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Journal of Pragmatics 37 (2005) 813–835

journal of
PRAGMATICS

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Pragmatic support of medical recommendations in popularized texts

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Received 10 February 2004; received in revised form 25 September 2004; accepted 10 October 2004

Abstract

In order to be successful, speech acts that are intended to get the hearer to do something are often accompanied by supporting utterances aimed at making him/her understand their communicative purpose and, accept it as appropriate, as well as enabling him/her to perform the requested action. The purpose of this article is to determine the type of utterances that support recommendations in a corpus of popularizing medical texts published in two major Argentinean newspapers. The analysis shows that the most frequent supporting functions are those aimed at the acceptance of the communicative purpose. Also, supporting functions have been analyzed in terms of the speakers' acceptance of responsibility, i.e., we have considered whether supporting functions are (re-)formulated as a direct or indirect quotation of the information source or are formulated by the reporter. Findings show that a high percentage of supporting functions that justify recommendations are formulated as a direct quotation of the specialist's voice.

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Keywords: Main speech act; Supporting functions; Illocutionary structure; Quotation; Popularized science; Medical discourse

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doi:10.1016/j.pragma.2004.10.013

1. Introduction

The purpose of this work is to determine what linguistic activities are performed to support recommendations in popularized medical texts published in Argentinean newspapers. Recommendations constitute a prototypical component of these texts, which, besides their informative purpose, have an instructive-pedagogical intention.

It is assumed here that every text is composed of a main speech act and secondary speech acts that support the former. The analysis of the hierarchical and sequential illocutionary structure of these speech acts may contribute not only to the understanding of a particular text type but also to the wider field of text typology. It is hypothesized that the type of illocutionary structure may constitute a criterion allowing to refine the distinctions between text types sharing the same function.

2. Theoretical background

2.1. *Science popularization*

Science popularization is an area of language that has been studied over the last twenty years from different perspectives: discourse studies, text linguistics, and sociological studies, among others.

Linguists have tried to give a suitable definition of this activity and have analyzed different aspects of texts: lexico-grammatical procedures, structure and functions. Most studies of linguistic features consist of contrastive analyses in which popularized texts are compared with their source texts: the research articles published in specialized journals (Ciapuscio, 1993a, 1993b, 2000; Loffler-Laurian, 1983, 1984; Mortureux, 1982, 1985; Harvey, 1995; Myers, 1991, 1994).

More recently, textual studies have questioned some of the traditional assumptions on science communication, such as that knowledge travels only one way, from science to society (Calsamiglia and López Ferrero, 2003; Ciapuscio, 2003; Moirand, 2003; Myers, 2003).

Studies on science popularization have either compared texts from different disciplines or focused on a single discipline, with medicine being an area that has attracted much interest. Studies focusing on one discipline have been aimed at comparing texts of different levels of specialization, i.e., newspaper articles contrasted with research articles (Dubois, 1986; Varttala, 1999).

Furthermore, some studies have focused on citation (Calsamiglia and López Ferrero, 2001, 2003; Méndez García de Paredes, 1999). In this perspective, it is considered that through citation, writers manage the words of others in order to convey and serve their own purposes.

A great number of other studies have been conducted from the standpoint of conversational analysis in an attempt to shed light on doctor–patient relationship (Cicourel, 1985; Díaz Martínez, 1999; Gülich, 2003; Heritage and Sefi, 1992). In the case of medical advice, some authors conclude that patients are more motivated to comply with advice when they receive enough information about their illness from the doctors. Doctor–patient

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