

Introduction. Stancetaking in late Modern English scientific writing

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1. Introduction

Stancetaking has received extraordinary scholarship attention over the last decades. Research focusing on present day languages is evidence of this interest. See, for instance, Iwasaki and Yap's monograph (2015) on stancemarking and stancetaking in Asian languages (Japanese, Korean and Mandarin); Briz (2012) and Albeda-Marco (2016) on Spanish; and Bassiouney (2015) on Egyptian Arabic, just to mention a few. The analysis of stancetaking in discourse offers valid insight to explain processes of variation and change, and this makes its study in earlier stages of languages a substantial contribution to assess the way in which evaluation, perspectivization, affect, and commitment, for instance, have had an effect on linguistic innovations (Cf. Moskowich and Crespo 2014). In this volume, contributors study certain devices, e.g. pronouns and conditional structures, which evince authorial stance on a corpus of scientific texts excerpted from *The Coruña Corpus of English Scientific Writing*. The methodology of analysis is particular to each one of the papers included in this monograph, as the study of stance devices may be addressed at from different perspectives. The term *stance* indeed refers to different phenomena in language, and so it is generally the umbrella term for notions, such as *epistemic stance* (Biber and Finegan 1989), *commitment* (Caffi 1999 and 2007; Del Lungo Camiccioti 2008), *mitigation* (Martín Martín 2008; Alonso-Almeida 2015), *reinforcement* or *strengthening* (Brown 2011), *intensification* (Gonzalez 2015), *authority*, *involvement* and *hedging* (Hyland 1998 and 2005), *assessment* (Goodwin 2006), *modality* and *evidentiality* (Chafe 1986, Palmer 2001, Fairclough 2003, Goodwin 2006, Marín Arrese 2009, Carrió Pastor 2012, Pic and Furmaniak 2012), *affect* (Martin 2000, Martin and White 2005), and *vagueness* in language (Cutting 2007).

For Hyland (2005: 176), stance “can be seen as an attitudinal dimension and includes features which refer to the ways writers present themselves and convey their judgements, opinions, and commitments. It is the ways that writers intrude to stamp their personal authority onto their arguments or step back and disguise their involvement”. The evaluative dimension of *stance* is patent in this definition. Evaluation is still an inclusive term that makes reference to several other concepts, as pointed out in Hunston and Thompson (2000: 5): “evaluation is the broad cover term for the expression of the speaker or writer's attitude or stance towards, viewpoint on, or feelings about the entities or propositions that he or she is talking about. That attitude may relate to certainty or obligation or desirability or any of a number of other sets of values. When appropriate, we refer specifically to modality as a sub-category of evaluation”. Within the spectrum of evaluation, Du Bois (2007: 163) considers the social and cultural dimension of *stance* in his definition: “a public act by social actor, achieved dialogically through overt communicative means of simultaneously evaluating

objects, positioning subjects (self and others), and aligning with other subjects, with respect to any salient dimension of the sociocultural field". In sum, the core of all the perspectives to *stance* mentioned here is its pragmatic nature, and thus *stance* covers the study of (inter)subjective meanings and commitment/involvement vs. detachment, for instance, which are often potential for linguistic variation, particularly in specialized discourse, as shown in the studies in this volume on the texts of the *Coruña Corpus*.

2. The Coruña Corpus

The Coruña Corpus of English Scientific Writing (CC) started at the University of A Coruña in 2003. As explained in Crespo and de la Cruz Cabanillas (2016: 63), the interest of their compilers was the evolution and vernacularization of scientific writing in the medieval period and later written by male and female authors, and this interest included aspects related to the macrolevel to cover the study of scientific genres. The CC contains texts from the eighteenth to the end of the nineteenth century (1700-1900), and these were selected for compilation according to different sociological, linguistic and disciplinary criteria, as also described in Crespo and de la Cruz Cabanillas (2016: 63). The texts have been chosen from different English-speaking geographical areas, other than England, namely: North America, Ireland and Scotland.

The internal organization of the corpus has been partially guided by the UNESCO classification of science, and thus each subsection of this corpus represents a sphere of science. This results in the following configuration of CC: (1) Natural and Exact Natural Sciences, this parameter includes the domain of Astronomy: *Corpus of English Texts on Astronomy* (*CETA*); Life Sciences: *Corpus of English Life Sciences Texts* (*CELiST*); Physics: *Corpus of English Texts on Physics* (*CETePh*); and Chemistry: *Corpus of English Chemistry Texts* (*CECheT*); (2) Humanities, this parameter to include the domain of Philosophy: *Corpus of English Philosophy Texts* (*CEPhiT*); Linguistics, *Corpus of English Texts on Linguistics* (*CETeL*); and History: *Corpus of English History Texts* (*CHET*). The compilers decided not to include the domain of medicine, as this is well represented in the *Corpus of Early Medical Writing* compiled by members of the VARIENG group (Crespo and de la Cruz Cabanillas, 2016). The *Coruña Corpus* is not yet completed, and *CETA* (Moskowich and Crespo 2012; Moskowich et al. 2012), *CEPhiT* (Moskowich et al. 2016), and *CHET* (Moskowich et al. 2012) are the only ones available at present; *CECheT* is soon to appear.

Each of the mentioned subcorpora contains ca. 400,000 words, half for each century, taken principally from first editions. The reason is that two texts of ca. 10,000 words are taken per decade after transcribing the author's own texts, excluding additional material, such as quotations, graphs, figures, etc. not representing the author's idiolect. Each of the texts owns two files. One of this is the text encoded in XML language. The other is metadata information concerning the author and the text. The presence of this information is certainly fundamental in evaluating stancetaking in texts. The consultation of these databases is performed thanks to the use of the *Coruña Corpus Tool* (*CCT*), described in Lareo (2010). The available CC texts can be interrogated in full, or any of its subcorpus, for a given unit or string of language. Statistics as to occurrences (tokens and variants) per text are given in the *results summary* window, also presenting concordances. Each concordance line shows the text where the word appears by clicking on it.

Research carried out on texts in the *Coruña Corpus* proves its validity for the study of the language of science from a historical perspective, and for the study of language variation and change. In general, research conducted using *CC* includes material on (a) the compilation of the corpus itself or descriptions of the databases (Moskowich and Crespo 2007; Moskowich and Parapar 2008; Crespo and Moskowich 2010 and 2015; Moskowich 2016); (b) morphological and/or syntactic descriptions (Puente Castelo and Mónaco 2013; Puente Castelo 2015); (c) pragmatics (Alonso Almeida 2012; Crespo 2011; Crespo and Moskowich 2015a); and (d) cultural and social concerns in relation to language and language variation (Moskowich 2012; Crespo and Moskowich 2015b; Dossena 2016), among other aspects. All this work is only an indication of the corpus' potential for further research. Its configuration in subcorpora according to register allows for contrastive analyses dealing with disciplinary variation. This is not the only way in which this material allows comparison, as language use can also be assessed with a focus on genre, for example. From a diachronic perspective, *CC* could be used in conjunction with other historical corpora of (pseudo)scientific texts to study diastatic variation and the evolution of scientific styles.

3. The contributions

The volume contains seven studies on several aspects of eighteenth and nineteenth century scientific English writing, as portrayed in *CC*. Each of the chapters includes a description of the subcorpus or subcorpora used in order to provide precise indications of the material analyzed. In the first chapter, **Margarita Sánchez-Cuervo** explores *appraisal* in modern English historical discourse written by male and female authors following Martin and White's model (2005) for the study of the language of evaluation. The interpretative nature of history, Sánchez-Cuervo claims, seems to suggest the use of evaluative language in order to reflect and accommodate the authors' point of view. The devices found to convey authorial position in the texts analyzed include strategic use of the pronoun "we", epistemic and deontic modals, hearsay, mindsay and perception verbs. The author closes her text by suggesting further research, which would include the analysis of dialogic contraction options.

The following chapter written by **Marina Dossena** also reports on aspects of stancetaking in late Modern English historiography. The author analyzes the ways in which (un)certainly and evaluation strategies are used in order to convey perspectivization of knowledge. Dossena's analyses involve both the texts in the *CHET* subcorpus and their titlepages, which represent the authors' first contact with their audience. These titlepages contains some language elements that indicate what the authors' position would be in their texts. A valuable contribution of this paper is the way in which the author highlights similarities and differences between *CHET* and *CEPhiT* concerning the expression of evaluation.

Persuasion strategies are the focus of the next chapter, where **Begoña Crespo** explores discourse strategies deployed to designate third person actor with a legitimizing function in *CHET*. For this, she concentrates on the syntactic, semantic and pragmatic aspects of the verb *demand*, which she exemplifies with excerpts from the corpus to demonstrate that the persuasive function of this verb needs to consider contextual factors, the function of the intervening material, its original legal meaning, its presence in set phrases and its occurrence in passive structures.

Margarita Mele-Marrero studies self-mention as seen in the use of the pronouns *I* and *we* in the eighteenth-century section of *CETA* and *CHET*, thus reporting on their use in the so-called hard- and soft-sciences. Mele-Marrero proves that self-mention is an important strategy to convey stance and engagement in her selection of texts. She concludes her paper with a set of interesting findings concerning the presence of self-mentioning pronouns in the texts, one of which reports in the patent occurrence of self-mention pronouns in astronomy texts in relation to history ones. The following chapter by **Isabel Moskowich** also describes pronouns as stance features in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century *CETA*, *CEPhiT* and *CHET*, also with a focus on first person pronouns as involvement devices. The author considers the register variables of subject-matter and gender in order to analyze the use of these proforms in the selected subcorpora of the *Coruña Corpus*. Her study reveals that these involvement features are used as dictated by the discourse requirements of the discipline. The variable of sex seems, however, less influencing.

Francisco J. Álvarez-Gil offers an analysis of the stance adverbials *apparently*, *fairly* and *possibly* in *CHET* to show how these forms are used either to indicate elaboration of meaning and/or to indicate appraisal of propositional content. This paper discusses central theoretical aspects to the notion of evidentiality and its relation to epistemic modality in order to contextualize his analyses of the adverbials chosen. In his study, the author concludes that the syntactic position of adverbials may also indicate different pragmatic functions of these forms.

The potential of conditional constructions as hedging devices is described by **Luis Puente-Castelo**. In his study, Puente-Castelo examines three type of conditionals in three subcorpora of the *CC* in order to show their use to convey authorial uncertainty. The author applies socio-historical and formal parameters in his account of these structures as stance features. The last contribution written by **Elena Quintana-Toledo** is an account of vague expressions in *CHET* following Zhang's model (2015). She classifies her findings into *approximate stretchers*, *general stretchers*, *scalar stretchers* and *epistemic stretchers*. These devices have several pragmatic functions. They could be used to mitigate a claim, to indicate degrees of specificity, reliability, accountability, or affectivity. These expressions may have a persuasive function.

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