

YLMP2012 Congress: Sessions by Dr Kevin Harvey

Presentation

A corpus linguistics approach to online health communication: Using keywords to interrogate issues of emotional distress

In this presentation I highlight the facility of corpus linguistics for interrogating health communication. Drawing particularly on keywords, I examine the language choices of young people seeking advice from an Internet-based health forum run by medical professionals, with a special emphasis on emotional health issues. For instance, I focus on the emergent theme of eating disorders, concerns which features prominently in adolescents' questions to medical practitioners, as well as considering related emotional health concerns, such as depression.

In examining question types, register and a discourse-based analysis of the young people's advice-requests, I draw attention to dominant discourses of the body, including a 'discourse of slenderness' and a 'discourse of normality', discourses which exercise a negative influence on adolescents' perceptions of self and their dietary behaviours.

In short I aim to demonstrate the utility of keywords as means of making sense of young people's health concerns, while pointing up the value of online resources as a way of eliciting health concerns from individuals who may be reluctant to seek professional advice face-to-face.

KEYWORDS: computer-mediated health communication, corpus linguistics, discourses of the body, weight and eating, emotional distress