

Medical Writing in Early Modern English

Medical writing tells us a great deal about how the language of science has developed in constructing and communicating knowledge in English. This volume provides a new perspective on the evolution of the special language of medicine, based on the electronic corpus of *Early Modern English Medical Texts*, containing over 2 million words of medical writing from 1500 to 1700. The book presents results from large-scale empirical research on the new materials and provides a more detailed and diversified picture of domain-specific developments than any previous book. Three introductory chapters provide the sociohistorical, disciplinary and textual frame for nine empirical studies, which address a range of key issues in a wide variety of medical genres from fresh angles. The book is useful for researchers and students within several fields, including the development of special languages, genre and register analysis, (historical) corpus linguistics, historical pragmatics, and medical and cultural history.

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and

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Preface

The large field of medical writing in Early Modern English is still a fairly uncharted area from a linguistic point of view, and this is what our book sets out to explore. In language-external developments, the era between 1500 and 1700 is remarkable: the world view gradually changed from Ptolemaic to Copernican, new continents were discovered, and people ceased to believe in received knowledge. Scientific and medical writing became more diversified with the new medium of the printing press, and the position of English, which had begun to emerge as a language of science and medicine from the shadow of Latin during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, became stronger. Medieval conventions continued in medical writing well beyond the Late Middle English period as early printed books imitated manuscripts, and it took at least half a century or more for a new print culture to break away from the old. Generic developments were dynamic: during the two centuries, the top genres of old scholasticism declined, lost their position as the spearhead of science and were adapted to writings that dealt with established or inherited knowledge. This process created a vacuum at the top. Institutional developments gave an incentive to further changes, and by the time of the Royal Society the written word in the printed form had achieved a leading role in communicating science. Members of the new, close-knit discourse community made a conscious decision to communicate their scientific findings and opinions by writing in the new *Philosophical Transactions*.

The birth of the scientific journal paved the way to future developments that led to the spearhead position of the new medium. The genres in use by Royal Society members have direct relevance to present-day scientific writing; today, new discoveries and achievements are first reported to the global discourse community in research articles in scientific journals. But there is continuity at the lower end of the scale as well. The aftermath of medieval science lives on in popular adaptations of the *homo signorum* and other astrological doctrines to broad and heterogeneous readerships, even today. This development can be traced to the early modern period and beyond to almanac literature. Between these two means of communicating, *Philosophical Transactions* and the almanac, there is a wide range of publications, including textbooks, treatises, health guides, collections of remedies

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and pamphlets. The scale is broad and interesting, with different types of new manifestations of commercialism in advertisements, debate conflicts in short tracts and household literature for women in demand with increasing literacy.

The research reported in this book is mostly produced in the frame of the Scientific Thought-Styles project, launched about fifteen years ago at the University of Helsinki. In this book venture, the project team has been complemented by other scholars – visiting fellows, as it were – sharing an interest in scientific discourse and in the history of medicine and medical writing. We would like to thank the Research Unit for Variation, Contacts and Change in English at the University of Helsinki for providing us with the opportunity to organize workshops with some of our visiting fellows to discuss, on the one hand, the interdisciplinary nature of our endeavour with Peter Murray Jones, and, on the other hand, the more technical questions and software solutions of corpus linguistics with Douglas Biber and Raymond Hickey.

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Abbreviations

<i>CED</i>	<i>A Corpus of English Dialogues 1560–1760</i>
<i>EMEMT</i>	<i>Early Modern English Medical Texts</i>
EP(s)	efficacy phrase(s)
<i>ESTC</i>	<i>English Short-Title Catalogue</i>
KWIC	keyword in context
<i>MEMT</i>	<i>Middle English Medical Texts</i>
MS	manuscript
<i>OED</i>	<i>Oxford English Dictionary</i> (Murray et al. 1989–2009)
<i>PCEEC</i>	<i>Parsed Corpus of Early English Correspondence</i>
<i>PT</i>	<i>Philosophical Transactions</i>
<i>STC</i>	<i>A Short-Title Catalogue of Books Printed in England, Scotland, & Ireland and of English Books Printed Abroad 1475–1640</i> (Pollard et al. 1976–91)
VP	verb phrase