

Grammatical analysis of spoken discourse as a method to studying understandings of depression

Report of language use as an example

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In Denmark, as well as internationally, there is a wish for enhanced collaboration between primary care and the psychiatric sector in the treatment of patients with depression. On the basis of interviews with general practitioners and psychiatrists, the article demonstrates that the two groups of professionals have diverging approaches to depression: the general practitioners employ a constructionist, bottom-up approach, indicating that they view depression as a dynamic and negotiable entity, while the psychiatrists treat depression as essentialist and employ a top-down approach to depression, indicating that this group of professionals has a more static understanding of depression. This difference is constituted by the two groups' reports of habitual language use. Consequently, the general practitioners use causative constructions, modality and pronouns denoting visible referents, while the psychiatrists use copula constructions, generic referents and less modality. These different understandings of depression may have implications for future collaboration. While most studies of health care communication are interactionally framed, this study can be regarded as a contribution to examining health care communication in a context of representation, that is, how medical professionals talk about their profession and their patients, rather than how they communicate with their patients. This study of reported language use is inspired by a framework of reported speech and thought originally intended for written, predominantly literary text. In order to make the phenomenon suited to shed light on understandings of depression in spoken language, it is framed in a grammatical context and the methodological implications of doing so are discussed.