

“IF THEY ARE NOT, THIS IS UNNECESSARY”: EXAMINING THE AVOIDANCE OF “THEN” AFTER “IF” IN WOMEN-AUTHORED TEXTS*

Luis Puente-Castelo
Universidade da Coruña

ABSTRACT

This study examines the uses of “then” in “if... then...” structures, with a particular focus in their use (of lack thereof) by women authors, the evolution in their use over time and whether these uses are linguistically prompted or not. To do so, CHET, CEChET and COWITE, three corpora of eighteenth and nineteenth-century texts including texts on history, chemistry and mostly recipes, will be examined, and cases will be manually disambiguated and analysed. The results will show how the distribution of the use “if... then...” structures depends on both socio-historical and linguistic constraints, with a first stage in which its use is freer, reflecting its widespread use in the scholastic tradition, and a later phase in which the use is mostly reserved to linguistically and contextually prompted cases, mostly to avoid ambiguity and after long or complex conditional clauses. The apparent preference of women authors to avoid “if... then...” structures is confirmed, with the cause hypothesized as a reflection of their experiencing a lighter scholastic influence.

KEYWORDS: Conditional Structures, Correlative Structures, Scientific Register, Female Authors, Scholasticism.

“IF THEY ARE NOT, THIS IS UNNECESSARY”: LA AUSENCIA
DE «THEN» TRAS «IF» EN TEXTOS DE AUTORÍA FEMENINA

RESUMEN

El estudio analiza el uso de then en las construcciones condicionales *if... then...* en textos de los siglos XVIII y XIX, con especial atención a la escritura femenina y a su evolución histórica. A partir de tres corpus especializados (CHET, CEChET y COWITE), los ejemplos se analizan manualmente para distinguir factores lingüísticos y sociohistóricos. Los resultados apuntan a una evolución en dos fases: un uso inicial más libre, heredero de la tradición escolástica, y una etapa posterior en la que *then* se restringe a contextos lingüísticamente motivados. El análisis confirma una tendencia de las autoras a evitar estas estructuras, posiblemente relacionada con una menor exposición a dicha tradición.

PALABRAS CLAVE: estructuras condicionales, estructuras correlativas, registro científico, autoras femeninas, escolasticismo.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.25145/j.recaesin.2026.92.09>

REVISTA CANARIA DE ESTUDIOS INGLESES, 92; abril 2026, pp. 199-213; ISSN: e-2530-8335
[Licencia Creative Commons Reconocimiento-NoComercial 4.0 Internacional \(CC BY-NC-SA\)](#)



1. INTRODUCTION

In 2016, a study on the uses of “if...then...” in CEPHiT, the subcorpus on philosophy in the Coruña Corpus of English Scientific Writing, containing samples of philosophy texts from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, found, among a number of other interesting findings, that there was no single use of “if... then...” in the texts authored by women included in the corpus (Puente-Castelo 2016, 174).

Although the scarce total number of texts written by women precluded any definite conclusion, the results were, nevertheless, intriguing. “If... then...” sequences are interesting in that the use of “then”, being voluntary and often stylistic, can often be explained by a number of linguistic factors, such as the length of the subordinate clause. At the same time, these sequences, as one of the prototypical examples of logical argumentative language, are considered as particularly characteristic of scholastic discourse (Taavitsainen 1999, 249), a preference which could influence the results.

A number of competing hypotheses could be posed to explain the absence of “if... then...” in these texts authored by women philosophers: It could be a reflection of disciplinary differences at the time, with philosophy (and women philosophers) being particularly prone to use conditionals without “then”; it could be a particular characteristic of female writing, with the absence of “then” after “if” being a consequence of the different ease of access to education and textual production men and women experimented during the scholastic period; or it can also be simply a result of idiosyncrasies in the compilation of the corpus: there are only three female-authored samples in CEPHiT, and all three were published in the eighteenth century.

In any case, to check these hypotheses it is necessary to extend the analysis further to include other corpora. The ones selected for this study are, on the one hand, two further subcorpora of the Coruña Corpus of English Scientific Writing, namely CHET and CEChET, including c. 400,000 words each of texts on respectively, history and chemistry, authored by both male and female authors; and, on the other hand, COWITE, a corpus of instructive texts written by women, whose 18th and 19th century sections total more than one million words. These will be examined to find uses of “if... then...” and thus, first, check if the results are similar to the ones for CEPHiT, and, second, try to find the answer as to why women seem to avoid using “then” in conditional structures.

In what follows, section 2 examines the uses of “if... then...” sequences in detail, identifying several linguistic and contextual features which seem to promote the use of “then”. Section 3 presents the description of the different corpora and the methodology used, whilst Section 4 features the analysis of the results. These are later discussed in Section 5, which also includes some tentative conclusions.

* The research reported here has been funded by the Spanish Ministerio de Ciencia, Innovación y Universidades, Grant PID2022-136500NB-I00 funded by MICIU/AEI /10.13039/501100011033 and by FEDER, UE.



2. USES AND FUNCTIONS OF “THEN” IN “IF.. THEN...” STRUCTURES

“If.. then...” structures are mostly similar to their “then”-less counterparts: The use of “then”, a conjunct at the start of the apodosis, seems a purely stylistic decision on the part of the author, and its introduction adds little, if any, new meaning, compared with its omission. However, the structure presents both linguistic and sociohistorical features that merit further investigation:

2.1. LINGUISTIC FEATURES OF THE “IF...THEN...” CONSTRUCTION

There are a number of linguistic features that favour the presence of “then” in conditionals. Most crucial of all is the fact that, as “then” always appears as the first element of the apodosis, it also marks precisely the point at which the protasis ends. This is particularly useful in cases of ambiguity or with complex protases, as the presence of “then” helps solve any possible doubt in terms of interpretation.

In fact, previous studies (Puente-Castelo 2016, 176-177) have shown that linguistically or contextually-prompted cases account for the majority (69.1%) of all uses of “then” in conditionals. Some of these complex or ambiguous uses are illustrated in examples (1-3) below, all taken from CEPHiT. (1) below is a clear case of ambiguity, in which the absence of “then” would cause the whole reasoning to become ambiguous, with the second clause being potentially considerable as part of the protasis instead of the apodosis in case “then” is cut out. In (2) and (3), we can see complex conditional structures, in (2) with two coordinated protases that have just one apodosis, and in (3) with an example of a constructive dilemma, a type of inference rule which develops a disjunction in which its two elements act as antecedents of two independent implications, then concluding that one of the two consequences of those implications must be true. In both cases, the presence of “then” helps achieve a clearer understanding of the arguments being made.

- (1) “For if causes are not necessary causes; then causes are not suited to or are indifferent to effects;” ([85 (1850)]¹ Collins 1717, 58)
- (2) If God has placed within our reach the means of avoiding unhappy marriages, and if we neglect to avail ourselves of his gift, then we are ourselves to blame for the evils we endure. ([111 (7587)] Combe 1846, 29)
- (3) “This I have always thought, yet have found it difficult to refer the phenomena to their specific causes. If mechanical, then no miracle; and, if a quality of matter, then absurd in its operation.” ([106 (4829)] Phillips 1824, 28)

¹ Cases from the Coruña Corpus are identified with this univocal notation, in which the first number identifies a specific sample and the second, between brackets, identifies the position of the query word (in this case, “*if*”), in the specific sample.



“Then” is also frequently used with long protases, to simply help mark the end of the subordinate clause and help the reader understand the text more easily. An extreme example is shown in case (4) below, with a 97-word long protasis in which the presence of “then” seems particularly useful to remind the reader of the fact that all previous text is in fact a conditional subordinated clause.

- (4) But if what we perceive and cognise is not merely a cause of our subjective impressions, but a Thing possessing, in its own nature and essence, a long list of properties, Extension, Impenetrability, Number, Magnitude, Figure, Mobility, Position, all perceived as “essential attributes” of the Thing as “objectively existing” –all as “Modes of a Not-Self” and by no means as an occult cause or causes of any Modes of Self– (and that such is the case Sir [W]. Hamilton asserts in every form of language, leaving no stone unturned to make us apprehend the breadth of the distinction) then I am willing to believe that in affirming this knowledge to be entirely relative to Self, such a thinker as Sir [W]. Hamilton had a meaning, but I have no small difficulty in discovering what it is. ([110 (6207)] Mill 1845, 21)

Finally, “then” can indeed sometimes keep part of its temporal meaning, as shown in (5) below, or be part of a semi-formulaic use, such as “if... then follows”, as in example (6):

- (5) “and if they can prove the contrary, in a just and merciful God, then they may make good their Assertion, but not before” ([87 (4586)] Kirkpatrick 1730, 21)
- (6) “If this is proved, then it follows, that when the same motives predominate, the same action must result;” ([101 (4083)] Crombie 1793, 26)

More peripheral but also interesting is the fact that the use of “then” prevents a change in the order of the conditional constituents, imposing the canonical protasis-apodosis order, as shown in (7), with the opposite, (8), being impossible unless “then” is deleted.

- (7) “if any action whatsoever can be done without a cause; then effects and causes have no necessary relation” ([85 (5372)] Collins 1717, 82)
- (8) “*then effects and causes have no necessary relation, if any action whatsoever can be done without a cause.”

2.2. SOCIO-HISTORICAL FEATURES OF THE “IF... THEN...” STRUCTURE.

There are as well a number of sociohistorical reasons that could be favouring the continuous use of the “if... then...” structure over time. It has been argued that scholastic scholars preferred the use of “common logical terms to organise discourse and build up the arguments” (Taavitsainen 1999, 249), and “if... then...” structures



satisfy this criterion in two ways at once, as they fulfil a double role as a structure that is conditional and correlative at the same time:

Conditional structures, with their formal and functional versatility, are particularly valuable in scientific and academic discourse (Carter-Thomas & Rowley-Jolivet 2008, 191), where they have been used particularly frequently (Horsella & Sindermann 1992, 131, Ferguson 2001, 69). They play a number of important roles in argumentative writing, particularly as the main linguistic device to represent the logical relation of implication (Ferguson 2001, 62), marking dependencies and thus being central for the advancement of any reasoned argument; but also in a number of other ways, such as indicating “the relationship between different segments of text and to make the readers recognise this relation” (Warchal 2010, 146), creating argumentative spaces (Dancygier 1998), introducing tentative claims or conclusions as a result of their inherent non-assertiveness (Carter-Thomas & Rowley-Jolivet 2008, 191), speculating with different options and outcomes, or formulating hypothesis and theories (Ferguson 2001, 61, Gabrielatos 2010, 1).

They are also central to the interpersonal development of discourse, being used as “a rhetorical device for gaining acceptance for one’s claims” (Warchal 2010, 141) with which writers try to reach consensus and gain acceptance for their claims. Conditionals can do this in a number of ways, such as introducing direct conventional politeness structures (Quirk et al. 1985: 1095), alternatives to one’s own claims (Declerck & Reed 2001), recognising uncertainty, or mitigating the strength of a claim (Atkinson 1996, 1999; Alonso-Almeida 2025), among many others.

Correlatives, despite their diverse and discussed² nature, have played a key role in the logical and textual organisation of discourse in English ever since the Old English period (Millward & Hayes 2011, 275). They also accommodate well to the Renaissance style, with the influence of Latin, and the importance of subordination and parallelisms, with their paired introductory elements being particular helpful for scholastics, reflecting their content- and logic-heavy discourse, in which “establishing the correct definition of things” (Taavitsainen & Pahta 1998, 167) and the relationship between them is of crucial importance.

Initially, it would seem that the preference of scholasticism for this kind of structures should imply a drop in the number of cases of “if... then...” over time, as scholasticism loses its influence on scientific writing, but previous results (Puentes-Castelo 2016: 172-174) have shown that, although there is indeed some evolution in the use of “if... then...” structures over time, this seems to account for very little (2.83%) of the total variation. In fact, a general examination of the results showed that most authors did not use the structure at all in their texts, with its use only being generalised in the first fifty-year period studied (1700-1750).

² The position taken here follows Truswell (2008), considering correlatives “as a family of constructions” defined by “by a cluster of properties which do not necessarily all co-occur”. In any case, even authors with narrower criteria, such as Hockett (1958), consider “*if... then...*” as an example of correlative, to the point that he uses it to illustrate the whole category (1958, 195).



In any case, scholastic influence could also be shown in some other aspects: differences among disciplines, with those having suffered the scholastic influence for longer hypothetically showing more uses than those that evolved more quickly towards the newer scientific register; and differences regarding the different trainings of writers, with those having acquired their writing habits in scholastic universities showing, perhaps, a higher preference for “if... then...” structures than those that did not, particularly women, who were mostly kept out of formal training for most of the period (Abir-Am & Outram 1987).

3. CORPUS AND METHODOLOGY

This study uses three different corpora: CHET, CEChET and COWITE. CHET (Moskowich et al. 2019) and CEChET (Moskowich, Puente-Castelo & Monaco, 2022) are the subcorpora on history and chemistry, respectively, of the Coruña Corpus of English Scientific Writing, a corpus of eighteenth and nineteenth century scientific writing in English. All the subcorpora in the Coruña Corpus share the same general design, principles of compilation and criteria for the selection of samples. Each of them is devoted to a specific discipline, and contains two c.10,000-word samples per decade, for a total of c.400,000 words per subcorpus (404,658 words in CHET and 402,869 in CEChET specifically). Texts in the Coruña Corpus have to be originally written in English, and in prose. First editions are preferred. Texts by both male and female authors are included, as are different genres, topics, and authors with different origins (Moskowich & Crespo 2007).

COWITE (Alonso-Almeida et al. 2025a; 2025b) is a corpus of late Modern English instructive texts written by women, “with a focus on cookery and domestic medical recipes authored or compiled by women” (Alonso-Almeida et al. 2025c). This study uses the eighteenth and nineteenth century sections of COWITE, including a total of 55 samples and totalling 1,044,184 words.

The total size of the different corpora newly examined here amounts to 1,851,711. The study also incorporates data from CEPhiT (Moskowich et al. 2016), the subcorpus on philosophy in the Coruña Corpus, as published in Puente-Castelo (2016), mainly for illustrative reasons, accounting for an extra 401,129 words. This extends the total size, when considered with CEPhiT, to 2,252,840 words³.

To obtain the data, searches were made for “if” and “then”, with the help of the Coruña Corpus Tool (Parapar & Moskowich, 2007; Barsaglini-Castro & Valcarce, 2020) for the corpora in the Coruña Corpus Family and of AntConc (Anthony 2024) for COWITE. The results were then examined and manually disambiguated, looking for equivalences of “if... then...” and eliminating non-conditional uses of “if”, so that calculations of prevalence could be accurate. As illustrated in (4) above,

³ Particular care has been taken to specify which total is being considered during the calculation of the averages.



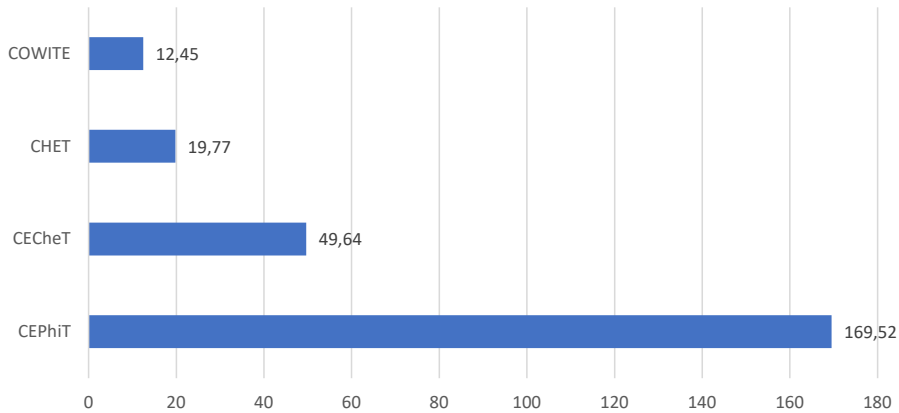


Figure 1. Total use of “if... then...” in the different corpora. Normalized figures, N=1,000,000.

the length of the protases precluded any possible automatic gap-search, with manual disambiguation remaining the only possible option. Results were then recorded, and its context and linguistic structure examined to check the degree to which the insertion of “then” has been contextually prompted.

4. ANALYSIS OF RESULTS

After the analysis, the total number of new “if... then...” cases found was 41. This amounts to 22.14 cases per million words, and represents 0.92% of all 4,478 uses of “if”, and 0.40% of the 10,134 uses of “then”. It is also less than the 68 cases found in the original examination of CEPhiT (in a corpus 4.5 times smaller) in Puente-Castelo (2016).

The examination of the different corpora found interesting contrasts. As shown in Figure 1 above, the use of “if... then...” is much more common in the different subcorpora of the Coruña Corpus, particularly in CEChET, than it is in COWITE. COWITE has only 13 cases of “if... then...” in the whole corpus (12.45 cases per million) whilst, CEChET shows 20 (49.64 per million words) and CHET eight (19.77). As already mentioned, CEPhiT had 68 cases of “if... then...” (169.52 per million words).

This difference is even more striking if we consider the results in terms of the percentage of uses of “if... then...” over all conditional uses. In CEPhiT, 5.09% of all uses of “if” showed a concurrent “then” (68 of 1335). This percentage amounts to 2.08% in CEChET (20 out of 961) and 1.91% in CHET (8 out of 419). However, in COWITE, only 0.42% of all conditional uses (13 of 3098) present a correlative “then” after “if”.



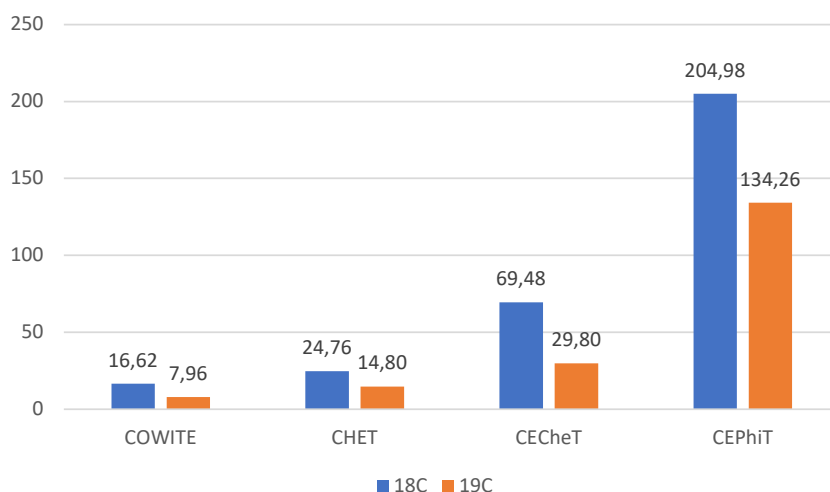


Figure 2. Evolution in the use of “if... then...” per century and corpora. Normalized figures, N=1,000,000.

This, however, is just a general view, and the results according to both socio-historical and linguistic variables show further nuances.

4.1. RESULTS ACCORDING TO SOCIO-HISTORICAL PARAMETERS

Comparing the results across the two centuries under study, as shown in Figure 2 above, all corpora show a decrease in the use of “if... then...” over time. In CEPHiT there were 204.98 uses of “if... then...” per million words in the eighteenth-century section, and these decreased to 134.26 in the nineteenth century, 34.50% less. A similar percentage can be seen in CHET, in which the diminution from 24.76 to 14.80 cases per million amounts to a loss of 40.22% of all uses. These drops are however much steeper in COWITE (16.62 to 7.96 cases per million, a 52.12% descent), and, particularly, CEChET (69.48 to 29.80, meaning 57.12% less uses).

If we analyse the evolution of the proportion of use of “if... then...” over all conditionals we find a similar panorama of unanimous descents: 5.27% to 4.85% of all possible conditional uses in CEPHiT, 2.23% to 1.54% in CHET, 3.39% to 1.09% in CEChET and 0.61% to 0.25% in COWITE.

However, the most striking difference is in the use according to the sex of the author. As shown in Table 1 below, the results show a single instance of “if... then...” in female authored texts in the three subcorpora of the Coruña Corpus which have been analysed, resulting in 7.04 cases per million. This is comparable, if even lower, to the use in COWITE, which, as already explained above, has 13 cases (12.45 per million) in the whole of the corpus, which only includes texts written by women.



TABLE 1: USES OF “IF... THEN...” ACCORDING TO SEX OF THE AUTHOR AND CORPUS

CORPUS	SEX	NUMBER OF CASES	NORMALIZED FIGURES (N=1,000,000)
CEPhiT	Male	68	183.32
	Female	0	0.00
CHET	Male	8	24.76
	Female	0	0.00
CECheT	Male	19	50.99
	Female	1	33.07
Coruña Corpus (Sum of Subcorpora)	Male	95	89.07
	Female	1	7.04
COWITE	Female only	13	12.45

The results back the original hypothesis that women use “then” in conditional structures much less often than men do. However, a linguistic examination of the results is still necessary to check whether their use is free or presents any kind of linguistic constraint.

4.2. RESULTS ACCORDING TO LINGUISTIC CONTEXT

The linguistic analysis of the results has found that less than half of the new uses of “if... then...” found in CHET and CECheT (13 out of 28, 46.43%) are favoured by the linguistic context in one way or another. The same happens in COWITE, where the proportion is even lower (5 out of 13, 38.46%). This contrasts starkly with CEPHiT, where, as explained above, a majority (69.1%) of the cases where influenced by the linguistic context, mainly because of the complexity of the syntactic context or the ambiguity the deletion of “then” would cause.

As shown in Figure 3 below, in CECheT the most common linguistic factor prompting the use of “then” is the length of the protases, whilst in both CHET and COWITE it is the complexity of the syntactic environment.

Among the complex syntactic environments, we can find examples of double protases, as in (9) below; and of ambiguity, as in (10), in which the deletion of “then” would hinder the identification of the point where the protasis ends and the apodosis starts. There are also examples of constructive dilemmas, such as the one shown in (11) below, taken from CHET. In this case, a modified version of the classical logical rule, the author justifies a common result developing a disjunction with two implications, leading to the same result (A or B, if A then C, if B then C; So C). Constructive dilemmas seem particularly productive contexts for the presence of “then”.



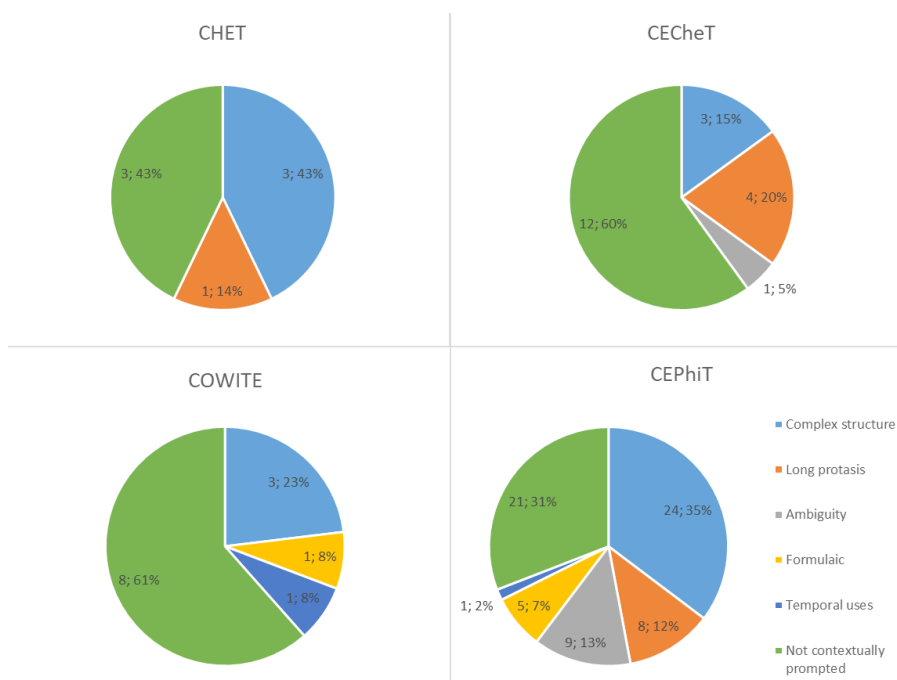


Figure 3. Linguistic reasons behind the use of “if... then...” structures per corpus.

- (9) If there are no more alkaline falts in nature, than the three already mentioned; and if there were no more acids than four; then the number of neutral falts would be confined to the twelve marked in [Dr]. Cullen’s Table ([176 (407) Monro 1767, 481])
- (10) If the particles of atmospheric air were capable of division to an infinite degree, then the attenuation which occurs in the higher regions of the air should have no limit, and we should look upon all space as occupied by the elements which form our atmosphere, rarefied to an inconceivably great degree, and that our earth had provided itself, in its course through space, with as much of this circumambient matter as, from its attractive power, it was able to keep round it. ([192 (4233)] Kane 1842, 438)
- (11) As also to demand the several Captives which they had of ours, and that hence forward they would withdraw all manner of assistance from the Enemy; for as they were Indians bordering between both Governments, they belonged either to the Dominion of Great Britain, or unto the French King; if to the French King, then consequently they were his Subjects, and the encouraging or supplying them with warlike Stores against the English, was a flagrant violation of the Peace between the two Crowns; if they belonged to the King of Great Britain, then the exciting them to War was as great a breach, and a stirring them up to Rebellion, contrary unto their Allegiance and Submission in the year 1693. ([127 (6378)] Penhallow 1726, 108)

There are as well a number of uses of “then” justified by the length of the protases. An example of this is (12) below, the only example of “if... then...” used by women found in the three subcorpora of the Coruña Corpus examined here, taken from CEChET. In this example, Ellen Richards, the author, introduces “then” after a thirty-word long protasis. It should also be noted that this example also contains a coordinated protasis, another instance of complex syntactic environment, highlighting how both length and syntactic complexity can happen at once.

- (12) “If the animal, having accomplished this decomposition of the vegetable, and appropriated the material, is killed, and the prepared nitrogenous food in the form of muscle is eaten by man, then no force is necessary to render the food assimilable; it is only to be dissolved in order that it may enter into the circulation.” ([200 (4349)] Richards 1882, 41)

Apart from these, there are also some instances in which the use of “then” is favoured by a combined temporal meaning, as in (13) below, as well as some semi-formulaic uses, such as “if not, then...”, as shown in (14).

- (13) When the bowels cease to be sore and inflamed, if the weakness still continues, then astringents are often useful. (COWITE 19 – Mrs Child 1841)
 (14) if not, then let the Mistress turn them for her. (COWITE 18 – Bradley, 1750)

The distribution of these results over time offers another interesting finding. In the previous study of “if... then...” in CEPHiT (Puente-Castelo, 2016) it was found that unexplained uses (also labelled as “not-contextually prompted”) were clustered in the first half of the eighteenth century, with 11 out of the 21 (52.38%) unexplained cases occurring in the first fifty years, and the rest over the remaining 150. However, as shown in Table 2 below, this clustering is even more notorious now, as 14 out of the 23 (60.87%) total new unexplained cases in CHET, CECHET and COWITE are clustered in the first fifty years. This is most clearly in CECHET, the corpus, out of the three, that presents the most total uses.

TABLE 2: DISTRIBUTION OF LINGUISTICALLY EXPLAINED AND UNEXPLAINED USES OF “IF... THEN...” OVER CORPUS AND PERIOD.

PERIOD	1Q (1700-1750)		2Q (1750-1800)		3Q (1800-1850)		4Q (1850-1900)	
	Explained	Un.ed	Explained	Un.ed	Explained	Un.ed	Explained	Un.ed
CHET	3	1	0	1	2	0	0	1
CEChET	2	10	1	1	2	1	3	0
COW- ITE	4	3	0	2	1	1	0	2
TOTAL	9	14	1	4	5	2	3	3
CEPHiT	18	11	10	2	4	4	9	4



Finally, there is another linguistic feature, which had not been considered in the original study on CEPHiT, which was noticed during the close reading of the texts in COWITE, and which could provide a linguistic context explaining the lack of use of “if... then...” structures. This is the proportion of use of temporal “then” in the different corpora.

As shown in Table 3 below, COWITE uses “then” particularly more frequently than the other corpora, with 8597.14 uses per million words, compared with 1079.45 in CEPHiT, 1247.97 in CHET and 1618.39 in CEChET. This high usage corresponds with the more instructional nature of the texts included, which usually imply following a sequence of instructions. At the same time, the results suggest that the overwhelming presence of “then” as a temporal adjunct seems to discourage the use of “then” as a conjunct and, consequently of “if... then...” structures.

	COWITE	CHET	CEChET	CEPHiT
Then	8977	505	652	433
Then (N)	8597.14	1247.97	1618.39	1079.45
If... then...	13	8	20	68
% of uses of “if... then...” over all “then” uses	0.14%	1.58%	3.07%	15.70%

5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUDING REMARKS

Despite the notorious differences in the overall proportion of use of “if... then...” depending on the discipline, the distribution of the results as presented above mirror some of the results obtained for CEPHiT (Puente-Castelo 2016): women use “if... then...” particularly scarcely, and, even among male authors, most of these uses are linguistically or contextually prompted, with a majority of the not-contextually prompted uses clustered in the first half of the eighteenth century.

This distribution is coherent with a scenario in which the use of “if... then...” structures is influenced by both socio-historical and linguistic factors.

In what has to do with socio-historical factors, the more frequent use of “if... then...” in the eighteenth compared to the nineteenth century, in more speculative rather than descriptive or instructional disciplines; and in male rather than female-authored texts, all point to a scenario in which “if... then...” structures could be remnants of an older writing style, with a higher degree of scholastic influence. This would correspond with the notably more frequent use of the structure in texts on philosophy, a discipline in which the scholastic influence seems to last longest (Puente-Castelo 2017); and also with the notable distinction in the proportion of uses between male and female authors, as women were precluded from accessing universities (Abir-Am & Outram 1987), then controlled by scholasticism, and thus could not adopt scholastic writing features.



Regarding the linguistic factors, features contributing to the use of “if... then...” structures seem to coexist with features hindering their use. Among the former, the length of protases, their complexity, the emergence of ambiguity after the elimination of “then”, as well as the sporadic temporal or semi-formulaic uses, all seem to contribute to justifying the use of the structure; whilst, among the latter, a higher usage of temporal “then” seems to discourage their use.

The results, then, seem to back the interpretation given in Puente-Castelo (2016, 179): The distribution of usage of “if... then...” reflects the paradigmatic evolution of scientific and instructive writing, with two authorial attitudes towards their use coexisting and gradually replacing one another.

In the old attitude, “if... then...” is used freely by authors. This explains the distribution of non-contextually prompted uses of the structure, concentrated in the first half of the eighteenth century, and would also be an instance of enduring scholastic practices, thus reflecting its higher use in philosophy texts and among male authors.

This attitude would then evolve towards a new one, in which most of the cases are contextually prompted, and only a minority are used at the discretion of the author. This process, however, would be happening at different rates in different disciplines and authors with different backgrounds, thus explaining the lower clustering of non-contextually prompted uses of “if... then...” at the beginning of the period in CEPHiT, as the influence of scholastic practices in philosophy would last much longer than in other disciplines.

Finally, in what has to do with the analysis of the usage of the structure by female authors, in the Coruña Corpus, only one example has been found in the whole of the three subcorpora analysed (in what would amount to 7.04 cases per million words), and in COWITE there were only 13 total cases found (12.45 per million words). These results seem to back the hypothesis that female authors use “if... then...” structures very scarcely indeed, a result that fits nicely with the two-attitude interpretation explained above, in which women would be less affected by scholastic influence as a result of their exclusion from the scholastic-controlled universities.

However, the fact that most cases in COWITE are not contextually or linguistically prompted is intriguing and seems counterintuitive, even if the scarce total number of cases seems to make the results necessarily unrepresentative. In any case, for a complete analysis, it would be necessary to compare COWITE with a corpus of male-authored instructive texts, to see if the difference is merely a question of disciplinary specificities. This, however, is a matter for further research.

Reviews sent to the authors: 29/11/2025

Revised paper accepted for publication: 28/01/2026



WORKS CITED

- ABIR-AM, Pnina & Dorinda OUTRAM. 1987. "Introduction." In *Uneasy Careers and Intimate Lives: Women in Science (1789-1979)*, eds. Pnina Abir-Am & Dorinda Outram, 1-16. Rutgers UP.
- ANTHONY, Lawrence. 2024. *AntConc* (version 4.3.1). U Waseda. <http://www.antlab.sci.waseda.ac.jp/>.
- ALONSO-ALMEIDA, Francisco. 2025. "Estrategias de mitigación con *If you...* en textos instructivos en lengua inglesa de los siglos XVIII y XIX escritos por mujeres." In *Avances en los estudios de lingüística aplicada en el siglo XXI*, eds. María Luisa Carrió Pastor & Clara Ureña Tormo, 13-35. Ediciones Octaedro.
- ALONSO-ALMEIDA, Francisco, ÁLVAREZ-GIL, Francisco, & Ivalla ORTEGA-BARRERA. 2025a. *Corpus of Women's Instructive Texts in English (1700-1799) (CoWITE18)*. U Las Palmas de Gran Canaria. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.15151249>.
- ALONSO-ALMEIDA, Francisco, Francisco ÁLVAREZ-GIL, Ivalla ORTEGA-BARRERA, Elena QUINTANA-TOLEDO, Magdalena BATOR, Isabel DE LA CRUZ CABANILLAS, Margarita Esther SÁNCHEZ-CUERVO & María José GÓMEZ CALDERÓN. 2025. *Corpus of Women's Instructive Texts in English (1800-1899) (CoWITE19)*. U Las Palmas de Gran Canaria. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.15097949>.
- ALONSO-ALMEIDA, Francisco, Francisco ÁLVAREZ-GIL, Ivalla ORTEGA-BARRERA & Elena QUINTANA-TOLEDO. 2025c. *CoWITE Database. Corpus of Women's Instructive Texts in English*. U Las Palmas de Gran Canaria. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.15571301>.
- ATKINSON, Dwight. 1996. "The Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society of London, 1675-1975: A sociohistorical discourse analysis." *Language in Society* 25: 333-371.
- ATKINSON, Dwight. 1999. *Scientific Discourse in Sociohistorical Context: The Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society of London, 1675-1975*. Lawrence Erlbaum.
- BARSAGLINI-CASTRO, Anabella & Daniel VALCARCE. 2020. "The Coruña Corpus Tool: Ten Years On." *Revista de Procesamiento del Lenguaje Natural* 64: 13-19.
- CARTER-THOMAS, Shirley & Elizabeth ROWLEY-JOLIVET. 2008. "If-conditionals in medical discourse: From theory to disciplinary practice." *Journal of English for Academic Purposes* 7: 191-205.
- DANCYGIER, Barbara. 1998. *Conditionals and Prediction: Time, Knowledge and Causation in Conditional Constructions*. Cambridge UP.
- DECLERCK, Renaat, & Susan REED. 2001. *Conditionals: A Comprehensive Empirical Analysis*. Mouton de Gruyter.
- FERGUSON, Gibson. 2001. "If you pop over there: A corpus-based study of conditionals in medical discourse." *English for Specific Purposes* 20: 61-82.
- GABRIELATOS, Costas. 2010. *A Corpus-Based Examination of English If-Conditionals through the Lens of Modality: Nature and Types*. Unpublished PhD diss., Lancaster University.
- HOCKETT, Charles F. 1958. *A Course in Modern Linguistics*. Macmillan.
- HORSELLA, María & Gerda SINDERMANN. 1992. "Aspects of scientific discourse: Conditional argumentation." *English for Specific Purposes* 11: 129-139.
- MILLWARD, Celia M., & Mary Hayes. 2011. *A Biography of the English Language*. Wadsworth.
- MOSKOWICH, Isabel & Begoña CRESPO. 2007. "Presenting the Coruña Corpus: A collection of samples for the historical study of English scientific writing." In *Of Varying Language and Opposing*



Creed': New Insights into Late Modern English, eds. Javier Pérez Guerra et al., 341-357. Peter Lang.

- MOSKOWICH, Isabel, Gonzalo CAMIÑA RIOBÓO, Inés LAREO & Begoña CRESPO (comps.). 2016. *Corpus of English Philosophy Texts*. U Coruña. <https://doi.org/10.17979/spudc.9788497497077>.
- MOSKOWICH, Isabel, Inés LAREO, Paula LOJO SANDINO & Estefanía SÁNCHEZ-BARREIRO (comps.). 2019. *Corpus of History English Texts*. U Coruña. <https://doi.org/10.17979/spudc.9788497497091>.
- MOSKOWICH, Isabel, Luis PUENTE-CASTELO & Leida María MONACO (comps.). 2022. *Corpus of English Chemistry Texts*. U Coruña. <https://doi.org/10.17979/spudc.9788497498388>.
- PARAPAR LÓPEZ, Javier & Isabel MOSKOWICH. 2007. "The Coruña Corpus Tool." *Revista de Procesamiento del Lenguaje Natural* 39: 289-290.
- PUENTE-CASTELO, Luis. 2016. "Explaining the use of *If...then...* structures in CEPHiT." In *The Conditioned and the Unconditioned': Late Modern English Texts on Philosophy*, eds. Isabel Moskowich, Gonzalo Camiña, Inés Lareo, & Begoña Crespo, 167-181. John Benjamins.
- PUENTE-CASTELO, Luis. 2017. *On Conditionality: A Corpus-Based Study of Conditional Structures in Late Modern English Scientific Texts*. Unpublished PhD diss., U Coruña.
- QUIRK, Randolph, Sidney GREENBAUM, Geoffrey LEECH & Jan SVARTVIK. 1985. *A Comprehensive Grammar of the English Language*. Longman.
- TAAVITSAINEN, Irma. 1999. "Dialogues in English medical writing." In *Historical Dialogue Analysis*, eds. Andreas H. JUCKER, Gerd Fritz, & Franz LEBSANFT, 243-268. John Benjamins.
- TAAVITSAINEN, Irma & Päivi PAHTA. 1998. "Vernacularisation of medical writing in English: A corpus-based study of scholasticism." *Early Science and Medicine* 3: 157-185.
- TRUSWELL, Robert. 2008. "Wh-correlatives in Early Modern English." Unpublished manuscript. <http://www.lel.ed.ac.uk/~rtruswel/correlatives.pdf>.
- WARCHAL, Krystyna. 2010. "Moulding interpersonal relations through conditional clauses: Consensus-building strategies in written academic discourse." *Journal of English for Academic Purposes* 9: 140-150.



