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INSIGHTS INTO MEDICAL DISCOURSE: DIACHRONIC AND SYNCHRONIC PERSPECTIVES

Abstract

This paper investigates some of the main trends currently characterising the study of medical discourse, and explores the complex nature of its realisations. Indeed, in the last few years medical discourse has shown important variations deriving from a host of factors, such as cultural aspects, community membership, professional expertise and generic conventions. Moreover, a few research projects have pointed out differentiations in the behaviour of medical writers compared to that of members of other disciplinary fields. After a presentation of the main studies on the evolution of medical discourse, the paper analyses the principal results of previous investigations into medical text genres, presenting some significant data originating from a research project carried out by CERLIS, the research centre on specialized discourse based at the University of Bergamo. In this project special attention has been given to the relationship between socioculturally-oriented identity factors and textual variation in English specialized discourse, focusing in particular on the identification of identity traits typical of medical English compared to other different branches of learning. Moreover, the paper discusses some of the main issues concerning medical discourse employed in oral contexts and the dissemination of medical research findings and healthcare information, and highlights the considerable variety of themes, data and research methods adopted in these fields of inquiry.

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Key words

medical discourse, diachronic studies, specialized genres, discourse communities, dissemination of medical research findings, presentation of healthcare information.

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