#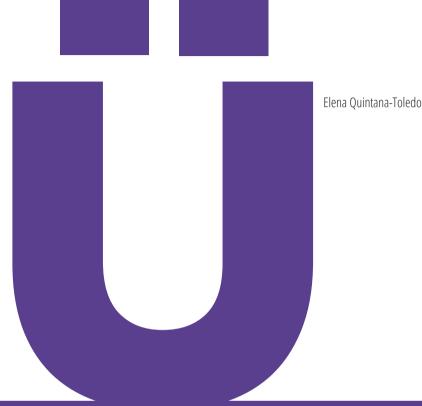 'IN SHORT TYME IT WIL HEALE THE SORE'. A RELEVANCE PERSPECTIVE OF PROMISING IN MEDICAL UTILITARIAN TEXTS OF THE EARLY MODERN ENGLISH PERIOD

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ESTUDIOS DE LINGÜÍSTICA APLICADA

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Elena Quintana-Toledo completed her PhD in English Philology in 2013 at the University of Las Palmas de Gran Canaria, where she has taught undergraduate and postgraduate courses in English as a Foreign Language and Corpus Linguistics. She has also taught a number of courses and seminars in English for Specific Purposes at the Technical State University of Quevedo, Ecuador. She is a member of the research project IAMET (Identification and Analysis of Metadiscourse Strategies in English and Spanish, FFI2016-77941-P, Spanish Ministry of Economy, Industry and Competitiveness), currently underway at the Polytechnic University of Valencia. Her research interests include the analysis of specialised English scientific texts from a pragmatically-oriented perspective, and she has been recently engaged in the study of the relationship between modality and evidentiality, and its pedagogical implications.

SUMMARY Medical recipes written before the birth of modern scientific writing, at least as we know it today, are frequently characterised by the inclusion of expressions aimed at validating the efficacy of the remedies. These expressions have been traditionally considered as promises of efficacy. This research hypothesises that a closer examination of the context in which they are embedded may render interpretations that are different from promissory speech acts in the strictest sense. The corpus of study has been excerpted from the *Corpus of Early English Recipes* and it comprises medical recipes written in English between 1500 and 1600. The texts have been analysed using *AntConc* and the results have been manually checked afterwards. The detection of potential promises of efficacy has relied on Speech Act Theory and particularly on Searle's (1969) constitutive rules for promises. Relevance Theory (Sperber and Wilson 1995) has been used to account for the process of contextual enrichment the reader follows so as to derive the illocutionary force of efficacy statements. This work shows that not all efficacy statements are necessarily interpreted as promises in the Searlean sense. In fact, it has been observed that the occurrence of stance elements, i.e. epistemic and/or evidential devices, together with the authors' lexico-grammatical choices crucially shape their illocutionary force, normally by lowering the promissory value of the locutions. Readers can additionally infer differing degrees not only of authorial commitment but also of reliability of information.

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

Recipe texts can be taken to be rooted in the widespread European tradition of recording instructions on how to make a wide range of products (Leong 2018: 4), including culinary, medical and household, among others (DiMeo 2017: 210). A closer examination of medical recipes in particular can provide us with large amounts of information about how the language of science and scientific communication itself have changed across different periods of the English language because, as Taavitsainen (2011: 79) notes, changes in scientific thought-styles get necessarily reflected on the linguistic and stylistic choices made by writers in their texts. Referring to manuscript recipe collections, Leong and Pennell (2007: 133) point to their value as "evidence regarding the exchange, acquisition and evaluation of medical information". It is not difficult to imagine, though, how language studies may also benefit from the analysis of the recipe books in printed form which became so popular during the Early Modern English period and afterwards.

Medical recipes written before the birth of modern scientific writing, at least as we know it today, seem to be an adequate genre for the inclusion of expressions aimed at validating the efficacy of the end product. It would not be unreasonable to expect "some indication that the medication would work for the disease indicated" (Price 2016: 16) at a time when the transition from the scholastic, logocentric scientific thought-style to the new empirical one was still yet to begin (Taavitsainen and Pahta 1997: 71-72; Taavitsainen and Pahta 1998: 162; Taavitsainen 2018: 96). The scholastic and the empirical philosophies of science differ significantly in the way evidence is considered when making claims: scholasticism is heavily dependent on authorities so that its preferred source of knowledge is quotative. Empiricism, in contrast, favours making scientific claims based on observation so that mode of knowing is frequently expressed by means of direct evidentials, particularly those involving sensory evidence (Taavitsainen and Pahta 1998).

This study contains an analysis of promises of efficacy in a corpus of English medical recipes written between 1500-1600. The texts have been excerpted from the *Corpus of Early English Recipes*, a compilation of recipe texts covering different periods of the history of the English language, i.e. 1375-1900. This corpus was compiled by the *Tecnologías Emergentes aplicadas a la Lengua y a la Literatura* research unit at the *Instituto para el Desarrollo Tecnológico y la Innovación en Comunicaciones* at the University of Las Palmas de Gran Canaria. The passages under examination in this work are those that point to the writer's positive assessment of the remedy. They have been labelled as *incidental data* (Stannard 1982), *statements of efficacy* (Hunt 1990) and *efficacy phrases* (Jones 1998) in earlier scholarly literature. At first sight, they may be taken as promises of efficacy since the producer of the text is attesting the value of the therapy. However, it is hypothesised in this research that a closer look at the context in which they are embedded may render interpretations that are different from promissory speech acts.

These stretches of discourse are analysed following the relevance-theoretic approach to comprehension because this theory has proved to be efficient in the interpretation of several linguistic phenomena, including speech acts (Sperber and Wilson 1995). In addition, Relevance Theory provides us with a unified theoretical framework which allows for the inclusion of contextual information in the interpretation process in a comprehensive way. Context is to be widely understood as the network of assumptions derived from (i) the interpretation of utterances occurring earlier in the communicative situation, (ii) the addition of encyclopaedic information, and (iii) the addition of information which is immediately observable from the environment. The role of context, I contend, is crucial in the determination of the illocutionary force of these utterances.

The main objective of this study is the description and analysis of the speech act of promising in English medical recipes written between 1500-1600 by following Relevance Theory. It is intended to contribute to the field of Historical Speech-Act Analysis as it focuses on the pragmatics of a specific speech-act function as manifested through efficacy statements in the context of Early Modern medical recipe texts. I should like to point out at this stage that this work does not intend to be a diachronic study of the formulation of promissory speech acts as the corpus of study is not large enough so as to allow for the tracing of this specific communicative function and its linguistic manifestations at different points in time in the history of the English language.

1.1. Method

The analysis of any speech act in a historical text must necessarily take as point of departure the theoretical frames of reference provided by modern theories because the notion of *speech act* is in itself a relatively recent one. Although there is a lack of consensus in many terminological and methodological issues from a synchronic perspective, Austin's (1975) and Searle's (1969) pioneering works are still quite influential. The theoretical and methodological procedures followed here as regards the dimensions of speech acts and taxonomical issues coincide with the ones proposed by Searle (1969) because his contribution to the development of Speech Act Theory, which is partially based on Austin's investigations, is to date the most comprehensive one. Moreover, the Searlean approach to promises in terms of constitutive rules captures a great deal of the pragmatics of this type of commissive speech act in an exhaustive way. It proves to be a useful tool in the identification of potential promises of efficacy.

As regards the interpretation of efficacy statements, this relies on Relevance Theory as formulated by Sperber and Wilson (1995). In spite of the fact that this theory may be said to show some theoretical weaknesses, for instance, as regards its suitability to account for modality (Traugott 2003), its potential to explain several linguistic phenomena, including speech acts, has been satisfactorily proved, even from a historical perspective (Alonso-Almeida and Cabrera-Abreu 2002). This derives from the plausibility of the ostensive-inferential model of communication as applied to human cognition, which after all, is a universal. Additionally and, as will be apparent from the research reported here, there is a wide range of linguistic resources intervening in the formulation of efficacy statements. These elements may have several pragmatic functions depending on the specific contexts in which they occur, but all of them may be considered to be indicators of *stance*. In the light of their complex nature in terms of both form and function, the analysis of the fragments will be combined with the theoretical insights of the *stance* approach to communication and text construction (Biber et al. 1999). Other works including Kerbrat-Orecchioni (1980), Palmer (1986), Hunston and Thompson (1999), Nuyts (2001a, 2001b, 2012) and Plungian (2001) come to enrich the methodological framework of analysis.

Regarding methodological procedures concerning the quantification of data, corpus-based approaches to Historical Speech-Act Analysis have been specifically characterised by two important issues (Kohnen 2007: 139-141): first of all, the impossibility of making an inventory of all the potential manifestations a speech act may have and, secondly, the existence of

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