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Modifiers as means of description in medical short stories

В статье описаны особенности и значение модификаторов, используемых в английском медицинских текстах. Основное внимание уделяется роли модификаторов в описании, например, врачей, пациентов, их симптомов. В качестве источника используется рассказ из книги Генри Марша «Не навреди». Исследование проводится в четыре этапа.

Ключевые слова: модификаторы, описание, «Не навреди», Генри Марш

The article describes the features and significance of modifiers used in English medical texts. The focus is on the role of modifiers in describing, for instance, doctors, patients, their symptoms. The story from Henry Marsh's book "Do No Harm" is used as a source. The research is performed in four stages.

Keywords: modifiers, description, 'Do no harm', Henry Marsh

Introduction. Modifiers are, definitely, well researched in numerous linguistic studies. Most researchers claim that modifiers are critical to the English language. Without them, reading and writing would not be as effective. Furthermore, sentences would be incredibly boring as modifiers add especial meaning to the sentence, they add color, vividness and interest. In the field of medicine modifiers are essential for describing patient's symptoms, complaints and condition in general. In given research we study the peculiarities of modifiers used in the English medical text.

The aim of our research is to reveal the specifics and value of modifiers used in the written English text on medicine on the example of the book 'Do no harm' by Henry Marsh (2014) and in particular story 'Photopsia'. As secondary syntactic units

modifiers fall into numerous categories depending on the main word they modify (i.e. noun, pronoun or verb).

Our aim comprised the following **tasks**: (1) to choose one story from the whole book for analyze; (2) to structure the story accorded with the patients' cases described by the author; (3) to make up subgroups based on the main words and their modifiers in each patients' case; (4) to perform semantic classification of each subgroup; (5) to reveal the significance of modifiers used in the story.

The research rested on the following **methods**: continuous sampling, description, elements of statistical analysis, comparison.

Modifiers play a significant role in medical English language since they serve as one of the main markers of the patient's health condition. The above-mentioned significance as well as algorithm predetermines the research **relevance**.

The novelty of our research comprises the application of the author's algorithm for the lexical and semantic analysis of the work, aimed at determining the specifics of used modifiers.

The choice of the research material rested on the assumption that book 'Do no harm' is a good source of description of numerous patients' cases and manipulations performed either by the protagonist or by his colleagues [1]. That may be regarded as invaluable contribution to experience of any medical student [2, 3].

The story 'Photopsia' consists of 5132 tokens. At research **Stage 1** we planned the structure of the story accorded with the patients' cases described by the author. Thus, we can distinguish between four cases dealing with unrelated medical issues.

Patient 1 is the author himself, who experienced vitreous and then retinal detachment. This conditions manifested with photopsia, blurred vision, hemorrhage in the eyeball of the affected eye. After medical examination he was performed an operation called a gas-bubble vitrectomy and later lens replacement. So protagonist fully recovered within a few weeks.

Patient 2 is a thirty-four-year-old man who jumped from a bridge. He was a polytrauma case and his brain was so damaged that there was no hope of survival, even if he had been operated. So patient died within the next twenty-four hours.

Patient 3 is a young woman in her twenties who jumped under a tube train. She had to have a hindquarter amputation of one leg and suffered a compound depressed skull fracture. At first she lost her memory, but as she recovered from her head injury her memory started to return.

Patient 4 is the author again, this time with a broken leg. He was applied a gypsum on a damaged leg and sent home for further recovery.

At **Stage 2** we performed thematic classification of the longest and the most complete patient case (Patient 1) based on the following topics:

- self-examination;
- medical examination;

- pre-operation;
- post-operation;
- surgeon;
- benefits of medical career.

At **Stage 3** we developed a structure of subgroups based on the main words and their modifiers [4, 5].

Subgroup ‘Verbs’ is represented by 44 examples and modifiers comprise:

- nouns (25): *‘took little notice’, ‘fell from a bridge’, ‘landed on his feet’, ‘smashed beyond repair’, ‘picking up crutches’, ‘dismiss initial symptoms’, ‘gritting my teeth’, ‘diagnose illnesses’, ‘called on mobile’, ‘jumped under a train’;*
- adverbial phrases (19): *‘momentarily appear’, ‘hard to pin down’, ‘intermittently blurred’, ‘removed completely’, ‘sat there patiently’, ‘quickly returned’, ‘occasionally hear’, ‘emerge from time to time’, ‘rarely touch’, ‘do that tomorrow’, ‘promptly established’;*

Subgroup ‘Nouns’ is represented by 52 examples and modifiers comprise:

- nouns (22): *‘light in the eye’, ‘motor response’, ‘cloud of ink’, ‘polytrauma case’, ‘vitreous detachment’, ‘brain scan’, ‘fracture dislocation’, ‘head injury’, ‘sort of medicine’, ‘plaster room’, ‘the morning of discharge’;*
- adjectives (30): *‘factory-like corridors’, ‘large haemorrhagic contusion’, ‘young woman’, ‘pathetic bulk’, ‘sudden shower’, ‘last memory’, ‘short queue’, ‘vulgar way’, ‘little expression’, ‘great pain’, ‘internal fixation’;*

At **Stage 4** we performed semantic classification of each subgroup (Table).

Table

‘Semantic groups within each subgroup’

Verbs (44)	
Doctors	11
Patients	24
Symptoms	9
Hospital	0
Nouns (52)	
Doctors	12
Patients	12
Symptoms	20
Hospital	8

Comparing these 2 subgroups we can see that ‘Verbs’ with their modifiers are mostly used to characterize patients and their actions, whereas ‘Nouns’ with modifi-

ers are most commonly used to describe symptoms. Examples of each semantic group are as follows:

- Doctors (23). E.g., ‘*So when doctors fall ill themselves they tend to dismiss their initial symptoms...*’ or ‘*My colleagues, in smart dark suits, would emerge from time to time from their consulting rooms...*’

- Patients (36). E.g., ‘*He landed on his feet but he hit his head as well...*’ or ‘*This is a thirty-four-year-old man who fell from a bridge...*’, another example: ‘*I do not know what human tragedy lay behind the pathetic, dying bulk that lay on the hospital bed beside us.*’

- Symptoms (29). E.g., ‘*I noticed that... an odd little flashing light would momentarily appear in my left eye.*’ or ‘*...the vision in my left eye intermittently blurred...*’, another ones: ‘*He’s a polytrauma case – he’s got a fractured pelvis, bilateral tib and fibs and a severe head injury.*’ or ‘*A large haemorrhagic contusion in the left temporal lobe... He’s had a big, fixed pupil on the left for five hours now.*’

- Hospital (8). E.g., ‘*I walked down the brightly lit, factory-like corridors of the hospital...*’ or ‘*...and beyond it the monitors and machinery and syringe drivers at the head of the bed, with their flashing red LEDs and digital read-outs’*

Conclusion. The study of Modifiers as means of description in medical short stories shows that (1) subgroup ‘Verbs’ is most commonly used with nouns and adverbial phrases as modifiers, (2) subgroup ‘Nouns’ is most often used with nouns and adjectives as modifiers, (3) modifiers describe the words and define their meanings in the text.

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