

Computer-mediated adolescent health communication: Local and global audiences

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Introduction

- Data from the Teenage Health Freak website, a reputable adolescent healthcare website run by GPs
- Combining approaches from corpus linguistics and sociolinguistics

Teenage Health Freak Website

- Created in response to fear of confidentiality breaches, marginalisation, embarrassment in face-to-face consultations
- Provides complete anonymity: disembodied identities
- Text written locally and privately becomes globally accessible: written for persona of Dr Ann and the overhearing online audience

Teenage Health Freak Website

- Currently being updated with grant from Dept. of Health
- Popularity: 52,864 visits per day from a wide range of countries
- 86% of visitors from UK and USA but 176 different countries overall (2007-2009)

Top 5 visiting countries (07-09)

Country	Total IPs	Percentage
United States	642,703	62
UK	244,643	24
China	30,225	3
Sweden	16,169	2
Canada	13,446	1

Corpus Methodology

A quantitative corpus approach

- Word frequencies
- Keywords – words which occur with a statistically greater frequency in the teenage health emails than in our general reference corpus

Sociolinguistic Approaches

Age: Self-reported

Gender: Self-reported

Change over time? 2004-2009

Register and style of adolescents (and Dr. Ann)

Corpus Summary

	All	Male	Female
Total Messages	113,481	41,830 (37%)	59,885 (53%)
Total Words	2,194,418	659,964 (30%)	1, 427976 (65%)
Avg. Words per Message	19	15	23

Frequencies of top 20 keywords in the 'teenage health email' corpus

N	Key word	Freq.	%	Keyness
1	I	154,207	6.96	422,351.34
2	MY	59,777	2.70	219,749.14
3	SEX	17,368	0.78	100,670.93
4	AM	21,215	0.96	98,783.43
5	DO	35,108	1.58	87,646.09
6	I'M	21,070	0.95	75,674.23
7	ME	28,437	1.28	74,365.61
8	PENIS	8,658	0.39	62,311.52
9	WHAT	30,490	1.38	59,432.77
10	HAVE	39,284	1.77	47,771.84
11	PREGNANT	6,629	0.30	41,219.82
12	PLEASE	9,048	0.41	40,364.82
13	ANN	6,400	0.29	40,142.99
14	HELP	11,854	0.53	38,240.11
15	REALLY	12,211	0.55	35,827.87
16	BOYFRIEND	5,374	0.24	35,596.28
17	HI	5,075	0.23	32,154.75
18	HOW	14,569	0.66	30,287.97
19	GET	14,431	0.65	29,312.62
20	WORRIED	4,513	0.20	22,451.35

I MY SEX AM DO I'M ME PENIS WHAT HAVE PREGNANT
PLEASE ANN HELP REALLY BOYFRIEND HI HOW GET
WORRIED DON'T GAY WANT VAGINA CAN FEEL NORMAL
WHY DEAR BUT DR SCARED MASTURBATE FRIEND MUM
PERIOD IS YOU PILL CONDOM FRIENDS GIRLFRIEND
GIRL SHOULD SMOKING BOY THINK STARTED SPOTS
PERIODS WEIGHT I'VE BECAUSE STOP BOOBS DOCTOR
CAN'T KNOW LIKE WHEN SMOKE TELL IT DOES FAT
GETTING FORESKIN GIRLS ABOUT IF HELLO CUM
HAVEN'T SPERM PUBERTY BREASTS BAD WRONG
HAVING MASTURBATING DRUGS UR PUBIC MYSELF
DISCHARGE LOVE WONDERING HURT EAT OK
FINGERED BULLIED BUM BOYS STRESSED JUST HURTS
THANKS UNPROTECTED AGE

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Thematic Keyword Summary

Group	Types	Tokens
Sex/Pregnancy/Relationships	180	67,582
Puberty	55	21,102
Weight/Eating	55	15,759
Smoking/Drugs/Alcohol	56	13,887
Mental Health	29	5,117

Researcher-researched

- GPs are most interested in:
 - Data giving access to what adolescents *really* want to ask face-to-face, but do not
 - Top 10 questions adolescents want to ask on each of the themes emerging from the corpus analysis
 - Adolescent language: use of slang and taboo

Researcher-researched

SO: how can we use corpus and sociolinguistic techniques to disseminate this information in a usable and useful format?

Target audiences:

- GPs
- Parents
- Youth health workers
- Adolescents

Dissemination formats

- Website/online summaries of findings: For an academic and broader audience (<http://cral.nottingham.ac.uk>)
- GP surgery leaflets
- 'Encyclopedic' book resource

Dissemination format discussions

- Teenage Health Freak GPs
- University of Nottingham affiliated GPs
- *Royal College of General Practitioners' Adolescent Health Group*
- *Association of Young People's Health*
- Focus group with interested parents

Raw Frequency: 3057.0
Frequency per 100,000 words: 137.807237562
Log-likelihood against BNC: 10368.38
Classification: Eating/Weight



Age Group	Number of People
10 or younger	50
11	140
12	200
13	150
14	160
15	130
16	125
17	90

Year	Number of Deaths
2004	150
2005	140
2006	135
2007	135
2008	135
2009	115