

## Patient indexicality in medical case reports

Magdalena Murawska (Adam Mickiewicz University, Poznań)

Patient-centredness is an umbrella term for recent trends in medical practice that attempt to redefine the patient-doctor relationship. They advocate treating patients as “experiencing individual[s]” (Mead – Bower 2000: 1089) and the incorporation of their “whole self[ves]” (Wade – Halligan 2004: 1400) into the processes of diagnosis and treatment. Yet, although spoken discourse in medical settings has been extensively researched with a view to improving the quality of physicians’ encounters with patients, written medical discourse in the context of patient-centred medicine has attracted scant attention. Medical texts may not consider the communication in the doctor-patient dyad, but they still refer to patients and it appears critical how it is done. In the present poster presentation, the issue of patient indexicality in professional medical texts has been addressed. To this aim a corpus of medical case reports has been compiled to examine both direct and indirect references to the patients described there. The studied tokens are investigated from two perspectives. First, the focus falls on patient textual presence/absence as conditioned by the aims of the respective text-parts. Second, the analysis of patient reference in the sections of the case reports is discussed with respect to some of the facts from the history of the development of medicine, as, according to Bazerman (1988), scientific discourses are shaped by given disciplines (1988: 47). It follows that the ways in which authors give account of their scientific activities are conditioned by modes of reasoning, methodologies and objectives of a given area of study. In the case of the texts in question, their form and content may also be influenced by the currently practiced model of medicine, i.e. the biomedical model. In short, this framework views illness as a direct consequence of the diseased body and patients as mere recipients of treatment (Wade – Halligan 2004: 1398). Furthermore, the analysis draws on the hierarchical levels of medical description as well as on the two models of disease presentation as proposed by Blois (1984), which also help to explain the choice of modes of writing about patients and diseases they suffer from. The study reveals that as the texts progress, they become more patient-evacuated and focus on his/her progressively smaller body parts. In other words, patient reference changes from direct indexicality to indirect references to his/her body parts or the textual absence of the treated. This effect is achieved not only by the type of information imparted but also by the lexical and grammatical resources used to describe it. Consequently, the mode of writing as testified in the case reports at hand contributes to the presentation of treatment, disease and mental/bodily experience in abstraction from a patient.

Bazerman, Charles. 1988. *Shaping written knowledge. The Genre and Activity of the Experimental Article in Science*. Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press.

Blois, Marsden S. 1984. *Information and medicine*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Mead, Nicola – Peter Bower. 2000. “Patient-centredness: a conceptual framework and review of the empirical literature”, *Social Science & Medicine* 51: 1087-1110.

Wade, Derick T. – Peter W. Halligan. 2004. “Do biomedical models of illness make for good healthcare systems?”, *British Medical Journal* 329: 1398-1401.