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UNCERTAINTY REPRESENTATION IN THE SUN'S MEDICAL ARTICLES: A CORPUS-BASED ANALYSIS

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In the field of medical communication, the accurate transmission of information is not only essential for effective treatment but also vital for patient safety and professional credibility. While previous research has extensively examined medical terminology, nominal structures, and syntactic complexity, comparatively little attention has been devoted to uncertainty – situations involving imperfect or unknown information. It applies to predictions of future events, to physical measurements that are already made, or to the unknown, and is particularly relevant for decision-making. Medical texts – ranging from peer-reviewed journal articles to patient-oriented informational materials. As such, uncertainty plays a critical yet often overlooked role in shaping the tone, clarity, and epistemic stance of medical discourse. The aim of this study is to examine how uncertainty is employed in written medical texts. Using a corpus-based approach, the analysis seeks to uncover patterns of usage that characterize the representation of uncertainty of medical writing, and to contribute to a more nuanced understanding of its stylistic and rhetorical conventions.

A specialized target corpus of health articles from The Sun was compiled and subjected to comparative analysis against two external reference corpora: a general reference corpus and a broadsheet health reporting corpus. Analytical techniques employed included: 1) relative frequency analysis to quantify the occurrence of established epistemic hedges (e.g., modal verbs like might, could; phrases like further research is needed); 2) collocation analysis to examine co-occurrence patterns between core medical nouns (risk, finding) and surrounding adjectival/adverbial lexis; and 3) concordance line analysis to identify patterns of lexical transformation from implied source material to the published article.

The corpus evidence provides robust, quantifiable support for the hypothesis that tabloid health reporting in The Sun employs a strategy of systematic suppression of linguistic uncertainty markers. By substituting epistemic caution with high-frequency affective and hyperbolic language, the reporting prioritizes sensational news value over scientific precision. This practice ultimately results in the presentation of provisional or complex research findings as conclusive and alarmist certainties, potentially misrepresenting the state of medical knowledge.

Key words: UNCERTAINTY, corpus analysis, collocations, media, discourse, The Sun.