

The evolution of discourses about the patient in medical case reports

Key words: medical discourse, case report, patient, discourse analysis, systemic-functional linguistics

The medical case report as a written medical genre disseminates information about new diseases or any new aspect of the already known ones. Being one of the oldest forms of communication in medicine, the function of the medical case report has been evolving from the main source of medical knowledge through primarily pedagogical material and recently to innovative forms of teaching and practicing clinical skills (see Nissen and Wynn 2014). It is also one of the arenas where discourses about the patient operate and thus can be examined.

The purpose of this poster presentation is to demonstrate how discourses about the patient have evolved along with the developments within the genre of the medical case report and against the backdrop of changing paradigms in medical practice. To this aim, a corpus of medical case reports has been compiled, in order to analyse the recent evolution of discourses about the patient therein, following the leitmotif of the conference. The publications were derived from prestigious British and American professional medical journals, they covered the period between 1998 and 2015, and represented different case reporting varieties. What will be pointed to, will be particular communicative accents, i.e. what elements regarding the subject matter of the texts get foregrounded/backgrounded and what linguistic means are used to achieve this. Consequently, the methodological background will constitute broadly understood functionally and cognitively-based grammar of discourse (in general; Duszak 1987; Duszak and Kowalski 2013; Miller and Bayley 2016), and the analysis will replicate the study by Francis and Kramer-Dahl (2004) (in particular; see also Bloor 2016). The latter compares the choice of linguistic means, e.g. passive/active voice, references to patients, etc., in a medical case history and a literary text. In the current project, these groups of linguistic selections will also be discussed against the changing landscape of medical paradigms, with their assumptions regarding the role of the patient and the conceptualisation of disease. It will be shown that the premises of particular paradigms are also reflected in the fabric of the analysed texts. It will be demonstrated that the aforementioned evolution of the discourses goes in the direction of acknowledging the patient's perspective, through both article sections dedicated to patients' contributions (patient's voice) and particular linguistic choices (textual visibility of the patient). In the presentation, first the very genre of the medical case report will be described, followed by a discussion of its varieties, along with the linguistic aspects of case reporting in general. Next, the context of evolving paradigms in medical practice will be covered as a backdrop for the changes the genre has been undergoing. Finally, an analysis of discourses about the patient in the genre at hand will be offered, along with its discussion and ideas for further research.

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