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STYLISTIC AND RHETORICAL PECULIARITIES OF EDITORIALS AND LETTERS TO THE EDITORS IN PROFESSIONAL DENTISTRY JOURNALS

Studies of professional genres and professional practices are considered as complementing each other, thus, they not only influence each other but are often co-constructed in specific professional contexts. Dentistry discourse is a type of an institutional discourse as it shares ‘features, which are attributed to institutional practice’ [5, p.15]. It is also described as a professional discourse as it represents ‘a unique set of cognitive needs, social conditions and relationships within society at large’ [3, p.109]. Dentistry discourse encompasses a whole assemblage of activities, practices, events, instruments and settings referring to oral health. However, until recently, professional genres have been analysed in isolation, leaving the study of professional practice completely out, except as providing context for specific analyses [1]. Moreover, unlike core written genres of professional and academic communication, peripheral genres of academic and professional communication are still remaining understudied and underestimated.

This paper aimed at highlighting the key stylistic and rhetorical features of two genres typical of professional dentistry journals and described as opinion-making texts: editorials and letters to the editor in dentistry professional journals. In the academic writing these sub-genres are considered as secondary or peripheral as they do not introduce original research. Nevertheless, the idea of creating professional journals came from the need to share experience and knowledge obtained between representatives of a certain professional community. Letters were prototypes of modern genres of academic writing, which dramatically evolved through the past two – three centuries.

Corpus of texts (n=80, 40 editorials and 40 letters to the editors) was selected from the two reputable international dental journals, “British Dental Journal” (BDJ) and “Journal of American Dental Association” (JADA) for 2014 – 2017.

Editorials studied aim at achieving the following purposes: the most prevalent and commonly shared by the journals are commentaries on articles of ample scientific potential from the point of view of the Chief Editor or seldom of Editorial Board, or concise reviews on a topic of current interest focusing on vital tasks of the domain or topics vital for readers and the dentistry community as a whole. These editorials provide perspective on how the articles of the current issues fit with other information on the same topic, include critiques of original research articles published in the same issue of the journals, or tough on different topics may appear in different sections of the same journal [4, p.46]. We may suggest the editorials studied perform metatextual function as they evaluate other publications or profession-related issues and help to disseminate their content among practitioners as well as researchers in other sub-specialities

Most BDJ editorials are signed by the individual authors, while JADA more often invite the authoritative external experts in dentistry to introduce the journal issue with so-called *guest editorials*, which can be co-authored (usually from five to seven authors). All the editorials present accentuated personal messages that can be comparable only with messages published in sections “Letters to the Editor” and “Response section”. The editorial voice and personality appear prominently within the limits outlined by the communicative purposes of this genre, i.e. to large extent, but, on the other hand, is pent-up by rules and conventions of the professional discourse. Strong first-person writing style typical of public journalism contrasts with the more common first person plural usage in conventional academic writing. There is no common genre schematic structure for the editorials. In their writing style and rhetoric the editorials studied stand apart from scientific articles, but their content is usually evidence-based.

Editorials vary not only in content but also in length. BDJ editorials (the body only) are about 700 – 800 words, while those of JADA can go over the conventional 1000 word limit. In cases when editorials touch on the most pressing topics for dentistry community, the number of words can double.

Letters to the editor are an effective way to support communication between the authors and their readers. The International Committee of Medical Journal Editors has recognized that Letters to the Editor are an essential aspect of post-publication review and has recommended that all biomedical journals contain a section for comments, questions, or criticisms about articles they have published and where the original authors can respond [2]. Letters to the editor are typically written by discourse producers, members of the community, whose professional status can be varying and usually differs from the authors of editorials. These real-life texts include professional community concerns and personal relations, thus injecting the private or subjective into the public sphere and showing what is valued in this community. These letters are used for two purposes: 1) to demonstrate support, agreement or disagreement with respect to previously published articles, or 2) to explain brief information that does need the length and detail of the original article.

Like editorials, the letters to the editors are far from being strictly shaped in the structure. Both sub-genres of BDJ and JADA have headings; some of them are relatively short and captivating titles, e.g.: *Fighting the stupidity* (letter to the editor,

BDJ, April, 2015, V. 218, P. 368); *Dento-legal: A modern-day Wolf Hall?* (letter to the editor, reference to *Wolf Hall*, a renowned British television serial, BDJ, April 2015, V. 218, P.368 -369). The titles are rather to capture reader's attention than to inform about the subject matter. To this purpose, various stylistic devices involving interrogative sentences, exclamation, punchy titles, allusions, modified proverbs, etc. JADA editorials usually have a heading of a title and subtitles, which are of explanatory character, give an idea of the theme or content of the article: *Preventing tooth loss with biannual dental visits and genetic testing. Does it work?* (JADA. 2015, Vol. 146(3). P.141). *From tea tasting to t test: a P value ain't what you think it is.* (JADA. 2015, Vol. 146 (3). P.141).

The logical frame of the informational structure identified in the corpus is mainly identical one, since all the texts of our corpus may be divided into three large parts: introduction, development and final conclusion.

A pattern that of the letters to the editors that comment on the research articles published in previous issues usually includes an introductory paragraph that introduces the topic, describes the issue; a paragraph that presents the statement of the problem or problems covered by the articles; discussion that places the findings of the studies highlighted into the context with the other relevant research; comments on the clinical and health policy implications and discussion about next directions in the research; evidence-based conclusions that give clear take away message for readers. The concluding paragraph or closing sentences carry a clear answer to the question arisen in the opening paragraph. If there is no clear answer, the authors may suggest possible ways to better tackle the issues.

The findings have shown that the letters to the editors are not uniform and cover more specific topics but there are many similarities found out among the majority of the sampled corpus. Their length covers approximately from 180 to 450 words.

Both editorials and letters to the editors are to advance understanding of the articles or topics they accompany, they present strong author's voice and personality. It would be pedagogically reasonable to raise their awareness of cross-cultural variation in academic writing. To support this, more cross-cultural research into academic discourses in English and Ukrainian using rigorous comparative designs is still necessary.

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