GENRES OF SECULAR INSTRUCTION: A LINGUISTIC HISTORY OF USEFUL ENTERTAINMENT

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Methodology

Genre and text type

My method of assessment combines two levels. The first word of the title, 'genre', is a notoriously difficult term as scholars use it in various ways. In my approach, 'genres' are groupings of texts according to language-external evidence: function (here useful instruction), audience (here heterogeneous, including both professional and lay people), and occasion (teaching and learning). In contrast, 'text types' denote classifications made on the basis of linguistic criteria. The two terms are often used interchangeably, but I have found the distinction suggested by Biber (1988) useful. Both terms are abstractions, and provide different ways of grouping texts (Taavitsainen 1997a, 2001a).

Appropriation

Genres display conventions of communication and condition both the writing process and the reception of texts. Their function in the dissemination and appropriation of scientific knowledge is important. Genres are culture-specific and unfold in different ways. They have been assigned a major role in the reception of texts, as they are dynamic cultural schemata used to organize knowledge and

experience through language (for an overview, see Paltridge 1997). According to the already classical formulation, they create "horizons of expectation" for readers to recognize and audiences to share (Jauss 1979, Burrow 1982). The above definition shifts the focus to the recipient. In this connection, the theory of appropriation is helpful as, with appropriate theoretical tools, it becomes possible to detect how useful knowledge was appropriated. The term 'appropriation' means the process by which meaning is negotiated and produced and the ways in which discourses affect the reader and lead to a new form of comprehension of oneself and the world (Chartier 1994: 27, 1995: 89). Thus the meaning of a text is created each time a text is read, produced in a dialogue between the propositions contained in the work and readers' responses to them. The theory of appropriation provides an interesting starting point for the assessment of instruction in the form of useful entertainment aimed at a broad and heterogeneous audience. According to this theory, common cultural sets are appropriated, understood and acted upon differently by different audiences. It is possible to take the insights of this theory one step further and apply them to linguistic text type analysis and stylistic analysis of genres, i.e. texts grouped together by text external criteria. A large part of the material falls under the heading 'popular' literature (Taavitsainen forthcoming). According to cultural historians, 'popular' is a way of using cultural products, and the matter is more complicated than an issue of polarized 'high' and 'low' culture (Burke 1978, Harris 1995). According to a more sophisticated view there are no stable, universal, or fixed meanings, but only plural significations that are constructed according to the competence of the public that adopts them (Chartier 1994: ix-x). Texts have even contrasted uses, as the same text can be perceived in different ways at different times by different audiences, depending on how and in which context it is presented. What we have in these instructive books reflects the author's or the bookseller-publisher's view of their readers' and customers' expectations and abilities.

Readership

Genres need anchoring to their sociohistorical reality, and it is important to address the question of who the readers of these texts were. Secular instruction in Late Middle and Early Modern English was aimed at a wide and heterogeneous audience, but facts about the exact readership are hard to find. Text external evidence, e.g. owner inscriptions, library catalogues and wills give sociohistorical evidence of the distribution of texts, but unfortunately such indications are rare (for the methodology, see Pearson 1994). Literacy was not common and the majority of readers came from the learned elite and upper middle classes. Use of the

vernacular is significant in itself in the multilingual discourse world of scientific writing, though the mention of 'the unlearned' in the prefaces was rather a matter of decorum and a commonplace than a reflection of the real target audience (Slack 1979). The following preface is from an early printed book from 1530 (emphasis in all examples mine):

> Than is this boke necessary to **al men** [...] Than I consayle **euery man to rede this boke, or that cannot rede to geue dylygent eere** to the reder for they shal fynde therin great frute bothe to the soule and body. (*Sidrak and Bokkus*, 1530, CUL, Peterborough Sp. 27, p.ii)

In the course of time literacy became more common, and sales figures of e.g. almanacs reached millions a couple of centuries later (Capp 1979). For example, a handbook like Izaac Walton's *The Compleat Angler* or *The Contemplative Man's Recreation* (1653) is described as

> A "piscatorial classic" [...] read and loved by countless people [...] an exquisite book. There is no dullness and no stagnation; the characters walk briskly, talk vigorously, angle, eat, and drink like cheerful men of the world. The passage of time has given the book a further importance, for it is a pretty "compleat" picture of a way of life that has gone. (Sampson 1970: 322)

Genres of secular instruction: A historical overview

The word 'secular' in the title is intended to rule out the vast field of religious instruction, though religion was so dominant that it cannot be avoided altogether, as Example 2 will demonstrate. My studies for some years have focused on scientific register, especially on medical literature, and much of my present assessment has its starting point in this field. Medicine was the spearhead in many respects: vernacularization in medical writing led the way, and matters of health are of general interest so that the scale is wide. Medical matters are a concern in many other fields of useful writing as well, e.g. how to build houses, how to cultivate plants, how to raise cattle, and so on. Practical advice and advice for a better life seem to be so central that almost all secular instruction in one way or another has a link to it.

I now wish to survey genres of secular instruction in a long diachronic perspective from Old English to Modern English. My list does not include purely literary genres, though some of them can claim a place among useful entertainment, e.g. romances may have had didactic aims, but their primary affiliations are different, and as such they do not belong to the scope of this paper. Subject matters like the wonders of the East and travelogues are nearer to the present concerns, but my

focus is more directly on instruction. The following inventory lists the most important secular genres of instruction.

Old English genres of secular instruction

1. Maxims, riddles
2. Handbooks of (veterinary) medicine, astronomy (including prognostics)
3. Instructive miscellanies like *Salomon and Saturn*
4. Language teaching

Maxims and riddles head the above list. Maxims state facts of life and derive from various sources, e.g. "The apple never rolls so far that it does not make known whence it came" is a translation from Latin (the modern version "The apple doesn't fall far from the tree"), or "Each one who calls desires a response" states a self-evident truth and is of unknown origin. Several maxims coincide with proverbs (for a detailed analysis of maxims, see Cavill 1999). There are handbooks of (veterinary) medicine and astronomy (including prognostics) and remedybook materials include recipes, rules of health, charms and *materia medica*. Entertaining elements are rarely present, but there are texts where instruction is given in more interactive form. *Salomon and Saturn,* for example, is a dialogue touching on miscellaneous matters, and an Old English gloss of Aelfric's *Colloquy* describes various occupations in a dialogue form (see below). After late Old English, there is a gap before the emergence of secular instruction in English in the last quarter of the fourteenth century.

Middle English and Early Modern English genres of secular instruction

1. Encyclopaedias: learned and popular
2. Handbooks of medicine, music, navigation, agriculture, astronomy, etc. (including prognostics)
3. Wisdom literature, including *secreta secretorum*
4. Pastimes of rural life: hunting, hawking, fishing
5. Language teaching

I have put together the Late Medieval and Early Modern periods together, as they are closely connected. The scientific register was introduced into the vernacular in the fourteenth century, and all kinds of utilitarian texts appear in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. There is still unknown ground to be explored, as new texts are being discovered and editions cover only part of extant manuscripts (see Pahta and Taavitsainen 2004). The Early Modern period continues the trends set in the fifteenth century. There are new developments and, in general, the amount of

useful writing of all kinds increases in the aspiring world of Early Modern England. Secular instruction covers a vast area, with both serious and more playful texts.

Encyclopaedias are an important genre of medieval learning with the function of giving explanations and accounts of the universe, man and the animal world. The human condition was seen in terms of correspondences between the microcosm of man and the macrocosm of the universe. Health was understood as the balance of humours; sickness was due to the excess or lack of one of them (see e.g. Getz 1998: 55-6). Learned Latin encyclopaedias include *De proprietatibus rerum,* which deals with theoretical issues like humours and elements and has sections on anatomy and herbs, and the order of angels. Trevisa's translation into English is from the first phases of the vernacularization of learned treatises (1398/9) and was initially undertaken for patriotic purposes (see Wogan-Brown *et al.* 1999 for the preface).

> [1] *De humoribus et eorum generacione effectu operacione. Capitulum 6m.*
> And þere beþ foure humours: blood, flewme, colera, and melencolia [...] **þise foure humours, if þey beþ in euene proporcioun in quantite and qualite, he fediþ alle bodyes þat haþ blood and makeþ hem parfite and kepiþ in þe beinge and state of helþe; as aȝenward, if þey beþ vneuen in proporcioun and infecte, þanne þey brediþ eueles.** [...] So seiþ Galien super amphorismorum.
>
> <div align="right">(Trevisa, ed. by M. C. Seymour et al, 1975: 147-8)</div>

> And there are four humours: [...] These four humours, if they are in balance in quantity and quality, they feed all bodies that have blood and make them perfect and keep them alive and in the state of health; and the contrary, if they are uneven in proportion and corrupted, they breed evils [...] So says Galen super amphorismorum. (All translations mine.)

The English version reflects the multilingual situation as it retains the use of Latin in rubrics, perhaps to emphasize the transfer of knowledge from the world of learning to the vernacular. The academic quality of the work is shown by its impersonal style with passive constructions and references to authorities, typical of Late Medieval science. A concern for accuracy typical of learned texts is also present. An important definition of health as the balance of humours (see Siraisi 1990) is also contained in the passage. This is academic teaching in expository prose.

Matters of health are of general interest, and some kind of knowledge of the basic doctrines must have penetrated all layers of society, forming a common ground and reflecting a world view (see Burrow 1986). Although the world view gradually changed, the same principles lived on in texts written centuries later. Entertaining elements are few at the learned end of the spectrum, but there are encyclopaedias for a general readership as well, and these are important for the present assessment.

Correspondences seem to have been appropriated in different ways by different audiences.

An important genre from the present point of view is handbooks. Handbooks contained useful knowledge including all kinds of advice for improving one's life. Most handbooks were compilations of things one needed to know in one field or another, including music, navigation, agriculture, astronomy, and even household matters, e.g. how to treat servants. Instruction on manners and courtesy books also belong to this branch of literature. Important areas of secular instruction include *secreta secretorum* writings and other wisdom literature (see Mustanoja 1948 and Manzalaoui 1977). The frame of parental instruction is old and derives from Egyptian and classical models. Rural pastimes like hunting, hawking and fishing inspired lots of writings, and educational works include language teaching dialogues, grammar books and glosses. Most of this material is very useful but not very entertaining.

A linguistic history of useful entertainment

Traditional histories of English focus on phonology, morphology, syntax, and lexis, and structures of words and sentences form the basis of the traditional outline. Some more recent histories of English have different foci and view the history from different perspectives: from the point of view of standardization, communication, sociolinguistics, and generic developments. With the new, more comprehensive evidence of corpus-informed data we have achieved more knowledge of linguistic changes and generic developments. The outline of the history of English has become fuzzier.

There is a growing awareness that there is no such thing as a single history; instead there are several overlapping histories depending on the point of view and focus of interest. Genres and registers, for example, behave differently, and processes like standardization take place at different rates in different types of writing (see Diller and Görlach 2001, Taavitsainen 2001b). Pragmatic aspects of the history of English provide a challenge; some studies have already opened up new horizons (Arnovick 1999, Jucker and Taavitsainen 2000, Kohnen 2000, Taavitsainen and Jucker forthcoming, Kohnen forthcoming). This article points in the same direction as it provides an assessment of how meanings of texts are historically constructed and negotiated in interaction between text participants. It is possible to see how this is done concretely, revealing what means are used in works of secular instruction to help the reader. In what follows I hope to show some concrete examples of the use of the interactive dialogic discourse form in the history of English to ensure the reception of instruction in the intended way. This linguistic history includes

macro- and micro-level assessments; both discourse forms and the use of individual linguistic features.

What makes a text entertaining?

The literature of secular instruction is found in various discourse forms and most texts fall into the genres of textbooks, manuals, and handbooks. Instruction and entertainment go together in several texts. The core question for closer assessment is what do we mean by entertainment? At this point it is useful to look up the on-line *Oxford English Dictionary*, which gives the following definitions:

> *entertainment*
> **8. a.** The action of occupying (a person's) attention agreeably; interesting employment; amusement

The definition of *amusement* clarifies the issue further:

> *amusement*
> **5.** The pleasurable occupation of the attention, or diversion of the mind (from serious duties, etc.) [...] **a.** (*in early use*) Idle time-wasting diversion [...] **b.** (*generally*) Recreation, relaxation, the pleasurable action upon the mind of anything light and cheerful; **c.** (*esp.*) Pleasant excitement [...].

One of the quotations refers directly to the present topic:

> **1735** HANWAY *Trav.* (1762) I. 10 We seldom profit by writings that do not afford amusement.

My next question is: What provided useful entertainment in the Late Medieval and Early Modern world? What means are used to engage the readers' minds in agreeable action and pleasant excitement, and at the same time profit the readers by teaching them something useful in a period before the advent of the entertainment industry and modern mass media? The answer may be somewhat surprising. The first item in my answer is *verse*, the second the *underlying text type* with descriptions and narratives at the top, the third is *style*, and the fourth conventional *frames* of literary presentation.

Verse

In the Middle Ages, verse had a very different status from today. It was considered a more elementary mode of expression than prose, which was more sophisticated and associated with philosophy and higher learning. Rhymes were easy to memorize and had links to oral culture. Earlier studies on the transmission of works both in verse and in prose established different audiences for the two modes; prose

was for the learned, while verse was for a more popular audience. The oral quality of verse and devices to aid the memory such as rhyming couplets and common stock rhymes make the contents easy to memorize. An example of a compilation of useful knowledge in verse is *Sidrak and Bokkus*, a pedagogical and philosophical dialogue in verse between a Christian philosopher (Sidrak) and a heathen king (Bokkus). The contents give a digest of medieval knowledge in the fields of science, theology, and moral teaching. Matters of general interest include physiognomy, how to recognize various types of people, useful advice for the right timing of actions, and sexual instruction. The items are dispersed in the text, and knowledge is represented in a simplified and stereotypical form. The work is an encyclopaedia of a popular type, widely disseminated throughout Europe; several dozen manuscripts are extant in French, English, and other European vernaculars (Burton 1998).

The following passage starts with a scientific question, states the basic doctrine of science concerning the elements and complexions, but it soon reverts to a narrative, in this case the canonical story of creation from the Bible. Readers and listeners knew the story and derived pleasure from it (see Frye 1982). The extract also shows how religion was constantly present: the borderline between religious and secular culture did not exist and religion often plays a role in medieval secular writings. It is also noteworthy that this encyclopaedic verse compilation, *Sidrak and Bokkus*, is a narrative that builds on questions and answers (see below).

[2]

Now wolde I wite wheþer wore	scientific
Soule or body made bifore.	question
The body is first made clere and fair	
Of fire and watir, erthe and air;	answer: basic
And þe **iiij complexiouns** þat ere	theory
In man of þise iiij þei were.	
And whanne þe body was made also,	
God of his grace come þerto	
And blewe in him a goost of lyf	
And sithen made of him a wyf,	
And lord and sire made him to be	biblical story
Of al þat he in erthe might se;	
But whan he þe appel ches,	
Clothing of grace he forlees:	
And þat angrid him ful sore	
As ȝe haue herd bifore.	

> Now I would like to know/Whether soul or body was made first.
> The body was made first clear and fair/Of fire and water, earth and air
> And the iiij complexions that are/In man of these iiij they were.
> And when the body was made also/God in his grace came thereto
> And blew in him a spirit of life/And then made of him a wife
> And lord and sir made him to be/Of all that he on earth could see
> But when he the apple chose/He lost the clothing of grace
> And that caused a great deal of sorrow/As you have heard before.

The following passage of the same work serves to illustrate how scientific doctrines were appropriated in this more popular mode of expression. The passage introduces the basic concepts of humours, with a climax in the last line: *were deed anoon,* which refers to the conception of health as balance, but has reduced it to a blunt statement of the cause of death.

> [3] Ca. xxxviij
> Telle me now, if þat þou can,/þe perilousest þinges þat ben in man.
> **Foure colours** a man haþ him ynne/þat of **foure complexiouns** bigynne:
> [...]
> **And if a man of þise wantid oon,/His body were deed anoon.**
> (*Sidrak and Bokkus,* ed. by Tom L. Burton, 1998: 498)
> Tell me now if you can/the most dangerous things that are in man.
> Four colours a man has in himself/that of four complexions have their origins.
> [...]
> And if a man lacked one of these/His body were dead at once.

My next example comes from *The Englishman's Doctor* about two hundred years later, 1607. The verse form is simple. The poem begins with a short summary of theory and an application follows. This is typical, as (according to my studies) applications mark the popular mode (Taavitsainen forthcoming). With applications, serious instruction strikes a more entertaining note; the more popular type of prognostication resembles a game in which different properties and characteristics are assigned to those present.

> [4]
> **Foure Humours** raigne within our bodies wholly,
> And these compared to **foure Elements**,   theory
> The Sanguin, Choller, Flegme, and Melancholy,
> The later two are heauy, dull of sence,
> The tother are more Jouiall, Quicke, and Jolly...

Complexions cannot vertue breed or vice,
Yet may they vnto both giue inclination,
The Sanguin gamesome is, and nothing nice,
Loues wine, and women, and all recreation.
Likes pleasant tales, and newes, plaies cards and dice,
Fit for all company, and euery fashion:
Though bold, not apt to take offence, nor irefull,
But bountifull and kind, and looking chearefull:
Inclining to be fat and prone to lafter,
Loues myrth, and musicke, cares not what comes after.

application

(*The Englishman's Doctor*, ed. by D. A. Talboys)

These examples show how central doctrines were appropriated by heterogeneous audiences. Applications follow the theoretical section, often in a somewhat simplified form. A shift of emphasis has obviously taken place.

Text type

Text types, i.e. groupings made on the basis of linguistic features, provide insights into combining instruction with entertainment. Instruction by itself is one of the prototypical text types, the others being expository, narrative, descriptive, and argumentative text types (Werlich 1982). Instruction is most directly realized in imperative forms and action-demanding sentences. A recipe is a prototypical representative of the instructive text type. It has imperative forms and action-demanding sentences; it is certainly useful but hardly entertaining:

[5]
For any swellinge in Horses backe [...]
Take a pinte Chamberly & about halfe a pound of Hogges
grease & boyle them well togeather & take a Linen cloth &
putt in here & so bath y^r Horse wth this once a day very
well.

(Archdale Palmer. *Recipe book*, p. 161)

Instruction can be very matter-of-fact, even boring. Likewise, expository texts lack an entertaining function (see Example 1). In this respect it is worth attending to the testimony of contemporary witnesses. The explanations of the titles of many works often serve as the author's or publisher's sales blurb to attract potential readers. They give a clue to the reception of these texts.

[6] IOYFVLL NEWES out of the newfound world, wherein are declared the rare and singular vertues of diuers and sundrie Herbs, Trees, Oyles, Plants, & Stones, with their applications, aswell to the vse of Phisicke, as Chirurgery: which being wel

applied, bring such present remedy for all diseases, as may seeme altogether incredible: notwithstanding by practize found out, to be true.

(Nicolás Monardes. *Ioyfvll Newes Out Of The Newfound World*)

The adjectives 'ioyfvll', 'rare and singular', and 'incredible' are used to describe the contents. A promise of profit is given and truth assured. In accordance with the earlier text's passages, applications are explicitly mentioned here. According to this witness, applications together with descriptions of the wonders of the world can engage the reader's mind in pleasant excitement and surprises.

Most pleasure and amusement is, however, derived from narratives. People like to hear stories, e.g. the simplified version of the Creation brings the story to people's minds in an accessible and entertaining fashion. Instruction makes use of narratives in several ways, e.g. they may serve to prove the point and act as efficacy phrases; case reports in medical texts often serve this purpose. A more imaginative and entertaining possibility is to give the whole instruction in the form of a narrative. This indirect form of instruction is important as stories are the main means of providing excitement and engaging the mind in pleasant action. Narrative is one of the prototypical text types and a discourse form with various manifestations. I shall go deeper into this issue by looking at question-answer sequences, mimetic dialogues and their stylistic features and literary frames.

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Discourse form: questions and answers

Questions and answers were originally a classical discourse form, but underwent a development from sophisticated philosophical treatises to turn-taking in textbooks and entertaining commonplaces. Mimetic dialogues are closely connected, and though originally distinct, the forms merge and the traits intertwine in the Early Modern period (Taavitsainen 1999). The discourse form of questions and answers is already found in Old English. Language teaching and learning dialogues have a long history, starting with Aelfric's *Colloquy* composed in the ninth century as a companion piece to a Latin grammar. Teachers asked the questions and pupils were expected to memorize the answer. Anglo-Saxon glosses were added by a contemporary scholar. Several occupations are represented with direct questions, address terms, and interjections, as in this modern translation: "What do you say, plowman? How do you practise your work? Oh, dear Lord, I labour extremely [...]" (for the Old English text, see Mitchell and Robinson 1982: 184).

In addition to language teaching, the question-answer form is found in scientific books, and some fifteenth-century alchemical texts. There is a medical handbook from the fifteenth century, with questions and answers, called *Thesaurus pauperum*. There are long monologic passages revealing that the frame was based on an earlier monologic text. Dialogic elements in the following passage include

address terms and pleas like *tell me*. The answer begins with an expository explanation, but soon the passage turns to applications of the doctrine, such as how to recognize various types of people. This is practical advice, the long lists of characteristics providing entertainment for the readers and listeners (cf. above). This kind of reading is still popular in almanac literature today.

> [7] **Brother**, syth thou hast spoke of malice of complexion, **telle me what is a mannys complexion**, and **wherof it cometh, and whether al men ben of on complexion, or buth nat. Telle me hou I may know a mannys complexion.**
> **Brother, ther be foure humours** in a man, of the which humours a mannys body is norisshed [...] **Blode is hot & moyst** in his kynde, and **therfor men that ben sangweyne in complexion ben hot & moist** in his kynde for plente of blood that they haue. [...] And euery man is of on of this foure complexions. And yf he be changed from on complexion [...] **he shal falle into seknes [...] And me[n] may knowe mannys complexion by hir stature, & by hir colour, & by hir maners.** **For sagnwyne men ben** of medle stature and of rody colour; and thay ben loyung, & large inough in spendyng, & good syngers, & of lawhyng chier, and hardy inough, & benyngne. **Colorik men ben** of hye stature [...].
>
> *(Thesaurus pauperum*, BL MS Sloane 3489, f. 30)

> Brother, since you have spoken of malice of complexions, tell me what is a man's complexion and where does it come from, and whether all men are of one complexion or not. Tell me how I can know a man's complexion.
> Brother, there are four humours in a man, by which humours a man's body is nourished [...]. Blood is hot and moist in its kind, and therefore men who are sanguine in complexion are hot and moist in their kind as they have plenty of blood [...]. And every man is of one of these four complexions. And if he is changed from one to another [...] he shall fall into sickness [...]. And men can know a man's complexion by his stature, by his colour and by his manner. For sanguine men are of middle stature and of red colour and they are loving and large enough in spending and good singers and of laughing disposition, and hardy enough and benign. Choleric men are of high stature [...].

The use of the interactive discourse form increases in the sixteenth century. There are textbooks structured in this form and, in general, the format is commonly used in instruction in the Early Modern period. The most widely spread informative works for centuries were the pseudo-Aristotelian questions and answers. There were several collections: the *Masterpiece*, *Problems,* and *Questions.* Ultimately, these collections stem from classical models, and pseudo-Aristotelian texts from earlier periods, but the contents have been modified. The emphasis is on sexual matters and theories of reproduction (Wear 2000: 192). All kinds of questions are dealt with in a similar pattern.

> [8]

> Q. Why be men's eyes of divers colours?
> A. This proceedeth, saith Aristotle, be reason of the diversity of humours […].
>
> (Aristotle's *Problemata*)

The answers are built on various aspects of humoral theory and the medieval world view is retained. Correspondences are attributed the same explanatory power as centuries earlier though learned literature had already abandoned them. The question-and-answer format is still used in manuals for quick consultation, textbooks, and columns on "most frequently asked questions".

The works that provide useful and amusing entertainment clearly represent the literary side of secular instruction. There are shared areas so that literary and non-literary modes overlap: narratives are used in scientific texts, settings familiar from literary works are quoted in scientific books, and fictional characters are introduced into mimetic dialogues. The borderlines between these modes are not clear, but this interface between literary and non-literary texts is of great interest for the present purpose, as it seems to be an area where useful entertainment and secular instruction meet.

Discourse form: mimetic dialogues

One of the devices to make teaching more entertaining was to cast the contents into mimetic dialogues by introducing fictional characters and setting the conversations in literary frames. This discourse form starts to emerge in the Early Modern English period. In the most skilful examples, secular instruction achieved a new mode. The mimetic dialogue made use of several literary devices and of music. Medieval texts were anonymous, but the authors of Early Modern dialogues are known by name.

William Bullein (c. 1515-1576), one of the most important authors of health guides, is the first known author of mimetic dialogues in medicine. Participants have well-defined roles and present typified characters. Bullein's texts have been recognized for their literary merits (Sampson 1970: 111). *Pills to Purge Melancholy* grows into a social satire: the vice of greed is impersonated by two lawyers and a learned physician in somewhat carnivalistic scenes with vivid dialogue (see Taavitsainen and Nevanlinna 1999). The main contents, however, indicate an affiliation with handbooks and instruction. The literary form is a dialogue set in the frame of the countryside at the time of the plague (cf. *Decamerone*), and the recreational function of literature is explicitly referred to (see Olson 1982). Another handbook, *The Gouernement of Health* (1558-9), is a dialogue between John, a young man sowing his wild oats, and Humphrey, a physician and a wise old man. The frame is adopted from the long tradition of wisdom literature. The following passage is from their dialogue and contains an explanation of the basic doctrines

of humoral theory and the concept of health as balance, again accompanied by applications. The use of Latin emphasizes Humphrey's learnedness.

[9]
Ioh. **What, might not men**, beasts, fish or foule, hearbe or tree, bee of one element as well as of foure? I pray you tell me.
Hum. No, for Aristotle saith: *Deus & natura nihil agunt frustra,* God and nature hath doone nothing in vaine. **And if any thing vpon the earth sencible were of one element, no sicknesse could hurte it, nor disease corrupt it,** but euerie thing liuing vppon the earth, seeing it hath had beginning, it must needes haue ending [...].
Ioh. What is the complexion of the quarters of the yeare, and names of signes?
Hum. The spryng time when bloud doeth increase: Summer [...].
Ioh. What be the complexions of medicines?
Hum. Those things that ouercome and gouerne the body, as purgations [...].
(William Bullein. *The Gouernement of Health*, p. 8)

The doctrine is also given as a song. The entertaining elements have been enhanced, rhymes provide further aid to the memory and songs give pleasant variety to the readers. The role of music and songs as recreation was very prominent, and the insertion of such passages emphasizes the entertaining function.

[10]
Ioh. **Now thou hast taught me** [...], **I pray thee shewe me** some pretie rules of the complections of men, and **that I may aptly knowe them** with their properties, elements, temperaments, and humours.
Hum. **Vpon my Lute** some time**, to recreate myselfe**, I ioine with my simple harmonie, many plaine verses. Among all other **one small song of the foure complections**: wilt thou heare it? Take that chaire and sit downe, and I will teach thee my song.
Ioh. I thanke thee.
Humfrey.
The bodies where heat and moysture dwel,
Be sanguine folkes as Galen tell,
With visage faire and cheekes rose ruddy. (pp. 7-8)
The sleepes is much & dreames be bluddy.
Pulse great and full, with digestion fine,
Pleasantly concocting flesh and wine.
Excrements aboundant, with anger short,
Laughing very much and finding sport,
Vrine grosse, with colour red:
Pleasant folkes at boord and bed.
Ioh. This is a good song, and I will learne it [...]. Now thou hast spoken [...], I praie thee teach mee shortly, howe to knowe the elements [...].
(William Bullein. *The Gouernement of Health*, p. 8)

Stylistic features

A text can be made interesting and appealing to the reader by features that create involvement style and make the contents worth listening to and learning. Such features include personal pronouns of the first and second person to create interpersonal relations, proximal deictic expressions like *here, now, this,* and present tense verbs (see Taavitsainen 1997b). The frequencies of these items are high in Bullein's text, but a frequency count is not enough. It is necessary to go one step further and see how and in what context these personal pronouns are used. This assessment revealed an interesting feature: the first person singular forms are mostly found in speech acts —in thanking, apologizing, complimenting. This is in contrast to most scientific treatises where these pronouns are found in metatext, i.e. comments about the unfolding text. The speech acts are expressions of polite behaviour in interpersonal management and form part of the narrative dialogue. The whole discourse grows to be an interpersonal negotiation of giving and taking good advice, teaching and learning. New topics are regularly introduced by a discourse particle, *now,* and direct questions are frequently used to clarify the topics.

Language is used to structure and express thought and experience in another way, too. Proverbs and maxims are linguistic moulds into which observation and experience are cast. The contents are self-evident truths as the Old English maxim showed. Such commonplaces serve to preserve inherited wisdom and provide pleasure, and they are frequently reverted to at the more entertaining end of secular instruction.

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Literary frames

Literary frames are found in several instructive texts of the Early Modern period. Dialogues are commonly set in a rural background, in accordance with the Latin literary device *loci amoeni* and models taken from classical literature. In the following professional surgical treatises of the sixteenth century, the interlocutors are real surgeons, not fictional characters, and the contents of their discussion an "institution", i.e. a textbook on surgery. Like Chaucer's narrator in *The Book of the Duchess*, the protagonist cannot sleep but rushes out in an early May morning.

> [11] *Iohn Yates.* Phoebus who chasith awaye the darke and vnconfortable night: castinge his goldyne beames on my face, **woulde not sofer me to take anye longer slepe**: but said awake for shame,& beholde the handy worke of our sister Flora, how she… in so muche that the old and wetheryd cote of **wynter**, is quite **done away**… my hart quickened in me, and all desire of slepe was eftsones forgotten.
> **Wherfore I am now cumme into this beautiful mydowe to recreate my selfe**…
> **But let me see? me thinke I perceyue**. ij. men walkinge… I wyll aproche neerer vnto them, perchaunce they be of my acquaintaunce: Suerly I shoulde knowe them. I am

deceyued yf the one be not my frende maister Gale, and the other maister Feilde. It is so in deade. Wherfore I will go and salute them. God that hath brought vs together in to this place, make this daye prosperous and fortunate vnto you both.

Tho. Gale, **Brother Yates** the same we wishe vnto you, & you are welcome into our co~pany.

Iohn Feilde. **This faire and plesant mornynge**, will not soffer maister Yates to kepe his bed: but leuynge the citye, he **rometh the feildes**, to espie oute some strange herbes, vnto hym yet vnknowen.

Iohn Yates. I muste of force confesse, that **you doe hitte the nayle on the heade**... I wolde leaue of my former determinyd purpose, and require you to enter into some **talke of Chirurgerye**... **knowledge**, & **experience**,... **profite**... longe **practise**...: y**ou shoulde meruaylouslye pleasure**

me, and profit other... vnto those that shall here after desire the knowledge | of Chirurgerye.

Tho. Gale. Your request is honest, and reasonable: and therfor not to be denyed.

<div align="right">(Thomas Gale. An Institution of a Chirurgian, f. 1)</div>

The book starts with eloquence, and for example the historical present is used to make it more vivid. The discussion itself contains occasional colloquialisms like *hit the nail in the head,* discourse particles and direct questions, but mostly the discourse is very matter-of-fact and professional, perhaps taken directly from an earlier textbook. The same frame of walking in the countryside while holding a pleasant conversation is employed in Walton's *The Compleat Angler* from 1653.

[12]

Piscator. You are wel overtaken, Sir; a good morning to you; **I have stretch'd my legs up** Totnem Hil to overtake you, hoping your businesse may occasion you towards Ware, **this fine pleasant fresh May day in the Morning**.

Viator. Sir, I shall almost answer your hopes: for my purpose is to be at [...] I wil not say, before I drink; but before I break my fast: for I have appointed a friend or two to meet me there [...] And that made me **so early up**. And indeed, to walk so fast.

Pisc. Sir, I know the thatcht house very well: I often make it my resting place, and taste a cup of Ale there [...] and to that house I shall by your favour accompany you, and either abate my pace, or mend it, to enjoy such a companion as you seem to be, knowing that (as the Italians say) **Good company makes the way seem the shorter**.

Viat. It may do so Sir, with the help of good discourse, which (me thinks) I may promise you, that both look and speak **cheerfully**. And to invite you to it, I do here promise you, that for my part, I will be as free and open-hearted, as discretion will warrant me to be with a stranger.

Pisc. Sir. I am right glad of your answer; and in confidence [...].

<div align="right">(Izaac Walton. The Compleat Angler, pp. 1-2)</div>

The conversation flows more freely in this text and the whole discourse is more consistent in civilised and polite style of interaction.

Conventions in a diachronic perspective

In studying the linguistic features and their stylistic associations, various levels of assessment are possible. The range is considerable, from serious to playful and entertaining, and from matter-of-fact instruction to fictitious dialogue. The interactive discourse form makes the reader more readily involved with the use of direct address, appeals, and questions; verse provides pleasure by rhymes, and various devices like proverbs have an entertaining function. Such stylistic devices are employed to make the scientific doctrines more easily accessible and instruction more personal; the whole discourse takes on an appealing and entertaining tone. An overall description of style can be achieved by tracing the co-occurrence patterns of linguistic features with different functional and conventional associations, but that remains to be done in a future study. This survey proves that there is a great deal of variation within genres of secular instruction, as linguistic realizations of texts and the conventions reflecting social practices of communication vary. The present assessment of a linguistic history of useful entertainment showed an interesting continuity from Old English to Early Modern English in maxims and proverbs and didactic dialogues. The explanations can be found in underlying Latin models. This is a new perspective worth further investigation.

From the present point of view, genre-specific diachronies are interesting. Scholastic features in post-scholastic periods have different connotations from their heyday use (Taavitsainen 2002). Mutability of genres has been emphasized in literary genre theory (Fowler 1982), and the same kind of mutability applies to science, instruction and useful entertainment. For example, recasting the discourse forms but keeping the contents changes the generic affiliation; when a medieval commentary was recast in a new format, it became more accessible to its readers as an instructive text and fell into the textbook genre, and perhaps it became more entertaining as well. With the change of thought-styles and world picture, earlier science became pseudoscience, as the Aristotelian questions show. The contents of the originally scientific doctrines became fossilized and applications gained a more important role. In the course of time the originally sophisticated philosophical discourse form of questions and answers was reduced to more popular uses in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. This shows how earlier high-level science acquired different connotations and different appropriations. Earlier scientific doctrines, for example, became stereotypical maxims. There is indeed a continuity in this circular movement and the dynamics of change become clear: features of former learned writing find their way into texts for "popular" uses, and a vacuum is created at the learned end of the scale, showing that there is room for innovation.

Additional Note

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