

*For I am woorthyer by muche then he: The Functions of First Person Singular Utterances in Early Modern English Debate Verse*¹

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Abstract

Very little linguistically oriented work has so far been done on debate poetry. However, debates are an interesting source for studying conflict interactions, a topic of increasing relevance. While literary representations of conflict will not show us how disputes were carried out in reality, they can shed light on which features were salient enough to be used as stylised markers of interactivity in literary texts. As first and second person pronouns are well-known markers of interactivity and involvement, this paper examines the first person utterances in a small corpus of debate poetry, available from the EEBO database. The analysis has two parts: a quantitative analysis, where the represented dialogue and the narrator's frame story are analysed as separate layers (Clark 1996), and a qualitative analysis focusing on the dialogue sections only. The quantitative analysis involves locating all instances of the first person singular pronoun in subject form, combined with the associated verb phrase. The verbs are then classified according to semantic domains (Biber et al. 1999) and the layer of text they occur in. This quantitative part is designed to allow comparisons between the layers, but also between debate poetry and the genre of controversies. The qualitative section, on the other hand, investigates certain moves commonly found in the dialogues, along with the verb types most frequently associated with each move.

1. Introduction

Debate poetry is not a genuinely speech-based genre (for this term, see Culpeper and Kytö 2010: 17), as these disputes occur between clearly fictional characters: in such cases we can safely assume that the reported speech event never took place. However, debate poems are interesting to dialogue analysts for many reasons. Firstly, so far there has been very little linguistically oriented research on debate poetry. Secondly, conflict in general is still a relatively understudied form of interaction (Pagliai

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2010). Conflict talk has many alternative names,² but it always contains a minimum of three turns or moves, the two latter ones containing acts of disagreement (Muntigl and Turnbull 1998: 225–227). There have been studies of conflict talk in face-to-face conversations (pioneered by Grimshaw 1990), and over the last decades the literary representations of conflict interactions have also been examined (e.g. Spitz 2005). Although poetic debates are a stylised representation of a form of conflict talk, there are benefits to studying such literary materials: while they will not show us how disputes were carried out in reality, they can shed light on which features were salient enough to be used as stylised markers of interactivity in a literary text.³ Thirdly, the similar genre of controversies (for example on science or religion) has recently been examined in some detail (see e.g. Gloning 1999, 2005; Fritz 2005; Ratia 2011), which means that comparisons can be made between debate poetry and controversies to provide further insights into both genres.

Both debates and controversies share a similar ancestry, deriving from scholastic *disputationes* (see e.g. Ratia 2011: 20). Debate poems, however, are literary texts, while controversies tend to be interactions between real people or ideas. The format is also different: the (represented) dialogue in debate poetry gives both parties a chance to state their viewpoints. In controversies, on the other hand, the interaction (while genuine) takes place between separate texts, and a single text is only “quasi-dialogical” (Fritz 2005: 238) to the extent that the writers include the opponent’s viewpoint within their own text by citing or summarising it. Furthermore, while both are types of conflict talk, the goal of the exchange may be different: Dascal (1998) has argued that

2 Muntigl and Turnbull use the term *arguing* (1998), Brenneis (1988) and Kotthoff (1993) speak of *disputing*, Krainer (1988) prefers the term *verbal discord*, and Knoblauch (1991) distinguishes between *disagreement* as a format and *dialogical asymmetry* (the function of exerting dominance), mentioning that sometimes disagreement can be a way to avoid dialogical asymmetry. As Muntigl and Turnbull point out (1998: 225), all of these terms seem to refer to much the same activity.

3 In fact, some analysts working on modern conflict talk have found literary texts an ideal source of data in the sense that they show the communicative mechanisms in a much more condensed form than genuine spoken exchanges (Bülow Möller 1986; Spitz 2010: 200).

disputes are ultimately about winning,⁴ while controversies are about convincing the audience (if not necessarily the adversary, see Gloning 1999: 95). An influential early study by Walther defined debate poems as texts in which “two or more rarely three people, personified things or abstractions” carry out a dispute (1920: 3).⁵ Conlee has argued that the debate typically takes place between “two natural opposites” (1991: xii). While this is indeed typical, contemporary writers and audiences do not seem to have drawn such strict boundaries between debates and other genres.⁶

Compared to controversies, debate poems exhibit the quality of layering (Clark 1996, Chapter 12) to a much greater extent. The basic idea of layering is that interaction can occur on different layers: in the immediate situation, the pronoun *I* refers to the current speaker or writer. But if the speaker is playing a role, the referent of the first person pronoun will change subtly to point to the character instead, and the speaker has moved to a different layer within the discourse (*I* will refer to the more abstract layers as ‘higher’). While layering is a particularly typical feature of literature, it can be found in everyday interactions as well: story-telling, which is very common in conversation, often involves the representation of earlier events and discussions, which then form a new layer. Clark gives no theoretical limit to the number of overlapping layers, although in practice a high number of layers would probably become cumbersome to interpret.

4 I think this is a reasonable assessment. However, many debate poems interestingly have no clear winner or resolution—the idea may have been for the audience to decide the winner.

5 “Ich nenne hier Streitgedichte im eigentlichen Sinne Gedichte, in denen zwei oder seltener mehrere Personen, personifizierte Gegenstände oder Abstraktionen zu irgendeinem Zweck Streitreden führen [...]”

6 It has even been argued that contemporaries would have been more likely to categorise any such texts as simply dialogues (Cartlidge 2010). While the variety of textual labels referring to the genre might indeed suggest a certain fluidity, similarities of register and field/topic would no doubt have been recognised.

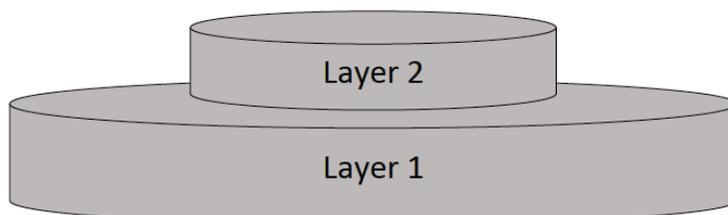


Figure 1. A visual representation of the two layers

It is worth noting that the most fundamental layer is always present, even if the interaction is taking place on a higher layer; events on the fundamental layer may effect what happens on higher layers, but not usually vice versa. In some ways, the concept is similar to embedding, but Clark notes (1996: 355) that the metaphor of layering is preferable, precisely because the different elements of Layer 2 (characters, setting etc.) are not a part of Layer 1 in the way that embedded clauses form a part of the matrix clause.

When a first person pronoun is found in a debate poem, the reference may in some cases be to the author, but much more frequently either to the narrator or the characters. References to the author, on what Clark would define as the first layer, are very rare in these texts. For the sake of simplicity, I have thus relabelled the layers so that references to the author would be on Layer 0, and references to the narrator on Layer 1, except in the relatively rare cases where the narrator engages in interaction with the characters, taking a role in the debate itself. Such references, like references to the other characters, take place on Layer 2.⁷ The strategies exhibited on the two layers naturally differ. After all, the narrator on Layer 1 is not engaged in debate, but merely describes the debate episode, giving the interaction as reported speech. It can be expected that this would also be reflected in the types of verbs typically used on each layer.

⁷ I have not distinguished a Layer 3 (which would involve characters in the text reporting what other characters have said); there are examples of this, but for this paper I have chosen to focus on the comparison between the narrator and the characters.

2. *Materials and methods*

While debate poetry was at the height of its popularity in the medieval period, many later examples have survived as well. This paper analyses the utterances related to the first person in a small corpus of early modern debate poetry, accessed through the *Early English Books Online* (EEBO) database. My goal is to include a representative selection of debates from the early modern period. The selection is based on a search of textual labels such as ‘debate’ and ‘dispute’ in EEBO. However, most of the relevant labels will also produce many false hits, such as political or religious debates, which have to be combed through manually. Conversely, not all debates have such a textual label. For these reasons, the selection remains a selection, not a comprehensive listing of all early modern debates.⁸

The criteria for including a text in the dataset were as follows: 1) The title, title-page or introduction should include a textual label referring to the conflictive nature of the text. This criterion is intended to exclude dialogues other than debates.⁹ It is also hoped that this criterion will serve the purpose of taking into account the contemporary perceptions of the central theme of each text, in addition to modern scholarly interpretations. 2) The text must be verse. 3) It must be between fictional characters. This criterion is intended to distinguish between debate poetry from similar genres like verse controversies between poets. Note that the number of participants has not been used as a criterion: the dataset includes one debate with three debaters (*Horse, Goose and Sheep*), and some of the other texts are polylogic in the sense that although there are only two contestants in the debate proper, other characters participate in the action as judges, jury members or commentators.

⁸ In addition, some early modern debates were produced in manuscript, and are not available through EEBO.

⁹ One exception to this criterion was made, however, as one of the *Body and Soul* debates is missing such a label, and it would have seemed strange to exclude one while including the other text, which is very similar in topic.

Table 1. The primary sources for this paper (for the full titles, see the References)

Short title	Date	Number of words
<i>Horse, Goose and Sheep</i>	1477	4179
<i>Heart and Eye</i>	1516	6604
<i>Man and Woman</i>	1525	1515
<i>A Lover and a Jaye</i>	1527	2661
<i>Summer and Winter</i>	1528	1140
<i>Spectacle of Lovers</i>	1533	6777
<i>A Dialogue Defensive</i>	1542	8816
<i>Pride and Lowliness</i>	1577	16956
<i>Soul and Body</i>	1622	2867
<i>Saint Bernard's Vision</i> (Body and Soul debate)	1640	1340

All of the texts analysed are available from EEBO; in most cases I have used their full-text versions but some texts are my transcriptions from the EEBO images. The number of words mentioned is the word-count of the portions analysed—some texts included paratexts that were not analysed. For instance, *Pride and Lowliness* concludes with a longish “commendation of lowlynesse”, which is clearly not part of the debate narration. In the *Horse, Goose and Sheep*, the explicit is followed by a listing of collective names for animals (*an Herde of hertes, a Muster of pecoks...*). Such extraneous materials were not analysed, but otherwise the texts were included in full length.

A frequent theme in debate poetry is the “question of women” (*la querelle des femmes*, e.g. Coldiron 2009). This is discussed not only in *Man and Woman*, but also in the three debates concerned with matters of love: *A Lover and a Jay*, *Spectacle of Lovers* and *A Dialogue Defensive*. *Heart and Eye*, too, touches on the question of love, although it sets a pair of natural opponents against one another, a strategy that Conlee mentions as typical of debate poetry (1991: xii). Natural opponents are also found in *Summer and Winter*; *Horse, Goose and Sheep*; and the two Body and Soul debates (*Soul and Body* and *Saint Bernard's Vision*). *Pride and Lowliness* also opposes two abstract qualities, although they

are embodied in material objects: two pairs of breeches, a fancy pair representing pride and a plain one representing humility. The Body and Soul debates focus on the question of which of the two is to blame for human sins.

On the whole, the characters in the texts take their conflicts seriously, and the topics discussed can be weighty ones. However, some texts contain ironical elements: *A Lover and a Jay* includes a long complaint by the lover, which certainly strikes the modern reader as humorous. In *Pride and Lowliness*, a dream vision, the narrator undermines the initially more serious tone in his final comments by noting that his discussion of breeches should not be interpreted as implying that he bears any grudge “to the buttockes”. In *A Dialogue Defensive*, one contestant confesses in the end that he has been reviling women just because men govern the world and he has more to gain from praising them than women—another twist tending to undermine the seriousness of the debate.¹⁰ In this way, what is a serious dispute on the characters’ layer becomes highly entertaining to the audience.

In this paper, I examine all instances of the first person singular pronoun in subject form, in context with their verb phrases. First and second person pronouns are well-known markers of interactivity and involvement (e.g. Biber 1988).¹¹ Ultimately I am interested in the roles and strategies of the interactants, and looking at the verb phrase is the most straightforward way to examine the types of discourse moves associated with the first person. In the first section of this paper, I analyse the frequency of different verb types on Layers 1 and 2, using Biber et al’s semantic categorisation system. This model of analysis closely follows Ratia’s 2011 study on first person verbs in tobacco controversies, to enable a comparison between debate poetry with a

10 The texts have some interesting similarities with the ritual contract-by-conflict procedure found in some early literary dialogues (cf. Bax 1999); however, since the verbal conflict is the main point of the text, it seems to me that the conflict in debates cannot be termed ‘ritual’ in the proper sense of the word.

11 Here I am focusing on first person pronouns only, due to limitations of time and space, although a comparative study on the functions of the second person would also be interesting.

genre of real-life written conflict talk.¹² In this article, Ratia's model of analysis is complemented with Clark's concept of layers, enabling numerical comparisons between literary and non-literary materials. The qualitative section then attempts a rudimentary function-to-form mapping, relating the findings of the quantitative part with certain types of first person moves, adopted from earlier research on controversies (Fritz 2005). Such moves include clarifying text organisation, hedging, marking a disagreement, self-praise and clarification of meaning.

The corpus is not tagged, so there was no direct way to access first person verbs. The approach taken was to retrieve all instances of the first person singular pronoun in the corpus. These were further divided into layers depending on whether the first person refers to the narrator or other characters. In medieval manuscript materials it can sometimes be difficult to tell who is talking, a fact exploited for stylistic purposes by authors (Moore 2011: 179). In my material, however, there are hardly any such difficulties: although many features of modern punctuation were not yet available to the printers, speakers are generally marked carefully. In debates it is perhaps particularly crucial that the audience is aware of who is speaking at any particular moment.

Object and possessive forms were not retrieved, as my underlying interest was in the strategies exhibited by the first person. For the same reason, I excluded combinations where the first person pronoun was combined with a passive verb form: such verbs would be more likely to reflect the strategies of other entities than the first person. Instances of ellipsis with no explicit subject pronoun were identified during the close reading process, and the verbs in such phrases were added to the total count. Modal auxiliaries were not analysed (with the exception of a few cases lacking a main verb); it would be extremely interesting to examine them in more detail, but here I have focussed on the main verb only.

Each verb phrase was examined in context to determine the semantic domain of the verb using Biber et al's categorisation. They classify lexical verbs into seven semantic domains: activity verbs, mental verbs, communication verbs, verbs of existence or relationship, verbs of simple occurrence, causative verbs, and aspectual verbs, in order of descending

12 Collocational analysis might be a useful approach for further analysis. However, for the purposes of comparing results with what is known about controversies, it was preferable to follow a methodology used in previous studies on that genre.

frequency (1999: 360–365). There are disadvantages to this classification scheme: the verb domains are necessarily broad, and since the classification is based on semantics, it is also subjective to some degree. However, there are advantages as well: the major semantic domains of activity, mental, communication and existence verbs are relevant categories even from a functional viewpoint. A semantic categorisation also avoids the inevitable multifunctionality that would confuse any pragmatic classification of this type, making numerical comparisons of functional classes very difficult. Most importantly, it allows for a comparison with Ratia's analysis on tobacco controversies (2011).

3. Quantitative analysis

Figure 2 gives a summary of the distribution of verbs into semantic domains in the corpus as a whole. While Biber et al.'s modern corpora generally have activity verbs as the most frequent type (1999: 365–366), mental and communication verbs are more common in my material. These are very similar results to what Ratia found in her corpus of tobacco controversies (2011: 125): mental verbs are the most common type, followed by communication verbs, activity verbs and existence verbs, in that order. The three remaining verb types are relatively infrequent. Biber et al. remark that mental verbs are particularly common in conversation (1999: 366), which may in part explain their high frequency here as well: both controversies and debates are more like conversation than registers such as news reports.

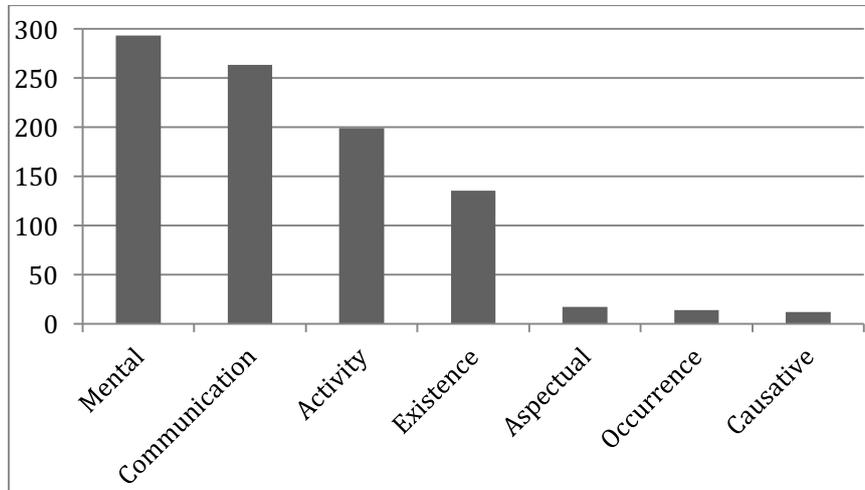


Figure 2. Raw data frequencies of different verb types occurring with first person pronoun reference

In sum, when looking at the texts as a whole, the patterns of verbs in debate poetry are very similar to those of controversies. I will now go on to examine the verbs in each semantic domain in more detail. The semantic domains will be discussed in order of descending frequency.

Mental verbs

According to Biber et al. (1999: 362), verbs in this semantic domain typically denote either mental states or activities which do not require physical action. This domain can be further subdivided into verbs denoting cognitive meanings, emotional meanings, perception (e.g. *see*), or receipt of communication (e.g. *hear*).

Layer 1 (the narrator's layer)¹³

see 21, *thinke* 13, *hear* 12, *gesse* 7, *meane* 7, *espie* 6, *find* 6, *wote* 6, *read* 5, *muse* 4, *remember* 3, *forget* 2, *iudge* 2, *know* 2, *perceyue* 2, *trow* 2, *trust* 2, *wene* 2, *apperceyuen*, *apply my mynde*, *attende*, *beleeeue*, *call to remembraunce*, *cast in my minde*, *consyder*, *count*, *descry*, *entend*, *feel*, *gather*, *greue*, *hold*, *imagine*, *keepe in heart*, *mark*, *mett*, *might (know)*, *proue*, *purpose*, *quake and tremble*, *seek to knowe*, *sigh & weep*, *surmit*, *take hede*, *take kepe*, *wepe wayle and grone*

Layer 2 (the characters' layer)

know 19, *thinke* 13, *proue* 12, *trow* 11, *mene* 9, *see* 8, *loue* 7, *finde* 6, *dare* 4, *desire* 4, *doubt* 4, *holde* 4 ('consider'), *conclude* 3, *fele* 3, *gesse* 3, *meruayle* 3, *recke* 3, *weene* 3, *will* 3, *beholde* 2, *endure* 2, *entende* 2, *feare* 2, *hear* 2, *iudge* 2, *mourne* 2, *perceyue* 2, *suppose* 2, *sustaine* 2, *wepe* 2, *confute*, *contemplayte*, *craue*, *detest*, *distinguishe*, *go madde*, *hate*, *hyt the nayle* ('make an accurate assessment'), *mysse* ('misunderstand'), *rede*, *rekyn*, *skorne*, *take* ('accept'), *trust*, *trymble and quake*, *wayle*, *wishe*

We may observe that the narrator, who is reporting a story he has witnessed, makes frequent use of perception verbs such as *see* and *hear*. Receipt of communication appears to be less common in Layer 2. The characters, on the other hand, are more focussed on asserting that they are right, using verbs like *know* and *prove*. They also try to project confidence by using the verb *trow*, and strong emotion is more present than with the narrator. The use of mental verbs for hedging, or conversely for emphasis, is discussed in more detail in the qualitative section below, as is the process of clarifying the meaning of something said earlier.

Verbs describing emotional states are found on both layers. Expressions such as *wepe* or *trymble and quake* do involve a certain

13 There were frequent instances of the phrase *me thought* in the material, but these were not included in the analysis on formal grounds. Semantically, there is little difference between *methought* and *I think*, but including the former would suggest that expressions such as *it semeth me* or even *it grieveth me* should also be examined for the sake of consistency. This would shift the focus from the presentation of the speaker to that of his or her surroundings.

amount of physical action as well, but it is the strong emotion that comes across as central.

Communication verbs

This domain can be seen as a subcategory of activity verbs involving communication activities (Biber et al. 1999: 362).

Layer 1

quoth 23, say 22, tell 19, bidde 12, call 10, pray 9, ask 7, answer 5, write 5, reherce 4, besech 3, lye 3, read (aloud) 3, ensure 2, fayne 2,¹⁴ plead 2, speak 2, vndertake 2, alledge, commaund, deuise, enquire, expresse, make answer, make enquirie, make question, make rehearsal and ask, repyue, requyre, shew, supply, term, thank

Layer 2

say 20, pray 10, tell 9, call 6, graunt 6, aske 3, confesse 3, denye 3, make rehearsayle 3, read (aloud) 3, speake 3, affirme 2, answere 2, contrarye 2, declare 2, excuse 2, expresse 2, redd 2, reherse 2, report 2, shewe 2, vndertake 2, adde, alledge, blame, challenge, charge, complayne, demaunde, dysclose, dyspute, flatter, laude, make complaynte, make confessyon, make declaracyon, make promysseyon, mell, rayle, recyte, reply, sclaunder, swere, wryte

The list of verbs found in Layer 2 is similar in many ways to that of Layer 1. There are differences, however, which are no doubt due to the different roles that the characters play in the discourse. Simple verbs like *say* and *tell* are found in both layers. Layer 1 shows a comparatively high number of verbs that have to do with commanding or requesting: *pray*, *bid*, *besech*. Many of these are from *Pride and Lowliness*, where the narrator takes the role of adjudicator in the debate, gathering a jury and asking people for their viewpoints. Layer 2, on the other hand, has many ‘combative’ verbs used to accuse or insist on a viewpoint: *contrarye*, *vndertake* (here in the sense of ‘claim’), *affirme*, *alledge*, *challenge*,

14 Outside of context, *fayne* might well be interpreted as meaning ‘rejoice’, which would be a mental verb. However, in context it is clearly to be interpreted as a communication verb: both instances are found in the phrase “yf I sholde not fayne”, which is exactly parallel with “yf I sholde not lye”, also found in the same text.

charge, complayne and so on. Sometimes communication verbs are also used for clarifying text organisation.

Activity verbs

Activity verbs primarily denote volitional activity, and so the subject usually takes the semantic role of agent (Biber et al. 1999: 361). However, in some cases non-volitional actions can also be expressed with activity verbs.

Layer 1

goo 7, do 6, walk 5, lay 5, look 5, find 4, take 4, stand 3, approche 2, come 2, forsake 2, giue 2, passe 2, put 2, restrayne 2, sleep 2, abrayd ('to start out of sleep'), *admyt, arise, attain, behold, behold and look, blow, bring, comforte, commytte, defend, descend, do reuerence, draw forth, draw nere, dress* ('move'), *driue, get, iniurie, keep, leave, lye, make, must, myght, obserue, press, procede, proue* ('test'), *refuse, renounce, salute, satisfie, seche, send, serche, serue, sette, shrowd, synde, touche, tourne my bak, tye, view, wrye*

Layer 2

doe 9, make 6, take 5, attayne 4, stay 4, bring 2, build 2, cast 2, control 2, gete 2, kepe 2, lead astray 2, offend 2, seke 2, vse 2, abyde, bende, bere, bridle and rule, bring about ('accomplish'), *chose, com, confound, couer, descend, direct, do my payne, do submyssyon, draw, dyffer* ('put off'), *enforce* ('drive by force'), *erre, exyle, fynde, folowe, go, goe to, helpe, layne* ('conceal'), *lede, must awaye, optayne, passe, pay, pleaser, purchace, pursewe, put, refryan, refuse, requyre, restraine, retourne, sende, serch, serue, set, sharpen, slee, spare, spede, stande, sterte, subdue, submyt, tary, varye*

This semantic domain shows great variation, and relatively few verbs are repeated multiple times (cf. mental and communication verbs, where a few central verbs have very high frequencies). We may discern a slight tendency for the use of very concrete action verbs like *walk* and *lay* on Layer 1; this can be ascribed to the typical *mise-en-scene* of debate poetry, where the narrator wanders to a lonely place in the woods and overhears a debate, often but not necessarily in a dream.

Verbs of existence or relationship

Copular verbs are the most common type of existence verbs; other verbs like *live* or *contain* can be used to refer to a state of existence or a relationship between entities (Biber et al. 1999: 364).

Layer 1

be 21, *have* 11, *abide*, *bound*, *dwelt*, *liue*

Layer 2

be 61, *have* 28, *live* 8, *dwelt*, *want*¹⁵

In my dataset, these verbs generally report the speaker's relationship to a place or person. However, there is also a sub-group of cognitive states reported with the help of the verb *be*: *I was sure*, *I was ware*. Emotional states are reported similarly: *I was not aferde*. For the verb *have*, similar uses are found: the phrase *I had this fantasie* reports a cognitive activity, and in *I had such great pleasure* an emotive meaning is transmitted. Such nominalisations are hardly surprising, since the two major existence verbs themselves have little semantic content.

We may observe a tendency that in the narrator's case, the copular verb often co-occurs with a location; there are also reports of emotional states, and some examples of humility expressions (*I had but small experience*). On Layer 2, however, such humility is not common at all: instead, there are numerous instances of more or less direct self-praise, often involving a less than flattering comparison with the adversary. Descriptions of emotional states are also very frequent.

Aspectual verbs

Layer 1

gin 8, *begin* 2, *leave*¹⁶ 2, *fyne*, *cease*

Layer 2

begin 2, *end*

¹⁵ *Want* would normally be a mental verb, but here it is used in the phrase *I want iudgement*, clearly referring to the non-existence of a quality.

¹⁶ *Leave* is here found in the phrase *where I left to take my hold agayne*, suggesting an activity that has been discontinued for a while and is now taken up again. It is more typically found as an activity verb.

There has been some scholarly debate about the exact significance of *gin* (as in *I gan to dreame so woonderfull and straunge*), which originally had an inchoative function (showing the beginning of a process). However, in late medieval texts and presumably early modern texts as well, it has been argued to function as a mere line-filler, and there is no agreement on how to interpret it (Fischer 1992: 265–267.). I have chosen to include it in the aspectual class nonetheless, as the inchoative meaning seems to be acceptable in context. This has the effect of doubling the total number of aspectual verbs. As all the instances of *gin* are found in *Pride and Lowliness*, these results are somewhat skewed by the influence of a single text.

Verbs of simple occurrence

Biber et al. define this class as describing events that are not the result of volition, typically physical ones (1999: 364).

Layer 1

lose 5, *awake* 2, *chance*, *dye*

Layer 2

dye 2, *arise*, *perish*, *sterue*

Arise here refers to rising from the dead, which is clearly not something achievable through volition only.

Verbs of facilitation or causation

Instead of acting directly, here the subject indirectly causes something to happen; typical examples would be verbs like *cause* or *force* (Biber et al. 1999: 363).

Layer 1

let 2, *have*, *make*

Layer 2

make 4, *let* 2, *cause*, *have*¹⁷

¹⁷ *Have* is obviously not primarily a causative verb, but here it is found in the phrase *So I may haue my cause heard all at large*, where it clearly denotes a facilitative or causative meaning.

Having examined each verb type in some detail, I will now compare the distribution of semantic domains on the different layers. When examined separately (see Figure 3), the verb phrases at Layer 1 behave similarly to what we saw earlier for the corpus as a whole, although the proportion of communication verbs rises beyond mental verbs.

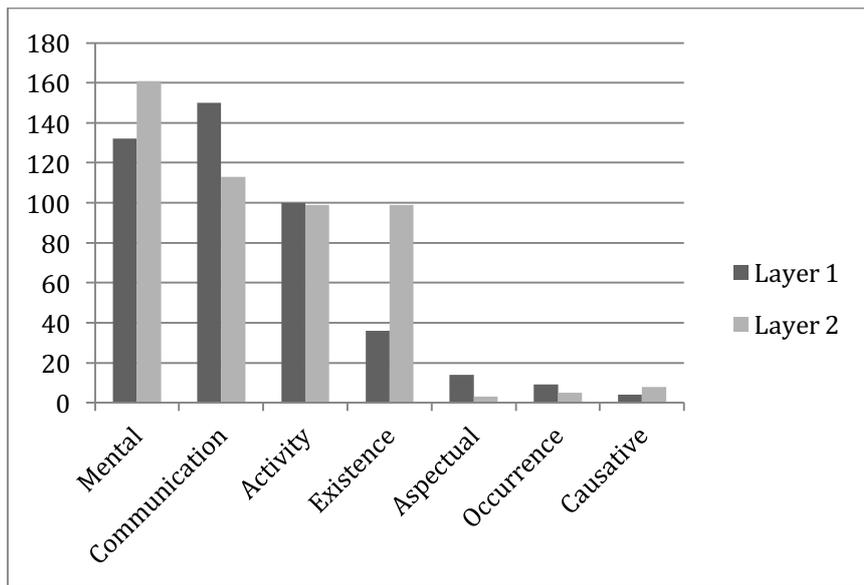


Figure 3. Raw data frequencies of different verb types occurring with first person pronoun reference, divided according to the layers of discourse

However, when examining Layer 2 on its own, the pattern is different: mental verbs are the most frequent type, followed by communication verbs. Existence verbs are somewhat surprisingly the next frequent, closely followed by activity verbs. The number of existence verbs is particularly noticeable since they are a relatively small category in Layer 1. The difference between Layers 1 and 2 is statistically significant ($\chi^2 = 38.3944$, $df = 4$, $p\text{-value} < 0.01$).¹⁸ This finding will be discussed in more

¹⁸ The three smallest categories were conflated into a single “Other” category for the statistical calculation, as the χ square test is not reliable with such small numbers of observations.

detail in Section 5; I will now proceed to a qualitative discussion of some moves and strategies associated with the first person.

4. Qualitative analysis

The broad semantic domains discussed above are convenient for statistical comparisons and give an overview of what is happening in the texts, but the verbs in each domain have varying functions; indeed a single verb in a specific context can still be multi-functional. In this section I will examine some move types found in debate poetry, based on Fritz's analysis of first person moves in 17th century controversies (Fritz 2005). Since debate poetry is built on very different assumptions from scientific controversies, it is expected that not all of Fritz's moves will occur in debates, and debates may similarly make use of moves not found in controversies. As Fritz gives no quantitative data, numerical comparisons of move frequency are not possible. Given the multi-functionality of utterances, such comparisons would be of limited use in any case.

While noting that many other moves can also be found in controversies, Fritz lists ten moves that he considers particularly interesting in connection with the first person:

1. Justifying one's entrance into a controversy
 2. Making explicit an aspect of text organisation
 3. First person hedging
 4. Marking a disagreement in quasi-dialogue
 5. Marking a disagreement with an authority
 6. Self-praise, self-advertising
 7. Presenting one's own observations or experience
 8. Giving an interpretation of one's own words
 9. Claiming incomprehension
 10. First person narrative of one's progress from error to truth
- (Fritz 2005: 236)

Out of these move types, not all are common in debate poetry: for example, the beginning of the conflict episode is usually not justified by the characters. This makes move 1 irrelevant for our present purposes. Moves 7 and 10 are closely associated with the scientific nature of

controversies, again making them less relevant for debates. The remaining seven move types are at least possible in any type of debate. Nonetheless, claiming incomprehension seems to be rare in my dataset, and it will not be discussed in detail. My focus will be on the moves used by the characters, although some narratorial moves are also mentioned.

Making explicit an aspect of text organisation

Fritz's example of this move is used to mark a diversion from the main point of the argument (Fritz 2005: 239), which is perhaps a more detailed type of metatextual comment than is usually found in debate poetry. However, we do find some examples of metatext in debates as well:

I haue **much other matter for to saien**
(*Pride and Lowliness*, l. 563)

Ryght in this wyse **as I shall telle you lo.**
(*Heart and Eye*, l. 342)

There are also reminders of points that were discussed earlier in the debate, although such comments often refer to an argument made not by the speaker, but by the opponent.

Withoute werre afore as I yow tolde
We may not saue ne kept our right
(*Horse, Goose and Sheep* ll. 401–402)

On the whole, the represented dialogue found in debate poetry perhaps does not allow for the very complicated argumentation structures of a written document, so there might be less need for clarifying textual organisation than in written controversies. In this respect, then, debate poetry might be seen as the more oral of the two genres.¹⁹

¹⁹ For visual marking of text organisation in some debate poems, see Salmi (2014).

First person hedging

This move typically takes the form of *I think*, *I suppose* and similar utterances. In my material the characters usually use such phrases not for hedging, but instead for emphasis: their tone is typically very confident.

True honour **I suppose** thou neuer knewe:
That iudget it in arrogance of hart,
In silke and veluet, and in outward shewe.
(*Pride and Lowliness*, ll. 534–536)

Do weye your blame/and laude in balaunce
To se of them/whiche twayne weye moste
And when that ye se/there the dyfferaunce
I trowe of your laude/ye wyll make small boste.
(*Man and Woman*, ll. 153–156)

However, the narrators do sometimes use hedging moves, typically to emphasise a dream vision setting. Anticipating the audience to be incredulous or disapproving, the narrator reminds them that the story is only the report of a dream, and any excessively far-fetched elements are thus not the responsibility of the narrator.

But to my purpose whiche I haue attained,
For my defence and of my dreame also:
There is no man alyue that here is blamed,
I knowe not such a man as weren tho.
That by the breche of cloth were chalenged,
Nor I thinke neuer were, for to my wyt:
They were fantasticall imagined,
Onely as **in my dreame I dyd surmit**.
(*Pride and Lowliness*, ll. 2029–2036)

The relative infrequency of hedging on Layer 2 reflects the combative nature of debate poetry. The confident effect achieved by the aggressive use of mental verbs is frequently enhanced by self-praise (see below).

Marking a disagreement

Fritz describes types 4 and 5, both marking disagreement, as contrastive or emphatic moves typical of the “quasi-dialogical structure of a staged polemic” (2005: 240). Such a move takes the basic form “You say/an authority says that p, but I say that q”. One might expect these to be common in debate poetry as well, but actually such emphatic contrasting of what the participants *say* is unusual—when explicit comparisons are made, they tend to be between the qualities of the characters themselves, rather than between what they say. However, there are examples where a statement by the opponent is responded to using a communication verb:

That Eue was full cause, **I do say nay**
whom **thou dost call**, the mother of myserie
(*A Dialogue Defensive*, ll. 319–320)

Similarly, there are examples where a speaker echoes something said by the opponent, implying that there was something wrong with what was said:

Winter:

Somer thou doest greate wronge / to boste so as I trow
If thou canst no answere make / to that that I wolde know
Wherfore sholde the worlde / to the do such honour here
Fro deth to life / canst not thou reise the ded leyd on bere

Summer:

Frende & what art thou **to whome I shulde answere**
(*Summer and Winter*, ll. 13–17)

Here Winter finds Summer excessively boastful, and he is demanding to hear evidence before admitting that his opponent should be honoured. Summer, in turn, objects to this request and wants to hear Winter’s credentials before answering.²⁰ All in all, while examples can be found, they are much less explicit than the examples cited by Fritz.

As for references to authority, in debate poetry they are overwhelmingly given in support of the speaker’s own viewpoint, and it is very unusual for an authoritative figure to be challenged. There are

²⁰ This sequence is reminiscent of the challenging ritual of knights eager to join battle (cf. Bax 1999).

two possible explanations for this. One is the long scholastic tradition behind debate poetry; when that tradition came to an end, so did debate poetry as a popular genre. Another explanation might be the subject matter. In scientific questions (discussed in controversies) it is probably easier to find evidence for challenging the authorities, compared to the more philosophic topics preferred in debate poetry.

Self-Praise

This is a trait not necessarily found in all conflictive genres: e.g. Spitz's study of representations of mother-daughter disputes (2005) does not mention this as a typical move. However, it is easily found in debate poetry, often making use of verbs of existence:

Besides all that, my foote is woorth thy yard,
So am I iolif fayre and precious:
Where I am present, who dooth the regard,
Or the vouchsafe to dwellen in his house.
(*Pride and Lowliness*, l. 269–272)

I am tyme of somer **to all creatures great plesure**
(*Summer and Winter*, l. 12)

As discussed above (see also Dascal 1998), debates are about winning, and victory can be achieved either by belittling the opponent or by praising oneself. While literary characters are subject to the same systems of politeness rules as their audience, the stakes are much lower, since real people on Layer 0 do not typically get hurt. Indeed, rudeness towards an adversary may be quite entertaining to the audience: Culpeper remarks that there may be an intrinsic entertainment factor to argument, and the audience may also derive a pleasant feeling of superiority from witnessing argumentative interactions (2005: 45–46). Exaggerated self-praise may have much the same effect; in any case it adds to the adversarial effect. Self-praise is typically combined with a more or less explicit negative assessment of the opponent. The narrator does not typically engage in self-praise.

Clarification of meaning

Fritz reports that misunderstandings and perhaps even intentional misinterpretations are frequent in controversies. This is not really surprising: misunderstanding is not only a feature, but also a common cause of conflicts. In fact, we find a reference to the possibility of misunderstanding in *A Dialogue Defensive*, where the Pye, attacking women, makes the following request:

Be playne in thy termes, sayde the Pye I the pray
And dystinctly declare, what thy meanynge is
By vanytie of rayment, for nothyng can I say
To the **yf thy mynde herin, I do mysse**.
(*A Dialogue Defensive*, ll. 704–707)

When the adversary has misunderstood a point made by the speaker, the issue must be clarified: “I mean p, not q.” This is another move type that is not very common in debate poetry. When the expression “I mean” is used, it is usually for the purpose of clarifying some instance of poetic vagueness rather than correcting a misinterpretation:

My moder of her estate notable
Uenus I meane the goddesse amyable
(*Heart and Eye*, l. 605–606)

I se betwene vs litle difference.
Or none at all, saue only woorkmanship:
Whereto yf there belong preeminence,
Make thou no claime to thy mistres woorship.
I meane the woorkman which the garnished,
With silke and golde, and with imbroderie:
By meane whereof Pride hath thee rauished,
To bost in things belonging not to thee.
(*Pride and Lowliness*, ll. 249–256)

This probably reflects the fact that the disputes in debate poetry are not truly interactive events, although they show many interactive features. Misunderstandings may be anticipated by the speakers, but as actual occurrences they are not very common. Anticipation of possible

misreadings can also be found on Layer 1. In *Pride and Lowliness*, there is a delightful parody of the phrases commonly used in books of the period to protest the good intentions of the author.

Because my matter hath ben of a breeche
Which is their habit and their couerture:
To thinke none ill therein I them beseeche,
Or that their losse, **I haue ment to procure.**
As that they might not weare as may the rest,
I meane the members of more worthines:
For sure I hold they ought to weare the best,
And if ye read S. Paule, he saith no lesse.
Wherefore to buttockes euil I ne ment,
More then vnto the belly or the backe:
(*Pride and Lowliness*, ll. 2045–2054)

While the mental verb *meane* is the most typical word used to mark such explanations, verbs of communication may also be used in phrases like *that is to say*.

5. Discussion

The main finding of the numerical analysis is the high frequency of existence verbs on Layer 2. Some such variation is perhaps to be expected; registers vary a great deal in the distribution of verbs across the domains. Biber et al. (1999: 366) note that existence verbs are particularly common in academic prose. While debate poetry is historically connected with the scholastic tradition of *disputationes*, they are decidedly unacademic in tone. However, genre features can provide us with one possible reason for the high frequency of existence verbs in debates. When examining the occurrences of existence verbs on Layer 2, one soon notices that often the existence verb is used in a phrase comparing the two debaters. Such a comparison can be relatively explicit:

Where I am present, who dooth the regard
(*Pride and Lowliness*, l. 271)

I was your servant, formd of Durt and Clay;
You to command, and I for to obey.
(*Saint Bernard's Vision*, ll. 51–52)

The eye answered and sayd **I am as trewe**
As ever thou were [...]
(*Heart and Eye*, ll. 388–389)

In other cases the comparison is more oblique and context-dependent:

Winter I have yonge damsels that haue theyr brestes whyte
(*Summer and Winter*, l. 49)

Here Summer and Winter are engaged in a fight for supremacy, each boasting of their positive qualities. Winter responds in his next turn: “I haue more of my ease than thou hast of delyghtes”, making the implicit comparison clear. Gloning has proposed a “supermaxim for a certain range of controversies”, which is to avoid any person-related moves, unless they are somehow relevant for the subject matter (2005: 273). Debate poems clearly do not belong to that range, since the characters are often personifications of the qualities under debate, and emotional and personal engagement is a characteristic of the genre (Conlee 1991: xii). Indeed, in a verbal duel between two contestants a winner can hardly be decided without making comparisons between them, and existence verbs are one convenient way of doing that: “I am cheerful, you are gloomy. I am therefore better than you.” Comparison does certainly explain a large portion of the existence verbs on Layer 2 in my dataset.

Related to the matter of comparisons is the liberal use of self-praise by the characters. This, again, is something not found in the narrator's sections. On Layer 1, there may be a greater likelihood of any potential offense ‘leaking’ back onto Layer 0 and the reality of the author. The distinction between author and narrator was perhaps not yet fully developed in the early modern period, so any narratorial boasting could be misinterpreted as referring to the real author. However, this explanation is problematic in the sense that self-praise is also found in controversies, where any boasting *does* take place on Layer 0. A more likely explanation can probably be found in the purpose of the

interaction: the narrator is not engaged in a conflict, and he is neither trying to overcome an adversary nor to convince one. Self-praise can be useful to both those ends, but it serves no function when simply telling an entertaining story.

As for the frequencies of communication verbs and mental verbs, it can be noted that on Layer 1, communication verbs are slightly more frequent than mental verbs, while on Layer 2 this order is reversed. As the narrator is engaged in reporting what happens in the debate, it is quite natural that communication verbs should show higher frequencies. The characters within the debate are more focussed on the argument itself (although there is some speech reporting on Layer 2 as well). This is probably reflected in slightly higher frequencies of mental verbs, similar to the findings reported by Ratia in her study of controversies (2011: 125).

6. Conclusion

This paper has shown that the narrator's sections of a debate poem use first person verbs in different semantic domains from those used in the characters' part. Most strikingly, verbs of existence are found in significantly higher frequencies on Layer 2. Mental verbs are slightly more frequent on Layer 2, while communication verbs are more common on Layer 1. In some ways such differences between the layers are not surprising, as the characters are engaged in debate, and the narrator is not. The frequency of verbs of existence can therefore tentatively be attributed to the influence of the debate genre, especially as previous studies on controversies have not found existence verbs in such high frequencies.

While the difference between layers may not be surprising, the difference between debates and controversies is an interesting and unexpected finding, as the two genres are otherwise similar in many ways. This difference may be related to the underlying purpose of the text: in controversies the important thing is to convince an audience with one's ideas, and comparison between participants is less central. In debate poetry, the participants and ideas cannot always be kept apart, since the characters are personifications of abstract concepts. In this way, all comparisons between them necessarily become personal. The entertainment factor should also be kept in mind: as the battle for victory

between the characters becomes more personal, it also becomes more entertaining to the audience, and there is no risk of retaliation against the author. In controversies any face attacks are likely to be reciprocated, which probably reduces their frequency.

This paper has also examined some of the first person moves previously studied in controversies, again highlighting some of the differences and similarities between debate poetry and controversies. It appears that while some first person moves found in controversies are uncommon in debate poetry, self-praise is quite frequent on Layer 2, probably due to the importance of trying to win the argument (as opposed to convincing the adversary). Hedging, marking disagreement, and clarification of meaning or text organisation are move types that occur relatively often in debate poems, although possibly not quite so prominently as in controversies—debates are perhaps less genuinely interactive as a genre. Further exploration of the strategies and interactions of the characters would be beneficial, to expand the listing of move types provided in this paper.

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