An Investigation of the Hortatory Texts in Persian Medical Discourse

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Abstract
Longacre (1996) recognizes four major discourse genres including narrative, procedural, behavioral and expository discourse. He considers exhortations to be a sub-branch of behavioral discourse, which “deals with how people did or should behave” (Longacre 1996, p. 9, in Dooley & Levinsohn, 2000).

Accordingly, this study is going to analyze Persian hortatory texts of two genres: Persian General Practitioners’ Books (GPBs) and Online Medical Journals (OMJs). In particular, it looks at the relative potency of different forms of exhortation and distinguishes between default, highlighted and backgrounded hortatory forms based on Levinsohn (2015).

The corpora of this study consisted of 100 texts from two written Persian GPBs and 100 texts from two Persian OMJs. The addressees of the GPBs were general practitioners and students of medical sciences, though writers sometimes directed their exhortations to patients. The addressees of OMJs were the public with some medical knowledge. Our initial step to conduct this research was to classify each sentence as an exhortation or setting it aside as a supportive material; then, 2) listing the different hortatory devices used; 3) counting the frequency of each one; 4) then deciding: a) which one was default, and b) whether using the others had the effect of highlighting or backgrounding the exhortations concerned; and 5) analyzing the statistical significance of the findings through the use of SPSS software version 24.

Results of the research indicated that the default devices and the most frequent hortatory devices used in GPBs were “verbless commands” (in the prescription sections of the GPB texts) and “imperatives” (in non-prescription parts of GPBs).

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Highlighted forms of exhortations found were “must” and “it is necessary” in GPBs. Backgrounded forms of exhortations in GPBs included “it is better”, “it is recommended” and “indirect exhortations”. Example 1, 2 and 3 show the use of the default (verbless command), highlighted (bayæd “must”) and backgrounded hortatory forms (it is better) in GPBs:

1) bθρAj-e control-e tθŋi-j-e nθfθs
   for controlling-EZ tightness-EP-EZ breath
   “For controlling shortness of breath”
   - Inhaler salbutamol N=1 2 puffs if necessary
   - Inhaler beclomethasone N=1 2 puffs every 6 hours
   (Attar, 2016, p. 191, Bronchiectasis, PFP)

2) kæpsul-e /amperazol-ra bayæd betorekamel væ qaæbl
   capsule Omeprazole-OM must completely and before
   /æz qaæza maesraef nemud /æz daævidæn
   væ from food consumption do.PAST.3SG from
   baz kæræn-e kæpsul bajæd /ædegænæb
   open do.PAST-INF-EZcapsule must avoidance
   SUBJ.become.PRES-3SG
   “Omeprazole capsule must be consumed fully before eating food. Chewing and opening the capsule must be avoided.”
   (Ayati Firoozabadi and Fallah, 2015: 17, Tennis elbow, DPG)

3) behtær /æst dæhæt-e tæzriq-e /æz epinefrin /æz
   better be.PRES.3SG for-EZ injection-EZ epinephrine
   from
   soræng-e /ænsolin /estefadeΣæv-aed
   syringe-EZ insulin use SUBJ.become.PRES-3SG
   - “It is better to use Insulin Syringes for injecting Epinephrine.”

   The default device in OMJs was “imperative”. Highlighted hortatory forms found in OMJs were “must” and “it is necessary”, “imperatives used with immediately” and “it is highly recommended” were used, as well. Backgrounded hortatory forms in OMJs included “it is better”, “it is recommended” and “indirect exhortations”, “imperatives directed to 1st person plural”, “(it) is helpful”, “infinitives” and “very indirect exhortations”. Example 4, 5 and 6 illustrate the use of the default (imperatives), highlighted (hætmæn “must”) and backgrounded hortatory forms (infinitive):

4) dær suræt-e døæt-an-e sabææj-e bimæri-j-e
   in form-EZ have.PAST-INF-EZ preexistence-EP-EZ disease-EP-EZ
   xas ja maesraef-e dara be peæzæk-e-tan
   special or consumption-EZ drug to physician-EZ-CLIT.3PL
   /ætæla/ dæh-æd
   information IMPER.give.PRES-2PL
   “If you have a special disease or consume some drugs, inform your physician.”

5) dær surææt-i ke sabææj-e bimæri-hææ-j-e
in form-INDEF that preexistence-EP-EZ disease-PL-EP-EZ /en/eqodi-j-e xun-i dor-id hætmæn pezeΣ-k-ra coagulation-EP-EZ blood-INDEF have.PRES-2PL must physician-OM motele/ soz-id informed IMPER.do.PRES-2PL “If you have the pre-existence of blood coagulation, you must inform your physician.” (Angiography of coronary vessels, DWB, http://www.pezeshk.us/?p=31745) 6) kaheΣ-e mæsref-e qæza-ha-j-e hejvan-i decreasing-EZ consumption-EZ food-PL-EP-EZ animal-ATTR bexosus guΣ-e qermez specially meat-EZ red “Decreasing the consumption of animal foods especially red meat.” (Prevention from breast cancer, DWB) Chi-square test results of the study confirmed significant differences between the application of the default, highlighted and backgrounded hortatory forms used in GPBs and OMJs. In addition, the results confirmed that the factors mentioned by Levinsohn (2015) affected the choice of hortatory forms in GPBs and OMJs; in this regard, the findings demonstrated that the “physician’s superior knowledge”, “the type of the hortatory texts”, “the position of the exhortations in the text”, “the degree of prominence each exhortation is to receive”, and “its scope” all influenced the form of exhortations chosen by the writers of GPBs and OMJs. Our study, further, reached some results contradictory with the ones obtained by Levinsohn (2015) which may be related to language- and culture-specificity and different discourse types studied by the authors of these studies:

a. using “it is necessary” as a highlighted form of exhortation, not a backgrounding one as mentioned by Levinsohn (2015);

b. using “imperatives” directed to 3rd person with equal potency of “imperatives” directed to second person, despite the assertion stated by Levinsohn (2015) where he claims that “imperatives” directed to second person are more potent than “imperatives” directed to 3rd person; and finally,

c. revealing a different result in Persian medical texts from that of Levinsohn (2015) regarding the arrangement of highlighted forms of exhortations and backgrounded ones. 

List of abbreviations

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<th>ATTR</th>
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<th>OM</th>
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<th>PAST</th>
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<td>Object marker</td>
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Keywords: Exhortation devices, Persian general practitioners’ prescription books, Online medical journals, Medical discourse, Levinsohn’s model