

GENRE IN ENGLISH MEDICAL WRITING,
1500–1820

Sociocultural Contexts of Production and Use

Written by an interdisciplinary team of scholars, this book offers novel perspectives on the history of medical writing and scientific thought styles by examining patterns of change and reception in genres, discourse, and lexis in the period 1500–1820. Each chapter demonstrates in detail how changing textual forms were closely tied to major multifaceted social developments: industrialisation, urbanisation, expanding trade, colonialisation, and changes in communication, all of which posed new demands on medical care. It then shows how these developments were reflected in a range of medical discourses, such as bills of mortality, medical advertisements, medical recipes, and medical rhetoric, and provides an extensive body of case studies to highlight how varieties of medical discourse have been targeted at different audiences over time. It draws on a wide range of methodological frameworks and is accompanied by numerous relevant illustrations, making it essential reading for academic researchers and students across the human sciences.

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Preface

In recent years, medical writings from the past have attracted a great deal of attention from scholars in a variety of related disciplines, and research on these materials, as in medical humanities more generally, has become increasingly multidisciplinary. This diversity of approach was reflected in the papers presented at the Second International Conference on Historical Medical Discourse (CHIMED-2) organised at the University of Helsinki in June 2019. Presentations at the conference drew upon a wide variety of cognate disciplines, including the history of medicine, linguistic and literary studies, and book history. Several themes emerged during CHIMED-2, and several underpin this collection of papers, all contributing to the current recuperation of philology within the wider frame of interdisciplinary research. The current volume contains not only revised versions of these papers, but several invited contributions, reflecting the richness of this field of research. All offer new insights into the ways in which medical discourse was deployed, both within and beyond explicitly medical situations.

With the advent of digital corpora and large digital archives capturing linguistic ‘big data’, empirical methods have become mainstream in historical linguistics. But while these resources improve the objectivity, reliability, and generalisability of research results, they also place additional requirements on selecting relevant data for analysis and appropriate conceptual classification. It is clear that textual research needs categories such as genres, text types, and registers that can serve as structural guides for corpus compilation. They are discussed in this volume together with textual traditions and changing conventions, pertinent to the creation of genres in the diachronic perspective. The richness of the medical register is what inspired this collection, and specifically the contexts of production and use of medical genres. In other words, context matters, and this concern has driven the current collection of papers.

Acknowledgements

The richness of the medical register with its recent discoveries of long-forgotten materials and new digital databases offers ample opportunities for original research. The contributors of this volume have been inspired by this state of affairs, and we are very happy to see this collective volume come true without overdue delay, in spite of the challenges posed by the pandemic. Several contributors faced problems from COVID-19, as some countries were particularly hard hit, libraries were shut down for longer periods and their role in supporting research activities suffered. Nevertheless, the difficulties were overcome, and we would like to thank these institutions for their collaboration and permission to use images from their collections.

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