

# Adverbials and interpersonal meaning in earlier women's instructive writing

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## ABSTRACT

This article explores how epistemic adverbials, particularly *assuredly*, *indeed*, *perhaps*, *possibly*, *probably*, and *surely*, function interpersonally in Late Modern English instructive texts authored by women. Drawing on Hyland's polypragmatic model of stance and hedging, the study investigates how these forms serve to modulate epistemic commitment, negotiate writer-reader alignment, and reinforce or attenuate claims. The data are drawn from the Corpus of Women's Instructive Texts in English (CoWITE), specifically the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century subcorpora. Combining quantitative and qualitative methods, the analysis reveals clear differences in frequency, syntactic distribution, and rhetorical function between the two centuries. While reinforcing adverbials such as *indeed* become more prominent over time, tentative forms such as *perhaps* and *possibly* are used strategically to preserve politeness, express contingency, and accommodate variability. These findings shed light on how women employed epistemic adverbials not only to structure instructional discourse but also to assert authority and manage interpersonal rapport in contexts shaped by social and rhetorical constraint.

**Keywords:** women's writing; adverbials; interpersonal meaning; epistemic modality; hedging; evidentiality; engagement; nineteenth century.



## I. INTRODUCTION

In instructive writing produced by women during the Late Modern English period (1700-1899), I find a rich relationship between knowledge transmission and interpersonal positioning. In contexts where women's authorial presence was often constrained or contested, epistemic adverbials, such as *perhaps*, *probably*, *possibly*, *indeed*, *assuredly*, and *surely*, emerge as powerful linguistic tools to manage stance (cf. Álvarez-Gil, 2022), negotiate credibility, and engage with readers. Drawing on Hyland's polypragmatic approach to epistemic modality and hedging (1996, 1998, 2005), I examine how women writers employed these adverbials not merely to attenuate their claims, but to manage complex rhetorical situations that required both persuasive clarity and strategic caution. I view these forms as hedging devices which, in Hyland's terms, allow writers to present ideas with a factual scope (1998), and to regulate their commitment to a claim based on the socio-discursive demands of the context (cf. Alonso-Almeida, 2012a).

This study investigates how evaluative adverbials function epistemically and interpersonally in women's instructive texts from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. I base the analysis on the Corpus of Women's Instructive Texts in English (CoWITE), focusing on the CoWITE18 (Alonso-Almeida, Álvarez-Gil & Ortega-Barrera et al., 2025) and CoWITE19 (Alonso-Almeida et al., 2025) subcorpora. The study of stance from a historical perspective has a consolidated tradition, as evidenced in previous research (e.g. Alonso-Almeida, 2009, 2015a, 2015b, 2017a, 2017b, 2023; Alonso-Almeida & Lareo, 2016; Alonso-Almeida & Mele Marrero, 2014; Alonso-Almeida & Vázquez, 2009; Álvarez-Gil, 2017, 2018; Álvarez-Gil & Quintana-Toledo, 2022; Mele Marrero, 2012, 2017; Moskowich & Crespo, 2014; Puente-Castelo, 2023). The selected adverbials—*assuredly*, *indeed*, *perhaps*, *possibly*, *probably*, and *surely*—have been shown in previous research (e.g. Hyland, 2005; Moskowich & Crespo, 2014; Simon-Vandenbergen & Aijmer, 2007; Álvarez-Gil, 2017, 2018) to carry important epistemic and interactional meaning. The main objective of this article is, therefore, to determine

how these adverbials contribute to the construction of interpersonal meaning in women's instructive writing. I aim to uncover how they are used to express degrees of certainty, to create reader alignment, and to soften or reinforce claims depending on rhetorical intention and audience awareness.

I propose the following hypotheses: (a) adverbials expressing strong epistemic commitment (*indeed, surely, assuredly*) are less frequent than those indicating lower certainty (*perhaps, possibly, probably*), especially in the eighteenth century, where female authors may have adopted more cautious rhetorical strategies; (b) their interpersonal functions will vary diachronically, reflecting changing conventions and the increasing rhetorical space afforded to women as expert voices in the long eighteenth century; and (c) these adverbials tend to occur in sentence-initial position, where they more clearly mark stance and guide reader interpretation. To address these hypotheses, I adopt a corpus-based methodology combining quantitative and qualitative approaches. I analyse the normalised frequency per 10,000 words of each adverbial form in the two CoWITE subcorpora. Additionally, I conduct a manual, context-sensitive analysis of concordance lines, since, following Hyland (1998), hedging must be interpreted in light of pragmatic and discourse constraints in the line of Alonso-Almeida (2012b). This also allows me to classify hedging functionally, according to Hyland's polypragmatic model: content-oriented, accuracy-oriented, writer-oriented, and reader-oriented hedges.

The research questions guiding this study are:

1. What are the frequencies and distributions of the selected epistemic adverbials in CoWITE18 and CoWITE19?
2. How do these adverbials function interpersonally, and what roles do they play in the management of stance and rhetorical persuasion?
3. Are there differences in use between centuries, and if so, what do these reveal about the deployment of these devices in women's instructive writing?

This article is structured as follows. Section 2 outlines the theoretical approach, with particular emphasis on Hyland's model of stance and interpersonal meaning. Section 3 introduces the corpus, CoWITE18 and CoWITE19, and details the methodological procedures adopted for data retrieval and analysis. Section 4 presents the quantitative distribution of selected epistemic adverbials across both subcorpora. Section 5 offers a qualitative interpretation of their rhetorical functions, organised into subsections on tentative stance, reinforcement, reader engagement, and diachronic difference. Section 6 integrates and discusses these findings in relation to the construction of authorial presence and epistemic negotiation in instructive discourse along with the study's limitations and suggestions of directions for future research on stance and modality in women's historical writing.

## II. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

My approach to epistemic adverbials in Late Modern English instructive writing is grounded in Hyland's (1996, 1998, 2005) polypragmatic model of hedging and stance. In this framework, hedging is conceptualised not as indecision or lack of clarity, but as a strategic and interactive rhetorical choice that allows writers to balance commitment and politeness, especially in persuasive or advisory discourse. Epistemic adverbials such as *perhaps*, *possibly*, *probably*, *surely*, *indeed*, and *assuredly* are particularly effective in managing this balance, as they contribute to both the propositional and interpersonal layers of meaning. Hyland (1998, p. 5) defines hedging as "the means by which writers can present a proposition as an opinion rather than a fact." His model includes four overlapping functions:

- Content-oriented: qualifying the truth value of propositions.
- Accuracy-oriented: indicating the degree of precision or limitation of the claim.
- Writer-oriented: expressing caution to protect the writer's face.
- Reader-oriented: inviting engagement, softening impositions or potential threats.

These functions are especially relevant to epistemic adverbials, which express stance, and also signal the writer's awareness of their audience and the rhetorical situation. Their position within the clause (especially sentence-initial), and their interaction with modal verbs or attitude verbs, often reveal their functional load as discourse organisers and stance cues.

In the case of the adverbials examined in this study, previous work has shown that they carry significant epistemic and interactional meaning (Simon-Vandenbergen & Aijmer, 2007; Hyland, 2005; Moskowich & Crespo, 2014). However, more fine-grained distinctions have also emerged from recent corpus-based research. Álvarez-Gil (2017, p. 248), for example, emphasises that adverbials such as *actually* and *in fact*, and by extension *indeed* or *assuredly*, "may fulfil several pragmatic functions, e.g. indicating different degrees of authorial commitment and detachment towards the information presented, persuasion or politeness." These items are classified by Biber et al. (1999) as stance adverbials, especially within the category of actuality and reality, and their use often signals reinforcement, evidential value, or contrastive emphasis.

This idea of variable commitment is further supported by Pic and Furmaniak (2012), who show that *perhaps* and *maybe* typically express low-probability conjecture, often with a speculative tone. In contrast, *possibly*, which allows for both circumstantial and epistemic readings, tends to encode more "objective" evaluations, especially when it precedes modal verbs like can or could. Following Greenbaum (1969) and Tucker (2001), they note that *perhaps* and *maybe* operate primarily at the neustic level, that is, as sentence adverbials, whereas *possibly* may also appear within the phrasic structure, modifying constituents below the clause level (e.g. *a possibly difficult decision*). This explains the broader scope and flexibility of *possibly*, but also its more neutral or less subjective tone. In the same line, Molina (2012, p. 57) highlights that epistemic adverbs such as *probably*, *clearly*, *certainly*, or *perhaps* are used not only to "evaluate and adopt stances" but also "to create solidarity and affiliation with speakers/readers." She observes that these items often contribute to reducing the speaker's authoritative tone, especially in contexts of oral technical instruction, where

rapport with the audience is valued over dogmatic assertion. *Really*, *basically*, and *actually*, she notes, are frequently used as conversational markers of reinforcement or reorientation.

From a syntactic perspective, adverbial placement plays a crucial role in interpretation. Álvarez-Gil (2018, p. 30) stresses that “the relevance of the placement of each adverb in clauses is such that their meaning changes depending on the place they occupy.” Sentence-initial adverbials often serve as textual organisers or indicators of stance, while medial and final positions may reduce emphasis or shift the focus of evaluation. Moreover, distinctions such as those proposed by Quirk et al. (1985) between adverbs of certainty (*surely*, *certainly*) and those of doubt (*perhaps*, *possibly*) remain operative, but must be nuanced in historical texts, where the same item may function as both stance and evidential marker, depending on context.

This study, therefore, draws primarily on Hyland’s functional categories to account for the interpersonal and rhetorical functions of epistemic adverbials in instructive writing. At the same time, it integrates a semantically and syntactically informed view of adverbial variation, as articulated by Álvarez-Gil (2017, 2018), Pic & Furmaniak (2012), and Molina (2012), allowing for a layered and context-sensitive analysis. In doing so, I aim to show how these adverbials contribute not only to the modulation of certainty, but also to the interpersonal work of instructive prose, especially as produced by women in the context of the discursive constraints and expectations of Late Modern English social constraints.

### III. DESCRIPTION OF CORPUS AND METHOD

This study is based on data extracted from the Corpus of Women’s Instructive Texts in English, particularly the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century subcorpora, CoWITE18 and CoWITE19 (Alonso-Almeida et al., 2023). The combined corpus comprises exclusively instructive texts written by English-speaking women from Britain and the United States. These texts, both printed and manuscript, were collected from UK

and US libraries and transcribed into plain text format to allow for computational processing and linguistic analysis. For the purposes of this research, I work with the version of the corpus compiled up to March 2025. The texts correspond to the recipe genre, broadly conceived to include culinary, pharmaceutical, and medical instruction. They are all categorised under the instructive text-type as defined by Werlich (1976), which entails a clear intent to guide readers in performing specific tasks or procedures. The CoWITE corpus has been compiled under strict criteria to ensure balance and representativeness. First, all texts must be authored by women whose native language was English. Second, they had to be sourced from the earliest available editions published while the authors were alive, excluding reprints of earlier materials. Third, the texts span the entire eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, with a target of approximately 50,000 words per decade to ensure diachronic coverage without content repetition.

The details of Co-WITE18 and Co-WITE19 are given in the following table:

*Table 1. The Corpus of Women's Instructive Writing in English, the nineteenth and the eighteenth century subcorpora, CoWITE19 (version Alonso-Almeida et al., 2025) and CoWITE18 (version Alonso-Almeida, Álvarez-Gil, & Ortega-Barrera, 2025).*

Files	Tokens	Types	Lemmas
33	502701	12288	11653
22	541789	13197	13296

The texts were POS-tagged to facilitate precise syntactic searches. I used *CasualConc*, a concordance and text analysis software, to extract all instances of the epistemic adverbials *perhaps*, *possibly*, *probably*, *surely*, *indeed*, and *assuredly*. Special attention was paid to sentence-initial occurrences, co-textual patterns (e.g. co-occurrence with modals or stance verbs), and syntactic behaviour. The retrieved concordance lines were exported to an Excel spreadsheet, with a 50-word context window to the left and right of each occurrence. This allowed me to perform a close reading of each instance to determine:

- the syntactic position of the adverbial;
- its functional role according to Hyland's categories (content-, accuracy-, writer-, or reader-oriented);
- its semantic value, with particular attention to degrees of commitment or detachment;
- and, when relevant, its interpersonal orientation, particularly in terms of subjective vs intersubjective stance.

The methodology adopted is thus mixed: I combine quantitative analysis (token frequency, normalised per 10,000 words) with qualitative interpretation grounded in rhetorical and pragmatic theory. This allows me to disclose variation in adverbial usage across the two centuries, and also to capture the nuanced ways in which epistemic adverbials contribute to meaning negotiation in female-authored instructive discourse.

#### IV. RESULTS

The quantitative analysis reveals both consistency and variation in the use of epistemic adverbials across CoWITE18 and CoWITE19, and the most frequently used item in both subcorpora is *indeed*, with a combined total of 30 occurrences (0.39‰ in CoWITE19 and 0.18‰ in CoWITE18). Its relatively high frequency suggests its central role as a reinforcing marker of affirmation and epistemic alignment, particularly in the later corpus. In contrast, *perhaps* appears more frequently in the nineteenth-century texts (13 tokens; 0.24‰) than in the eighteenth-century sample (1 token; 0.02‰), which may reflect a growing rhetorical preference for attenuated, tentative claims. Interestingly, *possibly* and *probably* show comparable behaviour, with slightly higher frequencies in CoWITE19. These adverbials, often situated at an intermediate point on the epistemic scale, tend to signal plausibility without strong commitment, and their combined presence supports the idea that instructive writing retained space for hypothetical or conditional reasoning, especially in contexts involving remedies, substitutions or procedural variability.

As for *assuredly* and *surely*, both appear only in CoWITE19 and with minimal frequency (one and two tokens respectively). This scarcity suggests that expressions of strong epistemic assertion or speaker conviction were infrequent overall, possibly due to genre conventions that favoured modesty, politeness, and open-ended instructive tone. Overall, the data reflect a nuanced epistemic positioning in women's instructive discourse, with a preference for moderate commitment and a careful calibration of certainty. These frequencies will be further examined qualitatively to determine how the selected adverbials function in context, whether they mitigate claims, reinforce instructions, or contribute to the negotiation of interpersonal rapport with the reader.

To provide a more immediate comparison of epistemic adverbial use across the two subcorpora, I have plotted the normalised frequencies of each form using a grouped bar chart (Figure 1). This visualisation allows for a clear representation of the distribution and diachronic evolution of the selected adverbials, highlighting both continuity and variation between the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

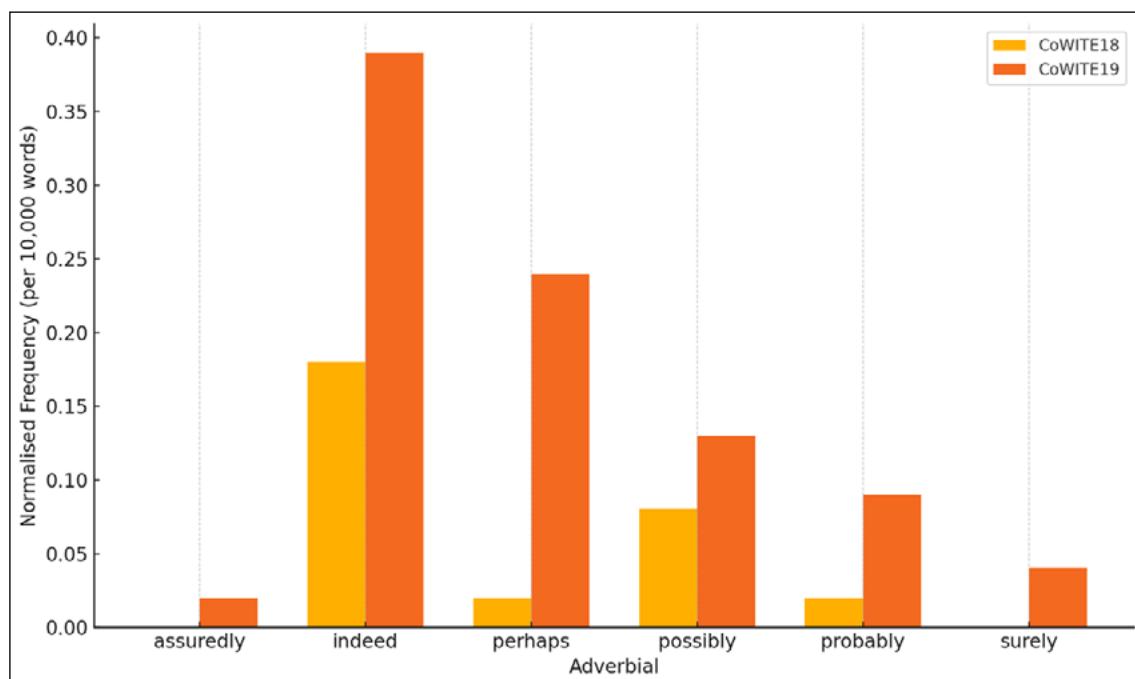


Figure 1. Normalised frequency (per 10,000 words) of epistemic adverbials in CoWITE18 and CoWITE19.

As shown in Figure 1, *indeed* stands out as the most frequently used adverbial in both subcorpora, with a marked increase in CoWITE19 (0.39%) compared to CoWITE18

(0.18‰). This may indicate a broader rhetorical reliance on reinforcement and affirmation strategies in nineteenth-century instructional prose. Similarly, perhaps experiences a notable rise in frequency, from a marginal 0.02‰ in the eighteenth century to 0.24‰ in the nineteenth, suggesting a shift towards more cautious or speculative claims, in line with a greater dialogic sensitivity or increased hedging.

The adverbials *possibly* and *probably* also appear more frequently in CoWITE19, although their overall frequencies remain low. Their role as indicators of moderate epistemic commitment likely reflects moments in the texts where the writer accommodates uncertainty or highlights procedural alternatives. In contrast, *assuredly* and *surely* are entirely absent from CoWITE18 and occur minimally in CoWITE19, suggesting that strong epistemic assertions were largely avoided in this genre, possibly due to norms of politeness and rhetorical modesty associated with female authorship in the period. This chart confirms that, even if the overall frequencies of epistemic adverbials are low, their distribution reveals meaningful diachronic tendencies, particularly an increased tendency towards evaluative nuance and mitigated stance in nineteenth-century instructive texts.

## V. MEANING AND FUNCTIONS OF ADVERBIALS

This section explores the epistemic adverbials identified in the CoWITE subcorpora with a focus on their functional contribution to the construction of stance and interpersonal meaning in instructive writing authored by women. These adverbials—*perhaps*, *possibly*, *probably*, *indeed*, *surely*, and *assuredly*—play a central role in the expression of the writers' epistemic positioning and in the negotiation of authority and alignment with readers. Drawing on Hyland's (1998) polypragmatic model of hedging and boosting, the analysis distinguishes between adverbials that convey tentative stance and those that act as reinforcing or evaluative markers, while also recognising their potential to create dialogic engagement or reader alignment. Attention is given to the propositional force of these forms, and also to their discourse-pragmatic

and rhetorical functions, including their syntactic positioning, attitudinal value, and frequency across the two subcorpora.

### V.1. Tentative stance: Adverbials of possibility and speculation

The adverbials *perhaps*, *possibly* and *probably* are frequently used in the corpus to express tentative epistemic stance, allowing writers to hedge their claims and present information as provisional, subject to variation, or dependent on individual circumstances. These forms serve primarily content-oriented and accuracy-oriented hedging functions, as defined by Hyland (1998), and are often employed in contexts where certainty is either not possible or not desirable, such as when suggesting alternatives, allowing for contextual variability, or signalling caution in instructive recommendations. A prototypical example of speculative use appears in Corbet's (1835) instructional writing:

(1) It may, **perhaps**, continue to ferment for two or three weeks; when this has ceased, put in 3 lb. of raisins, chopped fine (Corbet, 1835).

Here, *perhaps* is placed medially and co-occurs with the modal *may*, creating a layered expression of uncertainty. The author presents the duration of fermentation as contingent, without asserting it as a fixed outcome. This type of possibility hedging respects the reader's agency and situational variables, which is typical of instructive genres aiming to be applicable across differing domestic contexts.

In other cases, *perhaps* introduces a hypothetical adjustment or alternative action, often reformulating or softening a previous statement:

(2) **Perhaps** a small piece of alum might serve to set the color, in some degree (Mrs Child, 1841).

The concessive and reformulatory nature of this sentence transforms the suggestion into a tentative recommendation, inviting experimentation rather than prescribing a rigid procedure. The use of *perhaps* here signals awareness that the reader may need to adjust or reject the advice depending on context.

A similarly cautious use of *perhaps* appears in Kettilby (1714):

(3) 'Twill cause a little Vomit, and **perhaps** a Stool; but has often relieved, when Squils and Bleeding has fail'd; though Squils in Extremity is almost a Specific for that Distemper (Kettily, 1714).

In this medical context, *perhaps* introduces a possible secondary effect that may or may not occur. The adverbial attenuates the claim and highlights the variability of physiological reactions. Its use reflects a broader rhetorical strategy in which women writers frame medical knowledge in probabilistic terms, avoiding prescriptive certainty.

*Possibly* is often employed to mark pragmatic limitation or estimation, as seen in Rundell's recipe for a meat pie:

(4) ...and when done pour into it as much gravy as it can **possibly** hold, and don't cut it till perfectly cold (Rundell, 1806).

Although the adverbial refers to physical capacity rather than abstract reasoning, it nonetheless functions as a mitigator, guarding against overfilling and recognising material variability. In instructive texts, such wording allows authors to account for practical unpredictability. An earlier example of *possibly* appears in a 1703 text by Fitzgerald:

(5) About the latter end of Aprill or beginning of May you must Cutt up these weeds as Close to the around as **possibly** you Can, & then binding them up in fagotts (Fitzgerald, 1703).

In this instance, *possibly* operates as a hedge signalling practical limitation. The instruction is softened by acknowledging that the action may not be perfectly achievable, depending on context or ability. This usage reflects an awareness of physical constraint and positions the writer as considerate of real-world application. A more epistemically charged example can be found in Mrs Child's description of meat preparation:

(6) The pickle for pork and hung beef should be stronger than for legs of mutton... water enough to cover the meat well --**probably**, four or five gallons (Mrs Child, 1841).

Here, *probably* introduces an approximate value, indicating a degree of guesswork or common experience rather than a precise measurement. Its placement, after a dash and before the numeral, visually and rhetorically emphasises its hedging function, while still maintaining the practical utility of the instruction.

The following example from Bradley (1750) demonstrates a similar speculative use of *probably*:

(7) Then a good Nest is to be prepared for her, and **probably** she will take to it  
(Bradley, 1750).

Here, the adverbial introduces a conjecture based on observed behaviour. The writer avoids overstatement and allows for individual variation in animal response, thus maintaining a tone of caution and acknowledging uncertainty. This kind of epistemic moderation aligns with the ethos of early instructive discourse, where prediction is often couched in experiential approximation.

All these adverbials occur most commonly in medial or initial position, often modifying modal verbs or full clauses. As Álvarez-Gil (2018, p. 30) notes, sentence-initial and medial placements tend to carry stronger interpersonal effects, signalling the writer's stance overtly and framing the interpretation of the proposition that follows. The use of *perhaps*, *possibly* and *probably* in CoWITE texts clearly contributes to the negotiation of stance, politeness and credibility. Female writers in these recipes display a consistent tendency to attenuate certainty and allow room for variability, often through syntactically mobile and contextually nuanced adverbials.

## V.2. Reinforcement and certainty: Adverbials of assertion

The adverbials *indeed*, *surely*, and *assuredly* are used in the corpus to express epistemic reinforcement and interpersonal certainty. These forms act as boosters in Hyland's (1998) typology and typically serve to emphasise agreement, confirm prior assertions, or to project strong authorial commitment. Unlike tentative adverbials, these expressions are evaluative and affirmative, and often appear in sentences that aim to strengthen the validity of an instruction or amplify the writer's authority. Among the items examined,

indeed is the most frequently attested, whereas assuredly and surely appear only in CoWITE19 and far less frequently, reinforcing their status as marked and emphatic resources. A typical use of *indeed* to reinforce a prior proposition can be observed in Bradley (1750), and in Haslehurst's (1814) description of butchery practices:

- (8) The Fire is to be considered greatly in the roasting of Poultry; **indeed** almost all depends upon it. (Bradley, 1750)
- (9) **Indeed**, the bones of a pig are little else than gristle, so that it may be cut in any part without the least difficulty (Haslehurst, 1814).

In the first instance, *indeed* occurs medially and functions to underscore a strong evaluative judgement. The author reinforces the critical role of heat in cooking, and the adverbial intensifies this claim by signalling that the effectiveness of the entire procedure relies on this single factor. This usage exemplifies how *indeed* serves to lend emphasis and credibility to experiential knowledge even in early instructive writing. In (9), the adverbial, placed initially, functions here as a discourse connector, marking agreement with a preceding evaluative observation and adding weight to the proposition. It conveys a high level of certainty and simultaneously frames the subsequent instructional explanation as authoritative and reliable.

In other cases, *indeed* reaffirms a critical precaution or adds justification to a claim, as in this culinary warning from Mrs Child:

- (10) It is a foolish waste of time to tear cloth into bits for the sake of arranging it anew in fantastic figures; but a large family may be kept out of idleness, and a few shillings saved, by thus using scraps of gowns, curtains, &c. In the country, where grain is raised, it is a good plan to teach children to prepare it. It is, **indeed**, a foolish waste of time to tear cloth into bits (Mrs Child, 1841).

Here, *indeed* is used mid-clause to reinforce the writer's evaluation, supporting the claim with a restatement that increases assertiveness while maintaining a didactic tone. Another notable example appears in a medical context from the book of Esther Copley:

(11) This is very powerful, and for very young children, the salt ammoniac should be left out, and the spirits of hartshorn lessened, or **indeed** the oil of amber used alone; as much however of the spirits should be used as can be borne without blistering the skin (Copley, 1825).

The use of *indeed* here introduces a more definitive or authoritative alternative, reinforcing the writer's command of the subject and the gravity of the recommendation. It also shows a transition from cautious guidance to stronger directive authority, which is typical of instructional medical writing. As for *surely*, its occurrence is rare but rhetorically significant. It is used in highly evaluative contexts to promote alignment with the reader, suggesting shared values or common sense. In Hill's treatise on dessert presentation, we find:

(12) **Surely** a dessert need never be scantily furnished while there exist methods of easily transforming the four culinary cardinal commodities—eggs, flour, butter, and sugar—into such a multitude of agreeable compositions (Hill, 1863).

The sentence appeals directly to the reader's logic and judgment, implying that the conclusion (a dessert need never be scantily furnished) is self-evident. *Surely* thus functions as a reader-oriented booster, engaging the reader while simultaneously affirming the writer's stance.

Finally, the adverb *assuredly*, which occurs only once in the corpus, displays a high level of authorial certainty and solemnity:

(13) If, in this respect, families more frequently made perfection their aim they would **assuredly** soon end by attaining it (Hill, 1863).

Here, *assuredly* is used in a near-apodictic tone, presenting the consequence as a logical certainty. Its lexical weight and relative rarity suggest a marked rhetorical stance, appropriate for contexts of strong exhortation or moral conviction. The tone borders on the sententious, signalling deep confidence in the truth of the statement.

Altogether, this group of adverbials works to enhance persuasion through assertiveness. They offer valuable insight into how instructive writing, particularly by women, can

mobilise rhetorical strategies to command trust and assert epistemic authority, even within the constraints of politeness and genre conventions. Their use reflects a discursive posture that is neither submissive nor didactic in the negative sense, but strategically confident and dialogically aware.

### V.3. Interpersonal alignment and reader engagement

While less frequent than expressions of epistemic tentativeness or reinforcement, certain adverbials in the corpus, particularly *perhaps*, *probably*, and *surely*—perform a distinctly intersubjective function, serving to align the writer with the reader and to establish a rhetorical dialogue. These items are used not simply to modulate certainty but to invite the reader into the reasoning process, appeal to shared experience, or soften impositions through conversational engagement. In Hyland's (1998) terms, they operate as reader-oriented hedges or boosters, fostering solidarity and co-constructing meaning.

A salient example appears in *Modern Domestic Cookery* by Georgiana Hill, where *probably* anticipates the reader's curiosity and positions the author as responsive to imagined questions:

(14) **Probably** some of my readers would like to be informed whether there are any precise rules to be followed in providing a dessert for a given number of guests (Hill, 1863).

This use of *probably* signals a projected inference about the reader's needs and simultaneously legitimises the ensuing instruction. It creates an inclusive tone that suggests attentiveness and interpersonal consideration, distancing the text from rigid prescription. Such rhetorical work is particularly significant in instructive texts, where authority can be reinforced through collaboration rather than imposition.

Another illustrative case is the modal construction found in Corbet's treatise on brewing:

(15) Brewing is not, **perhaps**, in strictness, brewing is not a feminine occupation; there are, nevertheless, many women who are exceedingly skilful in this very useful household art (Corbet, 1835).

Here, *perhaps* operates as a mitigating device to introduce a socially sensitive claim. The writer deflects possible criticism by couching the statement in epistemic caution, while simultaneously validating women's expertise. The use of *perhaps* thus blends stance softening with reader engagement, appealing to a shared awareness of social norms while asserting a counter-claim.

Similarly, *surely* appears in a rhetorical structure designed to confirm shared beliefs between writer and reader:

(16) **Surely** a dessert need never be scantily furnished while there exist methods of easily transforming the four culinary cardinal commodities—eggs, flour, butter, and sugar—into such a multitude of agreeable compositions (Hill, 1863).

In this instance, *surely* does not merely signal speaker confidence, but functions as an interpersonal appeal, inviting the reader to agree with the common-sense logic of the assertion. The effect is to create an inclusive argumentative space, framing the claim as both reasonable and mutually acceptable.

These examples highlight how epistemic adverbials are well equipped not only to signal stance but also to manage social relations within instructive discourse. Their dialogic function, especially when embedded in structures like *you would think, some of my readers*, or *you will agree*, enables female authors to manage authority and politeness simultaneously, engaging their readers in a cooperative, affiliative manner. Although relatively scarce, these forms are particularly telling of the relational strategies embedded in women's specialised writing, where instructing is often coupled with accommodating, anticipating, or aligning with the addressee.

#### **V.4. Variation across the subcorpora in function and frequency**

The diachronic distribution of epistemic adverbials in the CoWITE subcorpora reveals not only quantitative variation across the two centuries, but also significant shifts in rhetorical function and discourse salience. As shown in Section 4, the nineteenth-century subcorpus (CoWITE19) exhibits both greater frequency and greater functional

diversity in the use of epistemic adverbials, particularly *indeed* and *perhaps*, while the eighteenth-century subcorpus (CoWITE18) contains only sparse occurrences. This might suggest that the modalisation of instructional discourse became increasingly marked and rhetorically complex over time, likely reflecting changing authorial practices and expectations regarding reader engagement and stance management. The adverb *indeed* is a particularly telling case. While it already appears in CoWITE18, its frequency nearly doubles in the nineteenth century (from 0.18 to 0.39 per 10,000 words), and more importantly, it displays functional versatility and rhetorical adaptability across a range of contexts. In eighteenth-century texts, *indeed* tends to occur in sentence-initial or medial position, typically as a reaffirmation of previously stated information. Its usage is relatively conventional and contributes to reinforcing or echoing a proposition.

Evident examples of *indeed* as a rhetorical intensifier can be found in the following excerpts:

(17) The Fire is to be considered greatly in the roasting of Poultry; **indeed** almost all depends upon it (Bradley, 1750).

(18) It is the great fault of most brewers, **indeed**, that, in order to save the evaporation caused by a good boiling, they cool the liquor before it has become sufficiently cooked (Corbet, 1835).

The instance from Bradley (1750) shows how *indeed* is used to reinforce a technical statement in CoWITE18. Its function is primarily emphatic, but it remains locally anchored to the proposition, with little indication of broader rhetorical layering. By contrast, in CoWITE19, *indeed* often functions as a discourse organiser, contributing to claim sequencing, argumentative progression, and moral evaluation. The comparison between (17) and (18) suggests a shift from localised reinforcement to a more textually embedded and attitudinally nuanced use in the later subcorpus.

In example (18), *indeed* occurs in medial position, reinforcing a value judgment rather than a factual observation. It emphasises the author's critical stance and underscores the epistemic strength of her claim. The sentence as a whole extends

beyond instruction into evaluative commentary, and the presence of *indeed* intensifies the rhetorical force of the critique. Unlike earlier, more neutral uses, this instance exemplifies how nineteenth-century women writers deployed *indeed* not only to affirm factual accuracy, but also to construct a persuasive and authoritative voice, one capable of challenging conventional practice and advocating improvement grounded in experiential knowledge.

This shift illustrates how *indeed* evolves from a mere booster of factual assertions in the eighteenth century to a marker of expert judgement and discursive authority in the nineteenth. The change reflects a broader rhetorical development in women's instructional writing, where epistemic adverbials are increasingly employed to claim and defend a legitimate space for female expertise in public discourse. In contrast, CoWITE19 reveals a richer rhetorical use of *indeed*, where the adverbial not only reinforces but also organises, transitions, and intensifies information, especially in morally or socially evaluative contexts. In these instances, *indeed* often signals epistemic commitment while preserving an instructive tone that invites identification or moral alignment. Consider the following example:

(19) It is, **indeed**, a foolish waste of time to tear cloth into bits for the sake of arranging it anew in fantastic figures (Mrs Child, 1841).

In this case, *indeed* is used mid-clause, where it intensifies the evaluative tone of the statement. The author is not merely confirming a prior assertion but rather presenting a moral judgement about household economy and time management. The presence of *indeed* enhances the authorial ethos, positioning the writer as both knowledgeable and judicious. The adverb here functions not just propositionally, but also attitudinally, contributing to a voice of authority that is emphatic yet tactfully embedded in a domestic context.

## VI. CONCLUSIONS

This study has investigated the use and rhetorical functions of epistemic adverbials in Late Modern English instructive texts written by women, using data from the CoWITE18 and CoWITE19 subcorpora. The analysis reveals that these adverbials, while not frequent in absolute terms, play a significant role in the construction of epistemic stance and interpersonal meaning. They contribute to the modulation of certainty, the management of authorial identity, and the negotiation of alignment with readers in a genre traditionally associated with female domestic expertise. A clear difference between the two subcorpora emerges from the data: the nineteenth-century subcorpus exhibits a higher overall frequency and a broader functional range of epistemic adverbials than its eighteenth-century counterpart (CoWITE18). This increase reflects a general tendency towards a more elaborated and rhetorically flexible discourse style. In the nineteenth century, writers seem to employ these forms with greater sensitivity to the relational and persuasive dimensions of instructive writing. The functions of these adverbials are not limited to expressing degrees of certainty or doubt but extend to discourse structuring, value assertion, and reader engagement. They allow writers to calibrate their authorial voice, projecting caution, conviction, or solidarity as needed, thus facilitating a form of rhetorical control that is both socially acceptable and communicatively effective.

The findings suggest that epistemic adverbials in women's instructive prose served both protective and assertive purposes. On one hand, they allowed writers to soften the impact of advice, acknowledge variability, and express deference, strategies particularly important in contexts where female expertise may have been subject to scrutiny. On the other hand, these same forms offered opportunities for enhancing authorial authority, legitimising recommendations, and guiding the reader firmly and persuasively. The increasing rhetorical sophistication observed in the nineteenth-century texts aligns with broader developments in genre conventions and social discourse practices, and it reflects the evolving role of women as public conveyors of practical knowledge.

Despite these contributions, the study has certain limitations. The analysis has focused exclusively on instructive texts written by women and confined to a single genre—namely, recipes and domestic advice manuals. While this approach ensures internal coherence and genre specificity, it also restricts the generalisability of the results. The study has not explored potential variation across other types of instructive or specialised genres, nor has it considered how the patterns identified here may compare with those in male-authored texts. Additionally, although the analysis integrates both quantitative and qualitative methods, the scope of adverbials examined is deliberately narrow and does not account for the full spectrum of epistemic or interpersonal markers available in the language of the period.

These limitations open several avenues for future research. Comparative studies involving male-authored instructive writing could shed light on gender-based variation in epistemic stance and interpersonal engagement. Likewise, extending the analysis to other genres, such as medical treatises, scientific handbooks, or educational texts, might reveal whether the differences observed here hold across discursive domains. A broader diachronic perspective, incorporating earlier periods or the transition into the twentieth century, could further illuminate the evolution of epistemic marking in women's writing. Finally, a cross-linguistic or contrastive approach would allow researchers to investigate whether similar rhetorical strategies are found in contemporaneous instructive texts written in other languages and cultural contexts.

In conclusion, this study has demonstrated that epistemic adverbials in women's Late Modern English instructive texts serve as more than truth-modulating devices. They are key elements in the rhetorical construction of stance, politeness, and reader involvement. Their use reflects both the constraints and affordances of female authorship in the period, revealing a discourse shaped by careful calibration of authority, alignment, and interpersonal tone. These findings contribute towards better understanding of the relationship between language, genre, and gender in historical discourse.

## **DECLARATION OF INTEREST**

The author declares no conflict of interest related to the research, authorship, or publication of this article.

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