

AN ANALYSIS OF *CERTAINLY* AND *GENERALLY* IN LATE-MODERN ENGLISH HISTORY TEXTS*

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Abstract

This paper analyses the adverbs *certainly* and *generally* as stancetaking markers. These adverbial devices are said to show authorial stance and to communicate the author's commitment or detachment towards the information presented, and so they are classified as epistemic adverbs (Alonso-Almeida 2015). For this study, I have selected a corpus of history texts from the Modern English period (1700-1900), as compiled in *The Corpus of History English Texts* (Crespo and Moskowich 2015), on the basis of which the two evidential adverbs are examined using computer corpus tools, although manual inspection is also employed to assess the meaning of the items in context. The findings suggest that, in this type of scientific articles, the two adverbs are used with differing pragmatic functions, in the case of *certainly* it functions mostly as a booster and, in the specific case of *generally*, its use seems to primarily suggest a hedging purpose (Hyland 2005a).

Keywords: evidentiality, epistemic modality, stance, adverb, corpus linguistics

1. Introduction

This paper follows from ongoing research on the category of adverbs in English in a historical perspective. In this case, I show results concerning evidential adverbs *certainly* and *generally* used as stancetaking markers in the eighteenth and nineteenth century texts in the field of history. Most of these adverbial devices are said to show authorial viewpoint and to communicate either the author's commitment or the author's detachment with regard to the information presented in their context (Alonso-Almeida 2015). This is the reason why adverbials have been chosen as the target linguistic strategies in my analysis, and why they have been considered by most scholars in the field as one of the grammatical categories that most clearly contribute to the expression of interpersonal meanings (cf. Biber and Finnegan 1988, Conrad and Biber 1999). For the research purposes, I have focused on a selection of history texts from the Modern English period (1700-1900), as compiled in *The Corpus of History English Texts* (Crespo and Moskowich 2015), a subcorpus within the *Coruña Corpus of English Scientific*

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Writing, from where the two evidential adverbs are retrieved using computerised corpus tools, although manual inspection has also been employed.

Even if much research is still to be done in academic texts from a diachronic perspective, there are some previous studies on stance devices carried out within the field of historical pragmatics (cf. Gray et al. 2011, Simon-Vandenberg and Aijmer 2007, Taavitsainen and Pahta 1997). Following this tradition, I focus on *certainly* and *generally* as examples of a stancetaking feature to see how these forms signal authorial position. My intention is to see whether the analysed adverbs indicate primary epistemic meaning to show degrees of assurance, or there are also some further pragmatic evidential nuances. In my inspection of the instances of the adverbs, I consider the context in which they are embedded. This means especially the syntactic context, since their syntactic distribution may have some important effects on the pragmatics of these and other adverbs, as I have shown elsewhere (Álvarez-Gil 2017). The findings suggest that, in the analysed type of scientific articles, the adverbs are used with differing pragmatic functions; in the case of *certainly* it functions mostly as a booster and, in the specific case of *generally*, its use seems to suggest a hedging purpose in the sense used in Hyland (2005a), as I shall show below.

The structure of the paper is as follows. Section 2 contains the theoretical framework for the analysis of *certainly* and *generally*. This includes the definition of the adverbs as a word-class category along with my own understanding of the concepts of epistemic modality and evidentiality as stancetaking devices. Section 3 is the description of the data analysed as well as the methodology followed in the analysis. Section 4 offers a discussion of the findings. Finally, the conclusions drawn from the present study are presented.

2. Definitions: adverbs, epistemic modality and evidentiality

Adverbs can be considered as a quite heterogeneous word-class category, and this aspect contributes to the difficulty in providing a clear definition of the very category. Van der Auwera (1998), Haspelmath (2001) and Eisenberg (2013), among others, have made explicit reference to this heterogeneity, and they consider this word class

- as being the “most problematic major word class” (Haspelmath 2001: 16543),
- as being an “elusive” (1998: 3) part of speech, and
- as being sometimes “confusing” (2013: 212).

The lack of conceptual unity and the absence of a clear definition of this word-class category and of its scope have led scholars to treat the adverb as an umbrella term for many words which, apparently, are not good candidates for other categories. This can be understood in terms of (a) the diverse morphological structures that adverbs present; (b) the different positions they can occupy within

a clause, and (c) the various syntactic functions they can perform. The resulting problematic situation concerning the misclassification of several words as adverbs has already been highlighted by some scholars (cf. Huddleston and Pullum 2002) who indicated items misclassified syntactically mainly due to formal similarities, including selected cases of adjectives, e.g. *daily*.

Adverbs are often used as stancetaking devices. Stance relates to the expression of the speakers' and writers' "personal feelings, attitudes and value judgements, or assessments" (Biber et al. 1999: 966). Some relevant literature focused on the analysis of stance include Du Bois (2007) and Hyland and Tse (2005). Du Bois (2007: 163) refers to the "stance triangle" when analysing stancetaking in dialogic discourse. The author points out that any act of stancetaking comprises three elements, namely (i) evaluation, (ii) positioning, and (iii) alignment. All this means that whenever we take a stance, we evaluate a certain object, and, at the same time, we position ourselves in an evaluative dimension with respect to that object; and finally, we also associate ourselves with one line of thought. In other words, the stance triangle proposed by Du Bois (2007) emphasises the interactional nature of stancetaking as it necessarily involves specifying (1) where the stancetaker and the subject to whom the stancetaking is targeted stand in relation to the object being evaluated, and (2) where the two subjects stand in relation to each other.

Biber et al. (1999) make a distinction between three main groups of adverbs: (i) circumstance adverbs, i.e. *here, now*; (ii) linking adverbs i.e. *nevertheless, moreover, additionally*; and (iii) stance adverbs, i.e. *really, truly*. Stance adverbs are those that "express the speaker's judgment about the certainty, reliability, and limitations of the proposition; they can also comment on the source of the information" (Biber et al. 1999: 59-60).

In the present study I shall focus on Biber's group three, i.e. the last subcategory. Epistemic stance adverbials (Biber et al. 1999: 59-60) can entail a large number of meanings such as: (a) doubt and certainty, e.g. *perhaps, probably*; (b) actuality and reality, e.g. *actually, in fact, really*; (c) source of knowledge, e.g. *apparently, evidently, according to*; (d) limitation, e.g. *in most cases, typically, mainly*; (e) viewpoint or perspective, e.g. *in my opinion, from my perspective*; and (f) imprecision, e.g. *kind of, roughly*.

On the whole, stance adverbs can be used to indicate the authors' attitude and certainty towards their propositions. The adverbs *certainly* and *generally* are clearly examples of stance adverbs. The form *certainly* can be classified as a perceptual evidential adverb, as it indicates that the evidence the author has for the content s/he expresses has been obtained through the senses. The form *generally*, however, seems to indicate a lower level of authorial commitment to the text content by presenting information in a fuzzier way. These functions represent an evidential and an epistemic value of the two adverbs, respectively.

Evidential devices are "metalinguistic representations of an idea from another source" (Thomas and Hawes 1994: 129) whose function is to indicate the source

of knowledge. Cornillie (2009: 45) takes evidentiality to be a “functional category that refers to the perceptual and/or epistemological basis for making a speech act”.

Evidentiality has a strong relation with the concept of stance; however, the latter is classified as an interpersonal feature being defined as the writer’s viewpoint on a certain subject matter.

Cornillie (2009: 45) takes evidentiality to be a “functional category that refers to the perceptual and/or epistemological basis for making a speech act”. According to Willet (1988), evidentials can be direct, indicating that the speaker/writer has witnessed the action being described, and indirect, indicating that information has been given by someone else or has been obtained through a deductive process. The use of direct evidentials is linked to the acquisition of information through the senses, i.e. visual or non-visual; indirect evidentials, on their part, may belong to the reported category, i.e. first- or second-hand information, or folklore, or to the inferential category.

Evidentiality by many authors is considered to be a subdomain of epistemic modality, in which case it is not only supposed to indicate the writer’s source of knowledge, but also some sort of evaluation regarding the truth of the propositional content. This approach can be clearly seen in the works by Chafe (1986), Palmer (1986), and Kranich (2009).

Other scholars hold the position that evidentiality and epistemic modality are two distinct categories (Alonso-Almeida 2015), both semantically and functionally speaking. One case in point is Cornillie (2009: 46-47), who contends that “[e]videntiality refers to the reasoning processes that lead to a proposition and epistemic modality evaluates the likelihood that the proposition is true”. This is the position held in this paper, even if secondary pragmatic implications concerning the truth of the proposition may be inferred.

3. The corpus and the method

The *Corpus of History English Texts* (henceforth CHET) is a subcorpus of *The Coruña Corpus of English Scientific Writing* being currently developed and researched at the University of A Coruña. CHET covers a period of two centuries, i.e. 1700-1900. The first text in this subcorpus dates back to 1704, and the last text is from 1895. New patterns of thought, and new methodological procedures based on observation started to be common practices after the seventeenth century (Taavitsainen 2017: 83), and all this is reflected in technical and scientific texts. As regards the genres represented in CHET, there are samples of articles, essays, lectures, textbooks and treatises written by both male and female authors (Moskowich 2017). CHET includes ca. 400,000 words distributed in text samples of 10,000 words. The distribution of words per century is well balanced, 201,794 of the words compiled belong to the eighteenth century, and 202,823 belong to the nineteenth century (Moskowich 2016: 116-117).

My analysis of the texts has been done electronically by means of the *Coruña Corpus Tool* (cf. Moskowich 2016: 118), where the corpus is interrogated by inputting the words *certainly* and *generally* to obtain cases of the adverbs in CHET. In those cases where there is either graphemic or spelling variation, examples are conflated and counted together, as this variation has not proven distinctive from a semantic or a pragmatic standpoint. Statistics are given in the form of raw material, but normalised figures to 10,000 words are offered in the comparison of results according to the variable of sex.

The figures following from the analysis of the corpus are also arranged according to position into left and right periphery. Although the literature abounds with definitions of periphery –all of them referring to position in the clause (cf. Rizzi 1997, Aijmer 2015), I have chosen the orientation in Degand (2014: 154):

I define the left periphery linearly as the most leftward positional slot of the utterance, outside the dependency structure of the verb. The right periphery lies outside the dependency structure of the verb, at the right of the non-finite verb (if present). Medial position then corresponds to the dependency structure of the clause (predicate-argument structure with adjuncts), which itself has an initial and a final position. The utterance is thus operationalized in clausal terms.

This terminology is similar to the distinction *initial*, *medial* and *final*, as used in Simon-Vandenberg and Aijmer (2007: 82): “Initial and final refer to the positions respectively preceding and following the other clausal elements. Medial position means that the adverb either precedes (pre-finite) or follows (post-finite) the finite verb directly.” Specific positions of a linguistic unit may indicate particular discursive or pragmatic functions. Elements in the periphery, however, are not considered as “part of the syntactic structure of the unit they accompany... They affect discourse conditions, not truth conditions” (Haselow 2015: 160).

4. Results and discussion

The computerised analysis of the text retrieves 46 cases of *certainly* and 76 cases of *generally*. According to the position of the adverbs in the sentence, these appear, as shown in the graph, below (raw numbers):

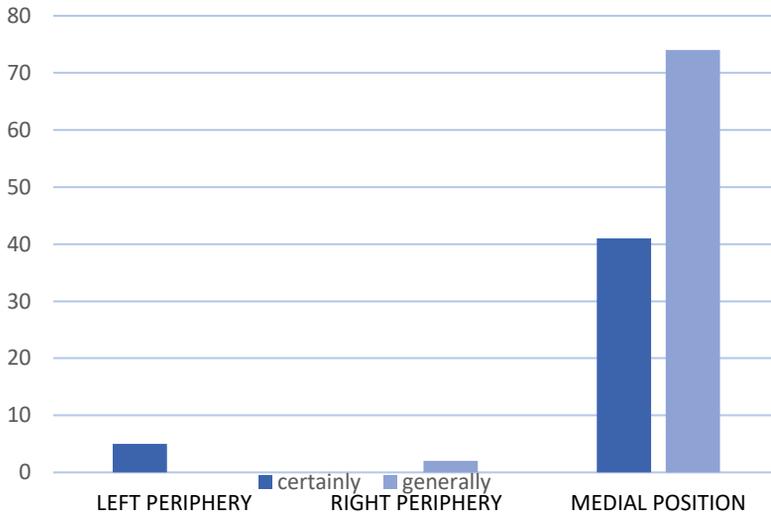


Figure 1. Position of *certainly* and *generally* in sentences (raw numbers).

As shown in Figure 1, quantitative analysis reveals that 74 cases of *generally* are given medially in the sentence, while 2 cases are right periphery. As to the form *certainly*, its occurs 41 times medially, and a set of 5 is left periphery. No cases of *certainly* and *generally* have been identified right or left periphery, respectively. As already said, both *certainly* and *generally* appear to emerge more often in medial position in order to modify the meaning of a verb, an adjective or another adverb rather than elsewhere. The adverb *generally* is not registered in CHET, left periphery, and so this form is not used either to be indicative of authorial stance in focus position to modify the complete proposition.

Certainly is also given in the left periphery on few occasions. In the case of *generally*, two examples have been found to occupy a right-periphery position. Considering the variable of sex, as visually shown in Graph 2, *clearly* is used left periphery by men and women indistinctively, but *generally* has been exclusively identified in those texts written by men. The use of *certainly* and *generally* in medial position is also more common in the discourse of men. *Certainly* in medial position is less frequent in texts by women. In the following sections, I review the use of *certainly* and *generally* in the corpus.

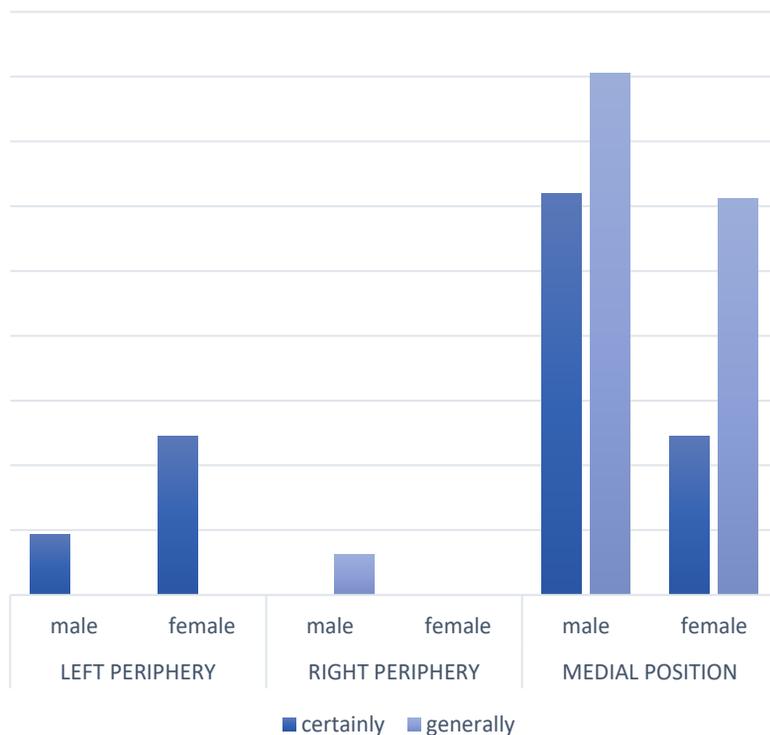


Figure 2. Position of *certainly* and *generally* in sentences according to the variable of sex (normalised figures, N/10,000).

4.1. *Certainly*, left periphery

The adverb *certainly* appears in the texts written by men and women with overuse in the texts by women, as shown in Figure 2, above. Left-peripheral *certainly* holds a dialogic function in that the author's subjective positioning is evinced to indicate authority. This function comes from its metadiscursive potential as a boosting device. At a clausal level, *certainly* designates a consequence logical relationship held between the clause it is in and the previous one.

One instance of *certainly* is given in (1):

(1)

All strategic considerations were lost in the blaze and glamour of anticipated success; and **certainly** if any one could have accomplished the gigantic enterprise it was Napoleon (hist1895Burrows); female.

This specifies the factual status of the information *it was Napoleon*, which the author truly considers to be the outcome of the logical deduction presented in the

relative construction. The adverb *certainly* comes to reinforce the author's view in the context of the information given previously in the text. This boosting effect is somehow attenuated by the conditional included in the *if-clause*. This conditional clause includes evidentiary inferential knowledge as entailed in the use of the structure *could* + perfective 'could have accomplished' indicating the author's subjective elaboration of information.

The boosting effect of *certainly* seems stronger in (2), and, from a discourse perspective, *certainly* suggests a consequence relationship between the two neighbouring sentences:

(2)

He was the first clergyman of the establishment appointed to the parish, and is also stated to have been the first of the body that officiated in the parish church, as tradition asserts, that, before his arrival, the Presbyterians used it as their place of worship; and, **certainly**, the building, in its primitive state, was well suited to their taste, as it had neither spire, belfry, stained-glass windows, nor any of those other ornaments which the Puritans regarded as sinful and ungodly (hist1862Bennett); male.

The use of *certainly* in this instance follows from the author's subjective positioning. The information provided earlier in the text cannot be safely attributed to any identifiable source; yet the author relies on an intersubjective source of information, as identified in the use of "as tradition asserts". In this context, responsibility for the claims made in this passage is collective, even if the use of *certainly* may indicate the author's conclusion. If the instances in (1) and (2) are compared, the former shows a nervier attempt to show information, even if protection of her face only relies on the logical estimate put forward by the use of the conditional. The latter appears to depart from giving a bold expression of self-accountability in his elaboration of information, and the idea of keeping his public face intact seems to lie behind the use of *certainly* initially.

This same reason justifies the use of *certainly* in front position to stress the validity of the complete proposition in (3). The evidential nature of this adverb is explained in the information given back in the text, which presents both evidential and evaluative devices, namely *knowing from his own experience* and *he judged rightly*, respectively.

(3)

Besides employing the poor, he was much fet on instructing them in religion, well knowing from his own experience, that piety is the foundation on which all other virtues must be built. And in that he judged rightly. For **certainly** those are most likely to submit to the evils of life with patience, and to fulfil the duties of it amidst temptations and snares,

who have a firm faith in, and a good hope towards God (hist1780Cornish); male.

The strengthening validity of the evidential device *certainly* contrasts with the use of *generally*, which appears to be used with a clear mitigating effect, regardless its position in the sentence.

4.2. *Generally*, right periphery

The adverb *generally* given finally in the sentence only occurs in those texts written by men. As explained earlier in section 3, the use of adverbials in this position has an effect on the discourse conditions of the text, rather than on the truth conditions. In all the cases of *generally* given in the right periphery seems to be indicative of an intersubjective authorial position with respect to what they describe. The use of the adverb *generally* pursues a mitigating effect, as it avoids offering information accurately. This hedging function of *generally* could be classified as an example of vague language (Cutting 2007: 6): “language that is inherently and intentionally imprecise”. Imprecision in the instances detected in our corpus has a source in the authors’ desire not to be assertive (Carter and McCarthy 2006: 202). Some examples taken from the corpus are included in (4) and (5):

(4)

The strength and vivacity of expression, the beauty and variety of thought are almost inimitable. This excellent author passes over the transactions of the two first propraetors under *Vespasian* lightly and **generally**, but is more full and particular in his relation of what passed during the command of *Agricola* (hist1732Horsley); male.

(5)

In connexion with the history of Tara at this period, two very important events are stated by the modern historians **generally** (hist1839Petrie); male.

In these examples, the use of *generally* appears to suggest both lack of details of the information passed on to them from earlier and contemporary historians. The adverb has here a hedging function to avoid full commitment with the truth of the events mentioned in (4) and (5).

4.3. *Certainly* and *generally* in medial position

The major presence of the adverbs under analysis is found medially in the sentence, as has been pointed out at the beginning of the section. The form *generally* is the most frequent device in CHET used as a premodifier preceding

the verb, with a higher frequency in those texts written by women, as revealed in Table 1.

Table 1. *Certainly* and *generally* in mid-position (normalised figures, N/ 10,000).

	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
	ADV + V		V + ADV		BE + ADV		ADV + BE		ADV + ADJ		ADV + ADV	
certainly	0.50	0.37	0.06	0.00	0.19	0.00	0.03	0.00	0.09	0.00	0.25	0.24
generally	0.99	1.47	0.15	0.12	0.09	0.00	0.09	0.12	0.40	0.00	0.06	0.37

In this chart, figures concerning other modifying uses of these adverbs are offered. These figures also indicate that *certainly* as a postmodifier does not occur after a lexical verb (V) or any form of BE in texts by women, while it shows in texts by men. Women do not use these adverbs as a premodifier with the obliques of BE or with adjectives. In general, this table and the graphs already shown suggest that differences do not really apply to the distribution of these two adverbs. It shows, however, that there is a preference for *certainly* in the texts written by men.

The following instance of *certainly* in preverbal position in (6), the adverb is used to show the author's conviction towards the information he owns. This use of *certainly* is contextually supported by the direct visual evidential *I have seen* given later in the text; in this way, the author shows both his involvement in the elaboration of information, while also arguing for his own responsibility in making this claim.

(6)

As to the precise time of *Barfcube's* Descent, I cannot determine; but this much I **certainly know**, that they were a younger Son of that Noble Family: For I have seen a Charter granted by *Matthew* Earl of *Lenox*, *dilecto consanguineo suo Thomæ Stewart de Terris de North-Bar, Craigtoun, Barfcube; Rashielee, apud Crocftoun 5. Julii Anno 1497* (hist1710Crawfurd); male.

The same sense of conviction is clearly noticed in the use of *certainly* in (7), and so this adverb reinforces the conclusion reached at after the deductive process given earlier in the text. This deductive process is specified in the cotext by the evidential devices *might* and *could* followed by the perfective: *might have been* and *could have remembered*. The reasoning process is also supported by (a) the use of lexical items showing interpretation and degree of subjectivity, namely *speculate* and the result of and (b) by the logical procedure established in the conditional sentence:

(7)

It is not of much use to speculate as to what might have been the result of a Peace in 1797. If the French could have remembered the ancient maxim that „half is better than the whole,” they would **certainly** have left off in their career of conquest at a much better point for the extension of their empire and of their political principles than they secured at the Treaty of Vienna (hist1895Burrows); female.

The use of *certainly* as a postmodifier in mid position after the verb shows the stance of the author and represents evaluative rather than evidential meaning, and this is evinced in (8), below. The adverb in this example comes to be revealing of the author's appraisal of the way the Earl of Sussex should understand the event described.

(8)

Queen Elizabeth, in Scotland, having by his letters from Edinburgh, of the 19th of August, given some occasion to the English court to doubt, whether the Baptism might not be solemnized on the Sunday following, though he had advertised the King on what day the Earl of Suffex began his journey; the Lord Burghley, Lord High Treasurer, wrote to that Earl a letter, the original of which is still extant in the Cotton library, *Calig. D. II.* dated from the court at Greenwich the 28th of August 1594, acquainting him, that if he should understand **certainly**, that the ceremony of Baptism was over, her Majesty's pleasure was, that he should not go into Scotland, nor suffer her present to be carried thither; but that he should, as of his own discretion, without seeming to have direction from the court, advertise Mr. Bowes, that he, the Earl, meant not to come into Scotland, considering, that his message was only to be present at the Baptism (hist1760Birch); female.

The adverb *certainly* occurring with any form of BE can show after and before this verb, as exhibited in (9) and (10):

(9)

It must, however, on the other hand, be carefully noticed, that though the Bill of Rights might not propose itself as any alteration, it was **certainly** a complete renovation of the free constitution of England; the abject state to which the laws, the constitution, and the people themselves, had fallen, must never be forgotten (hist1840Smyth); male.

(10)

But though the bait was visible to people of any sense, to the multitude it **certainly** was in no small degree alluring (hist1800Stock); male.

The position of the adverb in this respect indicates different perspectives, but both instances reinforce authorial position in relation to the statements made. The use of *certainly* in (10) reports on a more solid position and evaluation of the writer towards the information presented and so he shows his entire opposition. The use of this adverb in (9) suggests a less involved authorial stance than the case in (10).

A strengthening effect is also seen in the use of *certainly* preceding adjectives, as in (11) and (12), in which the author makes clearly manifest his position towards the information presented in (11) and an evaluation of the degree of truthfulness of the account in (12). The adverb in both cases can be subsequently categorised as a booster in the sense in Hyland (2000: 179). For Hyland, boosters “are words such as *clearly*, *obviously* and *demonstrate*, which allow writers to close down alternatives, head off conflicting views and express their certainty in what they say” (Hyland 2005b: 52). The use of *certainly* in (11) and (12) below fits within this definition.

(11)

There is **certainly** little in these transactions to countenance any experiments or reasonings of this nature (hist1840Smyth); male.

(12)

He is often censured and sometimes corrected, but the fact seems to be, that without his original, and **certainly** honest account, we should know little about the events and affairs he professes to explain (hist1840Smyth); male.

Finally, mid-position *certainly* preceding an adverb has a clear strengthening effect, and so it might be used to emphasize the meaning of the adverb, as in (13) in which the adverb is used as an intensifier preceding the adverb of negation *not*. The same is true in the case of *certainly* in (14) used as a premodifier to increase the illocutionary potential of the adverb *not*, and so the evidential value of the adverb *certainly* is noticeable. So much so that *obviously* and *evidently* can be synonyms for *certainly* in these contexts:

(13)

But Livy, though one of the moft beautifull, is **certainly** not the moft exact hiftorian (hist1750Chapman); male.

(14)

No incident of the whole life of Laud has exposed him to severer comment than this, and **certainly** not without reason (hist1833Aikin); female.

In the case of *generally*, the use of this adverb in combination with evidential forms, either of a cognitive nature, such as *know* and *understand* in (15), (16) and (17), or of a communicative nature, such as *say* in (18), is interesting. It seems that

the illocutionary force of these evidential verbs is somehow softened by the presence of *generally*, which suggests some vagueness in authorship. In other words, it reports on an unspecified conceptualiser, and consequently attribution is opaque. This means that responsibility for the claims made is shared; hence, *generally* is here representative of an intersubjective device.

(15)

The odious character he had, upon account of his cruelty and lewdness, is **generally known** (hist1732Horsley); male.

(16)

It is not, perhaps, **generally known** that our annals, simple as they may be, reach back nearly two centuries, and are connected in their origin with one of the most remarkable religious orders the world ever saw, a brief notice of which seems to be necessary (hist1884Breese); male.

(17)

In short, neutrality was impossible, both on social and political grounds; and this is now very **generally understood** (hist1895Burrows); female.

(18)

Whilst confined in Carisbrooke castle, it is **generally said** that the king wrote the *Eikon Basilike*; or, Portraiture of his own Sufferings (hist1814Britton); male.

The presence of *generally* as a modifier of adjectives and other adverbs implies some degree of vagueness in discourse in examples (19), (20) and (21), namely *generally monotonous* and *generally great* (ADV+ADJ), and *generally utterly* (ADV+ADV). The intentional use of *generally* to convey vague language in these texts might pursue a mystifying effect, and this emerges from a desire to reduce authorial responsibility in making the claim. Opposite to the use of *certainly* described above, *generally* could be also considered as a negative politeness strategy (Brown and Levinson 1987) to avoid full imposition on readers, while, at the same time, this strategy reduces the chances of a face-threatening act.

(19)

This northern front however is **generally** monotonous in effect (hist1814Britton); male.

(20)

Another of their Amusements is in the Week before *Lent*; which the *Ruffians* call the *Butter-Week*. They go about three Miles out of Town, where the Hills are of great Eminence; and both Men, Women, and Children, divert themselves by fliding down in Sledges. Some will do it in

a most dexterous Manner. But there are **generally** great Numbers, who break their Legs, and Arms. This Diverfion is fo highly honoured, as to have Her Majefty for a Spectator (hist1739Justice); female.

(21)

And it was nothing but the want of union among themfelves that refrained the favages from breaking up all our fettlements, which were **generally** utterly defencelefs (hist1769Adams); male.

In brief, there is a clear distinction between the use of *certainly* and *generally* in mid-position. Their use in the scientific texts analysed reveals that both adverbs are used to clearly show authorial stance. While *certainly* has always a strengthening function, *generally* fulfils a mitigating role. The former is used subjectively, while the latter is used intersubjectively. The form *certainly* is often combined with evidential devices to support the authors' perspectives, and so they seek for some kind of partnership and support in making a claim. The item *generally* indicates reliability on ther external sources, but without really committing to them.

From a gendered perspective, the analysis of *certainly* and *generally* right periphery, left periphery and medial in the clause shows no major difference between men and women in the sense that all of them pursue a desire to use mitigating resources to hedge their claims. Mondorf (2002: 176) reports, however, that women are often said to deploy more attenuating devices than men. Leaper and Robnett (2011) conclude the opposite, and so they hold that "tentative speech should be viewed as both women's *and* men's language" (2011: 139). Evidence collected here, albeit a small amount, comes to confirm Leaper and Robnett's view, although I have shown that women tend to include contextual hedges in the vicinity of assertive claims with *certainly*. Still, this is an earlier observation in the light of the data provided in CHET, and should be checked against data obtained from a much larger and multigenre corpus.

5. Conclusion

In this paper, my overall aim has been to evaluate the adverbs *certainly* and *generally* as used in context in early scientific writings. For this, I have used samples excerpted from the discourse of history texts in late Modern English. It seems that the syntatic position of these adverbs rarely affects their meaning. It is true, though, that the adverbs *certainly* and *generally* do not occur in all positions in the text analysed. The term *certainly* does not happen in the right periphery position, and the item *generally* is not registered in the left periphery in CHET.

From a pragmatic standpoint, results support my initial expectations, and they indicate that *certainly* follows from evidential implications contextually triggering the use of this adverb to reinforce the author's position concerning the information

presented regardless of their syntactic distribution. On the opposite side, there is the use of *generally*, which seems to suggest the author's intention to reduce responsibility by invoking imprecision in language. Likewise, it has been shown that the use of *generally* with evidential lexical verbs serves to downtone the illocutionary force of the proposition either by indicating shared responsibility or by claiming unidentified attribution.

The adverbs *certainly* and *generally* seem to show a dialogic function in the texts analysed, as they help to accommodate the author's viewpoint in their academic community following the tradition of linguistic politeness to avoid imposition. The pursuit for self-protection of their public image is also in the balance, and these adverbs can help in this matter because they are deployed intersubjectively. Otherwise, the form *certainly* would imply a strong deontic force, unless contextually attenuated by the presence of other justificatory claims.

Concerning the variable of sex, this has been a secondary issue in this paper, and much research would be needed in this respect with a larger body of data, as already said in this paper. I have shown that, while all my authors use *certainly* and *generally* with the same discourse and pragmatic functions from a gender perspective, the texts written by women tend to present patterns of the adverbs with a mitigating function supported by contextual attenuating devices. They also include fewer examples of the analysed adverbs with strengthening the function of clarifying their stance. This may show the imbalance existing between men and women scientists, as women had to show themselves in a different hierarchical position in the process of elaboration of meaning. The position implies a higher degree of modesty in an attempt to reach wider acceptance within their male-dominated scientific community. Yet, a full gendered approach on a larger database is still in order as future research to detect possible variation concerning the patterns of tentative language as deployed by men and women along with the definition of the frequency of this type of gendered language patterns.

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