اليقين في كلام الأطباء : تحليلٌ خطابي للمسلسل التلفزيوني "الطبيب الجيد" الموسم الأول

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Evidentiality in Doctors' Talk: A Discourse Analysis of "The Good Doctor" TV Series-Season One

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Abstract

When we speak our discourse very often involves obtaining, evaluating and analyzing information drawn from a variety of sources. This applies to all professional registers with no exceptions at all. Thus, in a hospital setting doctors assess and act upon information that varies in terms of both reliability and the extent to which it may be directly perceived. In this article, the main aim is to show how doctors in the TV series The Good Doctor use evidentiality terms to construct frameworks of credibility and responsibility that both underlie and enable medical work. Results show that doctors mostly use direct evidentiality terms as they express their credibility through their senses.

Keywords: evidentiality, evidentiality terms, doctors' talk

المستخلص

عندما نتحدث، ينطوي خطابنا في كثير من الأحيان على تقييم وتحليل المعلومات المستمدة من مجموعة متنوعة من المصادر. وهذا ينطبق على جميع اللهجات المهنية دون استثناء على الإطـــلاق. وعليـــه فــإن الأطبــاء ، في بيئـة المستشفيات ، يقومـون بتقييم المعلومـات مـن حيث موثوقيتها ومدى إدراكهم المباشر لها. إن الهـدف الـرئيس للبحـث هـو إظهـار كيـف يسـتعمل الأطبـاء في المسلسـل التلفزيـوني "الطبيب الجيد" مصطلحات اليقين لبناء أطر للمصداقية والمسؤولية التي يقوم عليها العمل الطبي. تشير النتائج إلى أن الأطبـاء يستعملون في الغالـب مصـطلحات إثبـات مباشرة حيـث يعبرون عن مصداقيتهم من خلال حواسهم.

الكلمــات المفتاحيـة : الـيقين ، مصـطلحات اليقين ، كلام الأطباء .

1. Introduction

Medical discourse in the broadest sense refers to the "discourse in and about healing, curing, or therapy; expressions of suffering; and relevant language ideologies" (Wilce, 2009: 199). It is an area of study that has received only little exploration. Therefore, the present research tries to explicate one discourse feature used by doctors in the TV series *The Good Doctor*, namely evidentiality terms to construct frameworks of credibility and responsibility.

So, the main concern of this research is to show how doctors, in a hospital setting, assess and act upon information that varies in terms of both reliability and the extent to which it may be directly perceived and how they use various evidential terms in their interactions with their patients or with each other.

2. Hypothesis

In the medical atmosphere, doctors always rely on different tools like blood examination, x-ray, ultrasound…etc to diagnose their patients. Counting on this, the research hypothesizes that doctors mostly use direct evidentiality terms as they express their credibility through their senses.

3. Significance of the Study

The significance of the present study stems from the fact that medical discourse, especially in televised settings, is an underexplored area of study. So, this study has come to fill the gap in the literature of televised medical discourse.

4. What is evidentiality?

Evidentiality, in simple terms, is described as a linguistic category whose primary meaning is the 'source of information' (Chafe 1986; Willett 1988; Aikhenvald 2004; Nuyts 2010). Others like Boye and Harder (2009) define it as a functional-conceptual domain which indicates the author's cognitive and/or communicative justification for a judgment. Hart (2011) maintains that evidentiality highlights the basis of the speaker's knowledge which concerns the state of affairs being reported in the assertion, and evidentials mark how the speakers have come to know what they are claiming.

5. Evidentiality in English

English has an ample reservoir of evidential devices. It provides its users with miscellaneous ways to express their modes of knowing and degrees of reliability. In English, evidentiality is expressed by the use of modal auxiliaries, some adverbs and various idiomatic expressions

(Chafe, 1986). The expression of evidentiality through any of these ways is said to reflect different type of evidentiality; degrees of reliability, inference, sensory evidence, or hearsay evidence. To claim that a language-like English- with various evidential resources shows a degree of balance as its users try to reflect on the way(s) they use to obtain, evaluate and analyze their knowledge is a mere myth. Although, English has a large variety of evidential resources, it may use them in different proportions.

6. Evidentiality, Evidential, Evidence and Knowledge

Aikhenvald (2018) differentiates and draws the borderlines between the terms evidentiality, evidentials and evidence and their relation to knowledge. In her terms 'evidential' and 'evidentiality' as being linguistic categories they don't involve 'evidence', as it is used in common language. She moves on to explain that 'evidence' covers facts, circumstances, objects which prove the validity or the existence of something and 'statement of proof' that is admissible as testimony in a law court.

The linguistic notion of evidentiality- as it is articulated by Boas (1938) and exemplified by Aikhenvald (2018)- differs greatly from the conventional usage of 'evidence'. Linguistic evidentiality has nothing to do with providing proof in court or in argument, or indicating what is true and what is not, or indicating one's belief. All evidentiality does is supply the information source.

In conclusion, evidentiality does nothing but marking information source. It covers the way in which the information was acquired, without necessarily relating to the degree of speaker's certainty concerning the statement or whether it is true or not. However, evidence provides support for the information source. Nevertheless, evidence can be reliable or not. Moreover, the notion of reliability or 'truth' only marginally applies to information source, and thus to evidentiality.

7. Evidentiality Systems

Evidentiality systems across the languages of the world vary in terms of the number of information sources encoded. Some systems work with just two evidential options, others provide three or four evidential options and some other systems provide larger evidentiality systems (Aikhenvald:2004, 23).

Our main concern here is not to survey or provide a full account of the evidential systems of the languages of the world, but we will confine

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ourselves to the English evidential system. The English evidentiality system is a three-term system which involves direct, inferential and reportative terms. In the direct term, evidence is acquired through experiencing or witnessing the events. The evidence could be visually acquired through visual witnessing of the event or it may be acquired non-visually by other senses through hearing, smelling, tasting and touching. In the inferential or (as it is referred to sometimes) the indirect term, the inference is based on visible or tangible evidence or result. In the reportative term, the evidence is acquired from something someone else has said. The source of evidence is called hearsay if the reported information has no reference to who it was reported by. In addition, it is called quotative if the reported information has an overt reference to the quoted source (Aikhenvald, 2004 & 2018). Table (1) below summarizes all three terms.

Table (1) The English Three-Term Evidentiality System

Evidentiality Term	Evidence	Example
Direct	Seeing	I see her coming down the hill
	Hearing	I heard her yelling at my son.
	Tasting	I taste pepper in my soup.
	Smelling	I smell a heavenly scent.
	Touching	The ground under my feet is rough.
	Feeling	I feel something crawling up my leg.
Inferential	Based on Seeing	It must have been raining.
	Based on result	Someone must have snatched my wallet.
Reportative	Hearsay	It is said that the strike will end soon.
	Quotative	Paul said that he was feeling ill.

8. Data and methodology

The data consist of transcripts of all 18 episodes of season one of the TV series *The Good Doctor*[1]. The transcripts were copied from the website https://www.springfieldspringfield.co.uk and they were pasted
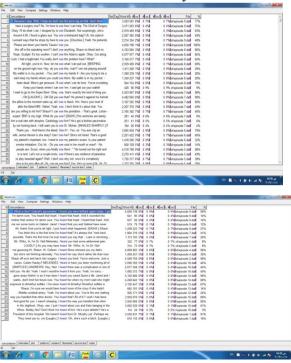
into newly opened word documents for ease of analysis. The average number of words per episode is 4716 and the total number of words is 84888.

With respect to the methodology, the analysis has been informed by the terms of evidentiality suggested by Aikhenvald (2004 & 2018).

9. Data Analysis

As the orientation of the study is both quantitative and qualitative, the Wordsmith software version 4 was used to search the frequency of occurrence. Frequencies of the evidentials occurrences were categorized in tables. Examples are provided in the discussions that follow the tables.

The processing of the data in the Wordsmith software version 4 has shown that the medical staff in this TV series have used the direct term of evidentiality 329 times. Their use of the reportative term comes with 174 occurrences. Not surprisingly, the inferential term comes last with 11 occurrences only. Screenshots (1-8) below show the concordances of the lexical items that represent all three terms of evidentiality as they are used by the doctors. Not all examples of concordance were considered for some of them don't involve evidentiality.
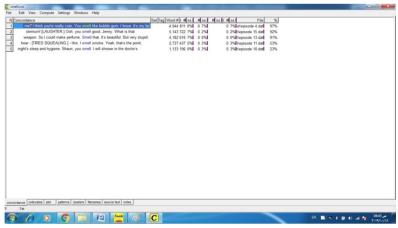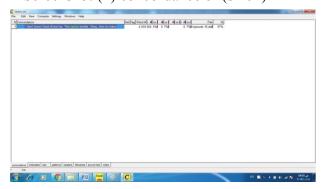
Screenshot (2) concordance of (hear)
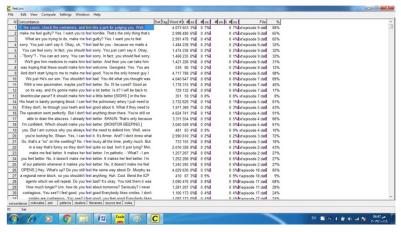

Screenshot (3) concordance of (touch)

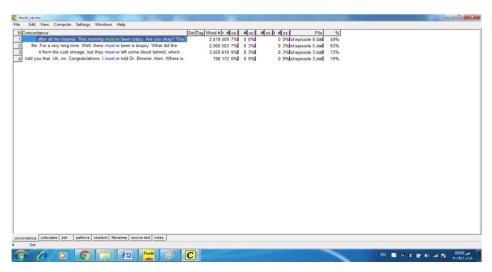Screenshot (4) concordance of (smell)

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Screenshot (5) concordance of (taste)
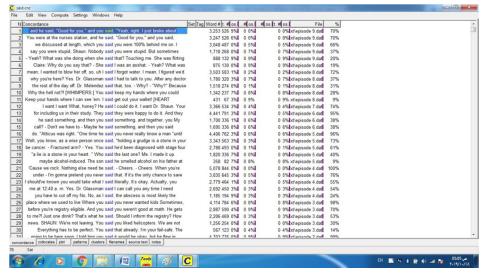

Screenshot (6) concordance of (feel)

Screenshots (1-6) above display the lexical items that were used by the doctors as a representation of the direct term of evidentiality. They provide examples of the base form of the verbs only; however, the other forms were considered also in the analysis if they show evidentiality. Though they appear in the concordance analysis, some verbs in contexts that don't involve any evidential reference were not considered in our study.

Screenshot (7) Concordance of (must've)- Inferential term

Screenshot (8) concordance of (said) –Reportative term

Table (2) below provides a full description of the concordance results obtained from the Wordsmith software version 4.0.

Table (2) Evidentiality Terms in *The Good Doctor*

Evidentiality Term	Evidence	Frequency	Example
Direct	Seeing	164	I saw a biohazard bag in here yesterday.
	Hearing	59	I heard that heart.
	Tasting	1	This tastes terrible.
	Smelling	9	I smell smoke.
	Touching	0	‑‑‑‑‑‑‑
	Feeling	96	I can feel the pulmonary artery.
Inferential	Based on Seeing	0	‑‑‑‑‑‑‑
	Based on result	11	I must have ruptured the aortic wall.
Reportative	Hearsay	0	‑‑‑‑‑‑‑
	Quotative	174	The son said he smelled alcohol …….

10. Conclusions

Based on the results obtained from the Wordsmith software and as table (2) above summarizes them, it can be seen that the objective

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component, represented by the direct term of evidentiality, in the doctors' talk is more than the subjective component which is represented by the reportative term of evidentiality. This definitely means that the doctors base their judgments greatly on physical examination of the hospitalized patients in order to ensure accurate diagnosis. However, they need some subjective component to be presented to them by their patients or care-givers of the patients to know something about the history of the patient, but they don't reckon fully on the information provided by the patients or their care-givers for they don't want to be misled by the inaccurate descriptions of the cases. Moreover, less inferences were made by the doctors because they try not to infer things unless they have an evidence at hand either based on seeing or on result. That's why we see that they haven't made many inferential utterances.

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[1] The Good Doctor tells the story of Dr. Shaun Murphy, a young surgeon with autism and savant syndrome, who is recruited into the surgical unit of a prestigious hospital.