slow in responding to the age-challenge. Some have even advocated that linguistics has been age-blind up to recently (Coupland 2009). Thus, it seems timely to take on an ageing lens in the humanities, making age and age-stages a focus of attention.

From the 1990s AS have essentially made of age an analytical category, opposing the idea that chronological age is age. From this apparently simple theoretical tenet, the new tradition set out to fight against predefined taxonomies of social types, which portray a generally assumed coherence and stability of age categories through times and places. This means that age has become increasingly understood as a cultural notion implying the assumption that the conceptualization, definition, even the existence of life stages like childhood, adolescence, adulthood or later life, – to mention just the most commonly accepted ones -, varies across time, space and populations. Any age stage seems ultimately dependent on cultural schemes, responsible for the number of life-stage categories recognised

[1] We hold to the short designation of *Age studies* (*AS*), as opposed to *Ageing Studies*, for two basic reasons. First, it requires no disambiguation as for the interpretation of life as an ageing process, involving different stages from birth to death. And second, the term *Age studies*, introduced by Gullette in 1993, is used by the Modern Language Association and in the humanities in preference to "ageing studies" (Cole – Ray 2010: 17).

within a community, their boundaries and duration and the prestige granted to them. In other words, understanding age as a cultural concept implies the assumption that there exist socially shared patterns of knowledge that should be unearthed. However, due to the interdisciplinary nature of AS and the merging of both social and humanistic traditions within a common arena, discussion on how to reach this goal has reinstated the divide between disciplinary approaches to social and human issues as for the validity of their explanations (Goffman 1983; Hagestad – Dannefer 2001: 4; Biggs et al. 2003; Katz 2014, among others). For advocators of the humanities, empirical explanations seem stereotyping and all too sweeping, whereas for empirical scientists the humanities often turn anecdotal and hence non-significant, particularly because of an alleged over-emphasis on individual micro-interactions that seems to render the social norms and values invisible. It is indeed to reduce this divide that linguistics may be called into play. Following Nikander (2009), who regards linguistics as a suitable middle ground in the theoretical and analytical debate, it is also our contention that this discipline may provide a potential tool to curb the estrangement between the supposedly scientific and the irreducibly humanistic grasp in the cultural construction of childhood patterns (Tejada 2019). As will be expounded below, contemporary linguistics may bring life-stage studies at least two gains. First, a theoretical approach preventing research from falling into a methodological individualism, and second, a fact-based argumentation, in as far as it is linguistic data, free of common research biases, that lie at the base of hypotheses on cultural conceptualisations and critical attitudes (Tejada 2019).

Regarding the need to focus on childhood, suffice it to say that social research has singled it out as the "forgotten category" in the life-course (Frijhoff 2012: 23), or the "silent" and "obscure" years (King 2007: 389; see also Thomas 2004). Moreover, there seems to be scholarly agreement that it was only in the 1960s that the child was *discovered* in social discourse; that is, it was then that the child became newly perceived as an autonomous object of historiography (King 2007; Fass 2009; Dekker 2012; Frijhoff 2012, among others). More specifically, historians seem to have discovered childhood some sixty years ago very much due to Phillipe Ariès' ground-breaking essay, originally released in 1960 and later translated into English as *Centuries of Childhood: A Social History of Family Life* (1962). As is well-known, Ariès' work sparked off a heated and productive debate, which, despite its intensity, or because of it, gave way to an outpouring of studies on the history of childhood.

Most important for us is the fact that childhood may be a modern invention. In his controverted book, Ariès argued that childhood was discovered within the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries in Western Europe. The child was then discovered in social practice, becoming separately identified and perceived as an autonomous human being. Ariès attributes this discovery to a series of social and economic changes in Europe, expanding from the middle classes down through the social scale from the sixteenth to the twentieth century: namely, the rise of privacy in the household; changes in education[2], and very importantly, a more codified system of apprenticeship. According to Ariès, by the eighteenth century the mentalities had changed[3]. Moreover, from the sixteenth century onwards a change in the way people felt about children seems to have been brought about, their perception steadily sliding from neutrality to a higher valuation. Drawing on these premises, scholars in the social sciences have insightfully concluded that childhood "as distinct from biological immaturity is neither a natural nor a universal feature", though "it appears as a specific and cultural component of many societies." (Prout – James 1990: 8). Notwithstanding the above, this judicious and insightful debate has scarcely attracted the attention of linguists so far. It is probably the alleged linguistic blindness on age that has resulted in a clear lack of research on a dynamic definition and meaning of childhood in cultural and historical terms.

The third idea guiding this study concerns the fact that lexicographical and semantic research has been recently re-valued. In English linguistics at least, investigation in this field has been progressively re-gaining ground for various reasons, among which two are remarkable and should be mentioned here. First, the release of the new online edition of the *Oxford English Dictionary* (*OED*) in combination with the *Historical Thesaurus of the OED* (*HTOED*) has contributed much to the reappraisal of these studies, as Busse (2012), Coleman (2012), Crystal (2014) and others have widely argued. Second and more important is the existence of a scholarly sustained tradition stemming from Sapir (1921, 1957), and ultimately deriving into Cultural Linguistics, stressing the idea that "vocabulary is

[2] Even at the risk of oversimplification, education moved from impersonal and stative wisdom into some kind of schooling, which opened the way to a new stage in child rearing, that of the so-called "intrusive parent" in deMause's (1974) terms.

[3] Despite its contentious nature, this is not the place to discuss Ariès' theory. Suffice it to say that most scholars currently agree on the rightness and accuracy of his overall idea, recognising that he tried to reconstruct the way people thought about the idea of childhood, rather than how individual children were reared or treated. See King (2007: 271), Kline (2008), Lowe (2009: 66), Mawhinney (2015: 22), among others.

a very sensitive index of the culture of a people" (Sapir, 1957: 34, 36; Brinton – Closs Traugott 2005; Bartmiński 2009), and that the lexis is one of the most conclusive bases for investigating linguistic worldview. According to this conceptual model, vocabulary would constitute the institutionalization of social meaning, words representing access-nodes to shared knowledge. That is, relatively stable lexical units, together with grammatical relations, are considered to be relic, codified traces of historical experiences and common understanding, influencing the thought patterns of their speakers. Consequently, the vocabulary of a language may be viewed as a body of accumulated innovations and meanings which have been salient for the community at a certain historical stage. These principles, most conspicuously followed by the Lublin school of Ethnolinguistics (see Bartmiński 2016), constitute not only a powerful analytical framework, but also a methodological advantage for social and cultural researchers. Being a bottom-up approach, analyses are unlinked to the researcher's intuitions or guided input. Explorations move from linguistic categories to speakers, rather than the reverse, thus escaping the risk of departing from predefined, previously established identities of language-users. Examining cultural conceptualizations rather than speakers, we may claim that language-centred approaches to AS represent an improved theoretical framework for the grasping of "cultural cognition", defined as the collective cognition that characterises a cultural group. In our case, it reveals itself as a useful scheme to unearth intersubjective patterns of Early Modern English childhood. In sum, this contribution claims that lexicographical studies within the Cultural Linguistics tradition are adequate to explore whether sixteenth- and seventeenth-century English shows "new categories, schemas, conceptual metaphors and propensities for certain perspectives" on childhood reflecting the cultural cognition of those who spoke the language at the time (Tomasello 1999: 169).

2. Methodology

As defined in the *OED*, the word *childhood* is both the state and the stage of being a child.[4] However, looking up the dictionary definitions of *child* is of little use, definitions being limited in their explanatory power and ultimately imprecise. On the one hand, the child is defined quantitatively, in

[4] "Childhood": a) "The state of being a child"; b) "The stage of life or period during which one is a child." Cf."childhood, n." OED Online, www.oed.com/view/Entry/31631, accessed September 2019.

relative terms of age, *child* and *youth* being synonymous expressions. On the other, we are provided with very little qualitative characterization. Hence, in order to reconstruct a qualitative assessment of childhood during Early Modern English, the opposite path should be walked; that is, from meaning to words, as allowed by the new *HTOED*.

Drawing on the premise that the Early Modern English conceptual category 'child' may be reconstructed using a lexicographical *HTOED* approach, a table of synonyms associated with the senses of 'child' as PERSON was produced, namely, ['child' as INFANT], ['child' as CHILD], ['child' as YOUNG MAN] and ['child' as GIRL], to which ['child' as FETUS] was added, considering the first *OED* definition for 'child' with reference to state or age.[5] Interpreted as markers of meaning profiles rather than sociolinguistic patterns of variation, it was assumed that, examined together, these synonyms would be revelatory about the thinking of a society (Kay 2010). Hence, after a global assessment of 'child' synonyms registered in the *HTOED* from Old English to the sixteenth century, a corpus of 103 new words and word senses (i.e. extended meanings of pre-existing words) appearing during the Early Modern English period and associated with the five 'child' meanings mentioned above was collected.[6] Subsequently, a chart of twenty-four study parameters was devised (Table 1) including, stylistic and axiological information, register connotations captured from cross-reference definitions of the terms, and further details, to obtain quantitative and qualitative results.

Also, in order to identify the degree of lexical and semantic innovation occurring during the Early Modern English stage, the period was divided into eight 25-year subcategories (Table 2).[7]

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[5] "The unborn or the newly born". Cf. "child, n." OED *Online*, www.oed.com/view/Entry/31619, accessed September 2019.

[6] Listed in alphabetical order, the corpus comprised the following inventory of synonyms: *bantling*, *bonne*, *boy*, *brat*, *bratchet*, *bratling*, *breed*, *bud*, *budling*, *butter-print*, *callow*, *cherub*, *child*, *child in arms*, *childling*, *chit*, *chitterling*, *chrisom*, *chrisomer*, *cockerel*, *cockling*, *codling*, *cub*, *dandiprat*, *dandling*, *demy*, *doveling*, *embryo*, *eyas-musket*, *fairy*, *feture*, *filly*, *flosculet*, *geniture*, *gorrell*, *gossoon*, *halflang*, *hans-in-kelder*, *hensour*, *hobbledehoy*, *hoppet*, *imp*, *kid*, *kinchin*, *kinchin-mort*, *kitling*, *lad*, *ladykin*, *lambkin*, *lap-child*, *little girl*, *loneling*, *loon*, *lullaby-cheat*, *maggie*, *maid*, *man-boy*, *minx*, *miss*, *mistress minx*, *muchacho*, *ninny*, *piccaninny*, *piggy*, *pigsney*, *pledge*, *prill*, *puppet*, *ragazzo*, *schoolboy*, *schoolgirl*, *shapeling*, *shaver*, *skipper*, *slut*, *snipper-snapper*, *spaught*, *spear*, *sprig*, *spring*, *squall*, *stranger*, *stubbed boy*, *stubble boy*, *tadpole*, *tenderling*, *tendril*, *two-year-old*, *urchin*, *urchin*, *vriester*, *wag*, *wean*, *whelpling*, *woman-child*, *womb-infant*, *youngster*, *youngster*, *younker*, *younker*, *younkerkin*. Note that terms classified under two different *HTOED* nodes appear twice.

[7] Throughout the article a number in brackets may appear together with a given term, indicating period of creation according to the *OED*, as for example, in *bantling* [4].

Table 1. Parameters of analysis

Parameters	
Child senses	new word
	new word sense
	period
	embryo/ fetus
	infant/baby
	child
	girl
	young man
	meaning
Currency	currency: obsolete
	last quotation
	last quotation after 1900
Zoosemy and nature metaphors	plants
	animals
Axiological nuances	diminutive/ hypocoristic
	contempt/ depreciative
	affection/endearment
	irony/playful
	negative overtone
	positive overtone
Stylistic labels	slang
	coll
	regional/ cant
	gendered
	uncertain/ unknown/ obscure etymology

Table 2. Time-periods for analysis

Periods		Periods	
1	1500-1525	5	1601-1625
2	1526-1550	6	1626-1650
3	1551-1575	7	1651-1675
4	1576-1600	8	1676-1700

For the sake of clarity, Table 3 illustrates the distribution of terms per time period. For a qualified assessment of each term, the analysis required not only a close reading of definitions and dictionary labels, but also examination of quotations as well as frequent cross-reference acts through the dictionary and the thesaurus.

Table 3. List of new words/ new word senses per period and child meaning

Period	Embryo/ fetus	Infant/ baby	Baby girl	Child	Girl	Young man
1				*brat*	*woman-child*	*hensour* *younker*
2	*feture*			*kitling* *younkerkin*	*bonne* *urchin*	*gorrell* *hobbledehoy* *lad* *spear*
3		*chrisomer*		*urchin*	*kinchin-mort*	*cockerel* *loon* *spring* *wag*
4	*embryo*	*chrisom* *tenderling*		*bantling* *bratchet* *breed* *budling* *lambkin* *loneling* *pledge* *ragazzo* *schoolboy* *tadpole* *two-year-old*	*dandiprat* *minx* *mistress minx* *prill*	*boy* *cockling* *demy* *imp* *muchacho* *pigsney* *shaver* *snipper-snapper* *spaught* *stubble boy* *youngster*
5	*womb-infant*		*child*	*bud* *butter-print* *chit* *dandling* *doveling* *eyas-musket* *piggy* *puppet* *whelpling* *younker*	*child* *filly* *little girl* *maggie* *squall* *tendril*	*codling* *cub* *skipper*

6	*hans-in-kelder*	*childling* *flosculet*		*fairy* *ninny* *youngster*	*ladykin*	*man-boy*
7	*geniture* *shapeling*	*bratling* *child in arms* *lullaby-cheat* *stranger*	*maid*	*chitterling* *lap-child* *piccaninny*	*miss* *schoolgirl* *slut* *vriester*	*callow* *halflang* *sprig*
8		*hoppet*		*cherub* *kid* *kinchin* *wean*		*gossoon* *stubbed boy*

3. Results and discussion

To assess whether Early Modern English reveals a changing construct of childhood, it is requisite to refer briefly to the previously existing situation, before turning to specific data and results. A look at the synonyms for 'child' meanings registered in the *HTOED* up to the sixteenth century would confirm that English exhibited a very limited number of terms for 'child', words encompassing little emotion or metaphor. At the time, childhood would be recognised as the first of a two-step ladder of life, whereby children would be at an early stage, as opposed to "non-children", or adults. These two steps were apparently defined around two basic external axes of youth and stature. Children would, thus, be either living persons or things that had lived for a relatively *short* time, and people of a *short stature* as opposed to fully grown human beings. Alongside this external characterization, childhood would be mainly associated to the idea of offspring and identified in terms of static, unaged social roles. Up to the sixteenth century terms like *page*, *groom* or *servant* are given as synonyms of 'child' in the *HTOED*.

According to our data, this system proves to change during the Early Modern English period, confirming a conceptual transformation. During the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries a much more refined picture of childhood is obtained, whereby childhood is no longer a vague first step in the ladder of life, but a stage with a well-profiled delineation of substages. As will be argued, during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries there seems to arise a cognitive and social separate perception of fetuses, infants, young children and youths,

leading to an awareness of children as individuals. Two of these categories obtain lexical prominence during the period: namely, the ungendered 'child' as [CHILD], constrained to a context of intimacy and affection, and that of 'child' as [YOUNG MAN/ BOY], a predominantly male later childhood, evaluated against broader social norms. Further in this shift, perception seems to move from an external to an internal or subjective assessment, new terms exhibiting a clear growth in emotional colouring and imagery.

3.1 Cumulative evidence for a new perception of childhood

A global analysis of data leads to the characterization of the corpus around three main features, which should be read in terms of cumulative evidence for the new perception summarized in the previous paragraph. First, during the period under study, a significant growth of new words and word senses applied to the notion of childhood is perceived. If we compare the rate of innovation per century affecting 'child' synonyms from OE to the nineteenth century, the intensification of novelty during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries becomes obvious. (Figure 1).[8]

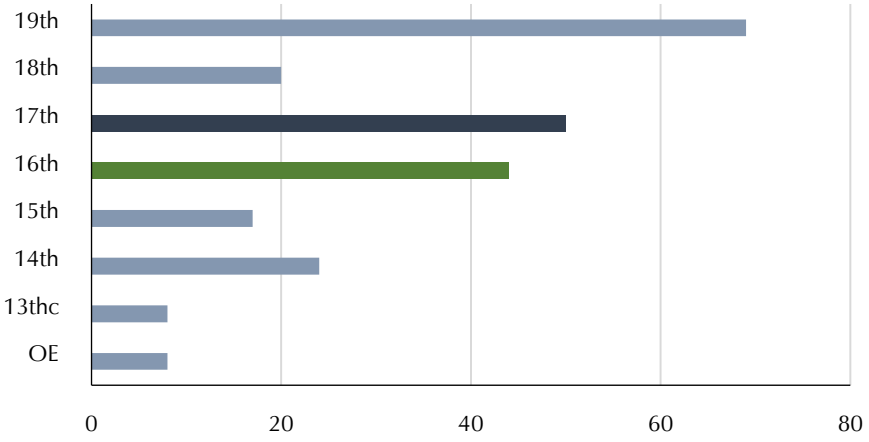

Figure 1. Lexical and semantic innovation for 'child' (all meanings) from OE to the 19th c.

[8] As may be observed, the greatest lexical activity and linguistic awareness seemingly occurs in the nineteenth century, following the Victorian concern and social discourse on childhood. As for Renaissance lexical and semantic innovation on the construal of child images, the years 1576-1625 (periods 4 and 5) constitute a most active stage, something very much in line with scholarly observations on Early Modern lexical productivity (See Nevalainen 2000: 336, and references thereby).

However, it is notable that a complex distribution of lexical and semantic innovation is obtained when narrowing the scope of analysis. During the period under scrutiny the rate of innovation varies widely across child meanings, as shown in Figure 2. Moreover, there seems to be a clear phasing of innovation affecting the two most conspicuous categories of childhood: period 4 points to a peak in the innovative construal of the [YOUNG MAN/BOY], whereas the 'child' as [CHILD] seems to have been more consistently discovered at a later stage (1576-1625).

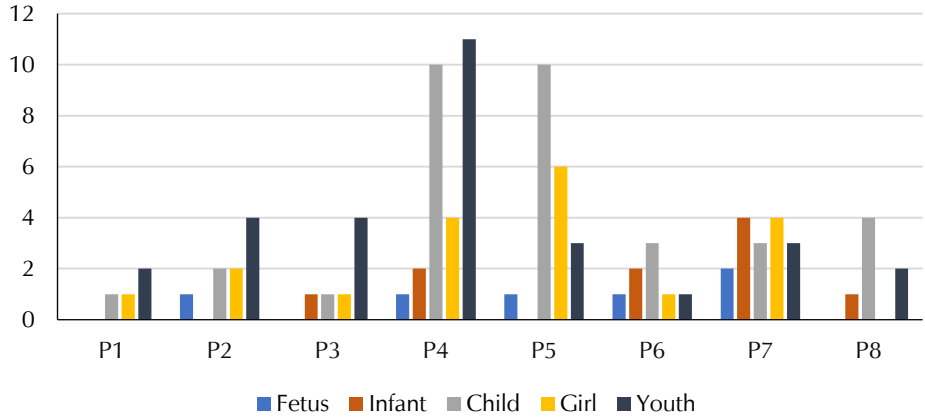

Figure 2. Lexical and semantic innovation per child meaning and time-period (16th c. and 17th c.)

A second feature defining the corpus is that almost 80% of the words could be classified as "expressives". This term has been taken from typological scholarship (Tufvesson 2007; Steriopolo 2016) to include diminutives, nicknames, metaphors, sound-symbolism, alliterative terms and terms indicating emotions (such as endearment/affection or contempt), attitudes (i.e. jocular uses, judgements of approval or disapproval) and evaluations (whether of an aesthetic, behavioural, moral kind).[9] Particularly significant in our corpus is the rate of diminutives. During this period the creation of diminutives with either a denotative or emotional meaning is to be highlighted, this feature affecting 25.2% of the terms.[10] Also, the corpus

[9] According to typologists, expressives may constitute "a distinct class of words denoting sensory, emotional or other types of perceptions of the speaker, in relation to a particular phenomenon." (Tufvesson 2007) This definition is in line with other more intricate definitions of expressive or evaluative meaning less adequate to our purposes.

[10] Cf. *bratchet*, *bratling*, *budling*, *childling*, *chitterling*, *chrisomer*, *cockerel*, *cockling*, *demy*, *doveling*, *flosculet*, *hoppet*, *kinchin*, *kitling*, *ladykin*, *lambkin*, *maggie*, *minx*, *ninny*, *piggy*,

demonstrates a significant growth in metaphors and imagery, mirroring the interests of the speech community. Noteworthy is the almost exclusive use of plants (12% of the terms) and animals (20% of the terms) for the symbolic representation of childhood. As evidenced in Table 4, figurative synonyms span from hedgehogs, to foals, pigs or doves and from buds to apples.

Table 4. Animal and plant metaphors per period and child meaning

Animal metaphors	Period	Fetus	Infant	Child	Girl	Young man
Animal metaphors	1					
	2			*kitling*	*urchin*	*gorrell*
	3			*urchin*		*cockerel*
	4			*tadpole* *lambkin* *Bratchet*		*pigsney* *cockling*
	5			*eyas-musket* *doveling* *whelpling* *chit* *piggy*	*filly*	*cub*
	7			*chitterling*		*callow*
	8			*kid*		
Plant metaphors	2					*spear*
	3					*spring*
	4			*budling* *bantling*		*imp* *stubble boy*
	5			*bud*	*tendril*	*codling*
	6		*flosculet*			
	7					*sprig*
	8					*stubbed boy*

Third and perhaps most substantial, the corpus stands out as a heterogeneous combination of non-standard and unstable terms. Specifically, the corpus provides ample evidence of a) terms tinged with colloquial and informal

pikaninny, *prill*, *shapeling*, *tenderling*, *whelpling*, *younkerkin*. Note that, according to the *OED*, the suffix *-ling* in *loneling*, *bantling* is not a diminutive marker, but a morpheme meaning "concerned with".

connotations, words belonging to jargons, slang, children's talk (e.g. *butter-print*, *piggy*, *kinchin*, *pigsney*), regional terms (e.g. *wean*, *hoppet*, *maggie*), fanciful formations and rhyming slang (e.g. *snipper-snapper*, *hobbledehoy*), etc.; b) words proving heterogenous origins, and frequently exhibiting obscure etymologies, which might suggest not only local innovation, but also the adoption and adaptation of terms introduced in the language through oral interaction, through "street exchange", rather than as literate or literary creations;[11] and c) terms revealing a tendency for quick obsolescence.[12] Apparently, Early Modern English words for childhood did not have a lasting effect on the language, being either rejected or ignored by the later speech community. As a matter of fact, the vocabulary of childhood seems to have been renewed in the nineteenth century. This reveals a most interesting result, taking into account the period under consideration. A high proportion of words defining childhood during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries appear to be popular and emotional formations. Most remarkably, the lexis of childhood, deeply connected with subjectivity and intimacy, seems to be a new fashion reflecting individual needs rather than social institutionalization from above, a phenomenon most likely to have occurred in the nineteenth century (see footnote 8). Although further research is needed, we are probably witnessing an incipient moment of vocabulary creation on the edges of language, where no attitudes of correctness seem yet to be monitoring behaviour.[13]

3.2 Childhood substages

Moving on to particular details in our analysis, a careful scrutiny of the corpus reveals that at the end of the period there appeared descriptive terms to denote childhood substages. These terms I have called "anchoring words". That is, by

[11] Among the words of uncertain/ obscure/ unknown origin, one may mention: *boy*, *brat*, *bratling*, *callow*, *codling*, *cub*, *dandiprat*, *filly*, *gorrell*, *gossoon*, *hensour*, *hobbledehoy*, *kinchin-mort*, *lad*, *loon*, *minx*, *ninny*, *piccaninny*, *pigsney*, *puppet*, *prill*, *slut*, *snipper-snapper*, *spaught*, *sprig*, *squall*, *stubble boy*, *tendril.* On the need to revise *OED* etymologies see Sayers (2016).

[12] It is significant that 40% of the terms in the corpus are marked as *obsolete* in the *OED* and a further 37% were apparently no longer in use after 1900. Among the terms marked as obsolete in the *OED*, one may mention: *bonne*, *breed*, *budling*, *butterprint*, *callow*, *chrisomer*, *codling*, *dandiprat*, *dandling*, *demy*, *feture*, *flosculet*, *geniture*, *gorrell*, *hans-in-kelder*, *hensour*, *spear*, *imp*, *kitling*, *lap-child*, *loneling*, *maggie*, *maid*, *mistress minx*, *ninny*, *prill*, *shapeling*, *spaught*, *spring*, *squall*, *stubbed-boy*, *tendril*, *urchin*, *vriester*, *wag*, *womb-infant*, *younkerkin.*

[13] On standardization and popular formations, see Marchand (1969), as cited in Nevalainen (2000: 431).

the eighteenth-century English has apparently lexicalized the stereotypes of childhood, around which the conceptualization of the whole stage revolves. By this time, boundaries have become established between a *womb-infant* and a *child-in-arms*; or between these and the *lap-child*, the *man-boy* and the *woman-child*. With this idea in mind, we can reconstruct the cultural schemes behind each of the childhood substages and the differences established in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries with respect to the previous period.

3.2.1 The womb-infant

The first interesting result is that the unborn child becomes separately perceived from the rest of the subcategories. One should not forget that the divide between abortion and infanticide, between the born and the unborn child, had not always been clear (King 2007: 391). According to our data, from 1576 onwards there seems to be a growing number of words for embryos. Divided into the specialized and the familiar stylistic registers (cf. *feture* vs *hans-in-kelder*), the new perception of embryos is channelled through popular metaphors of either smallness, bringing children closer to animals and plants as living entities getting shaped, as in *shapeling*, or confinement, as in *womb-infant*, whereby the defining term *womb* would be interpreted as a container, an image also elicited in the more complex *hans-in-kelder*, implying a second metaphorical level.[14]

3.2.2 The child-in-arms

The baby constitutes a second newly-perceived childhood stereotype, as the *child-in-arms*. The data in our corpus show it as a late perception. It is only from the seventeenth century onwards that a more explicit appreciation of babies is proved, through the creation of an increasing number of new synonyms (cf. Table 3 above). In relative terms, this category exhibits the largest degree of lexical innovation (i.e. of new words). Considering that 78% of the total amount of synonyms for this category of 'child' as [INFANT] are new words, it may clearly be claimed to be an invention. More specifically, during the years under consideration, babyhood seems to move from a religious to a more expressive and evaluative perception. At the beginning of the period the baby is identified as a *chrisom* or a *chrisomer* (periods 3 and 4) suggesting religious innocence symbolized through the white robes at baptism. Then, a more physical and descriptive definition is obtained:

[14] As for *Hans-in-kelder (Jack in the cellar)*, see Nevalainen (2000: 422) on phrasal nouns as a pattern of Early Modern English innovation.

the baby is understood as a small and fragile being (as in *tenderling* [4], *or childling* [6]), often through the use of denotational diminutives evaluating size), to reach a final phase of lexical innovation, comprising metaphorical perceptions, such as *lullaby-cheat* [7] or *stranger* [7], that would suggest a newly recognised need for affection and care in these entities.

3.2.3 The lap-child

Moving on to the next substage, the *lap-child* stands out as one of the two most salient categories of Early Modern English childhood, stereotypically recognised also as *the two-year-old* [4]*;* This third category is apparently discovered during periods 4 and 5. Our results suggest that the language then experiences an explosion of new words and word meanings for this substage, managed through a wide variety of resources, from borrowings through to new derivatives and meaning extensions of existing words. In absolute terms, this substage scores the largest number (34%) of new terms and new word-meanings, of which 52% are new coinages. Furthermore, the *lap-child* is confirmed as a gender-neutral category, 77% of the terms in the corpus being ungendered.[15] Moreover, almost no term in our collection is descriptive in nature, most being expressives and more particularly diminutives and animal metaphors (cf. Table 3 above). Rather than evaluating size, diminutives in this category seem to convey qualitative evaluation, responding thereby to their allegedly prototypical use (Ponsonnet 2018).[16] As for zoometaphors that are used as synonyms for the *lap-child*, most of them express positive evaluation, as suggested by terms like *kitling*, *doveling* or *lambkin*, among others.[17] However, the language-specific nature of this resource would require further research.

From a semantic point of view, this third childhood substage represents a newly discovered world in the sphere of familiar routines (cf. *dandling* [5], *lap-child* [7]). Members of this category are construed as small beings (*kinchin*, *wean*, *lap-child*), with some tinges of under-development or rudiment; lovable

[15] Save for a minority of terms, leaning towards either the girl-side (*fairy*, *puppet*), or the boy-side (*youngster*, *younker*, *younkerkin*). The term *urchin*, initially applied to female children with a pejorative moral meaning, extends to "raggedly, or untidily clothed" boys in period 3, and is endowed with a more aesthetic nuance.

[16] According to Ponsonnet 2018 (who draws on previous studies by Wierzbicka 1984 and Jurafsky 1996), diminutives are usually anchored in intimacy across languages, and express milder emotions of endearment, familiarity, affection or approval, and positive judgements as opposed to augmentatives.

[17] Cf. Sakalauskaite (2010: 17), for a definition of zoometaphors as metaphors in which the behaviour, emotion, or appearance of an animal is a reference to those of humans. See also Kiełtyka – Kleparski (2005).

and funny creatures (as evidenced by *kitling*, *eyes-musket*, *lambkin*, *doveling*, *budling*, *bud* or *kinchin*), who are also moveable and, therefore, troublesome, cheeky (*brat*, *chitterling)* or dependent, as in *lap-child*. They may even be cast as a burden (*piggy*), calling on scant resources; or ill-tempered and roguish, as suggested by *urchin.* Particularly significant in this lexical subgroup is the term *pledge* [4], newly depicting the *lap-child* as a token of mutual love and duty between the parents. A late perception of the *lap-child* as beautiful and innocent is also to be noted (*fairy* [6], *cherub* [8]). Peripherally, one may add that a marginal scheme based on the idea that alien is 'ugly' or 'low status' is also perceived in *tadpole* and *ragazzo.*[18]

All in all, our results show that the *lap-child* stereotype (or the 'child' as [CHILD], as in the *HTOED* node) is built in positive terms of lightness, vivacity, playfulness and tenderness, and as beings deserving caresses and delicacy (*fairy*). However, the emotional load in these terms leads us to introduce a caveat here. Whereas few words or word extensions are negatively loaded,[19] it cannot be ignored that the denotative value of smallness easily slides into the idea of insignificance or lack of importance, as in *bratchet.* Likewise, the presence of a subset of unstable terms, apparently fluctuating towards the notions of manipulation and mild or more serious contempt, such as *puppet*, *urchin*, *chitterling*, may be of note.

3.2.4 The man-boy

The fourth *HTOED* subcategory of 'child' as [YOUNG MAN], prototypically labelled as the *man-boy*, may be said to be the most complex and the second most conspicuous in the corpus. It comes forth earlier in the period and scores 30% of the total sum of new creations. In the construal of the *man-boy*, a change of focus is appreciated, the adult being now what constitutes the standard for assessment. Our results confirm a physical or metaphorical evaluation of members in this category according to aesthetic norms prevailing in a broader social context, in an outer sphere. Early Modern English boys seem to be construed by the adult community as the non-alike, and essentially evaluated along two dimensions: physical development and behaviour. Throughout the period the *man-boy* stereotype is steadily

[18] Cf. Sakalauskaite (2010) on the cross-linguistic uses and negative connotations of tadpoles and toads. During the period *tadpole* is applied to black infants. As for *ragazzo*, it was a synonym for "servant" or "pageboy".

[19] Cf., however, *bantling* (with "bastard" connotations); *whelpling* (apparently used for vile creatures "acting on impulses that most resemble animals"); *butter-print* (understood as "burden"), or the already mentioned *ragazzo* and *tadpole*.

described as undeveloped, as a "rudiment of an adult" (e.g. *demy*, *halflang*, *spaught*, *codling*, *cub*, *callow*). Through terms denoting plants rather than animals (e.g. *spear*, *spring*, *imp*, *stubbed*, *sprig*), boys are judged half-tall, thin, raw, shapeless or clumsy, features easily interpreted as "defective", expressing some kind of disapproval or subjective negative evaluation, bordering contempt. Notwithstanding the above, the *man-boy* is likewise distinguished as lively and vigorous (*youngster* [4]), something not too surprising at a time when size and strength were more important than age (Mintz 1993). As for social behaviour, both positive and negative judgments are brought up in the corpus. From the very beginning, the *man-boy* might be reckoned as gay and fashionable, even before lively or strong (*younker* [1], *hensour* [1]). Alongside, more negative profiles are found. Youngsters were apparently glimpsed as mischievous (*wag* [3]); idle (*loon* [3]); boastful (*cockerel* [3], *cockling* [4]); conceited or arrogant (*snipper-snapper* [4]).

As mentioned above, the analysis of synonyms recorded for this category certainly proves complex, given that there seems to be reasonable evidence to defend a multifaceted scheme of perception. The lack of univocal undertones in many of the terms in this subset apparently allows for a two-fold view of the *man-boy*: that of the adult confronting men-to-be, just mentioned, and a second peer-based perception. That is, it might be the case that some of the items in the category could be recognised as the lexicalized expression of an in-group grasp; some kind of horizontal assessment that would add to the adult's vertical view. According to this assumption, terms could be used either by adults or youngsters with different connotations. Positive uses could express adult's endearment or peer camaraderie, depending on the context. In turn, negatively-loaded expressions might be used descriptively or contemptuously by adults, or rather undergo a process of "reversal of judgement", whereby bad behaviour, toughness, etc. (as in *snipper-snapper*, *wag*, *loon*, etc.), would turn into pride of group or identity markers rather than contempt (Eckert 2003). However, that would require both a contextualized, discursive interpretation of positive and negative undertones suggested in definitions and labels, and the consideration of other significant features that seem to concur in this subclass of terms. The hypothesis, thus, remains open to conjecture.

3.2.5 The woman-child

The analysis of the corpus provides evidence of a last (and uncertain) category of Early Modern English childhood: that of 'child' as GIRL, very expressively stereotyped as a *woman-child* [1] or a *little girl* [5]. It is worth recalling that the

word *girl* entered the language in 1375 meaning "young woman", and only from 1400 was it used to refer to a female child. Contrary to what happened with the *man-boy*, the *woman-child* does not seem to be a discovery in the Early Modern English period, probably because she had never been perceived as a child in the past, and she was *not yet* perceived as a child during this stage. Save for a certain increase of attention recorded in period 5, the relatively low degree of lexical and semantic innovation affecting the category (18%), may be a clear indicator of this claim. Moreover, in accordance with our results, the *woman-child* lacks a clear profile as a life-stage. There is still a blurred distinction between *girl* and *woman*. Though the category comprises some new descriptive terms, like *woman-child* [1], *ladykin* [6], *little girl* [5] (pointing to their short stature), these come mixed up with other synonyms pointing rather to the girl social condition of being unmarried and susceptible to being wooed or courted (Cf. *miss* [7], *vriester* [7]). Moreover, the existence of comparatively few diminutives in the corpus points to the lack of endearment nuances in the perception of this category. It is true that words like *tendril* [5], *filly* [5] and *ladykin* [6] are described as terms of affection. However, it is to note that some -if not all- of them may constitute pseudo-euphemistic terms of abuse, or social and moral indicators. More particularly, it may be the case that *filly*, an instance of equine terms, would fit the interpretation by Borkowska – Kleparski (2007: 43), following Kiełtyka (2005), who identify the use of "mare" images as frequently used for contemptible women. Similarly, the presence of nicknames in the corpus, such as *prill* [4] or *maggie* [5], frequently classified as devices to express affection, may be argued to be socially and morally loaded, close to "cheeky", "rustic", "low", "flirtatious", "roguish", as suggested by dictionary cross-references. The *woman-child* is, thus, a clear case of semantic imbalance in the proportion of positive-negative undertones. According to our results, words in this *HTOED* sub-corpus seem to experience early processes of pejoration, an otherwise well-researched topic in the literature, as shown in Hughes (2000), Borkowska – Kleparski (2007) or Łozowski (2015), among others.

3.3 An age-blurred childhood

As will have been noticed, nothing has been said thus far regarding age-boundaries separating duly identified categories. In fact, our corpus definition of childhood remains age-blurred, but for the term *two-year-old*, given as a synonym for the 'child' as [CHILD]. This keeps in line with social studies, where the possibility of stages being tightly linked to a certain age or age-

range is still a line of enquiry. And furthermore, there seems to be a lack of agreement in the literature as for childhood age-values (Orme 2001; Clarke 2004; Cunningham 2006; Dekker 2012; Frijhoff 2012). As shown in our corpus, qualifying indexes other than age are used as substage categorizing factors, such as the child's walking ability, their size, and degree of dependency, the home routines involved in their caring and conspicuous gendering issues. In view of the foregoing, and considering the prominence of both the *lap-child* and the *man-boy* as the two most-profusely portrayed stages during the period, one might conclude that Early Modern English childhood could initially be depicted as a space comprising two separate spheres. On the one hand, the home, a private sphere for children up to the *lap-child*, where boys and girls would be treated the same, parents developing emotional links towards them[20]. On the other, a more public sphere, inhabited by would-be adults, where children would be judged accordingly. In this second and outer sphere, institutions like schooling or apprenticeship would act as strong gendering agents, as the stereotyping labels of *man-boy* and *woman-girl* suggest.[21]

4. Concluding remarks

Our results confirm that Cultural Linguistics can contribute interesting insights to AS. The lexicographical and semantic approach utilised here has proved illuminating in the reconstruction of Early Modern English cultural schemes responsible for the concept of childhood, allowing us to contend that childhood emerged as a cultural component of English society during that period. Confirming advances in social studies, the corpus provides cumulative evidence that during the Early Modern period childhood is recognised as a distinct stage of life, children becoming visible

[20] Though the corpus does not give any hints on the issue, this would apparently affect the commoner family rather than the nobility, where children would usually be left under the care of non-related women (see Orme 2001).

[21] The urge to put further research effort into this later childhood stage, at the cross-roads of contemporary childhood, adolescence and youth, proves binding. Merging our tentative conclusions with the historical evidence available, age 7 would apparently mark a gradual move from infancy to later childhood. At this vague marker of a wider range of 7 to 12 years, children would be sent away as apprentices and committed to tutors of whatever sort, which would result in an increasing separation between the spheres of home, education and work, especially for males. Running up to the age of 20 or over, these youngsters would be deemed old enough to protect themselves, while still dependent on adults. (Cf. Ben-Amos 1994; Dekker 2012; Frijhoff 2012; Mawhinney 2015)

as separate autonomous beings, beyond social role and external assessment of appearance, as was apparently the case prior to the fifteenth century. Moreover, the heightened lexical activity of the period points to a new structuring of patterns and meanings involved in the process of growing up. However, considering that the written language is conservative in nature, this should have begun earlier than the sixteenth century. Interestingly, the singular composition of the corpus suggests that the concept of childhood is at an incipient moment of perception and creation. Early Modern English exhibits no fixed terms yet for the new construct, and lexical innovation apparently reflects individual needs rather than the social institutionalization and the linguistic normalization of childhood. Closely connected with this, our results suggest that Early Modern childhood is not a prestigious stage overall, since undertones of unimportance, underdevelopment, burden or lack of a polished nature come up too often. However, a more detailed approach to this issue is required.

During the Early Modern English period five childhood identities or stereotypes seem to emerge, both socially and biographically, the most important divide being that between early and late childhood: or between the family and an outer domain. The focus of innovation seems to lie on two particularly salient categories: the *lap-child* and the *man-boy*, the girl not yet having been discovered as a child. As for the time-based definition of childhood, it remains age-blurred, other indexes being used for the qualification of main childhood substages.

Given that lexicographical sources offer few hints on issues of class, ethnicity, educational levels, etc., the social dimension of Early Modern English childhood has not been addressed. This limitation of research should be counterbalanced in the future. Likewise, a natural progression of this work should attend to the cultural construal of the broad and complex category of later childhood along the time-axis.

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