



**FRANCISCO ALONSO-ALMEIDA, FRANCISCO J. ÁLVAREZ-GIL, IVALLA ORTEGA-BARRERA, ELENA QUINTANA-TOLEDO**

Corresponding author: [francisco.alonso@ulpgc.es](mailto:francisco.alonso@ulpgc.es)

*Discourse, Communication & Society Research Group (DiCoS), Departamento de Filología Moderna, Traducción e Interpretación, Universidad de Las Palmas de Gran Canaria, Las Palmas de Gran Canaria, Spain*

### **GENDER DIFFERENCES IN THE FORM AND USE OF BOOSTERS AND DOWNTONERS IN 18TH AND 19TH CENTURY MEDICAL INSTRUCTIONAL TEXTS**

**Keywords:**

boosters, downtoners, medical discourse, gender, corpus linguistics, stance analysis, historical linguistics, metadiscourse

**Abstract:**

Medical writing in Late Modern English (1700–1899) reflects evolving rhetorical strategies for establishing authority, particularly through boosters (e.g., certainly, undoubtedly) and downtoners (e.g., perhaps, somewhat). While Hyland's (2005) model of stance and metadiscourse has been extensively applied to modern academic writing, its role in historical medical discourse—especially from a gendered perspective—remains underexplored. This study examines the use of boosters and downtoners in the 18th- and 19th-century sections of the Corpus of Women's Instructive Texts in English (CoWITE), comparing them to a reference corpus of male-authored medical texts.

Through a corpus-based analysis of stance markers, this study reveals distinct gendered rhetorical strategies. Female writers tend to use downtoners more frequently, softening assertions and introducing epistemic caution ('it may be beneficial to consider...'), a strategy in line with broader patterns of politeness and reader engagement (Hyland, 1998). In contrast, male-authored texts show a preference for boosters, reinforcing certainty and medical authority ('it is unquestionably the best method...'), positioning the writer as a more authoritative voice (Hyland, 2005). These results suggest that women writers managed credibility differently, often adopting mitigative strategies to balance expertise with social expectations.

This study seeks to contribute to historical research on gendered persuasion in medical technical discourse, highlighting how linguistic choices reflected epistemic authority, professional boundaries, and engagement with readers and peers. Findings offer new insights into the historical evolution of medical communication, informing both diachronic studies of metadiscourse and gendered professional rhetoric.