

Title:

“Is the aids virus difficult to catch?”: A linguistic analysis of two Internet advice columns on sexual health

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Abstract:

In light of the current increase of HIV infection world-wide (Society for Adolescent Medicine 2006), we investigate one UK and one US Internet-based, professional, health advice column as sources of advice-information for young people. Building on previous research (Locher 2006; Harvey and Mullany 2007), we will analyze from a linguistic perspective the language patterns that young adults use when seeking information about HIV and aids. In particular we will focus on the verbs used to describe the transmission and acquisition of the sexually transmitted infection. Despite established health campaigns, the advice-seekers' questions reflect misinformed conceptions, such as the conflation of HIV and aids or confusion as to the way in which the virus can be contracted. Health care practitioners' responses to these messages are then analyzed in order to see how they respond to these folk conceptions. Our research highlights the need to address lay beliefs about sexual health in order to improve the effectiveness of health education initiatives. Computer-mediated communication has the advantage of anonymity and reaching a wider audience than face-to-face client professional encounters. This type of health information source is enthusiastically taken up by young adults and is currently an under-researched area in the sphere of health communication.

References

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