

THE MUTUALLY EXCLUSIVE REFERENTS OF
MIDDLE HIGH GERMAN rîche

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Dictionary definitions have long been known to be insufficient for clarifying the use of words in context. Grimm's Deutsches Wörterbuch lists several referents for the Middle High German word, rîche, some of which are mutually exclusive, such as "inhabitants of a territory," "territory," "ruler," and "commonwealth."¹ This list corresponds to Manfred Hellmann's (1969) list of meanings in his study of rîche in the Herzog Ernst epic. Since the commonwealth is one of the basic concepts underlying most medieval epics, the historical perspective reflected in the Middle High German epic can only be understood when the word, rîche, representing this concept is properly defined. How is it possible to reconcile these conflicting referents? It is apparent that a dictionary study of a word abstracted from its syntactic and semantic environment cannot account for the full range of meanings and connotations associated with a word in context. The method suggested is to define the entire set of referents and connotations associated with rîche by restricting the context in which the word appears. The twelfth century Middle High German pre-courtly epics, Herzog Ernst (HE), Rolandslied (Rl), and König Rother, (KR) were chosen for the comparative study of rîche because they share the same themes (crusade and courtship) and the same basic plot structure, thereby limiting context. The various references have been grouped according to semantic and grammatical categories. These three semantic categories are: 1. inanimate object, 2. human agent, 3. abstract concept. Since it is rarely possible to assign a single referent to a given occurrence at sentence level, it is assumed that in each occurrence the meaning of the word may be composed of several possible referents.

1. Evidence for rîche as object

Previous studies by Eberhard Nellmann (1963) and Manfred Hellmann (1969) list almost as many referents for the term as Grimm does. They all agree that in many instances the referent is clearly inanimate and the object of some type of action. Evidence for this is found in various syntactic constructions such as verbs of motion:

1. us diseme riche versant (R1 1385)
'banished from this r...'
2. sô muoz dir der helt balt/rûmen dîn rîche (HE 851)
'then the courageous hero must quit your r...'
3. er ladet uch in sine riche (R1 7683)
'he will invite you into his r...'

With prepositions such as ûz, zu, and in which indicate that a geographical territory is implied, even when rîche is applied to God's realm (see eg. 1 and 3):

4. zu dem gotes riche (R1 3949)
'zu God's r...'
5. haim in sin riche (R1 2794)
'(that he flee) home to his r...'

Constructions such as a possessive adjective, genitive phrase, or a verb of ownership indicate that rîche can be possessed and controlled by people. It occurs often as the object of verbs meaning 'take' or 'give' (nemen, geben).

6. Adjective: see examples 2 and 5.
7. Genitive: des rîches Herrn (HE 6765,
R1 8748) 'lord of the r...'
- 7.b. des rîches vogt und herre (HE 355)
'overseer and lord of the r...'
8. Verbs: das er mir min riche neme/un iz
einem andern gebe,/un iz habe der mit gwalt
(R1 2261) 'that he take from me my r...,
give it to another, and have control over
it'

Thus far, riche has been shown to designate a geographical territory which is controlled by a lord or a master and can be owned or given away in the manner of a fief. As an object of possession, it can be attacked or protected in war. Verbs of warfare include: hern, 'to wage war,' geweltigen, 'capture, subdue,' schirmen, 'protect,' and behuoten, 'protect.'

9. so geweltige du sine riche (R1 5209)
'then capture his r... (plural)'

10. ze schirmen diniu riche (R1 6727)
'to protect your r... (plural)'

As long as only phrases and sentence fragments are considered (as above) in the manner of Hellmann's and Nellmann's work, the territorial meaning is clear:

11. Karl mit sinem grawen parte/hat manigiu
riche pedwungen (R1 5208) 'Karl with
his gray beard has conquered many r...
(plural)'

If we look at the continuation of the sentence, the list of conquests reveals the additional connotations of the term:

11. b. di al swarzen Unger/Pulle unt Latran
'the black Hungarians, Apulia and the
Lateran'

The term denotes territory with regard to Apulia and the Lateran, but Unger refers to people. If this structure is accepted as parallel, then it must be assumed that the term subsumes both people and territory. The procedure suggested is to accept the most precise referent possible until proven wrong by the examples. In this case it is also possible to assume that part of the connotation of riche includes people and that the author slipped into non-parallel construction for this reason. Final judgement must be reserved for later.

2. Evidence for riche as agent

As the subject of a sentence, rîche is often active and even if it is the object of a transitive verb, the connotation of some verbs often implies active participation on the part of the object. It is necessary, therefore, to seek an agentive, animate referent. The verb, vernemen, 'hear,' implies an animate, thinking subject. Duke Ernst gives out such good advice that the king and the entire rîche wish to know it:

12. daz ez vernemen mohte/der künic und al
daz rîche (HE 620) 'that the king and
the entire r... would like to hear it'

The active participation of rîche is implied even when it is the object of the verb. Widerstân, 'resist' implies that an active offensive must be countered:

13. ich mac leider mêre/niht dem rîche wider-
stân (HE 1773) 'unfortunately I can no
longer resist the r...'

Willekomen, 'welcome' implies human feelings:

14. dô was er grôze willekomen/den fürsten
und dem rîche (HE 444) 'he was welcome
to the lords and the r...'

The rîche also appears to be able to take a wife:

15. do diu herzoginne Adelheit/ze frowen
dem rîche wart gegeben (HE 466) 'when
the duchess A. was given to the r... as
wife'

This translation is not satisfying, because a more precise referent is needed. Previous studies have assumed that the referent is the husband. In order to determine to whom she was indeed given, other sections dealing with a wife need to be investigated.

In the process of choosing a wife for the emperor, it becomes clear that the rîche has a will and can make requests:

16. rîches bete, 'request of the lords

and emperor'

17. tuot des luch der keiser bite/und al
die fürsten sîne man/des müest ir immer
êre hân,/ob ir leistet des rîches bete
(HE 338) 'If you do as the emperor and all
all the brds ask, then you will be
honored and have prestige when you ful-
fill the request of the r...'

In addition, several things owned by the rîche are expressed with rîche in the genitive case:

18. küniginne des rîches, 'queen of the r..'
19. rîches krone, 'crown of the r..'
20. des rîches van, 'the banner of the r..'

Manfred Hellmann's (1969) analysis of the usage of rîche in the HE attempts to distinguish between instances where the term refers to lords excluding the king and those in which it refers to the king alone. He reasons that only a single man, such as the king, can marry. He is equally sure that the crown and banner belong to him personally, excluding the lords. However, the king is a member of the group of lords and is defined as the first among peers. Even in Hellmann's examples (18-21), the king cannot be distinguished from the group. Hellmann finds the clearest use of the term referring to the king alone in the genitive phrase:

21. des rîches tür, 'the door of the r..'

In this scene Otto and his nephew are sitting alone in council when Ernst bursts through the door ('of the r..'). He kills the nephew while the king escapes into the next room. Hellmann expects the king's door to be the door to his private chamber. This need not be the case. The general context of this situation is a council. The king is holding court at this time and place and has assembled all his advisors (lords) to this court. This was Ernst's reason for coming as well. It is reasonable to assume that if the emperor is in council with someone, he is conducting official business and is seated in the great

hall. Des rîches tür would then indicate an access to the official group which sits in council.

From examples 18-21 we may deduce the common official or ceremonial aspect of the people or objects denoted. It is likely that no single person, not even the emperor, owns the crown, nor the banner, nor the queen. These things are owned by a group collectively, and it is probably the same group that makes requests and decides on a wife. The referent, then, must be a collective noun referring to a specific group of people, perhaps to the lords of the realm who make decisions jointly. In 17, the duchess as wife of the riche merely fulfills her function as part of the group (as consors regni). If this is so, then the referent in all examples where riche is animate includes the ruling group and the entire sentence in each case stresses the official capacity of both the lords and the ruler.

If the narrowest meaning for king or emperor is accepted as the sole referent, too many examples do not apply, such as examples 12, 15, 17, 19. If the collective referent of lords is accepted in situations which portray official activity, it applies to all cases.

In order for the group of lords to act as riche, their act must be a public and official one. The lords decide to give Ernst their goodwill when they say:

22. nu sî im vergeben/al das er uns habe
getân./wir sulen dem edelen man helfen
umb des rîches hulde/.../und des
keisers hulde gewinnen (HE 5734)
'now let him be forgiven for all that
he has done to us. We should help the
noble man to regain the goodwill of
the r.../..../and win the goodwill of
the emperor'

Apparently Ernst is not reinstated by the lords without the king, and it must be done publicly.

Most of the examples cited by Hellmann where apparent distinction is made between the riche and the emperor are actually formulaic, in that they are used

not to contrast, but to intensify whatever is being described. This construction consists of the conjunction 'and' which connects any two expressions as long as parallelism is maintained. An example of V-and-V construction is:

23. ...die fürsten gestênt, /daz sie wol rîtent unde gênt/gên dir gewalteclîche (HE 794) 'the lords admit that they are riding and walking against you with force'

The entire expression simply refers to the attacking group, whether it actually consisted of both beridden knights and footsoldiers or not. The double verb is not meant to literally describe the movement of the knights, but to intensify the description of military aggression.

The two parts connected by 'and' often repeat the same situation in different words, or they mention different aspects of one situation or concept. In either case, the meaning of the two parts is closely related. N-and-N constructions are most abundant:

24. da ist walt unt mōs (R1 2689)
'there is forest and moss'
25. da waren tiêre unt uogele (R1 3327)
'there were animals and birds'

Often parallel phrases of almost equivalent meaning are doubled:

26. vil manic recke balt/muost den lîp von in verliesen/und den grimmen tût kiesen (HE 5020)
'many a courageous warrior had to lose his life and accept bitter death'

If such synonymous phrases are not redundant, and the denotation of one encompasses the denotation of the other, 'and' constructions with rîche are probably intended to be understood the same way:

27. dō was er grōze willekomen/den fürsten
und dem rîche (HE 444)
'after that he was quite welcome to
the lords and the r...'
28. beide mir und dem rîche/gedienet sō
willeclîche (HE 729)
spoken by emperor: 'he had served
both me and the r... so willingly'
29. swer mich und daz rîche minnet (HE 1164)
spoken by emperor: 'whoever loves
me and the r...'

If these examples are analysed as the previous formulae (23-26) were, then the entire group of men who compose the ruling body must be understood as the referent of rîche, thereby making it a collective noun. This eliminates the problem of having to define rîche as king in 27 and as lords in 28 and 29. The referent of rîche includes both the entire group of lords even when a single use stresses the individual in the collective group.

In comparing segments larger than the sentence the same syntactic distinction between king and rîche can be found, but again, there is no compelling evidence that the referent for riche is king only. When Karl is told that Genelun's peace talks with the heathen went well, he vows to keep the promises Genelun has officially made. First, he makes his vow in his prayer to God:

30. ich ne lazze in nicht unterwegen,/swa
er sine truwe hat gegeben./er hat dem
riche wol gedienet (R1 2841)
'I won't let him down with respect to
whatever assurances he gave them. He
has served the r... well'

Later he addresses Genelun by repeating the content of the prayer in an official declaration in front of the entire assembly. In this statement, the personal pronoun, mich, has replaced the rîche:

31. Genelun, liber man,/du hast

getruweliken widir mich getan (Rl 2895) 'Genelun, dear vassal, you have acted with loyalty toward me'

The act of serving the rîche (30) is equivalent to loyalty to 'mich.' The king may be understood as the representative of the group, in which case, the pronoun may be interpreted as a pars pro toto expression.

3. Evidence for rîche as an abstract concept

This term is often used with verbs indicating legal or moral obligation where the referent is neither a concrete object nor an animate actor. When someone serves the rîche, he may serve the entire group of lords or perhaps the entire feudal system. Service, dienen, as used in example 30 refers to military service owed by the vassal to the lords. In other examples using dienen in military contexts and in similar constructions (HE 729 and Rl 7768) there is no reason to assume that rîche refers to anything other than the collective referent discussed thus far. In these cases the relationship to the rîche is a personal fulfillment of vassalage. However, there is evidence that such use of dienen and other terms of vassalage with rîche is not always personal. Karl, when speaking about his intention to give Marsilie half of Spain if he is willing to become a Christian and a vassal of the rîche, implies this:

32. ich lihe ime halbe Yspaniam,/wirdet
er deme rîche undertan (Rl 1508)
'I will enfeof him with half of
Spain if he becomes a subject of the r..'

Here the rîche appears to denote more than the king, indicating that even if a person becomes the vassal of another, he may in addition be the subject of the rîche. Thus, the narrowest definition, king + ruling lords, does not appear justified in satisfying the example above. If it is indeed possible to conceive of individuals as vassals of the rîche, meaning commonwealth or feudal system, then one can anticipate that any action against the rîche would be a legal breach and not a personal one. An example of such legal implications is:

33. sô muget ir iuch entreden niht,/so ir
ze rehte soldet stân,/irn haetet wider
daz rîche getân,/und belibet in der
schulde (HE 920)
'should you have to answer to a court,
you won't be able to exonerate your-
self by saying that you had done no-
thing against the r... and then you
would be considered guilty.'

The possible trial discussed in this example is the result of a serious offense against the rîche--treason. Should Ernst defend his lands against the troops of the king's nephew, it would be considered an act of treason, and not a personal conflict with the king and his family. Such deeds must be dealt with publicly, in front of the entire rîche. Karl in the Rolandslied must follow the same procedure. He knows that Genelun is guilty of treason, but he must have a formal public trial, which is attended by all the lords:

34. der kaiser an daz gerichte gesaz;/
owî waz fursten uor im was!/.
(Rl 8729) Genelun...stat...gebunden
uor dem rîche (Rl 8795)
'the emperor sat in court (in judgement),
what a collection of lords there
were before him!...Genelun stood bound
before the r...'

Since we are told that Karl has assembled the lords for the trial, it is not possible for Genelun to be standing before Karl alone.

4. Conclusion

This paper accepts as a set the entire range of contradictory referents and connotations culled from all the references. The three specific referents are: the territory, the ruling group, and the feudal system of vassalage. This set defines the word, rîche. The concrete referents tend to delimit the meaning, whereas the connotations broaden it by allowing for many possible associations. When this set is treated as one concept,

it is no longer necessary to assign a specific meaning to each instance of use. Example 11 can now be understood as a non-parallel construction due to the range of meanings subsumed under rîche. In order to regain parallelism the translation would have to read:

11.c. 'Karl...conquered the territory of
the black Hungarians, Apulia, and
the Lateran'

When the totality of the concept, rîche, is understood, the range of connotations a single use may evoke in context can also be interpreted with greater accuracy. In the crusading epics compared, the word is understood to be the feudal institution through which man makes his contribution to history, since commonwealth, empire, territory, ruling group and monarch are all subsumed under the single word, rîche.

NOTES

¹ See Grimm, Deutsches Wörterbuch, "rîche," vol. 8 for all 11 separate definitions. The brothers attempted to be both exact and exhaustive. However, a list of meanings implies that one must choose one single definition for each use of the word.

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