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Deontic Variation in the 'Advice' for the Cure of the Plague by the Royal College of Physicians of London (1665 vs 1636 editions)

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Abstract

The 'Advice' drawn up by the College of Physicians for the prevention and cure of the plague was first published in 1578. It was attached to the *Orders*, a list of directions drawn up by the Privy Council to prevent or limit the spread of the disease. Like the *Orders* to which it was appended, the 'Advice' went through several reprints until 1630, when it had to be rewritten. The 1630 edition of the 'Advice' no longer confined itself to medical prescriptions, but included advice about medical provision in the city, the movement of goods and people, and referred to the political measures taken in foreign cities. In this revised, extended version, the 'Advice' was reprinted in 1636 and in 1665, when it finally appeared without the preceding *Orders*. This paper focuses on the pragma-linguistic changes displayed by the 1665 edition as compared with the 1636 edition of the 'Advice' in terms of mood and modality (Palmer 1986) and argues that the more mitigated expression of deontic modality and the preference for assertive acts over directive ones (Searle 1985) characterizing the later edition reflect the new editorial and historical context in which the text was produced.

Keywords: *Deontic 'Might', Diachronic Variation, English Modal Auxiliaries, Historical Pragmatics, Normative/Instructional Discourse*

1. Introduction

The article focuses on pragmatic variation in the use of deontic modal auxiliaries and other linguistic expressions of permission/prohibition, obligation and necessity occurring in two editions of a seventeenth-century prescriptive text for the cure and prevention of the plague, one published in England before the Civil Wars (1642-1651) and the other after the Restoration, at the outbreak of the Great Plague. The text in question is the authoritative 'Advice' of the Royal College of Physicians of London written 'by

the Kings Maiesties¹ special command', which not only provides 'natural' recipes for medicines but also gives advice on political remedies against the infection. The 'Advice' can thus be considered an instructional/directive text type (Werlich 1983) of a hybrid sort, as it displays both the features of legal discourse and those of procedural discourse (Longacre 1996) in terms of syntactic structures, modal auxiliaries and speech act types. However, this had not always been the case.

The 'Aduise set downe ... by the best learned in Physicke within this Realme, contayning sundry good rules and easie medicines', first published in 1578,² merely touched upon natural remedies for treating or preventing the plague in the form of recipes, and gave advice on how to clean houses and clothing and perfume the air. It was appended to the '*Orders, thought meete by her Maiestie, and her priuie Councell, to be executed throughout the Counties of this Realme, in such ... places, as are ... infected with the plague*', a list of seventeen directions drawn up by the Privy Council to prevent or limit the spread of the disease. Like the *Orders* to which it was attached, the 'Advice' was reprinted in 1593, 1603, 1625 and 1629 without any or 'no more than minor alterations of style'³ (Slack 1985, 209) until 1630, when it had to be rewritten.

The 'Advice' of 1630 came in a volume with *Certain Statutes*,⁴ the *Orders* concerning health, and a *Decree against Inmates and new Buildings*. It already differed from the previous editions (1603, 1625 and 1629) in the title, where 'the best learned in Physicke within this Realme'⁵ was replaced by 'the Colledge of Physicians',⁶ and the generic 'sundry good Rules' became 'certaine necessary directions', to signify that the 'Advice' had undergone substantial revision and that suitable regulations gave way to indispensable directions for the cure and prevention of the plague. These directions did not confine themselves to medical prescriptions, but included advice about medical provision in the city, the movement of goods and people, the burial of the dead, the appointment of doctors, apothecaries and surgeons for the cure of the infected, and referred to the political measures taken in foreign cities. In this revised, extended version, the 'Advice' was published again in 1636 (when it was no longer appended to the *Orders* dated 1603 but preceded them), and in 1665, when it finally appeared without the *Orders*.

The 1636 edition was not just a reprint of the 1630 edition. It displayed major changes in the ordering of paragraphs (for example, it opens with the paragraph 'Doctors, Apothecaries and Chirurgions' which features ninth in the 1630 edition), in the number of paragraphs (e.g., the paragraph 'Publique Prayers' of the 1630 edition is omitted from the 1636 edition, although

¹ 'The Kings Maiesties' are the King and the Privy Council. This applies to the 1630, 1636 and 1665 editions, not to the first edition (1578), written 'upon her Maiesties expresse commandement'. This particular is left unspecified in the 1603, 1625, and 1629 editions.

² The 1578 version of the text quoted above as 'Advice' is listed in the Primary Sources of the *Works Cited* section under the heading *An Aduise ...* (1578); the text to which it was appended is listed as *Orders ...* (1578); the 1636 and 1665 editions of the 'Directions' for the Cure of the Plague are listed under the heading 'Royal College of Physicians of London' followed by the date of publication of the different editions. The same reference appears after passages quoted from each of these texts.

³ Alterations in spelling and punctuation.

⁴ The Statutes are articulated into a Proclamation and four Acts concerning the management of the poor, of rogues and beggars, of soldiers and mariners, and of people infected by the plague.

⁵ *An Aduise set downe by the best learned in Physicke within this Realme, containing sundry good Rules and easie Medicines, without charge to the meaner sort of people, aswel for the preseruacion of his good Subiects from the plague before Infection, as for the curing and ordering of them after they shalbe infected* (1603, 1625, and 1629 editions).

⁶ *An Aduise set downe by the Colledge of Physicians, by his MAIESTIES speciall Command, containing certaine necessary Directions, as well for the cure of the Plague, as for preuenting the Infection; with many easie Medicines and of small charge, the use wherof may be very profitable to his MAIESTIES Subiects* (1630, 1636, and 1665 editions).

it survives in the first clause of the opening paragraph;⁷ the paragraph 'No visited person to be secretly removed without Licence' is excised in 1636 and its content merged with 'Caution concerning flying into the Countrey'; the paragraph 'Vomits' is an addition of the 1636 edition), and in a few additions and alterations within the paragraphs (for example, the widows of doctors, apothecaries and chirurgions 'shall have the moitie of their husbands' pensions during their lives' in the 1630 edition, whereas in the 1636 edition they 'shall have their [husbands' entire] pensions'; the indication 'for forty daies' referring to the period of isolation necessary for imported goods or people travelling from suspected places appears in the 1636 edition for the first time). These alterations are kept in the later edition of 1665, which was by no means a mere reprint of the previous edition, as argued by Slack (1985, 222) and Cook,⁸ but diverges significantly from the 1636 version in terms of deontic modality and in the way of giving directions. The quasi-equivalence in structure and content between the 1665 and the 1636 versions makes the latter a better testing ground than the 1630 edition for measuring pragmatic differences, which, it is here argued, reflect the weakening authority and power of the College resulting from the scientific and constitutional controversies of the mid-seventeenth century.

2. *The Royal College of Physicians of London: 1630-1665*

The Royal College of Physicians was founded in 1518 by Cardinal Wolsey⁹ 'in order to improve English standards of medical care, along the lines suggested by humanist physicians like Thomas Linacre' (Slack 1985, 201) and prohibit the medical activity of unqualified persons. Linacre was an eminent scholar and was becoming known in Europe as a translator of Galen, whose medical-philosophical creed was embraced by College members. Besides granting licenses to qualified physicians, punishing irregular medical practitioners and malpractice (both licensed and unlicensed) in London and 'within seven miles of the City' (Cook 1986, 20), the College was to have 'by inference ... an undefined authority over apothecaries' (Clark 1965, 79).¹⁰ The legal authority (or power) to imprison or fine irregulars and to enforce censorship was granted to the College by the crown and Privy Council during the epidemic decade of the 1550s (Pelling 2003, 21), and confirmed by a series of statutes and legal declarations over the years. It is clear, therefore, that the College needed royal protection and support to exercise its regulatory activity and power over the medical community of London. The professional authority of the College members came from learning and inner discipline (or good character) acquired during long university educations, to which the key concepts of judgment and advice were related (Cook 1994, 4).

For a collegiate physician, the essence of his profession was not to cure the sick, but to offer good advice about health to preserve it, prevent illnesses, and prolong life. This belief had

⁷ The clause reads 'The Church orders for praier being first observed as in former times, it is thought necessary that ...'.

⁸ 'On May 17 [1665] ... members of the College met at the request of the Privy Council to consider what was to be done about the plague in order to advise the council and the lord mayor of London. A little book of remedies was reprinted, and delegates from the College presented one copy to the Privy Council and another to the lord mayor' (Cook 1986, 155-156).

⁹ According to George Clark the College was founded 'by a charter of King Henry VIII' who granted the prayer of six physicians (led by Thomas Linacre) petitioning 'on behalf of the physicians of London that they might be incorporated as a college' (1965, 79). The charter 'was given statutory authority by an Act of Parliament in 1523' (Cook 1986, 20).

¹⁰ An act passed in 1540 'authorized the physicians to search apothecaries' shops and to practice surgery, effecting the imperial idea that physicians were the superiors of all medical practitioners' (Cook 1994, 8).

its roots in the medical ideas of the ancients concerning mind and body. If a person followed reason, s/he would go along an appropriate course of life and stay healthy, because health was a matter of personal responsibility. Sickness was the effect of a disharmony between a person's world/environment and his/her behaviour or temperament (13), and the physician's task was to change the patient's wrong habits by way of good advice to restore his/her health. This meant that in time of plague, when there would be little or no chance of restoring health, the duty felt by the collegiate physician was to give his 'elite clientele ... advance notice, upon which they would leave the capital, drawing the physician in their train' (Pelling 2003, 55). This occurred even during the 1630 plague epidemic notwithstanding the King's requests that college fellows should view corpses and treat infected people.

The absence of physicians during epidemics was a moral issue that ultimately undermined the College's authority and credibility, given the contrasting presence of other practitioners in situations of emergency. The objectionable, uncharitable behavior of collegiate physicians was often exploited by their opponents to make claims, petition against them or just to attack their reputation. Already in the 1630s, for example, the Society of Apothecaries claimed a right to practice physic on the grounds that during the recent plague they had been compelled to care for infected people because of the absence of the physicians. In 1647, the quack William Trigge sent a petition to the House of Lords where he denounced the flight of most college physicians in the 1630 and 1636 plagues and described his charitable work with the infected (Wallis 2006, 13). In 1665, William Thomson published a pamphlet (*Loimologia*) where the ethical obligation of medical practitioners to aid and assistance was represented as a professional standard rather than an exceptional virtue, a view at odds with the general acceptance of the physicians' freedom to withdraw their aid during epidemics.¹¹

The growing need for remedies to diseases also contributed to questioning the notion of the learned physician as mere adviser. In the context of the scientific revolution of the seventeenth century, clinical experience and knowledge of how to treat illnesses were becoming the new sources of authority in physic. These values were at the heart of the new medical philosophy derived from Paracelsus and van Helmont and advocated by chemical physicians (iatrochemists), virtuosi (i.e., the supporters of the new science) and apothecaries.

Paracelsism had been circulating in England since the 1580s, but it was not until 1640 – when Laudian censorship and central authority collapsed – that the ideas of the Paracelsian reformers gained in popularity (Elmer 1989, 19). Paracelsian and Helmontian physicians believed in the interaction of medicine and religion and in the unity of body and soul, and therefore they posed a threat to Galenic medical orthodoxy based on the dichotomy body-soul and the separation of science and theology. They believed that the purpose of medicine was therapeutic rather than preventive, and claimed that chemical remedies were far more effective and less dangerous than Galenic preparations (Cook 1987, 66). The Helmontians, in particular, saw plague as a distinct entity and not, as the Galenists held, as resulting from an imbalance in the humours (Slack 1985, 249); moreover, they criticised the practice of phlebotomy in cases of plague, because the blood was 'the seat ... chamber and magazine of life' (Biggs quoted in Elmer 1989, 16 n. 15) and therefore bleeding weakened the vital spirits.

While the epistemology underlying the new medicine occasioned much controversy during the Interregnum (1649-1660) and was substantially rejected by medical orthodoxy, some of the new ideas were accepted. Evidence can be found precisely in the 1665 edition of

¹¹ Quite significantly, the College responded to these and former repeated attacks on ethics by granting the presence of more physicians during the 1665 plague than in earlier epidemics.

the 'Advice' (revised on 25 May 1665 and printed soon after) where it is first said that 'bleeding, purging and vomiting ... rarely have place in the Plague, but are generally dangerous' (Royal College of Physicians of London 1665, 20); and, in the same text, where chemical prescriptions are included for the first time, albeit in the last page, without instructions for their use or information on their composition, and with the self-distancing and somewhat ironic premise: 'Those that are delighted with Chymical Medicines onely, may make use of some of these following ...' (35).

These inclusions and the contrasting skepticism manifested towards chemical therapies allow us to glimpse some of the issues that were going on when the 1665 'Advice' was revised and published. One of them is the intellectual confusion or ambivalence which the College had been experiencing since the 'puritan revolution' and which derived 'from the attempt to be, simultaneously, scientifically progressive and medically conservative' (Brown 1970, 13). In other words, the collegiate physicians were divided on their attitudes towards the new philosophy: while some of them were attracted by the new medicine and open to alternative and better methods of treatment, others were worried that chemistry and the new philosophy might diminish the dignity of academic physic and put the learned physicians on a par with their unlearned rivals.

Another issue is the attacks on traditional medicine from medical reformers (i.e., iatrochemists and virtuosi) combined with the sympathies that chemical medicine had attracted both among the aristocrats and gentlemen of the Court¹² and among clerics (including the Archbishop of Canterbury), to which the College could not be indifferent. Quite significantly, one of the points made by the anonymous author of *A Letter Concerning the Present State of Physic* (published in 1665) was that if medicine was to be reformed along experimental lines, 'chemical medicines must be better incorporated into the practice of the physicians' (Cook 1987, 65).

If the advent of empiricism and the new science weakened the College's intellectual preeminence and authority, socio-political circumstances diminished its power and institutional prestige. The decline of the College had in fact begun in 1640 with the collapse of central authority, when the Long Parliament began to dismantle the Privy Council, although this was never formally abolished. It was revived under Charles II (1660-1685), but 'The Privy Council of 1665-1666 was not quite the Council of 1630-1 ... it ... lacked the confidence of its predecessor' (Slack 1985, 223) as it could not ignore Parliament. We may assume that the lack of confidence characterising the Privy Council in 1665 was extended to the College, since the Privy Council was, with the crown, the College's chief source of power. After the Restoration, the College lost part of its political authority within the seven-mile limit, and it seems that it did not exercise its judicial functions 'with any vigour' (Clark 1964, 320). With the return of the bishops, episcopal licensing of physicians began again¹³ and impacted negatively on the number of extra-licenses granted by the College, which declined sharply after 1664 (Clark 1964, 316-317).

Historical evidence that 'the powers of the College had been seriously weakened' (Cook 1987, 62-63) by 1665 is the fact that a year before (April 1664) the House of Commons had refused to ratify the College's new royal charter (written in 1663) which would restore certain powers undercut by a verdict in 1656. This verdict, issued by the Chief Justice St. John in reaction to the College's unjust monopoly and prosecution of good practitioners, had left the College 'with no statutory existence', and 'had a very important impact on the College's judicial powers for more than twenty years' (Cook 1986, 131), that is, well beyond 1665.

¹² 'Charles II himself practiced chemistry in a laboratory he built on the grounds of Whitehall palace' (Cook 1987, 68).

¹³ Episcopal licensing was suspended during the Civil Wars and the Protectorate.

The fact that the College's bill was not approved by Parliament in 1664 was a blow which not only left the College members 'in a frail institutional and legal condition' (Cook 1987, 64) but also posed a threat to the preeminence of learned physic, if we consider that the charter had been opposed, among others, by the Society of Apothecaries, the Barber-Surgeons' Company and the virtuosi. So considerable was the support gained at Court by chemical empirics that within a year after the House of Commons vetoed the charter, they created the Society of Chemical Physicians and made an attempt (led by Thomas O'Dowde) to obtain a royal charter for it in open rivalry with the College of Physicians. This attempt consisted in a pamphlet that strongly condemned the Galenists and ended with two petitions, one for incorporation and another, signed by thirty-eight noblemen and gentlemen, in support of the chemists (67). Although in the end the chemical physicians failed to obtain legal endorsement,¹⁴ the consensus manifested at Court for the Society 'meant that the intellectual as well as the institutional standards of the medical status quo were being subverted' (61). We shall see in sections 4 and 5 below how all this is reflected in the linguistic choices characterising the 1665 edition of the 'Advice'. But before delving into textual analysis, a few words on mood and modality are in order.

3. *Mood and Modality*

'Mood' and 'modality' are terminologically and conceptually related. The term 'mood' refers to a morphosyntactic category of the verb (such as indicative, subjunctive, and imperative) which can be realised inflectionally but may also be expressed with modal verbs (e.g., we demand that the witness *take/should take* the stand). In other words, mood can be considered 'grammaticalized modality' whose function has been 'fairly removed from ... semantics' (Palmer 1986, 22). 'Modality' is, on the other hand, a semantic category which basically has to do with the expression of possibility/probability/certainty (epistemic modality) and permission/obligation/necessity (deontic modality).

Epistemic and deontic modalities have received most attention in language studies, but a third type termed 'dynamic'¹⁵ (Palmer 1986, 1990, 2001) and expressing ability/capacity is also recognized. Epistemic modality is concerned with matters of opinion, knowledge and belief (Lyons 1977), more precisely, with the speaker's attitude and commitment to the truth-value or factual status of what s/he is saying (propositional modality) (Palmer 2001, 8) (e.g., It *may* be raining). Deontic modality relates to obligation or permission coming from an external source or laid/given by the speaker on/to the addressee, it 'refers to events that are not actualized' (*ibid.*) (e.g., You *must/may* come tomorrow) and 'that will obtain if the act in question is performed' (Lyons 1977, 823). Dynamic modality refers to the ability or willingness of the person¹⁶ (e.g., He *can* speak Japanese; I *will* do it for you) (Palmer 2001, 9-10).

In English grammar, modality is mostly realized by modal auxiliaries,¹⁷ epistemic auxiliaries being *may, might, must, should, ought to, can, could, will, would* and deontic auxiliaries *may, might, must, ought to, should, shall, need*. As can be seen from these lists, the two types of modality can

¹⁴ The collegiate physicians managed to show that some of the chemists were quacks and anarchists (Cook 1987, 74-75).

¹⁵ Goossens (1987) uses the term 'facultative'.

¹⁶ In fact, dynamic modality is also meant to include 'possibility in a more general sense' (Palmer 2001, 10) (e.g., I think there's a place where I *can* get a cheap kettle), possibility which can be paraphrased as 'it is possible for ...' and which is termed 'root possibility' by Coates (1983, 95). This type of possibility can also be expressed by *may* in formal contexts, and is distinguished from epistemic possibility (e.g., 'I *may* be a few minutes late'), which can be paraphrased as 'it is possible that ...'/'perhaps' (132-133).

¹⁷ Modality can be grammatically realized by mood, particles and clitics (Palmer 1986, 33).

be expressed by the same auxiliaries. For example, the statement 'He *may* come tomorrow' can be interpreted either as '*Perhaps he will* come tomorrow' (epistemic possibility) or as '*He is permitted* to come tomorrow' (deontic permission) (Palmer 1986, 19). Epistemic meanings can also be expressed by *I'm sure, surely, certainly, I think, I suppose, I would guess, it seems to me*, etc., which may combine with modal auxiliaries (*may* or *must*) to reinforce or mitigate speaker's commitment (Coates 1983, 46, 138). Deontic meanings can be also expressed by '*it is necessary, advisable, compulsory, imperative, appropriate, important*, etc.' (see Quirk *et al.* 1989, §16.72). From a functional perspective, epistemic modality is realized by assertive speech acts (which express judgments), while deontic modality is typically realized by directives¹⁸ and, less typically, by commissives (acts in which the speaker imposes some obligation on someone else and on him/herself, like promises and threats) and assertives (deontic statements such as 'It's wrong to tell lies') (Lyons 1977, 828).

Diachronic studies on English modals have privileged the deontic auxiliaries *must, shall* and *will* (Goossens 1982; Traugott 1989; Gotti 2001, 2002; Traugott and Dasher 2002; Kaita 2013; Yanovich 2016). Historical investigations on *may/might* and *can/could* address their epistemic uses only. For example, Goossens (1982) includes *may/might* in his short study on the epistemic usage of the OE verbs *sculan* and *willan* (which gave rise to the modal auxiliaries *shall/should* and *will/would* respectively); Kytö (1991) contrasts *can/could* and *may/might* in British English vis-à-vis the expression of ability, root and epistemic possibility in past and non-past uses between 1500-1710; while Kakietek (1970) contrasts epistemic *may* and *might* in early modern English focusing on Shakespeare's works. The present article on deontic variation will attempt to fill a gap in historical research on English modal auxiliaries by addressing the issue of the deontic use of *may* and *might* with non-past reference.

4. *The 'Advice' of Physicians of 1665 (vs 1636): Directions for Preventing the Infection*

The 'Advice' of Physicians (both 1630 and 1665 editions) consists of 27 sections or paragraphs. The first 7 sections of the 1665 edition (8 sections in the 1636 edition) contain directions 'for preventing the infection', while the remaining 20 sections (19 in the 1636 edition) give directions 'for the cure of the plague'. The expression of necessity which is clear from the title (*Certain Necessary Directions*) is much more salient in the opening paragraphs devoted to prevention than in those dealing with remedies against the infection, because preventing was more important than curing (see section 2 above). For this reason, the two types of directions will be discussed separately.

4.1 *The Opening Paragraph of the 'Advice'*

Both editions of the 'Advice' open with the paragraph 'Doctors, Apothecaries, and Chirurgions':

1.

1a) ... , it is thought necessary that by the government of the City there be appointed six or fowre Doctors at least, who may apply themselves to the cure of the Infected. (Royal College of Physicians of London 1636, n.p.)

1b) It might be desired, that by the Government of the City there be appointed six or four Doctors at least, who may apply themselves to the Cure of the Infected. (Royal College of Physicians of London 1665, 1)

¹⁸Directives are 'utterances which impose upon someone the obligation to make a proposition true (or to refrain from making it true) by bringing about (or refraining from bringing about) in some future world the state-of-affairs that is described by the proposition' (Lyons 1977, 823-824).

In both cases we have a subject clause introduced by the phrase ‘*is + adjective*’ which ‘expresses the speaker’s attitude of mind concerning the activity in the subject clause by declaring it ... desirable, ... necessary’ (Visser 1984, §866). In (1a), the phrase ‘*is ... necessary*’ forms a semantic cluster with *must* (Coates 1983, 27), the deontic modal for strong obligation (equivalent to ‘I order you to do so’) (Coates 1983, 32-33). Its deontic strength, however, is weakened by the epistemic/hedging verb ‘*thought*’ (which leaves room for non-compliance on the part of the agent whom the speaker is trying to influence) and by the passive voice, both of which diminish the degree of imposition on the target (i.e., legal authorities who are to follow/enact the physicians’ advice), but do not diminish the speaker’s commitment to what is being said.

The phrase ‘*might be desired*’, again in the passive, is deontically weaker than ‘*is thought necessary*’, because ‘*desired*’ qualifies the actions to be taken against the plague as preferred rather than essential. The speaker is suggesting more than demanding action, and therefore the degree of imposition placed on the agent is lower. At the same time, ‘*desired*’ expresses a lower degree of commitment and involvement to what is being said, while the hedging auxiliary *might* further diminishes commitment by making the phrase more tentative. The physicians appear less authoritative in giving directions to the local authorities.

4.2 *The Second Paragraph of the ‘Advice’*

The second paragraph carries different titles in the two editions, but is very similar in content:

2.

2a) **Men or goods from foreign infected places.**

It is likewise necessary that there be care taken that neither men nor goods may come from any suspected places beyond the seas or in the land, without certificate of health, or else either to be sent suddenly away, or to be put to the Pesthouse or some such like place for forty daies (according to the custome of *Italy*), till the certainty of their soundnesse may be discovered. (Royal College of Physicians of London 1636, n.p.)

2b) **Prevention of Propagating the Infection from place to place.**

... it is advisable, that some suitable provision be made in relation to Persons within the Kingdom, who may remove or travel from Places much infected, to sound: as, That none might travel without Certificate of Health; that Persons justly suspected might not be suffered to enter such Places free from Infection, but speedily sent away, or kept in some House or Houses set apart to receive such persons ... for forty or thirty days at least, till their soundness might appear; And that any Goods coming from the like Places might be opened and aired, before received into Houses free and clear. (Royal College of Physicians of London 1665, 2-3)

This time the phrase ‘*is necessary*’ (1636), contrasts with ‘*is advisable*’ (1665). Coates observes that while ‘(it is) necessary for sb to do x’ (1983, 27) is associated with strong obligation, the paraphrase ‘*advisable for*’ forms a semantic cluster with *should* and *ought to*, the modal auxiliaries used for expressing weak obligation. In the 1665 version, therefore, the physicians are again suggesting more than urging local authorities to act, and appear both less committed and less authoritative/injunctive. The more tactful attitude of the physicians may also be due to the type of action they are proposing, i.e., ‘some suitable provision’ (instead of some generic ‘*caretaking*’) (1636), which they qualify as ‘*suitable*’ as if to imply that the measures taken until then by the government to forbid the movement of people in times of plague were unsuitable or ineffective. In other words, the criticism possibly implied in ‘*suitable*’ requires a mitigated expression of obligation (i.e., ‘*it is advisable*’ instead of ‘*it is necessary*’) to avoid the risk of sounding reproachful.

4.2.1 *May and might in Purpose/Result Clauses*

And now we come to the thorny issue concerning the use of *may* and *might* in subordinate clauses of purpose or result (i.e., that neither men nor goods *may* come) (2a, 1636), that none *might* travel) (2b, 1665). In present-day English *might* 'is sometimes found in subordinate clauses functioning as quasi-subjunctive, as the past form of quasi-subjunctive *may*' (Coates 1983, 165). Coates provides the following example from the Lancaster corpus and observes that this usage 'is very formal and normally restricted to written language' (*ibid.*):

3. He had made the reasonable suggestion ... that immigrants with bad criminal records in this country *might* be deported. (*Ibid.*)

Although this example matches with (2b) in terms of register, the two are hardly comparable for a number of reasons: a) the subordinate clause in (3) is an object clause dependent on a directive verb, not a final/purpose clause; b) the clause is introduced by a verb in the past, and therefore the auxiliary *might* has past-time reference with respect to the time of speaking, whereas in (2b) it is future-oriented; c) *might* expresses possibility in (3), whereas in (2b) it has a 'denied) permission' sense; d) while in (3) '*might* can be omitted ... without changing the meaning'¹⁹ (*ibid.*), removing *might* from (2b) would alter meaning.²⁰ As a matter of fact, while today 'I *might not* do x' has only an epistemic meaning (i.e., 'it is possible that I will not do x') (Coates 1983, 238), in the 1665 edition of the 'Advice' '*might not* do x' is being used with the deontic sense 'not possible for x ... / not permitted to do x', just like '*may not* do x' in the 1636 edition. To the best of my knowledge, the use of *might* combining deontic meaning with future-time reference has never been addressed in the literature on English modals.

4.2.2 *May and might in Present-day English*

In present-day English, *may* and *might* are more easily comparable in terms of epistemic than deontic strength, because *might* has lost the 'giving/denying permission' sense that *may* still has. *Might* has preserved its deontic 'permission' sense for asking permission (e.g., *Might* I come in at the moment on this, Chairman?), and in this use it is considered 'a more tentative, more polite, form' (Palmer 2001, 74) than *may*, as well as 'rare and apparently obsolescent' (Quirk *et al.* 1989, §4.53). *Might* is also used as the past form of *may* in reported or indirect requests for permission²¹ as in 'you asked if you might draw £ 20' (Coates 1983, 147), (i.e., 'was/were permitted to'). However, unlike *may*, *might* can be used deontically for making 'quite positive' (Palmer 2001, 74) suggestions²² (nota 22) (e.g., You might try nagging the Abbey National), and therefore it 'apparently ... expresses a stronger deontic modality than *may* – a positive suggestion rather than mere permission' (*ibid.*).

¹⁹ Here, the periphrastic construction with the modal auxiliary *might* is a variant of the mandative subjunctive (i.e., 'be deported'), which in present-day English is found in *that*-clauses 'introduced by an expression of demand, recommendation, proposal, resolution, intention, etc.' (Quirk *et al.* 1989, §3.59). On the mandative subjunctive in Early Modern English see Fillbrandt (2006).

²⁰ Another example with *might* functioning as quasi-subjunctive in a subordinate (purpose) clause is 'The jury and witnesses were removed from the court that they *might not* hear the arguments of the lawyers' (Quirk *et al.* 1989, §15.48 n. [b]). Here, again, *might* has past-time reference and expresses 'possibility', not permission, and, the authors observe, the verb phrase could be substituted for *should not hear* or *not bear*.

²¹ Quirk *et al.* (1989, § 4.61 n. [a]) observe that outside indirect speech this use is 'rare and archaic' (e.g., We *might* leave the school only at weekends).

²² Traugott (1989, 40) characterises this type of use as 'polite command', exemplified by 'You *might* go'.

Might is generally considered weaker than *may* also in terms of epistemic strength, as the form ‘used to express greater tentativeness’ (Palmer 2001, 14).²³ A different view is held by Coates, who claims that there is not ‘any actual linguistic evidence’ supporting this interpretation and that her data suggest that *may* and *might* ‘in their epistemic usage, are usually interchangeable’ (1983, 147). These contrasting positions are also witnessed by the Cambridge Dictionary online (2021), where we read ‘Many native speakers disagree on which one expresses more or less certainty’,²⁴ but then the Dictionary seems to take Palmer’s side in paraphrasing ‘The restaurant *might* close’ as ‘There is only a possibility that the restaurant will close but no one is very sure’ and ‘The restaurant *may* close’ as ‘It is likely that the restaurant will close’, thus attributing a much lower degree of certainty to *might*. In what follows, I will attempt to establish whether in the 1665 edition of the ‘Advice’ *may not* and *might not* were equivalent in their deontic ‘prohibition’ sense, or whether *might not* was being used as the tentative form of *may not* for denying possibility/permission.

4.2.3 ‘*may/might not* + infinitive’: *Different or Equivalent in Meaning?*

From Visser (1978, §1653-1687) it is possible to have a comprehensive picture of the uses of ‘*may/might* + infinitive’ in Early Modern English. We shall focus on those uses that are most relevant to our issue, viz. uses which involve deontic meaning, future-time reference, syntactic environment (i.e., the use of *might* in subordinate clauses) and type of discourse.

Might was used as the past form of *may* with the deontic meaning of ‘permission or sanction, in the past’,²⁵ (e.g., Neither the ancients nor moderns ... ever asserted that they could make one place two; but they *might* hope ... that the change of scene might lead the imagination to suppose the place altered) (Dryden 1667, quoted in Visser 1978, §1662). Quite interestingly, it seems that *might* could be used with present or future-time reference as a more hesitant and polite form than *may* to ask for permission. Visser points to a quote from Lyly: ‘But until something may be madeready, might I be so bold as enquire your names?’ (Lyly 1980, quoted in Visser 1978, §1662), illustrating this use, which is also possibly found in ‘Forgive me, Jaspar! Oh, what *might* I do, Tell me, to satisfy thy troubled ghost?’ (Beaumont and Fletcher 1613, quoted in Visser 1978, §1673). Anyway, neither use corresponds to that of *might* in (2b).

When used with future-time reference, *might* expressed ‘ability, capacity, possibility²⁶ and permission’, as in the following cases quoted in Visser 1978, § 1673, e.g., ‘so might we call a man of Inde white, because of his white teeth’ (More, c.1512), ‘It might raise him To act some violence upon himself’ (Congreve 1697). Visser observes that *may* and *might* are ‘approximately equivalent’ (1978, § 1673) in meaning in structures such as ‘men *may/might* think’ and ‘as I *may/might* say’ for expressing opinions. However, he also reports some quotes from twentieth century grammarians (i.e., Millington-Ward 1957; Strang 1962) on the difference in meaning between *may* and *might* in predictions such as ‘I *might* go’ or ‘it *might* rain’, where *might* is said

²³ See also Halliday 1970; Langacker 1978; Carter and McCarthy 2006.

²⁴ <<https://dictionary.cambridge.org/it/grammatica/grammatica-britannico/could-may-and-might>> (accessed 4 May 2022).

²⁵ *May* was used to express prohibition or sanction ‘allowed by authority, law, rule, morality, etc.’ (e.g., Thou maist not grudge agaynst thy kyng) (Visser 1978, §1661).

²⁶ ‘Hypothetical possibility’ according to the OED (e.g., I my self seeme to consume the time, which otherwise on my booke *mought* be employed) (Fleming, 1576) (*Might* not every Governour and Generall upon this pretence deliver up any Fort?) (Prynne and Walker 1644) (Visser 1978, §1673).

to express a lower degree of commitment and 'a smaller degree of future possibility' because it is 'an implied conditional' having a 'softening effect' (Visser 1978, § 1673).²⁷

In example (2b) above *might* is neither used to express or report opinions, nor to make predictions. Its force is deontic rather than epistemic for at least two reasons: first because the speech acts where *might* is used have a directive rather than an assertive force (Searle 1985);²⁸ second because the meaning of *might* is textually conditioned. Let us see why. In legal texts such as regulations, statutes and the like *may* 'is to be understood as equivalent to *shall* or *must*' (OED), that is, as expressing obligation: 'Where a Statute directs the doing of a Thing for the sake of Justice or the publick Good, the Word *may* is the same as the Word *shall*' (Salkel a1715).

The question is whether *might* could be understood as equivalent to the correspondent past form of *shall* (i.e., *should*), and whether *should* could be used as a weaker deontic modal with present or future-time reference. Although nothing is said about the use of *should* in legal language either in the OED or in Visser (1978), evidence that *should* was associated with hypothetical meaning (compatible with conditionality and with a lower degree of both probability/possibility and obligation/necessity) comes from the fact that it was used 'in statements of likelihood, prediction, etc.' and 'in statements relating to the necessity, justice, propriety, etc. of something contemplated as future, or as an abstract supposition' (e.g. It is most just, that all their faults *should* be imputed to yee) (Milton 1641, OED).

When used in purpose clauses, *may* and *might* were markers for the subjunctive and expressed 'eventuality or objective possibility'²⁹ (Visser 1978, §1676). Visser points to the semantic equivalence of the two auxiliaries when he refers to Charles Coote's remark on the improper use of the past form *might* for the present tense *may*³⁰ (exemplified by 'I am come, that they *might* have life, and that they *might* have it more abundantly') (John 10:10), of which Visser says: 'here *may* would be more proper than *might*, as it is more correspondent with the tense of *I am come*' (Visser 1978, § 1676).³¹ A different view on the interchangeability of *may* and *might* in purpose clauses is held instead by Rissanen, who claims that 'the choice between the present and preterite in non-past contexts seems to depend on the emphasis given to the tentativeness of the proposition' (1999, 238).

In the light of the above discussion on *might* being the mitigated form of *may* for both deontic (asking permission) and epistemic (future possibility) uses in non-legal discourse, and given the other linguistic choices made by the physicians in terms of a less peremptory and committed attitude in the 1665 version of the 'Advice', we can safely argue that the use of *might (not)* to the exclusion of *may (not)* was not given to chance. The notion of conditionality and uncertainty that *might* carries with it mitigates the deontic component of the auxiliary and emphasizes the fact that the physicians are not urging action, they are merely suggesting it. Conditionality also emphasizes the fact that the behaviours to be forbidden (i.e., travelling,

²⁷ A softening effect of *might* is also acknowledged in questions as 'What *mought* I call your name, pray?' (Dekker 1630 in Visser 1978, §1675).

²⁸ Further evidence that *might* is deontic is the fact that in the phrases 'none *might* travel' and '*might not* be suffered to enter' it is the modality to be negated (no permission), not the proposition ('It *might* be that it is not so') (see Palmer 2001, 103).

²⁹ Whether *might* was more frequently associated with epistemic possibility than *may* (as was the case with the pattern '*might/may* be + past participle') (Visser 1978, §1656, 1760) is not made clear.

³⁰ A similar tendency is found in clauses depending on verbs as wish, demand, desire, etc. Visser (1978, §1678) quotes Brittain (1778, 107): 'The preterit is sometimes mistaken for the present tense; as, "What wilt thou that I should do unto thee? – Lord that I *might (may)* receive my sight"'.
³¹ The opposite phenomenon (i.e., the use of *may* for *might* in the context of a past tense) is also found (OED).

entering places) or made obligatory (opening and airing of goods) are subject to the enforcement of some 'suitable provision' of which the College is not directly responsible. Again, the physicians appear less committed and involved.

Lack of involvement and commitment are especially clear from the following alteration of the 1636 version found in the same paragraph (i.e., second) of the 'Advice':

a) till the certainty of their soundnesse may be discovered. (Royal College of Physicians of London 1636, n.p.)

b) till their soundness might appear. (Royal College of Physicians of London 1665, 3)

Although both structures are impersonal, in a) the passive voice in collocation with the word 'certainty' hints at some agent that has been suppressed and that coincides not only with 'doctors, apothecaries and Chirurgions', but also with the physicians themselves, because only those who have medical competences can determine complete recovery. The import of the word 'certainty' is in fact twofold: it is a semantic trigger for health professionals, and it strongly commits these to the accuracy of their assessment. In a) medical authorities are entirely responsible for the time that infected people are kept in quarantine and ultimately for the spread of the disease. In b), where the word 'certainty' has been removed and an intransitive active verb replaces the passive construction, there is no expressed or understood human agent to be held responsible. Coates (1983, 137-138 and 151) observes that *might* and *may* are found in combination with semantically harmonic phrases (e.g., 'I suppose', 'I'm not sure') 'whose meaning implicitly involves fuzziness' (Lakoff 1973, 471). These expressions are clearly avoided in regulations, but in b) vagueness lies in the verb phrase itself, where *might* has a tinge of epistemic meaning ('possibly') and where the intransitive lexical verb 'appear' does not trigger any definite perceptive entity.

4.3 *The Third Paragraph of the 'Advice'*

The third paragraph of the 1665 edition of the 'Advice' is hardly comparable to its correspondent paragraph of the 1636 edition in terms of content except for the sentence 'It were also to be wished ... offensive' (Royal College of Physicians of London 1665, 4).

4.

4a) **That all established good orders *be revived*.**

That the Statutes and good Orders made and formerly published against common Beggars, against all manner of Plaies, Bowling-allies, Inmates, Tipling-houses, Lestalls, against the sale of corrupt flesh or fish, may be reuiuied and strictly executed, and that the Skauengers in generall, and euery particular housholder take care for the due and orderly cleansing of the streets and priuate houses, which will auaille much in this case. ... It were also to be wished that the Slaughter-houses were utterly put from out the liberties of the City, being in themselves very offensiue ... (Royal College of Physicians of London 1636, n.p.)

4b) **Prevention of dispersing the Contagion amongst Persons.**

It is advisable, That all needless Concourses of People be prohibited ... And it were to be wished, that Vaults for Privies might be emptied onely in Winter: and that Soap-suds and Liquours wherein foul Clothes are washed or rinsed, might, as much as may be, be otherwise conveighed, than through the Stréets and Gutters, or washed away with plenty of water. ... It were also to be wished, that the Slaughter-houses were utterly put from out the Liberties of the City, being in themselves very offensive ... (Royal College of Physicians of London 1665, 3-4)

There are, however, a couple of observations to be made about modality and linguistic choices. In the 1665 version, 'it is advisable' is again substituted for 'it is necessary'. It was said above

that 'it is advisable' is semantically cognate to *should* and *ought to* which, Palmer argues, 'do not strictly lay an obligation, but merely indicate what the speaker thinks is right' (2001, 76). In both versions we find the weak deontic expression 'it were to be wished' (which can be paraphrased as 'it were desirable') (OED) whose tentativeness is given by the use of the past tense, a grammatical feature that can have a modalising function (Palmer 2001, 13). In the 1665 edition, this expression occurs twice and is followed by two different forms of the verb, i.e., the synthetic subjunctive 'were + past participle' (i.e. 'were ... put') in the sentence left unchanged from the 1636 version, and the analytic subjunctive with the past modal auxiliary '*might* be + past participle' (i.e., '*might* be emptied' and '*might* ... be ... conveyed'). The question is whether the two alternatives are functionally equivalent, that is, whether or not the analytic form in (4b) has the mere morphosyntactic function of expressing the modality of the unit (Visser 1978, §1678).

The physicians of 1665 quote the sentence with the synthetic subjunctive ('It were also to be wished that the Slaughter-houses *were* utterly put ... very offensive') *verbatim* from the 1636 edition. Interestingly enough, they use the same sentence structure and introductory phrase ('it were to be wished') to give advice on some issue which is not addressed in the 1636 edition, but instead of keeping the same verb pattern, they replace 'were emptied' and 'were conveyed' with '*might* be emptied' and '*might* be conveyed' respectively. Consciously or unconsciously the physicians are softening the force of their directions because these have to do with new preventive measures, for which they are taking full responsibility. Reproducing or keeping a portion of text unaltered entails some assumption of responsibility as well, but if its content is already legitimated, the burden of responsibility is not entirely on the text producer's shoulders. In other words, the more tentative stance of the physicians when giving new advice can be explained with their diminished authority and power, which makes them less entitled to the role of instructors vis-à-vis political authorities. The hedging modal *might* is thus indexical of the physicians' subordinate position, reduced entitlement, and of their very weak attempt to get the Privy Council and the Lord Mayor to carry out a certain course of action. The College appears less self-confident and less committed to the effectiveness of the new preventive measures it is suggesting.

It must be said, however, that the low degree of self-confidence displayed here may also depend on the little knowledge that medical science had acquired on preventing the contagion. Not by chance, the physicians appear a lot more self-confident and injunctive in the fifth paragraph of the 1665 edition of the 'Advice' (entitled 'Directions for the Searchers' and missing from the 1636 edition), where they give instructions to the searchers on how to diagnose the symptoms of the plague:

5. They are to take notice whether there be any Swellings, Risings, or Botch under the Ear, about the Neck, on either Side, or under the Arm-pits of either Side, or the Gruins, and of its hardness, and whether broken or unbroken. (Royal College of Physicians of London 1665, 5)

4.4 *The Fourth Paragraph of the 'Advice'*

The experience and knowledge gained from past plague epidemics can explain the following alteration made to the fourth paragraph of the 'Advice':

6. **To be cautious upon any suspicion**

6a) IT is to be feared, because every one desireth his owne liberty, that none will giue notice of any suspicion of the Plague against themselues; wherefore that must be the Ouerseers care, vpon any notice or

suspition of Infection, by the helpe of the Doctors, Chirurgions, Keepers or Searchers, to finde out the truth thereof, and so to proceed accordingly, but not to depend vpon the Testimony of women Searchers alone. (Royal College of Physicians of London 1636, n.p.)

6b) IT is to be presumed, because every one desireth his own liberty, that none will give notice of any suspition of the Plague against themselves; wherefore that must be the Overséers care, upon any notice or suspition of Infection, by the help of the Doctours, Chirurgions, Kéeppers or Searchers, to find out the truth thereof, and so to procéed accordingly, but not to depend upon the testimony of Women-searchers alone. (Royal College of Physicians of London 1665, 4)

In 1665, the prediction is introduced by a phrase ('it is to be presumed') that emphasises the probability of occurrence of a certain behaviour given certain premises. The text displays an informative intent and relies on the expectation of a certain consequence to get the addressee to act with circumspection. In 1636, by contrast, the introductory phrase 'it is to be feared' makes the directive intent more perspicuous and the deontic potential stronger, because it relies on a powerful emotion like fear to move the reader to action. It is also vague about the speaker's degree of certainty expressed, and therefore it is epistemically weaker. The physicians appear less confident in the event predicted than in the 1665 edition.

5. *The 'Advice' of Physicians of 1665 (vs 1636): Directions for the Cure of the Plague ... with Many Easy Medicines ...*

A different attitude of the College can be detected in the paragraphs devoted to the remedies and medicines 'for the cure of the plague' and for preventing it. Werlich observes that the illocutionary function of an instructive text is that of eliciting action, and that its surface structure typically consists of 'action-demanding sentences in sequence' (1983, 41). From example (7) we may see that this illocutionary function is more perspicuous in (7a) than in (7b), where an informative function seems to prevail. This is due to the presence in (7a) of imperatives (i.e., 'take', 'put', 'let') and of a deontic statement counting as mild advice where the presupposition that the suggested course of action would be good for the receiver (Vanderveken 1990, 197) is plainly expressed in the phrase 'it were good that':

7.

7a) **Preseruatiues. Correction of the ayre.**

FOr the correcting of the infectious aire, it were good that often Bonfires were made in the streets, and that sometime the Tower Ordnance might be shot off,³² as also that there be good fiers kept in & about the visited houses and their neighbours. ...

Take a quantity of Vineger very strong, and put to it some small quantity of Rosewater, ten branches of Rosemary, put them all into a bason, then take fiue or six flint stones, heated in the fire till they bee burning hot, cast them into the same Vineger, and so let the fumes be receiued from place to place of your house. (Royal College of Physicians of London 1636, n.p.)

³² The use of the tentative '*might be* + past participle' can be explained here with the lack of scientific or empirical evidence for the effectiveness of the type of action they are suggesting. Note also how the verb phrase with *might* collocates with the hedging 'sometime' while the verb phrase 'were made' (also dependent on 'it were good that') collocates with 'often'. This seems to confirm the fact that *might*-modalised verb phrases are not just morphosyntactic variants of the synthetic subjunctive, which in fact seems to be much less tentative, if at all.

7b) **Correction of the Air.**

Fires made in the Streets often, and good Fires kept in and about the Houses of such as are visited, and their Neighbours, may correct the infectious Air; as also frequent discharging of Guns.

Also Fumes of these following materials; Rosin, Pitch, Tarre, Turpentine, Frankincense, Myrrhe, Amber; ... one or more of these ... are to be put upon Coals and consumed with the least flame that may be, in Rooms, Houses, Churches, or other places. ...

Vapours from Vineger exhaled in any room, may have the like efficacy; ... To which Vineger also, to render it less ungrateful, may be added Rosewater, to a fourth or third part: These are cooler, and so more proper for hot seasons. ...

Take Salt-perer, Amber, Brimstone, of each two parts, of Iuniper one part; mix them in a powder, put thereof upon a red hot iron, or coals, a little at once. (Royal College of Physicians of London 1665, 7-8)

The physicians' involvement in (7a) contrasts with their detachment in (7b), where the speaker's attitude of mind (i.e., volition) is hidden behind general statements in which the modal auxiliary *may* ('*may correct*') signifies lack of commitment to the truth of the proposition expressed, and where a nominal style is used: 'discharging of Guns' (1665) vs 'the Tower Ordnance might be shot off' (7a 1636).³³

The preference for declarative over imperative clauses in (7b) (as opposed to 7a) not only contributes to making the text more impersonal (because the demands for a certain behaviour are not presented as the physicians' own demands and are not receiver-oriented either), but also tells us that the physicians are not invoking their authority in giving medical advice, and therefore the deontic force of the text is weaker. Strong obligation is only expressed in (7b) above and (8b) below by the passive construction with the quasi-auxiliary 'be to' + past participle', which again emphasizes objective necessity and lack of speaker's involvement.

8.

8a) **By perfuming of apparel.**

SVch apparell as you shall commonly weare, let it be very cleane, and perfume it often, either with some Virginia Cedar burned, or with Iuniper, and if any shall happen to be with them that are visited, let such persons, as soone as they shall come home, shift themselves, and ayre their clothes in open ayre ... for a time. (Royal College of Physicians of London 1636, n.p.)

8b) **Perfuming of Apparel.**

THis also may preserve from infection, being done by some of the more grateful of the dry fumes of the Gumms, &c. before mentioned to be burnt; and between whiles frequent shifting and airing of apparel may be, especially by the Fire, or in the Sun, the more effectual; this to be done the rather, if one hath come in danger of infection. (Royal College of Physicians of London 1665, 9)

6. Conclusions

This essay has aimed to show how linguistic variation can reflect social and historical changes. This has been done by analysing two editions of a seventeenth century regulatory text for the cure and prevention of the plague by focusing on deontic (and marginally, epistemic) modality. The text in question is the 'Advice' for the cure and the prevention of the plague by the Royal College of Physicians of London, published at the outbreak of the 1636 and the 1665 plague epidemics in England, that is, before and after the Civil Wars.

³³ See also (8b) ('frequent shifting and airing of apparel') vs (8a) ('let such persons ... shift themselves and ayre their clothes').

The two editions of the 'Advice' display significant differences in the way of giving directions and in terms of personal involvement which, it has been argued, can be ascribed to the intellectual and political controversies that had undermined the College's authority and power. Before the Civil Wars, the College enjoyed considerable legal and professional authority over the medical community of London owing to the protection and support of the King. The decline of the physicians' intellectual authority began in the 1630s, when they were attacked by the Society of Apothecaries for their absence during the 1630 and the 1636 epidemics, and when a new medical philosophy, Paracelsism, began to gain popularity among aristocrats and clerics. The decline of its institutional power began instead in the 1640s, when the Long Parliament began to dismantle the Privy Council (i.e., the College's chief source of power), and even when this was restored after 1660, its power was subject to Parliament.

The linguistic cues that have been identified as indexical of the collegiate physicians' institutional and ideological frailty are those expressing a lower degree of (self-)confidence and those through which the physicians appear to be making a weaker attempt to get things done (i.e., appear less authoritative). For example, by replacing 'it is thought necessary' with 'it *might* be desired', they qualify the actions to be taken against the plague as preferred rather than essential, and therefore they are suggesting more than demanding action. The modal auxiliary *might* has emerged as a key discourse feature for downgrading both deontic and epistemic strength. In the 'Advice', *might* is used for diminishing the speaker's degree of imposition on the addressee, the speaker's commitment or confidence, and involvement. The section devoted to the remedies against the infection in the 1665 edition looks more informative than instructive in terms of macro-textual function, due to the prevalence of statements of facts over deontic statements and imperative clauses, and to the presence of nominalizations, which contribute to making discourse more impersonal and project a sense of detachment and lack of involvement.

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An advise set downe upon her Maiesties expresse commaundement, by the best learned in Physicke within this Realme, contayning sundry good rules and easie medicines, without charge to the meaner sort of people, aswell for the preseruatiō of her good Subjects from the plague before infection, as for the curing and ordring of them after they shalbe infected, London, By Christopher Barker, Printer to the Queenes most excellent Maiestie, 1578.

Orders, thought meete by her Maiestie, and her priuie Councill, to be executed throughout the Counties of this Realme, in such Townes, Villages, and other places, as are, or may be hereafter infected with the plague, for the stay of further increase of the same. Also, an advise set downe upon her Maiesties expresse commaundement, by the best learned in physicke within this realme, contayning sundry good rules and easie medicines, without charge to the meaner sort of people, aswell for the preseruatiō of her good subjects from the plague before infection, as for the curing and ordering of them after they shalbe infected, Imprinted at London by Christopher Barker, Printer to the Queenes most excellent Maiestie, 1578.

Royal College of Physicians of London (1636), *Certain necessary Directions, aswell for the Cure of the Plague, as for preuenting the Infection; With many easie Medicines of small charge, very profitable to his Maiesties Subjects. Set downe by the Colledge of Physicians by the Kings Maiesties speciall command. With sundry Orders thought meet by his Maiestie, and his Priuie Councill, to be carefully executed for preuention of the Plague. Also certaine select Statutes commanded by His Maiestie to be put in execution by all Iustices, and other officers of the Peace throughout the Realme; Together with His Maiesties Proclamation for further direction therein: and a Decree in Starre-Chamber, concerning buildings and*

In-mates, Imprinted at London by Robert Barker, Printer to the Kings most Excellent Maiestie:
And by the Assignes of Iohn Bill.

Royal College of Physicians of London (1665), *Certain necessary directions as well for the cure of the plague, as for preventing the infection: with many easie medicines of small charge, very profitable to His Majesties subjects. Set down by the Colledge of Physicians. By the Kings Majesties Special Command*, London, Printed by John Bill and Christopher Barker, Printers to the Kings most Excellent Majesty.

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