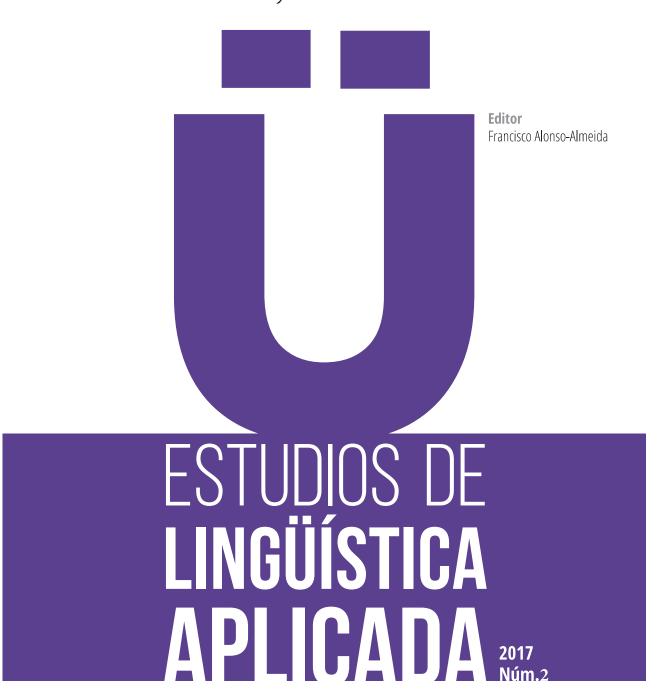# STANCETAKING IN LATE MODERN ENGLISH SCIENTIFIC WRITING

EVIDENCE FROM THE *CORUÑA CORPUS*. ESSAYS IN HONOUR OF SANTIAGO GONZÁLEZ *y* FERNÁNDEZ-CORUGEDO

Editor
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María Luisa Carrió Pastor
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Editores científicos

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Edita

A matter of opinion:

Stancetaking in Late Modern English historiography

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Abstract: This contribution is a preliminary study in historical pragmatics, aiming to discuss the main strategies employed in CHET for the expression of stance in relation to events and people. In particular, the focus is on methodological issues concerning the analysis of greater or lesser personalization and of expressions of (un)certainty and evaluation, understood as essential strategies to convey point of view in acceptable ways within the cultural framework in which individual works were published. After a brief overview of significant caveats in studies of historiography in a linguistic perspective, my analysis will consider the samples in CHET as instances of Late Modern English academic writing; where applicable, comparisons will be made with similar data in CEPhiT.

Keywords: stance-taking, modality, pragmatics, Late Modern English, historiography.

1. Introduction

Any discussion of essays, treatises, articles or indeed textbooks on history has to consider that such texts are seldom neutral, no matter how objective they purport to be: not only are they a more or less direct expression of their authors' views and experiences, but they are also a function of what concepts of historiography were viable in the cultural framework of the times in which they appeared.

This does not mean that they unreliable, but simply that they ought to be studied paying great attention to issues that might appear to be marginal for linguistic analysis, though in fact they are not; for instance, it is important to be aware of the author's own biography and of the time depth of the text: if the author is an eye-witness, this may result in a kind of 'proprietor' attitude which turns personal experience of the events into the only valid source of information and may skew the evaluative perspective; on the other hand, more or less distant commentators may be more or less militant or indeed revisionist, which may again bias interpretation. It is therefore crucial to understand the context in which the texts were written, what readers they addressed, how authors presented themselves, and what social, political, and cultural background they actually had.

Such issues are not unfamiliar even to non-experts, among whom clichés may circulate like 'it is the winners who write history', but in actual fact it cannot be denied that historical events, developments, and indeed protagonists, have been given greater or lesser prominence by different authors at different points in time. If we think of the twentieth century and consider what representations have been offered of the Civil Rights movement in the US, of the history of Native Americans, or even of Women's Liberation movements, we see that many voices have actually been "hidden from history"

(Rowbotham 1973): it was only with the advent of new approaches to social history in the late 1960s and 1970s that a different perspective began to be taken into consideration, in an attempt to finally shed light on people and events beyond what had been canonical until then.[1]

Narrations centred on long lists of kings and generals, wars and conquests certainly catered for patriotic audiences. However, this approach to historiography became the object of satire in a small book published in 1930, Walter Carruthers Sellar and Robert Julian Yeatman's *1066 and All That*, a parody of history texts of the Late Modern period presenting a (predictably) very Anglo-centric, top-down view of British history through brief annotations, which in many cases had first appeared in the well-known satirical magazine *Punch* (see Dossena, in preparation). After one world war and almost on the brink of another, the recounting of incessant pomp and circumstance was beginning to look threadbare.

Against this background, a study of historiography in Late Modern times, such as the one enabled by CHET (see Alonso-Almeida, this volume) thus becomes all the more important for an analysis of the ways in which linguistic strategies are employed to convey evaluations, express arguments, and – as a result – to attempt persuasion, at a point in time when historical narration could still be less than objective and thus function as a powerful tool of political propaganda.

In this study I will present an overview of what main strategies appear to be at work in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century texts for the expression of stance,[2] by focussing mainly on reporting verbs, adjectives, and adverbs. Space constraints do not permit further elements to be taken into consideration here; nonetheless, these items may provide useful starting points for more in-depth linguistic reflection, on account of their relative transparency.

After an overview of title pages, in which stance concerning the texts themselves is conveyed, I will examine the samples in CHET, identifying possible links with other (supposedly) purely informative textbooks, and more decidedly argumentative texts, such as pamphlets; as for the texts themselves, special attention will be paid to the comparisons that may be made with similar data in CEPhiT (Dossena 2016a).

2. Studying stance in CHET: some initial considerations

It is first of all important to mention that in CHET different text types are included: in the 18th-century section there are mostly treatises (14), but also essays (3), a biography, a travelogue and a 'narrative'; in the 19th-century section, instead, there are again mostly treatises (14), but also teaching materials: two lectures and two textbooks, to which are added a biographical catalogue and a journal article. This greater attention to secondary genres, i.e. genres addressing 'future' experts, i.e. students of the discipline, or even lay audiences, rather than other scholars, may prove important when

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[1] On this point see also Cartosio (2016), who discusses 19th-century histories of the American West in relation to the intersection of historical narrations from different points of view and artistic representation.

[2] In this study my understanding of 'stance' as the writers' ideological and epistemological positioning in relation to readers and topics relies essentially on the discussion in Hunston and Thompson (2000); see also Hyland (1998).

analyzing strategies that convey persuasiveness, as peers may need to be convinced of the validity of an argument in more complex ways than novices or indeed general readers.

In the 19th-century section there is also greater variety both in terms of authors (six women as opposed to two in the 18th-century section) and in terms of place of publication. While in the 18th-century section, out of twenty texts making up the sample, only two were published in the US, two in Ireland, and two in Scotland, whereas the majority were published in England, in the 19th-century section three texts were published in the US, two in Canada, four in Ireland, and one in Scotland, leaving 50% of the sample for texts published in England.

Numbers are clearly too small to attempt generalizations, but this may suggest a potentially fruitful line of further investigation when larger corpora become available. In what follows I will restrict my analysis to the samples in CHET and, for reasons of comparability, quantitative data will only be provided for CHET and CEPhiT, while bearing in mind that, in any case, we are looking at different corpora, in which text types, albeit similar, addressed different issues and, as a result, also different audiences. The first part of my study concerns titlepages, in which stance is conveyed even before readers do access the actual texts; stance in the presentation of contents will feature in the next subsection.

2.1. Titlepages

An analysis of stance may take titlepages as its starting point, as they are the first textual element designed to draw the attention of potential readers and ideally elicit their sympathetic understanding of the contents under discussion. The keywords employed in titlepages may therefore be crucial in this respect, since they set the tone for what readers may assume to find in the text itself.

As regards some of the most interesting evaluative keywords in titles, we see that they feature much more prominently in the 18th-century section, where we come across distinctly argumentative expressions, such as the following:

(1)   *An historical essay, [...]. Wherein the gross mistakes of a late book, [...] are exposed.* (Anderson 1705)

(2)   *A Genealogical Hiſtory of the Royal and Illuſtrious Family of the Stewarts, [...]: Containing the Deſcent, Original Creations, and moſt Remarkable Actions of their reſpective Anceſtors* (Crawfurd 1710)

(3)   *A concise, historical view of the perils, hardships, difficulties and discouragements which have attended the planting and progressive improvements of New-England; with a particular account of its long and destructive wars, expensive expeditions, &c.* (Adams 1770)

These titles are distinctly reminiscent of the often vociferous tone of political and religious pamphlets (see Brownlees 2006 and 2009; Dossena 2003 and 2006), in which the discursive strategy of animadversion was outlined in title pages that summarized the main point of view presented by the (often anonymous) authors – see the examples below, all dating from the turn of Late Modern times:

-   *A Defence of the Scots Settlement at Darien.* With an Answer to the Spanish Memorial against it. (1699).
-   *The Defence of the Scots Settlement at Darien, Answered, Paragraph by Paragraph* (1699)
-   *A Defence of the Scots Abdicating Darien: Including an Answer to the Defence of the Scots Settlement there.* (1700)

- *An Enquiry into the Causes of the Miscarriage of the Scots Colony at Darien. Or an Answer to a Libel entituled A Defence of the Scots Abdicating Darien.* (1700)
- *A Short Vindication of Phil. Scot's Defence of the Scots Abdicating Darien: Being in Answer to the Challenge of the Author of the Defence of that Settlement, [...]. With a Prefatory Reply, to the False and Scurrillous Aspersions, of the New Author of, The Just and Modest Vindication, &c.* (1700)

It may seem surprising, at least for twenty-first century readers, to see that controversy could be presented so directly in purportedly academic texts. However, CHET may be providing us with a fruitful instance of language change in progress, as nineteenth-century title pages present contents in much less marked ways, thus beginning to approximate the apparent neutrality and objectivity of present-day supposedly 'faceless' academic discourse (Biber and Finegan 1988: 3-5) — see the following examples of treatise titles:

(4) *A Short history of Spain* (Callcott 1828)

(5) *Confederation; or, The Political and Parliamentary History of Canada, from the Conference at Quebec, in October, 1864, to the Admission of British Columbia, in July, 1871* (Gray 1872)

(6) *The History of the Foreign Policy of Great Britain* (Burrows 1895)

On the other hand, title pages included more attention-seeking devices when their persuasive and promotional quality was more important to ensure the success of the book. In a recent study (Dossena 2016b), the title pages of books targeting prospective emigrants to Canada and the US have been shown to construe their credibility relying on skilful uses of qualifiers meant to emphasize the authors' direct experience and their friendly, supportive attitude to often specific groups of readers, such as in the following instances:

- Rolph, Thomas, 1820?-1883. *The emigrant's manual: particularly addressed to the industrious classes [...].* London: Cunningham & Mortimer, [1843?].
- Delano, Alonzo. *Life on the plains and among the diggings; being scenes and adventures of an overland journey to California: with particular incidents of the route, mistakes and sufferings of the emigrants, the Indian tribes, the present and future of the great West.* New York: Miller, Orton & co., 1857.

Textbooks, instead, a genre which does not feature in the 18th-century section of CHET, appear to have a fairly neutral, purely descriptive structure, such as

(7) *Medieval history* (Masson 1855)
(8) *A first history of Greece* (Sewell 1857)

This descriptive outline of contents is actually found in other instances of 19th-century textbooks, such as those digitized in the Nietz Collection of 19th-century schoolbooks:

- *A history of the United States of America: on a plan adapted to the capacity of youth, and designed to aid the memory by systematick arrangement and interesting associations: illustrated by engravings* (Goodrich 1822)

- *A brief history of ancient, mediaeval, and modern peoples, with some account of their monuments, institutions, arts, manners, and customs* (Steele 1883)

Their promotional quality, if any, relies on indications of accessibility — i.e., that the text is of a suitable level for its envisaged readers — completeness, conciseness, and possibly the integration of

illustrations, generally in the form of engravings, such as we find in one instance in CHET, a biographical catalogue concerning Salisbury Cathedral:

(9)   The history and antiquities of the cathedral church of Salisbury; illustrated with a series of engravings, of views, elevations, plans, and details of that edifice: also etchings of the ancient monuments and sculpture: including biographical anecdotes of the bishops, and other eminent persons connected with the church. (Britton 1814)

Texts like the one from which (9) is taken, however, would also need qualification before they can be compared with history books in the present-day sense, as the antiquarian fashion that was so pervasive in Late Modern times often presented buildings and even scenery of historical relevance in a somewhat romanticized way, highlighting what was 'sublime' or 'picturesque', i.e., suited to the readers' taste for idealized antiquity (Dossena 2015) – see the following examples from CHET texts published in the first half of the 19th century:

(10)   Salisbury Cathedral is popularly regarded as the finest church in England; […]. It is customary for visitors to approach it from the east; and having reached the north-east angle of the enclosed cemetery, where the whole edifice is commanded at a single glance, the effect is pleasingly sublime. PLATE II. shows it from this station, where it constitutes at once a beautiful and picturesque mass. (Britton 1814)

(11)   It is not necessary to the subject of this memoir to enter upon any minute investigation of the truth of historical traditions referring to times so remote: they are adduced here solely as evidences of the extreme antiquity assigned by the Bards to Tara as a regal residence; (Petrie 1839)

Whether the books were of actual historical interest or witnesses of a more romanticized attitude to the past is therefore something to be gleaned from a closer reading of the text. In what follows, both these and other samples in CHET will be analysed from this perspective.

2.2. Text samples

As I mentioned above, when actual texts are taken into consideration, it may be fruitful to compare findings with those in CEPhiT (Dossena 2016a), as the two corpora were compiled following the same methodological principles, as they are part of a much larger project for the creation of corpora designed for the diachronic study of specialized discourse.

Within the cultural framework of Late Modern times the texts at hand seem to have been of varying relevance: the *English Short Title Catalogue* lists more than 3000 texts published between 1700 and 1899 with the element 'philosoph*' (i.e., 'philosophy' or 'philosophical') in the title: 271 in Scotland and 3025 in England (92% of the total, 230 of which occur in *Philosophical Transactions*). As for 'scien*' (i.e., 'science', 'sciences' or 'scientific'), there are 3,512 entries for England (94% of the total) and 230 for Scotland; while the total number increases, owing to a slight increase in the number of texts of scientific interest published in England, percentages are similar.

Within the same two centuries, the *English Short Title Catalogue* lists more than 19,000 texts published in English with the element 'histor*' (i.e., 'history' or 'historical') in the title: 1,362 in Scotland, 1,814 in Ireland, ca. 15,000 in England (nearly 80% of the total), and 1,220 in the US, though surprisingly none in Canada, despite what is actually found in CHET.

These figures, however, include instances in which the word 'history' is used in the full title of literary texts, such as in Samuel Richardson's *The pleasing history of Pamela, or Virtue rewarded.* (1773-75?), while filtering results using the tag 'literature' in the field labelled 'genre' may still yield historical works, such as *An abridgement of English history, from the Conquest to the present reign.[...]. For the juvenile; or, child's library* (1800?).

Generalizations based on such findings would therefore need much closer investigation. In the analyses presented below only results based on samples in CHET and CEPhiT will be discussed in terms of normalized figures per 10,000 words, bearing in mind that there are, in any case, significant differences between the two corpora; for instance, in CEPhiT authors appear to take responsibility for their arguments more directly, although authorial presence is seen to decrease in Late Modern scientific discourse (Lewis 2012: 906), whereas CHET includes more instances of quoted or reported speech; as a result, the expression of stance is more mediated in the latter corpus, where propositions may be distanced by the fact that they are in fact a third party's statements and considerations, not the author's.

This important difference between CEPhiT and CHET is seen in the following overview of quantitative findings concerning reporting verbs – see Table 1 below:

Table 1. Frequency of reporting verbs in CEPhiT and CHET

Reporting verbs	CEPhiT		CHET	
Item	Number	Normalized (per 10,000 words)	Number	Normalized (per 10,000 words)
Affirm	89	2.23	16	0.39
Answer (v.+n.)	87	2.18	145	3.49
Argue	48	1.20	9	0.22
Ask	50	1.25	47	1.13
Assume	83	2.08	54	1.30
Claim (v.+n.)	37	0.93	98	2.36
Conclude	79	1.98	81	1.95
Define	45	1.13	10	0.24
Demonstrate	18	0.45	7	0.17
Deny	91	2.28	27	0.65
Prove	166	4.15	119	2.87
Refute	9	0.23	3	0.07
Reply	20	0.50	61	1.47
Say	287	7.18	653	15.74
Show	83	2.08	37	0.89

As seen in Table 1, in CEPhiT verbs like *prove, affirm* and *conclude*, i.e. verbs underpinning scientific argumentation, are much more frequent than in CHET, where verbs introducing dialogue, such as *say, answer* and *reply*, illustrate the kind of interaction on the basis of which historical events may unfold, or present the reported opinions of sources – see the following examples:

(12)   he hath heard John Pykas, and Henry Raylond fay, [...], in this Deponent's Houfe, and in Prefence aforefaid, that we fhould pray only to God, and to no Saints. (Strype 1721)

(13)   Regulus, in the progrefs of his conquefts, encamping on the banks of the Bagrada, [...], is faid by many authors to have met there with a monftrous ferpent of 120 foot long, (Hooke 1745)

This attention to speeches, claims and answers also makes a study of personal pronoun usage hardly viable, as frequencies would not indicate greater or lesser (de)personalization on the part of the authors, since instances of <I> or <we> would not necessarily refer to the writer, but may feature in quoted speech: in order to conduct this kind of analysis, the text would need to be tagged in ways that are not available yet.

Interestingly, if we focus on the semantic value and polarity of items, in CEPhiT *refute* and *deny* appear to be more frequent than *affirm*, which may be indicative of the argumentative nature of the texts. Indeed, argument implies the challenge of views which are held to be *erroneous* or *incorrect* – very important qualifiers which, however, occur less frequently than *absurd*, *inconsistent* and *unreasonable*. In CHET, instead, greater attention appears to be paid to the value of lands or other objects and the importance of events and acts, hence the higher frequency of *remarkable* and *valuable* (see Table 2).

Table 2. Frequency of adjectives in CEPhiT and CHET[3]

| Adjectives | CEPhiT | | CHET | |
Item	Number	Normalized (per 10,000 words)	Number	Normalized (per 10,000 words)
Absurd	80	*2.00*	6	*0.14*
Actual	41	*1.03*	9	*0.22*
Apparent	71	*1.78*	16	*0.39*
Authoritative	3	*0.08*	2	*0.05*
Certain	448	*11.20*	140	*3.37*
Clear	81	*2.03*	30	*0.72*
Consistent	18	*0.45*	10	*0.24*
Contradictory	6	*0.15*	2	*0.05*
Correct (adj+v)	25	*0.63*	25	*0.60*
Definite	39	*0.98*	5	*0.12*
Deliberate	10	*0.25*	3	*0.07*
Enlightened	17	*0.43*	6	*0.14*
Erroneous	23	*0.58*	6	*0.14*
Evident	114	*2.85*	36	*0.87*
Experimental	11	*0.28*	1	*0.02*
False	25	*0.63*	28	*0.67*
Hypothetical	8	*0.20*	0	*0.00*
Inconceivable	20	*0.50*	0	*0.00*
Inconsiderable	7	*0.18*	11	*0.27*
Inconsistent	46	*1.15*	10	*0.24*
Incontestable	1	*0.03*	1	*0.02*
Incontrovertible	0	*0.00*	0	*0.00*
Incorrect	1	*0.03*	1	*0.02*
Inductive	29	*0.73*	0	*0.00*
Informed (adj+v)	7	*0.18*	33	*0.80*
Intelligible	23	*0.58*	5	*0.12*
Obscure	16	*0.40*	13	*0.31*
Plain	67	*1.68*	40	*0.96*
Preposterous	1	*0.03*	0	*0.00*
Proper	137	*3.43*	67	*1.61*

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[3] Comparative and superlative forms are counted together with zero forms.

Reasonable	13	*0.33*	13	*0.31*
Remarkable	30	*0.75*	81	*1.95*
Speculative	22	*0.55*	0	*0.00*
True	374	*9.35*	99	*2.39*
Unconditional	0	*0.00*	0	*0.00*
Unconditioned	27	*0.68*	0	*0.00*
Undeniable	6	*0.15*	0	*0.00*
Unintelligible	8	*0.20*	1	*0.02*
Unquestionable	3	*0.08*	2	*0.05*
Unreasonable	26	*0.65*	5	*0.12*
Unrivalled	3	*0.08*	2	*0.05*
Unthinkable	3	*0.08*	0	*0.00*
Valuable	27	*0.68*	45	*1.08*
Wrong	61	*1.53*	15	*0.36*

In both corpora, however, what is *true*, *false*, *certain* or *evident* plays a very important role in the (re)presentation of contents. While it could be easy to classify such qualifiers also on account of their epistemic value, it should be remembered that this is not always so straightforward as their surface value might lead readers to conclude: as Silver (2003) has shown, the interpretation of an adjective like *evident* may require a very close reading of the text, in order to assess its actual value as a hedge or a booster. The examples that follow present occurrences in which both apparently objective and more subjective evaluations are offered, using the same adjective – see (14a, 15a, and 16a) and (14b, 15b, and 16b) respectively (added emphasis):

(14a) His personal appearance was striking, and he was **remarkable** for his strength and powers of endurance. (Kingsford 1887)

(14b) It is **remarkable** that he should have achieved such a measure of success at a time when his basis of operations, [...], was by no means in the condition which was required in order that he might use those weapons with their full power. (Burrows 1895)

(15a) The work called the Teagasc Riogh has been ascribed to Cormac by the Irish universally from a very remote period, and whether it be his or not, it is certainly one of the most ancient and **valuable** documents preserved in the language. (Petrie 1839)

(15b) Some years before, in 1846, by the Oregon Treaty, large portions of this **valuable** country had been given away by the British Government, in utter ignorance of its value, [...], sacrificing the national character of great tracts for a mere temporary convenience, and producing no lasting accord with the country to which the concession was made. (Gray 1872)

(16a) Such being the state of this literary warfare, it is **evident** that much must have been left undetermined, and that a good deal still remains to be atchieved [sic] and many cool dispassionate efforts made, before criticism can have that "secure anchorage" so much to be wished for; (Hardiman 1820)

(16b) It is **evident** to my mind that Champlain dated the de Maisonneuve whom he met from the place whence he sailed. (Kingsford 1887)

Indeed, the subjectivity of *evident* in (16b) is stressed by the authorial comment *to my mind*, which stresses the personal approach to discourse and points to the significance of adverbials co-occurring in the text (see Dossena 2001a and 2001b). In these cases meaning is generally reinforced: for instance, in CEPhiT appeals to reason and logic can be emphasized by adverbs like *unquestionably*, *certainly*, and *unavoidably*. CHET, instead, appears to pay greater attention to the possibility or probability of an event – see Table 3:

Table 3. Frequency of adverbs in CEPhiT and CHET

Adverbs	CEPhiT		CHET	
Item	Number	Normalized (per 10,000 words)	Number	Normalized (per 10,000 words)
Absolutely	18	0.45	20	0.48
Actually	29	0.73	16	0.39
Admirably	4	0.10	1	0.02
Apparently	31	0.78	17	0.41
Assuredly	2	0.05	0	0.00
Certainly	83	2.08	42	1.01
Clearly	64	1.60	13	0.31
Constantly	18	0.45	25	0.60
Deliberately	4	0.10	2	0.05
Demonstrably	1	0.03	0	0.00
Demonstratively	1	0.03	1	0.02
Duly	14	0.35	11	0.27
Entirely	87	2.18	53	1.28
Evidently	43	1.08	14	0.34
Exactly	53	1.33	19	0.46
Hardly	48	1.20	19	0.46
Incontrovertibly	0	0.00	1	0.02
Indeed	276	6.90	105	2.53
Infallibly	5	0.12	1	0.02
Invariably	28	0.70	5	0.12
Justly	56	1.40	29	0.70
Lawfully	1	0.02	1	0.02
Legally	0	0.00	1	0.02
Necessarily	179	4.46	13	0.31
Perhaps	212	5.30	81	1.95
Plainly	34	0.85	16	0.39
Possibly	13	0.33	19	0.46
Precisely	29	0.73	4	0.10
Probably	64	1.60	88	2.12
Properly	70	1.75	22	0.53
Purely	43	1.08	7	0.17
Quite	81	2.03	42	1.01
Reasonably	17	0.43	14	0.34
Seemingly	4	0.10	3	0.07
Simply	70	1.75	11	0.27
Speculatively	3	0.08	0	0.00
Strictly	29	0.73	15	0.36
Surely	58	1.45	9	0.22
Totally	29	0.73	20	0.48
Truly	71	1.78	17	0.41

Unavoidably	9	*0.23*	1	*0.02*
Undoubtedly	22	*0.55*	18	*0.43*
Unquestionably	13	*0.33*	1	*0.02*
Verily	1	*0.02*	1	*0.02*
Visibly	2	*0.05*	1	*0.02*
Voluntarily	4	*0.10*	3	*0.07*
Wholly	68	*1.70*	29	*0.70*
Wilfully	0	*0.00*	1	*0.02*
Willingly	6	*0.15*	8	*0.19*
Wittingly	0	*0.00*	0	*0.00*
Zealously	1	*0.03*	6	*0.14*

In general, however, adverbials seem to play a lesser role in CHET than in CEPhiT, as shown by their lower frequencies; when they do occur more frequently, it is either to evaluate constancy, zeal and volition, positive qualities in the assessment of historical events and characters, or to express epistemic possibility, whereas necessity features more prominently in scientific discourse – see the examples below:

(17)   This prelate was highly esteemed by King Henry VII., whose title and interest he constantly defended against Lambert Simnel and Perkin Warbeck. (Bennett 1862)

(18)   the citizens of Lincoln, being zealoufly attached to the king's party, fent him word, that the caftle was fo negligently guarded, that he might eafily obtain poffeffion of it. (Gifford 1790)

(19)   he would moft willingly perform what was in his power, by daily praying to God to give fuccefs to his Majefty's government (Birch 1760)

Like in CEPhiT, also in CHET views can be corrected using *in truth, in fact, actually* or *properly*; in such cases, authors present what is alleged to be a better assessment or description of the phenomena at hand – see the following quotations:

(20)   Such in fact was the excessive expense thus incurred by many of the Scottish nobles, […], as to bring upon them embarrassments the chagrin of which has been suggested as one of the motives of that disaffection to their prince […]: But in truth the general causes of this altered state of feeling lay far deeper. (Aikin 1833)

(21)   In the mean time, without collecting all the matter relating to the history of Tara, which would in fact be nothing less than a history of Ireland, it will be necessary, for the satisfaction of the reader, and the completeness of this memoir, to bring forward the notices of the more remarkable events in connexion with its early state, whether apparently authentic or apocryphal, without minutely canvassing their claims to credibility. (Petrie 1839)

(22)   Their opinion was so unfavourable, that Isabella's patronage, if not actually withdrawn, was indefinitely deferred; (Callcott 1828)

(23)   God was pleafed to lend them feveral children. It may properly be faid lend, for but one of them lived to man's eftate, who was named Giles. (Cornish 1780)

Another similarity with CEPhiT is the fact that a virtual dialogue with the reader is established, often in fairly direct ways: in CHET *reader(s)* are mentioned 47 times, often with qualifiers meant to enhance their positive face and/or pre-empt potential criticism by means of modesty moves, as in the instances below, which remind us that writing is seldom, if ever, solipsistic:

(24)   I do not in the leaſt doubt but that they will be agreeable and entertaining to my candid Readers.(Justice 1739)

(25)   In these notices there is nothing likely to be untrue; but [...] the modern historians [...] have collected so much minute historical details as must excite considerable doubts in the minds of unprejudiced readers (Petrie 1839)

(26)   becauſe ſome may have the Curioſity to know ſomewhat concerning the Templars, I ſhall furniſh my Reader with the Hiſtory of them, hoping he'll pardon the Digreſſion. (Crawfurd 1710)

3. Concluding remarks

This preliminary study, meant to identify the potentialities of CHET in relation to studies of Late Modern academic discourse from the perspective of historical pragmatics, has enabled us to highlight some important research questions that ought to be addressed before any quantitative investigation is conducted. Among these, we have seen that some basic concepts ought to be problematized, not least a supposedly uniformitarian principle concerning genres, as even within a rather limited time span significant differences may be observed in the ways in which contents are presented, despite a superficial similarity of text types. This is the case, for instance, of title pages, where explicit evaluation tends to decrease over time.

As for textual elements, of course conclusions can only be tentative at this stage: however, this overview of some linguistic strategies employed in the presentation, discussion and validation or challenge of contents in CEPhiT and CHET has highlighted a few interesting traits. As shown in an earlier study, in CEPhiT sources are seldom presented without further qualification, which sets the tone for the interpretation of the proposition. CHET, instead, appears to give more attention to the evaluation of events, people and their actions, which is evidently consistent with the authors' agenda: their aim is to present historical contents, not argue for or against a certain scientific theory. In both corpora, however, different textual elements are used in a pragmatically effective way: the semantic prosody of verbs, especially reporting ones, adjectives, adverbs, hedges and boosters helps readers to gain a consistent picture, while their consensus is elicited both by means of direct appeals and by laying emphasis on the quality of the materials on which the text is based. Nor do authors forget the importance of modest hesitation in the presentation of subjective assessments – in CHET the relatively higher frequency of adverbials indicating epistemic possibility and probability, rather than necessity, seems to point in this direction.

Late Modern science, whether in the context of what would later be called 'hard sciences', as exemplified in CEPhiT, or in the so-called 'soft sciences', as shown in CHET, was of course quite different from what it is today: looking for similarities in the texts that illustrated them would be naïve and would lead to probably predictable results suggesting the contrary. However, it is only by looking at these very texts that we may gain insights into the time-depth of present-day phenomena and assess how variation and change have occurred, though of course a much broader range of samples will be required.

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