

Patient imaging in medical case reports

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This poster presentation demonstrates a proposal of another stage of work in progress on patient imaging in medical case reports. The proposed study is developed from my previous analysis of the same texts and it aims to examine the reactions of students of medicine to patient objectification in these publications.

My previous analysis of a corpus of selected medical case reports has revealed that some of their features have the potential to dehumanize patients. On the one hand, the use of specific grammatical structures influences patients' sentential position, which may affect their prominence in texts. On the other hand, the very decision of whether or how to mention a patient when describing his/her illness determines his/her textual visibility. Consequently, the linguistic choices made by the authors tend to render the image of a patient incomplete, i.e. present him/her not as subjects but objects of medical study and practice. It appears to be an issue of concern in the light of the fact that the texts written by the already established members of the profession not only acquaint novices with particular attitudes and values but also promote discipline-specific modes of writing. Yet, any sweeping generalizations concerning the direct link between lexico-grammatical features of texts and their interpretation should be avoided as language should not be treated symbolically, i.e. in abstraction from the readers' actual understanding (O'Halloran 2003). Therefore, I intend to conduct a follow-up study in which students of medicine (who are not the target readers of the examined case reports) will be asked to answer questions regarding both the content and the form of the texts at hand. It is to determine whether the postulated "text bias" (O'Halloran 2003: 20) outlined above has any evidence, i.e. is shared by other readers.

In my poster presentation I shall present sample questions aimed at the prospective respondents. I shall also outline the premises of the systemic-functional model of grammar and of cognitive linguistics which served as the basis for the construction of this research questionnaire.

Bibliography

O'Halloran, Kieran. 2003. *Critical discourse analysis and language cognition*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.