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Self-mentioning: Authority, authorship or self-promotion in 17thC prefaces to manuals on obstetrics?¹

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ABSTRACT

Early Modern English texts on obstetrics have been a subject of study in the history of medicine and a source of a supposed antagonism between women midwives, on the one hand and surgeons and male midwives, on the other. Nevertheless, it can be questioned if sustaining this type of controversy was the main purpose of these works. This paper presents a discourse and pragmatic analysis of stance attribution in nine prefaces to obstetric books of mainly the 17th C. By paying attention to self-mentioning, the main objective is to determine if their writers (a) defended the authority of a professional community, (b) emphasized their individual contribution to the obstetrics bibliography, or (c) were basically interested in selling their books. Texts have been accessed in digitalized facsimile form and the pronoun counting has therefore been performed manually. The results obtained, illustrated and completed with examples, show there has

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been a misconception of “obstetric treatises” of the period, which in turn has obscured their basic purpose.

Keywords: Self-mentioning, discourse analysis, pragmatics, Early Modern English texts on obstetrics, surgeons, midwives, manuals.

1. Introduction

The progressive professionalization of midwifery and proliferation of obstetric manuals addressed to practitioners, especially during the 17th C, were facts for a long time attributed to the beneficial incursion of men in traditionally female territory. Furthermore, female midwives were frequently associated with witchcraft and ignorance of anatomy, even when their “skills” were sometimes praised and defended since they could better understand other females’ suffering and the process of delivery. This confrontation between surgeons and midwives has been a constant argument sustained by medical historians (Radcliffe, 1989; Wilson, 1996; Evenden, 2000; Van Teijlingen, 2004; McTavish, 2005). However, when we read manuals of the period written by male or female authors they all seem to coincide mainly in the persecution and reporting of bad praxis regardless of the sex of the practitioner.

It is very difficult to avoid a modern biased interpretation of historical facts. Nonetheless, the purpose of this paper is to determine what image of themselves these authors wanted to convey to the general public or readers of their time by focusing on the prefaces to their books. Basically, we question whether, in this part of their books, they defend their expertise or authority as a community, their contribution to the obstetrics bibliography, authorship; or whether these positions form part of self-promotion to sell their books. In search for an answer, our approach will be a pragmatic one, specifically focussing on stance and the use of self-mentioning.

Stance has had different readings (see Biber, 1999, for a fuller account) but most scholars understand it to be, in a higher or lesser degree, the way in which the author expresses or shows his or her “self”. To clarify our starting point we adhere to Hyland’s (2002, p. 67) definition of stance: “Stance refers to the ways that writers project themselves into their texts to communicate their integrity, credibility, involvement, and a relationship to their subject matter and their readers.” In this projection of the writer, prior research has revealed the importance of pronominal systems (Barton, 1993; Martín-Martín, 2003; Harwood, 2005; Hyland 2001, 2002, 2005a; Mele-Alonso, forthcoming; Mur Dueñas, 2007; Nevala, 2009; Weber, 2005). Particularly, self-mentioning, the use of first person singular or plural pronouns, indicates whether the results are the product of singular or collective works; but the choice of pronoun is also revealing in terms of self-esteem, superiority, dignity or humility. Thus, by using *I* or *we*, authors present themselves as sustaining pillars of their research and practise, or try to include themselves in their scientific community as a whole.

Most of the studies mentioned above have used modern research articles as corpora; this paper’s scope is diachronic and limited to prefaces in obstetric books of the 17th C. These prefaces usually consist of “letters”, addressed to different readers: dedications to an admired person or mentor and letters to a more or less defined group of readers (for a rhetoric analysis of these texts see Sánchez-Cuervo, 2009). The information they provide is relevant to our purpose. Experts in the epistolary genre of the Middle Ages and Renaissance consider the letter as a conversational turn (Murphy, 1986); we do not think that those “letters” found in prefaces are equivalent to actual correspondence (though answers could be expected in prefaces to later published books), but they are certainly an appropriate place to search for the author’s own voice. It is especially at this part of the books where the first person would be clearly displayed. Therefore, we would expect to find forms of self-mentioning: *I* for personal individual expression and *we*, that may be of an exclusive or inclusive type (Levinson, 1987, p. 69). Thus, a “majestic plural” can be found, where the author uses the plural *we* to refer just to himself, together with an inclusive plural that may involve author and reader, or the author and his professional colleagues. The latter would represent the manifestation of a textual (Porter, 1986, p. 38) and discourse community (Barton, 2007, p. 75) where a group of people share

interests acting either as authors or addressors and as addressees, that is, sharing a common discourse, in our case, one relating to women and childbirth.

The remainder of this paper is divided into three more sections. In Section 2 we find the description of selected prefaces and method. Section 3 presents the results obtained with tables, examples and subsequent discussion in section 4. Finally, we state our conclusions.

2. Seventeenth century prefaces to manuals on obstetrics

For our purposes, we have worked with nine manuals, all of them dealing with the topic of obstetrics, from child-birth to nursing, and basically dating from the 17th C with the exception of Raynald's text (1552). They were accessed in digitalized facsimile form as part of the *EEBO* collection,² which guarantees originality but does not allow for any computer manipulation. Some annotations for each title are provided below; in table 1, titles appear in chronological order, according to the year of the edition studied, with abbreviations for referential use throughout this article.

² *EEBO, Early English Books Online* (<http://eebo.chadwyck.com/home>), is the result of the joint Project of the University of Michigan, Oxford University and Proquest LLC. It provides a magnificent tool for researchers offering more than 100,000 titles in digitalized facsimile form that, for the moment, go from Caxton to Shakespeare.

Author	Year	Title	Preface pages	Reference name
Raynalde, Thomas	1552	<i>The Birth of Mankind, otherwise named the Woman's book</i>	33	RAY
Guillemeau, Jacques	1612	<i>Cild-birth or the Happy Delivery of Women</i>	9	GUI
Culpeper, Nicholas	1651	<i>A Directory for Midwives</i>	25	CUL
TC., ID., MS., TE.	1656	<i>The Complete Midwives Practise</i>	4	TC.AL
Wolveridge	1669	<i>Speculum Matricis Hybernicum</i>	8	WOL
Sermon, William	1671	<i>The Ladies Companion or the English Midwife</i>	7	SER
Mauriceau, Francis	1672	<i>The Diseases of Women with Child</i>	4	MAU
Anonimous	1682	<i>The English Midwife Enlarged</i>	3	ENL
Barret, Robert	1699	<i>A Companion for Midwives</i>	7	BAR

Table 1: First sources references

All the texts selected share a didactic purpose, they intend to illustrate, teach, midwives and novice surgeons good practices for attending women in the process of child birth and post-natal care. We understand that the following brief description of each of the texts provides the necessary context to frame any further analysis.

According to the Wellcome Library, which owns eleven editions of the text, RAY “was the most important English language work on midwifery in the 16th century. The text was a translation and adaptation of *Der schwangern Frauen und*

Hebammen Rosengarten, written by Eucharius Rösslin.” Richard Jonas carried out a first translation published in 1540, Raynalde’s was a second one, first published in 1545 and subsequently reprinted several times.

GUI was originally written in French by James Guillemeau, the French king’s “chirurgion” for Charles IX and Henry IV. He was the pupil and son-in-law of the famed French doctor and author Ambroise Paré. The book was published in France in 1609 (the year of his death) and then translated into English and published in London at least twice, in 1612 and 1635 (Davis, 1998, p. 292). Our version corresponds to the first one, printed by A. Hatfield.

Culpeper, also known for the “astrological herbalism” which he practised and published about in *The English Physitian* of 1652 (Claude Moore Health Science Library, 2009), wrote CUL out of personal interest, since he lost several of his children. He never graduated as a physician, although he studied at Cambridge, and did not conceal his lack of experience as a male midwife. Political differences, his translations of medical books and reporting of excessive costs charged by physicians caused him to be in conflict with the College of Physicians (Thulesius, 1994).

TC.AL, with a long original title, is a work that ran to several versions and editions. The one that concerns us here corresponds to that of the year 1656 attributed to a group of midwives under the initials T.C., I.D., M.S., and T.B.; the first two have been identified as Catherine Turner and Dina Ireland (Evenden, 2000, p. 8). These “practitioners”, as they consider themselves, are honest enough to acknowledge in their preface how indebted they are to Madame Louise Bourgeois, royal midwife of France, who was considered the first midwife to write a treaty on obstetrics in 1609, with several enlargements and re-editions (Dunn, 2004).

WOL was, according to Spencer (1972, p. 56), a plagiarism of *The Expert Midwife*, in turn a translation of Rueff’s *De generatione hominum*. The lack of acknowledgement of original sources was a very common, though not so well accepted, practice. Wolveridge was an Englishman surgeon working in Cork (Ireland), which may justify the full title of his book although in the preface he clarifies that it was written for his English kinfolk.

In SER we face another book that does not acknowledge its source. Evenden (2000, p. 10) states:

Aside from the parts taken from the midwives' publication, Sermon's work is typical of the medical literature of the day (both lay and professional) which was an untidy mixture of Galenic or humoral theory, superstition, and, in a few cases, common sense. It has been dismissed as primarily designed to advertise Sermon's cathartic and diuretic pills.

MAU is an acknowledged translation of Mauriceu's by Hugh Chamberlen the elder with some additions and marginal notes. Hugh Chamberlen was a member of the Chamberlens family of male midwives known as the inventors of the forceps, a secret instrument that he tried to sell to Mauriceau in 1670 (Dunn, 1999, p. 233). The letter to the reader is, therefore and as in the case of GUI, a translation from Mauriceau's. The prefatory part of the manual also incorporates "The Author's Epistle Dedicatory. To all my dear brethren, the sworn Master Chirurgeons of the City of Paris". This work was a successful one with several editions in England.

If WOL was a plagiarism of a translation, in ENL we find a further copy of this plagiarism probably produced by the publisher himself. "The order of the chapters is somewhat altered and there are verbal omissions and insertions: but in the main it is a copy of Wolveridge's work, without any acknowledgement of the author" (Spencer, 1972, p. 57)

BAR, written by Robert Barret, a Brother of Surgeons Hall, was published in 1699 in London. Barret's intended main authorities in writing this book were himself and the Scriptures, mentioning Hippocrates and "the Ancients" some four times.

In our selection of texts, prefatory parts are of different types and lengths. We find "dedicatory epistles" (3 out of 9), letters from the author to the reader (9 of 9) and letters from the translator to the reader (2 out of 9). We will concentrate on the second type, which can be found in all texts. In the case of CUL, both the letter to the reader and "To the midwives of England" will be used, since the latter, although entitled as a dedicatory, is not a letter to an admired patron or supporter; in it the author is just addressing a particular group of readers.

These letters range from 4 to 34 pages and render a corpus that amounts to 100 pages of running text. The “density” of the printed page varies from 91 words to 224 for a single page, and the printers have used script types that go from a gothic to a cursive one. Thus, taking into account this variability, it can be said that we are dealing with more than 13,700 words.

Most prefaces are not numbered in their original printed version. To facilitate localization of examples we will use as the page number that which ensues from counting each single page from the one containing the main heading of the letter/-s under survey. The original spelling of the text will be maintained in the examples, but capitalization has been modernized.

3. Pronouns results and discussion

Manual counting of the pronouns used in prefaces rendered the data presented in table 2.

Reference name	Self-mentioning	
	<i>I</i>	<i>We</i>
RAY	30	4
GUI	17	1
CUL	48	0
TC.AL	0	16
WOL	1	0
SER	22	0
MAU	17	3
ENL	10	0
BAR	22	7

Table 2. Self-mentioning pronouns

A simple overview of the raw data in the table, shows that the use of the first person singular is predominant in all prefaces as compared to that of the plural, *we*. Thus, it can be said that there is no great community reference in these texts; the authors do not intend to talk about themselves as part of a professional group but basically as individuals. Doubts could appear in the case of TC.AL, but it is clear that this is the only work signed by several authors so in every instance *we* is the adequate referent.

Examples from each text will be presented and commented below to illustrate the use of self-mentioning. This pronouns use is often intensified or attenuated through *boosters* or *hedges*. In Hyland's terms boosters (1998, p. 349): "such as *clearly*, *obviously* and *of course* allow writers to express conviction and assert a proposition with confidence, representing a strong claim about a state of affairs. Affectively they also mark involvement and solidarity with an audience, stressing shared information, group, membership". In turn, hedges (1998, p. 350) such as *possible*, *might* and *perhaps*, "represent a weakening of a claim through a specific qualification of the writers commitment. This may be to show doubt and indicate that information is presented as opinion rather than accredited fact, or it may be to convey deference, humility and respect for colleagues views".

In RAY's text, which he entitles "Prologue to the women readers", the *I* form is the most numerous, appearing in assertive sentences combined with either present tense, *shall* or *will* (pp. 1, 10). We even find emphatic sentences with *do* or *self* (pp. 9, 25), and *sure* (pp. 23, 26) acting as boosters. The cases where *we* appears are of an exclusive type, a majestic plural employed by the author to describe the contents of other chapters/books.

- I am sure he [a possible male reader] shall lerne nether lewdenesse [...] (p. 26).
- In the second boke we shal declare the divers sortes and maners [...] (p. 8).
- And this do I say, for because [...] (p. 31).

GUI also presents a considerable number of first person singular combined with perfect forms reflecting his past experience, while the single use of *we* (p. 5) is inclusive and might involve general readers and colleagues:

- I have dressed many that were wounded [...] (p. 4).
- I have had the experience thereof in two women [...] (p. 6).
- Yet neverthelesse we see that he which hath an empyema (p. 5).

CUL employs the greatest number of first person singular, without the inclusion of *we*. This dissociation is not strange since he uses his epistles to deplore the attitude of the College of Physicians and that of educational institutions in general:

- If any want of wisdom ask it of God (not of the Colledg of Physitians, for if they do, they may errand, unless they bring money with them (p. 9).
- Children must go before they can run, and the Colledg hath wrap't them up in the Blankets of ignorance, and so they intend to keep them until their dying daies [...] (pp. 23-24).

His use of the first person is sometimes softened by hedging but also combines with categorical assertions with boosters like *know* or *surely*³, showing he has confidence in what he says but not in how it will be received, this is manifest in the closure to his dedicatory to the midwives (p. 13):

- And yet think I am not mistaken in my thoughts [...] If I fail its in power not in will (p. 4).
- I could have written you deeper notions in Physick [...]; but I write for children (p. 23).
- I know (as surely as I know my name) if I reveal what I know that light will increase in me (p. 10).
- and Ile tell you but the truth (p. 6).
- Yours in what I may, or can (p.13).

As mentioned before, the case of TC.AL is different. It is the only text included here that was signed by several authors, thus, their use of *we* is that of a simple plural not necessarily including a whole community of midwives:

- We thought it fit to give you warning of them (p. 1).
- we must cleerly confesse, that we are highly obliged (p. 3).
- nor should we have prostrated our reputation and private experience (p. 4).

³ For further information on the use of “surely” as stance marker, see Downing (2001, 2009).

SER is another text in which only the first person singular is present. The author talks about his experience using the preterite, usually *I* plus perfect forms, and adding attitudinal hedges (*hope*) to what he intends to offer:

- I have always had good success in my practice, abhorring to delude my patients (p. 5).
- I hope I have not derogated, in divulging these excellent secrets (p. 4).
- I cured that Great Prince George the late Duke of Albermarle (p. 4).

MAU incorporates the use of *we* as a way of involving the reader in his purpose and once as representative of his professional community (p. 3):

- we see that most people are govern'd rather by Opinion than Judgement (p. 1).
- the most wholesome remedies we have to chase away ignorance (p. 2).
- contented my self to teach them the best [remedies], and principally such as we ordinarily use in our practice (p. 3).

In the references to himself, he is very cautious and his hedges become more visible (*believe, hope, might*). This may well be because he was concerned about the opinion his readers may have of him. In this sense we should recall the fact that his letter to the reader is preceded by a “The Author’s Epistle Dedicatory. To all my dear brethren, the sworn Master Chirurgeons of the City of Paris”. Examples of the use of *I* are given below:

- I believe I may hope you will easily grant me this request (p. 2).
- I hope you will have more satisfaction (p. 3).
- I might be more intelligible to yong Chirurgeons, and Midwives (p. 3).

Curiously, in WOL we only encounter one *I* in the letter to the reader. The author prefers to use *he* or “the author”:

- it being never intended for the Irish, (though I heartily wish it may be serviceable to them also, if occasion be) (p. 3).
- Neither could the author suppose, or intend his book useful to forreing parts (p. 7).
- he hopes it will be candidly received by all (p. 2).

This distancing, through the use of the third person, could be interpreted as a veiled recognition of the original author; the first person is used only when justifying the title (p. 3). In spite of Wolveridge's plagiarism, in the margins he acknowledges Biblical references and the story of Dr William Harvey that he includes in the text (pp. 4-5).

ENL varies from WOL in its use of pronouns. Here again the first person dominates, since the letter is addressed "To all English midwives", the writer gives continuous advice to them on how to use the book, with hedges such as *would* to underline the suggestions of someone who may be a non-professional and a booster like *assure* when referring to the information provided:

- I'll assure you, I have not conceal'd one secret, belonging to your art from you; neither would I have you with-hold your knowledge from others (p. 2).
- I would not have you [...] to try any new experiment, either upon rich or poor (p. 2).
- Lastly I would advise you not to be dismay'd (p. 3).

Disregarding TC.AL, BAR would be the one with the highest number of first person plural. Nevertheless, this does not imply a sense of community with other surgeons. Barret uses the plural form when talking about the classics and the scriptures, involving himself and an open group of readers in matters of what he considers general knowledge:

- We cannot reasonably suppose that Adam, who was so universally skilled (p. 5).
- As we read at large Gen. 1. God said (p. 10).
- We are inform'd that Podalius and Machaon (p. 6).

The use of *I* appears in present and future sentences that introduce his treatise and reflect his positive expectations, again combined with elements that mark his self-assurance, such as *confident* or *purposefully*:

- I'm confident will meet with approbation from such as are willing to be inform'd (p. 4).
- I purposefully wave all instances from profane History (p. 9).
- I shall gain my design if I can but prove serviceable (p. 17).

4. Discussion

From the examples given we can see how, although maintaining certain differences, the authors main concern is to convince their readers of their experience. According to Hyland (2005, p. 59) writing on a corpus of academic texts in English: “The use of first person combines effectively with boosters as a strategy to clearly promote the image of a determined, confident and positive hand”. Harwood (2005, p. 19) concurs when he says: “boosters often combine with the first person to construct a similar image of ultra-conscientious researcher”. In our case there is an intention to construct that image, something different is whether it was based on a reality or not. The evident use of hedges, as in MAU, seems to represent an expression of deference towards his colleagues.

The prevalence of the first person is relevant in itself since it provides the emphasis on individual knowledge. Our findings can also be backed by a previous study (Mele & Alonso, 2010, forthcoming) where we analysed the use of third person pronouns in directives of 17thC obstetrics manuals. Although it was not our main objective in that paper, there we noticed that the number of self-mentioning pronouns (*I/we*) played an important role in the way the authors referred to apprentices and patients. For example, we observed an authorial reliability, in the obstetric practice prescribed, expressed by the increase in number of the self-mention pronouns *I* or *we* and by the recalling of previous experience in the context of a directive where the pronoun *you* was used.

Barton (1993) when studying the use of *persona* by academic writers, indicates that the creation of an academic persona can be achieved through the combination of the first person with evidentials of belief and also by stating their professional category (credentials); hence they avoid “crossing the line into bragging” and with “these devices establish both individuality and community derived authority” (p. 750). Rare examples of this can be found in our corpus:

- I my self, or other phisitions beyng yet a lyve at this daye, have experimented and practised (RAY, p. 9).

Though it is assumed that the writer is a surgeon or a midwife we learn this through their insistence on their experience, rather than in any mentioning (apart

from what may appear on the book cover) of their professional category. Furthermore, in our texts that line into “bragging” may be crossed as when Sermon says: “And it is very *well known*, that I *have always had good success* in my practise” (SER, p. 5; our italics). The devoted collegiate Mauriceau, also shows his confidence in his experience when he explains: “rely on the method I show you, since, [...] I faithfully recite what I have with very happy success observed these many years in the practise of deliveries” (MAU, pp. 2-3). By contrast, the inclusive *we* used just once in MAU denotes his concern about his peers, something also demonstrated by the dedicatory to his brethren *chirurgiens*. This does not refrain him from subtly exposing that his way of presenting things might be one of, if not just, the best. Therefore, here the sense of community, if extant, is very limited. Even in the case of TC.AL, when using *we*, they do not mean all midwives, but themselves, and their acknowledgement to Madame de Bourgeois is a proof of the selection of the best sources for their own work, in contrast with all those in English they have read and found “strangely deficient, so crowded with unnecessary notions, and dangerous mistakes” (TCAL, p. 1). Moreover, they openly criticize Culpeper who “should descend so low as to borrow his imperfect Treatise from those wretched volumes” (TCAL, p. 2).

Although Harwood (2005, p. 1226) talks about the consequences of the present massive production of research papers her conclusions may also apply to obstetric manuals of the 17th century:

although pronouns which help the writer describe their methodology and procedure may seem unlikely tools for self-promotion, I and we can stress the writers’ procedural innovations, highlight how methodological pitfalls were successfully circumvented, and record how the writers were more rigorous in their quest for sound data than was strictly necessary.

In the above examples we can see the insistence on portraying the prefaced book as something unique, offered by each, single specific author and, accordingly, better than any previous manual on offer. This is largely accomplished through the use of the first person singular pronoun.

5. Conclusion

A pragmatic analysis of the prologues of obstetric texts in the span of more than a century confirms that the view of physicians and midwives as opposing communities arises from a confusion of their initial scope. In fact, only one of the authors presents himself clearly as part of a “scientific” community. We do not intend to deny the widely-accepted idea that scientists try to publish during their careers to obtain the personal recognition of their peers. Some of the examples illustrate how in submitting their work to the consideration of their readers, authors express their doubts and, therefore, a combination of first person and hedging appears.

Although comparable in some aspects of their production to present-day research papers, nevertheless, these volumes must be reconsidered as what they were: manuals.

In spite of the continuation in the contents of their treatises, sustained in most cases in a previous book that has in turn other antecedents, acknowledged or not, they are individual, particular works. They are not intended to defend the community of surgeons or midwives as the best to attend women; the use of the first person singular, combined quite often with boosters, indicates that the author is endorsing himself, his practices and experience and accordingly, stating that his book would be the ideal one. Thus, self-promotion to sell the product, the best manual, is salient.

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