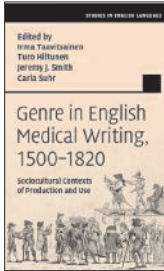


Book Reviews



Genre in English Medical Writing, 1500-1820. Sociocultural Contexts of Production and Use

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In recent years, medical writings have received considerable attention from interdepartmental scholars as a heated topic in the fields of humanities and social sciences, considering the guiding role of medical text in determining treatment. For instance, with the development of digital corpora and access to large amounts of documentation, the empirical approach has provided historical linguistics with penetrating insights into medical writing in the past (Schneider & Barron, 2008). Accordingly, drawing on the combination of genre analysis in medical writing and digital corpora, this volume from a symposium of several revised papers from the Second International Conference on Historical Medical Discourse organized at the University of Helsinki in June 2019 is a timely contribution that scrutinizes the evolution and life cycle of medical texts, offering new insights into the ways in which medical text is shaped and shapes health communication.

The book is structured into five parts, comprising sixteen chapters, aiming to show “how medical texts were modified to new uses and forms across several centuries in different cultural contexts” (p. 1). Chapter 1 initiates the corpus analysis of medical discourse throughout the book, laying the foundations for the following Chapters. Chapter 2, 3, 4, and 5 in part one focus on textual afterlives. Specifically, two themes have been highlighted on genres and text traditions of medical discourse from a diachronic perspective, with due emphasis on variation in the discursive forms of texts that were removed from the original settings and repurposed for new readerships.

In Chapter 2, Peter Murray Jones explores the fortunes of one particular English surgical text in the fourteenth century. The text, which was still

popular in manuscript form in the 17th century, not only serves as a counterexample to the modern academic distinction between the “medieval” and “early modern”, but also demonstrates that printing did not fully spread to Europe from the East.

In Chapter 3, Lori Jones describes the shifts in medical practice from the late fourteenth century to the sixteenth century, where the historical development in the medical domain is benchmarked by the health-related ideas underlying linguistic features across different periods. Similarly, in Chapter 4, Benati describes the transition from script to print by contrasting two early German medical works, highlighting the sharp differences in the path of diatopic knowledge dissemination. After comparing vernacular-vernacular translation and translation tailored to the professional needs of a single expert in the specific field, by detailed examination of the language, contents, and material contexts of later reworkings of this text, Honkapohja demonstrates the medical tract *Treatise's* long-lasting social impact in Chapter 5, as a link between medieval and early medicine.

To navigate into a wider scope of lingua-culture, chapters 6, 7, 8, and 9 of part two shift the focus of analysis onto the terminology of medical science, where chapter 6 shows how the “Brunonian” system of thought skewed treatment practices when confronted with an appalling pandemic as well as how medical science continued to struggle in the interstices between theory and practice (p. 100). This kind of critical assessment of all the therapeutic interventions is impressive since it is grounded on hard evidence.

As a short supplementary commentary to *The Plague in Southern Italy* in 1815-1816, chapter 7 serves as a prologue to the remaining papers in the set. To be specific, this chapter casts light upon the concept of Brunonianism which is about Vitalist and Romantic notions of the operation of the body. As declared by the author, chapter 8 examines comments by three different compilers on nature and function.

In Chapter 9, Smith elaborates on the pattern of literary responses to medical debates in the nineteenth century through the lens of lexical analysis. Moreover, this chapter illustrates the important role of machine-readable corpora in the contextualization of particular idiolectal usages of medical texts. Along the same vein of lexical analysis, chapter 10 traces the introduction of a variety of new substances into the lexicon of sixteenth-, seventeenth- and eighteenth-century medical recipes, which manifest the

multiple veins of society in a diachronic way, highlighting the significance of adopting new ingredient terms.

Switching from bills to pamphlet advertisements, chapters 11, 12, and 13 of part 3 are devoted to addressing the dynamic of change in specific genres. On the one hand, this part explains how the existing template adopts new components and loses others. On the other hand, this part also illustrates in what ways these changes are related to the development of society, ideology, and interdisciplinarity.

For instance, Taavitsainen in Chapter 11 concentrates on one leading medical writer's use of genres in terms of how it met the rhetorical needs of the communicative situation at the intersection of old and new medical science. Similarly, Ratia in Chapter 12 investigates *Bills of Mortality* that gives the latest news on epidemics as well as treatments and religious advice, indicating that different functions emerge out of the adaptations of texts tailored to the changing needs and desires of readers.

Different from the prior two chapters in this part, chapter 13 is dedicated to the hybrid genre of pamphlet advertisements of proprietary medicines in the seventeenth century. Here the dynamic nature is revealed of medical writing of the period, in which the authors give a full display of their considerable knowledge of established medical genres and the characteristics of the contemporary medical marketplace.

Focusing on early modern medical prescriptions and the communicative function of persuasion, chapters 14 and 15 take a divergent approach. For example, Kuna identifies and examines the conceptualization of persuasion in Hungarian medical recipes with the help of a reliability test of semantic categories in Chapter 14. In contrast, Mäkinen in Chapter 15 explores the metadiscourse markers along the three rhetorical veins of ethos, pathos, and logos. Actually, these two chapters can be read as a complementary whole that stresses the necessity of factoring in contextual information in the interpretation of medical texts in the past.

Finally, chapter 16 takes a multidisciplinary view to show us the hypertextuality of medical topics. Moreover, the inseparability of subjectivity and interpretation, and the fact that truth never appears unmediated, are demonstrated by this cross-genre nexus.

Just as the authors said, it is indeed the richness of the medical register and the contexts of production and use of medical genres that made this volume

possible and unique. Accordingly, the book is recommendable for several reasons. First, as it is multi-dimensional and interdisciplinary, the book broadens our vision of the genre in English medical writing in a very critical and multimodal way. In this sense, the well-structured volume can serve as an enlightening manual for the underreported discussion of the medical genre in the field of historical linguistics. Second, empirical methods, as the mainstream means of historical linguistics, are used throughout this book, which frames the research findings with adequate objectivity, reliability, and generalisability. Specifically, one remarkable strength of this book lies in its valid and convincing integration of both quantitative and qualitative analyses in the exploration of medical discourse that allows readers to obtain a multi-faceted view of the changing course of the medical genre in earlier times and to advance the understanding of variations in historical pragmatics. Moreover, the digital corpus is conducive to extending the boundary of historical linguistics regarding the scope and methods by accommodating increasing historical data on language use, further contributing to the development of linguistic theories from a diachronic perspective.

Thirdly, this volume has notable features that can be of great benefit to novice researchers. In particular, the vignettes in the book provide a general description of the key information and contribute to a theme-centred, coherent development of content. Fourth, the authors are staying stringent about the limitations of this volume as they point out clearly that the use of empirical methods is bound to place additional requirements on selecting relevant data for analysis and appropriate conceptual classification.

However, as this book is a collection of papers by different authors, it still has some potential room for improvement regarding its smoothness and systematicity as a reader-friendly volume. Besides, some studies (e.g. Chapters 10, 12, 13) rely on small samples for analysis. This may not be conducive to comparability in the selection of data for subsequent replication studies.

Despite the minor quibbles mentioned above, we strongly believe that this informative book, with a wide range of enlightening topics that delve into the different genres of English medical writing, is highly recommended for those researchers in the field of historic linguistics, codicology, philology, health communication as well as discourse studies.

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