



MAŁGORZATA SOKÓŁ

ORCID: 0000-0003-3078-5702

University of Szczecin, Szczecin

malgorzata.sokol@usz.edu.pl

Knowledge and identity construction in medical weblogs: A study of epistemic predicates

Słowa kluczowe

blog medyczny, tożsamość, wiedza, predykaty epistemiczne

Keywords

medical weblog, identity, knowledge, epistemic predicates

1. Introduction

The social media, with their “unprecedented access to health information and medical records”, have the potential to facilitate clinical communication and healthcare, but at the same time they pose challenges for healthcare professionals¹. Increased use of the social media has intensified the complexity of health communication: with new professional settings for the dissemination of medical knowledge, new multiple roles for both healthcare practitioners and non-experts have emerged and relationships between practitioners and patients have been re-negotiated. The reliability and objectivity of health information have become even more demanding ethical issues, so for health professionals it is more

¹ Prestin Abby, Chou S. Wen-Yying, “Web 2.0 and the changing health communication environment”, in: *The Routledge handbook of language and health communication*, ed. by Heidi E. Hamilton, Wen-Yying S. Chou (New York: Routledge, 2014), 187; see also Kevin Harvey, Nelya Koteyko, *Exploring health communication. Language in action* (London–New York: Routledge, 2013); Stefania Maria Maci, Michele Sala, Maurizio Gotti, “Introduction”, in: *Insights into medical communication*, ed. Maurizio Gotti, Stefania Maria Maci, Michele Sala (Bern: Peter Lang, 2015), 9–24.

challenging to construct a trustworthy and authoritative persona. At the same time, lay recipients of information, patients or potential patients, are empowered not only to take more responsible decisions about their health but also to actively contribute to knowledge construction and sharing².

Recent studies have shown³ that medical weblogs, as a popular social media genre, play an important role in the exchange of medical knowledge in a similar way to other specialist weblogs⁴. In terms of structure, blogs are frequently updated web pages in which entries are displayed in reverse chronological order, and whose important element is the commenting facility. Like other social media, blogs are dynamic and multidirectional ecologies which enable information sharing, personal reflection and interaction with others⁵. To apply Herring et al.'s⁶ early categorization of blogs, medical weblogs may be viewed as *k(knowledge)-logs*, that is environments for knowledge sharing, or according to more recent studies, *thematic*⁷ or *topic-oriented* blogs⁸.

The role of blogging in the exchange and dissemination of knowledge has been confirmed by investigations into healthcare practitioners' motivations for blogging⁹. One of the dominant functions indicated by blogging healthcare practitioners is the popularization of science. The relevance of the popularization function is supported by such motivations provided by the bloggers as the stigmatization of pseudo-science, the popularization of knowledge based on facts, the development of healthy attitudes and the promotion of a healthy

² Harvey, Koteyko, *Exploring health*; Judith Turnbull, "Knowledge dissemination online: The case of health information", in: *Insights into medical communication*, ed. Marina Bondi, Silvia Cacchiani, Davide Mazzi (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2016), 290–314.

³ E.g. Maria José Luzón, "Recontextualising expert discourse in weblogs: Strategies to communicate health research to experts and the interested public", in: *Insights into medical communication*, ed. Maurizio Gotti, Stefania Maria Maci, Michele Sala (Bern: Peter Lang, 2015), 331–351; Anna Stermieri, "Knowledge dissemination in genetics blogs", in: *Insights into medical communication*, ed. Maurizio Gotti, Stefania Maria Maci, Michele Sala (Bern: Peter Lang, 2015), 391–413; Małgorzata Sokół, "'Have you wondered why sportspeople die?' The medical weblog as a popularisation tool", *Discourse, Context & Media* 25 (2018): 13–24.

⁴ E.g., Antoine Blanchard, "Science blogs in research and popularization of science: Why, how, and for whom?", in: *Common knowledge: The challenge of transdisciplinarity*, ed. Moira Cockell, et al. (Lausanne: EPFL Press, 2011), 219–232; Cornelius Puschmann, Merja Mahr, "Scholarly blogging: A new form of publishing or science journalism 2.0?", in: *Science and the Internet*, ed. Alexander Tokar, et al. (Düsseldorf: Düsseldorf University Press, 2012), 171–181.

⁵ E.g. Jill W. Rettberg, *Blogging* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2008); Greg Myers, *The discourse of blogs and wikis* (London: Continuum, 2010).

⁶ Susan Herring, et al. "Weblogs as a bridging genre", *Information, Technology & People* 18 (2005), 22: 142–171.

⁷ Jack Grieve, et al. "Variation among blogs: A multi-dimensional analysis", in: *Genres on the web. Computational models and empirical studies*, ed. Alexander Mehler, Serge Sharoff, Marina Santini (Berlin: Springer, 2010), 303–322.

⁸ Cornelius Puschmann, "Blogging", in: *The handbook of pragmatics of computer-mediated communication*, ed. Susan C. Herring, Dieter Stein, Tuija Virtanen (Berlin–New York: Mouton de Gruyter, 2013), 83–108.

⁹ Sokół, "Have you".

lifestyle. Another related motivation is the use of blogs for didactic purposes. Healthcare practitioners are interested in educating their diverse audience through a medium which can provide knowledge in an accessible way rather than ‘from behind the desk’.

The objective of the present paper is to explore patterns of knowledge and identity construction in medical weblogs through a focus on epistemic predicates. The study follows interactional, discourse-based approaches to modality in which modality is viewed more broadly than a grammatical and semantic category. According to these approaches, modality as an important manifestation of subjectivity and evaluation relates to the expression of stance in discourse and plays a role in the construction of identity¹⁰.

In traditional grammar, modality is concerned with the status of a proposition which describes an event and refers to the expression of a speaker’s attitude to the content of a proposition¹¹. As a subcategory of modality, epistemic modality “expresses the degree of commitment of the speaker to the truth of what is being said”¹², and epistemic verbs belong to the main exponents of epistemic modality¹³. Modal verbs have been argued to express interpersonal meanings¹⁴ and their use is linked to the concepts of stance and evaluation¹⁵

¹⁰ E.g. Elise Kärkkäinen, *Epistemic stance in English conversation. A description of its interactional functions, with a focus on “I think”* (Amsterdam–Philadelphia: John Benjamins, 2003); Juana I. Marín-Arrese, Laura Hidalgo Downing, Silvia Molina, “Evidential, epistemic and deontic modality in English and Spanish: The expression of writer stance in newspaper discourse”, in: *English modality in perspective: Genre analysis and contrastive studies*, ed. Roberta Facchinetti, Frank Palmer (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 2004), 121–139; Robert Englebretson, ed., *Stancetaking in discourse* (Amsterdam–Philadelphia: John Benjamins, 2007); Juana I. Marín-Arrese, “Effective vs. epistemic stance and subjectivity in political discourse: Legitimising strategies and mystification of responsibility”, in: *Critical discourse studies in context and cognition*, ed. Christopher Hart (Amsterdam–Philadelphia: John Benjamins, 2011), 193–223; eadem, “Stancetaking and inter/subjectivity in the Iraq Inquiry: Blair vs. Brown”, in: *English modality: Core, periphery and evidentiality*, ed. Juana I. Marín-Arrese, et al. (Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, 2013), 411–445; Roberta Facchinetti, “Modal verbs in news-related blogs: When the blogger counts”, in: *English modality: 359–377*; Laura Hidalgo Downing, Begoña Núñez Perucha, “Modality and personal pronouns as indexical markers of stance: Intersubjective positioning and construction of public identity in media interviews”, in: *English modality*, 379–410; Geoff Thompson, Laura Alba-Juez, eds., *Evaluation in context* (Amsterdam–Philadelphia: John Benjamins, 2014).

¹¹ Frank Robert Palmer, *Semantics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981).

¹² *Ibidem*, 153.

¹³ See e.g. Jan Nuyts, *Epistemic modality, language and conceptualization. A cognitive-pragmatic perspective* (Amsterdam–Philadelphia: John Benjamins, 2000); Magdalena Danielewiczowa, *Wiedza i niewiedza. Studium polskich czasowników epistemicznych* (Warszawa: Katedra Lingwistyki Formalnej UW, 2002).

¹⁴ E.g. Avon Crismore, *Metadiscourse: What is it and how is it used in school and non-school social science texts*. (Urbana–Champaign: University of Illinois, 1983); William Vande Kopple, “Some exploratory discourse on metadiscourse”, *College Composition and Communication* 36 (1985): 82–93.

¹⁵ See e.g. Dwight Atkinson, *Scientific discourse in sociohistorical context* (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum, 1999); Susan Hunston, Geoff Thompson, eds., *Evaluation in text: Authorial stance and the construction of discourse* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000); Thompson, Alba-Juez, *Evaluation*.

and appraisal¹⁶. For example, epistemic verbs can be considered as interpersonal metadiscourse¹⁷, as interactional metadiscursive resources¹⁸ or as validity markers¹⁹.

The application of a broader, discourse-based approach to modality offers a way to study interpersonal meanings in text. For one thing, epistemic modality is socially and interactionally motivated and, as modal meanings are to some degree contextually determined, they may even acquire new interactive meanings and functions²⁰. For another, exploring modality more broadly allows us to study speakers' attitudes and beliefs as well as their engagement with other voices and positions constructed in text²¹. Thus modality has relevance for the construction of identity in discourse, whereby identity is defined as a process of positioning of the self in relation to others²². Modality choices may be strategically used to negotiate speakers' identity positions in text, and so the focus on epistemic verbs may give us a possibility to investigate bloggers' and readers' positions in relation to the knowledge claims which they advance, to other voices constructed in text, and to their intended audience.

More generally, the approach adopted in the present paper aims to contribute to the study of knowledge and its relation to discourse, or to the advancement of *discourse epistemics*, that is, a multidisciplinary research domain which can give us insights into how knowledge is acquired and shaped by discourse, how it is presupposed, implied, expressed and shared²³. What is of particular relevance for the aims of this paper is that both discourse and knowledge are “produced and understood under the control of context, defined as the subjective ‘definition of the communicative situation’, as it is represented by participants in dynamic *context models*”²⁴. This implies that knowledge, and so the use of epistemically relevant expressions, should be studied as part of communicative situations; hence, the

¹⁶ James R. Martin, Peter R.R. White, *The language of evaluation: Appraisal in English* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005).

¹⁷ Emma Dafouz-Milne, “Metadiscourse revisited: A contrastive study of persuasive writing in professional discourse”, *Regreso al metadiscursio: estudio contrastivo de la persuasión en el discurso profesional. Estudios Ingleses de la Universidad Complutense* 11 (2003), accessed 12.10.2020, 29–52, <http://revistas.ucm.es/index.php/EIUC/article/view/EIUC0303110029A>.

¹⁸ Ken Hyland, *Metadiscourse* (London–New York: Continuum, 2005).

¹⁹ Annelie Ädel, *Metadiscourse in L1 and L2 English* (Amsterdam–Philadelphia: John Benjamins, 2006).

²⁰ Kärkkäinen, *Epistemic stance*; Teun A. van Dijk, *Discourse and knowledge: A sociocognitive approach* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

²¹ Downing, Perucha, *Modality*.

²² E.g. Rom Harré, Luk van Langenhove, eds., *Positioning theory. Moral contexts of intentional action* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999); Bethan Benwell, Elizabeth Stokoe, *Discourse and identity* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2006); Anna De Fina, Deborah Schiffrin, Michael Bamberg, *Discourse and identity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

²³ Van Dijk, *Discourse*.

²⁴ *Ibidem*, 47; emphasis in the original.

importance of the following social dimensions of context models: the setting, the roles and relations of participants, and the goals of the communicative event²⁵.

2. Data and method

The research material for the present study consisted of 100 posts retrieved from the websites of ten blogs run in Polish by individual healthcare practitioners under their real names (five blogs) or anonymously (five blogs); for the complete list of blogs in the corpus, see Appendix. The bloggers represent the following specializations: ophthalmology, medical rescue, emergency cardiology, cardiology, stomatology, anesthesiology, optics and optometry, endocrinology and microbiology. The corpus includes both the posts and the accompanying comments. The bloggers differ in the frequency of updating their blogs: the data included in the corpus were submitted between January 2014 and December 2016, with the exception of one blog which had not been updated since 2013, so the data from this blog cover the period from February to October 2013. The research material is in Polish, but for the purposes of the present paper, I also provide an English translation of the examples²⁶. Following the guidelines for conducting research in web-mediated contexts²⁷, all of the bloggers were approached by email and gave their consent for the data to be used and quoted for the purposes of linguistic research²⁸.

The theoretical-methodological background of the investigation draws on discourse approaches to modality, identity and knowledge. The analysis undertaken is essentially qualitative and the focus is put on the role of epistemic predicates in identity construction by the bloggers in the posts and comments, and by the blog's audience in the comments. Therefore, the research involved the search for the occurrences of epistemic verbs according to the list established on the basis of Danielewiczowa's²⁹ classification of Polish epistemic verbs of "insufficient knowledge", that is, verbs which are semantically founded on knowledge but which imply the lack of the epistemic subject's knowledge³⁰. Danielewiczowa's study contributed to ample research in which modality, hedging and evidentiality are classi-

²⁵ Ibidem, 228.

²⁶ All translation from Polish are mine and have been confirmed by consultation with a qualified native speaker of English.

²⁷ Brook Bolander, Miriam A. Locher, "Doing sociolinguistic research on computer-mediated data: A review of four methodological issues", *Discourse, Context & Media* 3 (2014): 14–26; Anette Markham, Elizabeth Buchanan, "Ethical decision-making and Internet research. Recommendations from the AoIR Ethics Working Committee (Version2.0)" (2012), accessed 12.10.2020, <http://www.aoir.org/reports/ethics2.pdf>.

²⁸ I express my thanks to all the bloggers who agreed to participate in the study and whose blogs were included in the corpus.

²⁹ Danielewiczowa, *Wiedza i niewiedza*.

³⁰ Ibidem, 374.

fied according to function³¹. Danielewiczowa grouped the epistemic verbs under investigation into the following categories: (1) *myśleć, że* ‘think that’ – grasping the ungraspable³², (2) *sądzić, że* ‘reckon that’ – making epistemic judgments, (3) *uważać, że* ‘be of the opinion that’ – adopting a stance, (4) conjectures and doubts – two extremes of the epistemic scale, (5) helpful senses, or what it seems to somebody, (6) *być pewnym, że* ‘be sure that’ and *być przekonanym, że* ‘be convinced that’ – how much you lack in order to know and how important is justification, (7) belief and hope – a positive mindset, (8) suspicions and fears – a negative mindset, (9) delusions – contrary to what others may know, and (10) creating an epistemic reality. The verbs in focus are those denoting epistemic states, and as regards their surface structure, “they represent two-place predicates. The first argument refers to a personal epistemic subject. The other one takes the form of a subordinate clause; it is introduced by *że* ‘that’ in Polish”³³. The search was supported by the use of the concordancing software Poliqarp (<http://poliqarp.sourceforge.net/>), a tool suitable for the analysis of languages rich in inflection.

The objectives of the research are: (1) to identify the epistemic verbs in use, (2) to explore the patterns of their use, and (3) to analyse their function in relation to identity work performed by the bloggers and their audience. It is assumed that the use of epistemic predicates will reflect: (1) the specificity of the communicative context of the medical weblog which merges informal interaction with more ‘traditional’ scientific communication; (2) the pursuit of the bloggers’ professional and individual goals; (3) the patterns of blogger-audience interaction.

³¹ See e.g. Ellen F. Prince, Joel Frader, Charles Bosk, “On hedging in physician-physician discourse”, in: *Linguistics and the professions. Proceedings of the Second Annual Delaware Symposium on Language Studies*, ed. Robert J. di Pietro (Norwood, NJ: Ablex Publishing Corporation, 1982), 83–97; Axel Hübler, *Understatements and hedges in English* (Amsterdam–Philadelphia: John Benjamins, 1983); Greg Myers, “The pragmatics of politeness in scientific articles”, *Applied Linguistics* 10 (1989): 1–35; Françoise Salager-Meyer, “Hedges and textual communicative function in medical English written discourse”, *English for Specific Purposes* 13 (1994), 149–170; Jenny Thomas, *Meaning in interaction: An introduction to pragmatics* (London–New York: Longman, 1995); Ken Hyland, “Writing without conviction? Hedging in science research articles”, *Applied Linguistics* 17 (1996), 4: 433–454; Hyland, *Metadiscourse*; Teppo Varttala, “Remarks on the communicative functions of hedging in popular scientific and specialist research articles on medicine”, *English for Specific Purposes* 18 (1999), 2: 177–200; Peter R.R. White, “Evaluative semantics and ideological positioning in journalistic discourse – a new framework for analysis”, in: *Mediating ideology in text and image: Ten critical studies*, ed. Inger Lassen (Amsterdam–Philadelphia: John Benjamins, 2006), 37–69; Ignacio Vázquez, Diana Giner, “Contrastive study of international commercial arbitration awards and court judgments: Intertextuality through metadiscourse in action”, in: *Arbitration awards: Generic features and textual realisations*, ed. Vijay K. Bhatia, Giuliana Garzone, Chiara Degano (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2012), 171–191; Diana Giner, “Rhetorical strategies of persuasion in the reasoning of international investment arbitral awards”, in: *Power, persuasion and manipulation in specialised genres: providing keys to the rhetoric of professional communities*, ed. Maria Ángeles Orts Llopis, Ruth Breeze, Maurizio Gotti (Bern: Peter Lang, 2017), 243–265.

³² When enumerating the groups of epistemic verbs, I use my translation of the descriptions of particular groups which Danielewiczowa used in her work.

³³ Danielewiczowa, *Wiedza i niewiedza*, 370.

3. Analysis and discussion

In what follows, I discuss the epistemic predicates identified in the data and the variety of their usage patterns according to the frequency of occurrence, however the frequency is not central to my discussion. Rather than focusing on the semantic analysis of the verbs in question, I explore the pragmatic effects of their use in the context of the medical weblog.

3.1. Helpful senses, or what it seems to somebody

This group includes verbs which express short-term, changeable epistemic states constructed on the basis of data received from the senses, that is, at least to some extent, the epistemic subject's direct perception is involved³⁴. It is the most frequent group in the corpus represented by *mieć/odnosić wrażenie, że* 'have/get the impression that' and *wydaje się [komuś], że* 'it seems [to sb] that'. *Mieć/odnosić wrażenie, że* 'have/get the impression that' indicates the uncertainty and subjectivism of the epistemic subject, but if compared with another verb in this group *czuć, że* 'feel that', they are more objective and social. They denote a temporary state which is, to some degree, constructed on the basis of shared knowledge³⁵. The occurrences of *mieć/odnosić wrażenie, że* 'have/get the impression that' in the corpus indicate respectively the blogger's – examples (1) and (2), or the reader's – examples (3) and (4), mitigated expression, coupled with a dose of irony about the functioning of the healthcare system in Poland, as in example (3). The verbs play a role in informal debate in which the blogger's or reader's view is expressed with distance but also engagement, as in (1), (2) and (4).

(1) Tymczasem czytając poszczególne pisma z uwagami odnoszę wrażenie, że prace nad nowelizacją ustawy sprowadzają się do zabójczej walki o interes nie pacjenta a własnych grup zawodowych³⁶. MB³⁷

'Meanwhile, when reading particular documents with remarks, I get the impression that work on amendment of the act boils down to a deadly fight for the interest of own occupational groups rather than of patients'.

(2) Tak na szybko – mam wrażenie, że producent leku zrobił wszystko. aby nie mówić o jego podobieństwie do mifepristonu, a podobieństwo jest duże. MB8

'Briefly, I have the impression that the producer of the drug did everything not to tell about its similarity to mifepristone, and the similarity is big'.

(3) Reader's comment: Widzę, że problemy z drukarką są standardem :D czasem mam wrażenie, że przez nie wizyty trwają dwa razy dłużej :D MB5

³⁴ Ibidem, 186–210.

³⁵ Ibidem, 208.

³⁶ All of the examples are quoted in their original form, with the spelling and punctuation as used in the corpus under investigation.

³⁷ MB throughout the article refers to 'medical blogger'.

‘I can see that problems with a printer are a norm :D sometimes I have the impression that because of them, visits last twice as long :D’

(4) Reader’s comment: Mam jednak wrażenie, że w powyższym artykule niefortunnie dobrałeś piśmiennictwo. MB2

‘I have the impression though that your choice of bibliography in the above article was unfortunate’.

The meaning of the verb *wydaje się [komuś], że* ‘it seems [to sb] that’ denotes the epistemic subject’s awareness of his/her insufficient knowledge. It is thus close to *suppose that* and *doubt that* and refers to states which are weaker than belief and certainty. Its impersonal version *wydaje się, że* ‘it seems that’ has the value of such modal particles as *probably, supposedly* and so on³⁸; for an example, see (5). As a tentative expression, the verb is used to express low modality. Personal forms of the verb are frequently found in less formal debates held in comments sections. The blogger’s reflection in (6) indicates her consideration of the audience and her engaged attitude in the discussion held in the comments section. Similarly, example (7) includes the blog follower’s mitigated voice in the discussion inspired by the blog’s topic. The uses of the verb *wydaje się [komuś], że* ‘it seems [to sb] that’ may result from the authors’ consideration of politeness³⁹, functioning as a face-saving strategy⁴⁰.

(5) Wydaje się, że jeśli takowe zagrożenie prawne występuje, dotyka ono w największym stopniu ratowników medycznych. MB2

‘It seems that if such a legal threat exists, it affects predominantly medical rescuers’.

(6) Blogger’s comment: Jeśli faktycznie wierzysz we wnioski, które wyciągasz, to wydaje mi się, że informacje naukowe zawarte na tej stronie cię nie przekonają. Choć może...? MB10

‘If you actually believe the conclusions that you draw, then it seems to me that the scientific information included on this website will not convince you. Though maybe ...?’

(7) Reader’s comment: wydaje mi się, że warto dostarczać kwasy omega 3 z innych źródeł jeśli nie możemy sobie pozwolić na jedzenie ryby przynajmniej 3 razy w tygodniu. MB9

‘it seems to me that it is worth providing omega-3 acids from other sources if we cannot afford to eat fish at least three times a week’.

³⁸ Danielewiczowa, *Wiedza i niewiedza*, 186, 188.

³⁹ Penelope Brown, Stephen C Levinson, *Politeness: Some universals in language usage* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987).

⁴⁰ See e.g. Raija Markkanen, “Hedging and modality”, in: *Probleme der Modalität in der Sprachforschung (Studia Philologica Jyväskyläensia 23)*, ed. Ahti Jääntti (Jyväskylä: Jyväskylä University Press, 1989), 137–148; Raija Markkanen, Hartmut Schröder, “Hedging: A challenge for pragmatics and discourse analysis”, in: *Hedging and discourse. Approaches to the analysis of a pragmatic phenomenon in academic texts*, ed. Raija Markkanen, Hartmut Schröder (Berlin–New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1997), 3–18.

3.2. Belief and hope: a positive mindset

The epistemic verbs of belief and hope presuppose positive valuation and thus their use indicates an axiological or volitive attitude of the epistemic subject⁴¹. The group includes *wierzyć, że* ‘believe that’, *mieć nadzieję, że* ‘hope that’, *liczyć [na to], że* ‘count that’ and *oczekiwać, że* ‘expect that’. As argued by Danielewiczowa⁴², *mieć nadzieję, że* ‘hope that’ is a common verb which denotes an epistemic rather than an emotional state and the epistemic subject’s strong engagement, but also his/her humility, recognition of insufficient knowledge and uncertainty about the state of affairs referred to in the complement clause, as, for example, in (8). However, in numerous cases in the data, the verb *mieć nadzieję, że* ‘hope that’ is used in more conversational, personal expressions as an attitude marker, for example, in (9) and (10).

(8) Mam nadzieję, że taki fundusz w końcu powstanie, a krytycy obecnej zdegenerowanej (według nich) koncepcji medycyny nie zawahają się, nie pójną na kompromis, gremialnie zgłoszą tamże swój akces. MB8

‘I hope that such a fund will be set up eventually, and the critics of the present, degenerate (in their opinion) conception of medicine will not hesitate, will not compromise, but will collectively declare their readiness to join this fund’.

(9) Mam nadzieję, że przez pozostałe 30 tygodni, minus jakieś 8 przez sprawdziany i zaliczenia, będzie się nasza współpraca lepiej układać ;). MB4

‘I hope that during the remaining 30 weeks, minus some 8 because of tests and course completion assessments, our cooperation will run more smoothly ;). [in relation to the blogger’s teaching job taken up recently]

(10) Blogger’s comment: Esperal, pierwszy raz się z czymś takim spotkałam. Mam nadzieję, że chociaż ciekawa będzie ;) MB5

‘Esperal [=reader’s nickname], it is the first time I have come across something like this [about the confusion in relation to the blogger’s participation in a conference]. I hope that at least it [=conference] will be interesting ;)’.

Liczyć [na to], że ‘count that’ and *oczekiwać, że* ‘expect that’ do not have an axiological character and imply that the state of affairs referred to in the complement clause is barely advantageous for the epistemic subject and so the epistemic subject does not attach to this state any positive values⁴³. Examples of the verbs’ use in the research data give evidence of the bloggers’ engagement in dialog with the audience and occur in informal, self-expressive posts (11) or comments (12). The epistemic verb *wierzyć, że* ‘believe that’ denotes the epistemic subject’s belief which is clearly realized and which is in agreement with his/her system of knowledge and convictions⁴⁴. Instances of *wierzyć, że* ‘believe that’ in the data are

⁴¹ Danielewiczowa, *Wiedza i niewiedza*, 239.

⁴² Ibidem, 261–265.

⁴³ Ibidem, 269.

⁴⁴ Ibidem, 248–249.

rare. Example (13) presents the blog follower's personal belief expressed as a parenthetical, digressive comment on the discussion on the necessity of vaccination against chicken-pox.

(11) Nie oburzam się, kiedy ktoś przeklnie, ale, do diaska, musi być po temu powód! Kiedy ktoś walnie się młotkiem w palec nie oczekuję, że zakrzyknie: o, jakżeż mnie zabolalo! MB6

'I'm not outraged when somebody uses swear-words, but, damn it, they need to have a reason for it! When somebody clobbers themselves with a hammer, I don't expect that they will shout: oh, how it hurt!'

(12) Blogger's comment: Myślę, że się nie zawiedziesz, a nawet liczę, że zakochasz się jeszcze bardziej :). MB10

'I think that you will not be disappointed, and I count that you will fall in love [in the film] even more :)'. [in relation to the film which the blogger was reviewing]

(13) Reader's comment: Ironiczne jest to, że sama znam słynny chicken-pox wyłącznie z amerykańskich kreskówek, gdzie ospa wietrzna była przedstawiana jako coś niemal fajnego, łączenie kropek na ciele i w ogóle (aczkolwiek wierzę, że twórcy tych odcinków nie chcieli źle;...) MB10

'It is ironic that I myself know the infamous chicken-pox exclusively from the American cartoons, where it was presented as something almost cool, connecting the dots on your body, etc. (although I believe that the creators of those episodes didn't mean wrong ;...).'

3.3. *Myśleć, że* 'think that'

The epistemic verb *myśleć, że* 'think that' is frequent, especially in spoken registers. It is semantically the most general and denotes the epistemic subject's knowledge, vaguely expressed, and readiness to express it⁴⁵. It may also function as a face-saving strategy. The use of *myśleć, że* 'think that' in the corpus gives evidence for an informal, conversational style, where the bloggers as well as their readers are dynamically engaged in the explicit expression of their opinions, as in examples (14) to (18). This also shows that the process of thinking is an activity which directs attention both to the author and to the topic under discussion. The topics which generate intense discussions include the functioning of the healthcare system in Poland (14) and those considered to be controversial, such as vaccinations (16). The blog users readily shared their experience (17) and views about health communication online (15, 18). The verb *myśleć, że* 'think that' occurs mainly in the comments sections, which are more dialogic and spontaneous, see examples (15) to (18).

(14) Myślę, że czas na wznowienie pewnego wątku dyskusji na temat organizacji systemu ochrony zdrowia w Polsce. MB8

'I think that it is time to resume a certain thread of discussion on the organization of the health protection system in Poland'.

⁴⁵ Ibidem, 121–139.

(15) Blogger's comment: pisałem kiedyś, czym jest dla mnie blog i myślę, że można to rozciągnąć na różnego typu fora i dyskusje pod informacjami czy artykułami w internecie. To taka wirtualna kafejka, do której można wpaść i pogadać o tym, co wokoło. MB6

'I was once writing what a blog is for me and I think that this can be extended to various types of fora and discussions under news or articles in the internet. It [the blog] is such a virtual café, where you can pop in and chat about what is around'.

(16) Blogger's comment: I myślę, że tak to właśnie wyglądało, że szczepionka nie jest zbyt rokująca. Stąd nie zrobiono kolejnej fazy badań klinicznych i nie dopuszczono jej do użytku. MB10

'And I think that it looked just like that, that the vaccine was not too promising. That is why no further phase of clinical research was performed and the vaccine's use wasn't approved'.

(17) Reader's comment: Czy próbowaliście już Oleje Świata? Myślę, że każdy znajdzie coś dla siebie, ja dla siebie znalazłem olej lniany i z awokado. Spróbujcie. MB9

'Have you tried The World's Oils yet? I think that everybody will find something for themselves, I found linseed oil and avocado oil. Try them'.

(18) Reader's comment: Myślę, że kilka tekstów stąd – <http://czajniczek-pana-russella.blogspot.com/> też by się nadało. MB10

'I think that a few texts from here <http://czajniczek-pana-russella.blogspot.com/> would also be useful'.

3.4. *Uważać, że* 'be of the opinion that'

When using the interpretative verb *uważać, że* 'be of the opinion that', the epistemic subject takes a stance, often in a radical but responsible way, with the awareness that although the stance taken represents a subjective view of the world, it is well-grounded⁴⁶. Occurrences of *uważać, że* 'be of the opinion that' used in the first-person singular indicate the bloggers' responsibility and confidence. In this way they legitimize the health practitioners' professional identity, as public members of society who are concerned with more general issues, as in (19), and as specialists offering their competent advice, as in (20). The audience supports the bloggers with their voices in the discussion, for instance aiming to dispel popular health myths, as in (22). The bloggers and readers present their opinion while respectfully acknowledging the space for other, alternative voices, as in (19), (20) and (22). The verb may also be used impersonally, like in more 'traditional' forms of scientific communication, as in (21).

(19) Odwracanie uwagi od faktów i ich realnego znaczenia ku emocjom nie najwyższego lotu to codzienność naszej prasy. W każdym razie internetowej, ale z podejrzeniem graniczącym z pewnością uważam, że pozostała, drukowana prasa wygląda podobnie. MB6

⁴⁶ Ibidem, 164–165.

‘Drawing attention away from the facts and their real meaning to emotions of not the best quality is the everyday reality of our press. Anyway, of the Internet one, but with the suspicion bordering on certainty, I am of the opinion that the rest of the printed press looks similar’.

(20) Generalnie uważam, już niezależnie od tematu ćwiczeń odchudzających, że warto się przestawić na pomiar pulsu tylko wieczorem. MB9

‘In general, I am of the opinion that, regardless of the subject of slimming exercises, it is worth switching to measuring the pulse only in the evening’.

(21) Uważa się, iż brązowy kolor oczu jest najczęstszy, taką barwę ma około 90 procent światowej populacji. MB1

‘There is an opinion that brown eye color is the most common, about 90 percent of the world’s population has this color’.

(22) Reader’s comment: Ja uważam, że dość głupia jest tu opisana teoria <http://www.forumonkologiczn...> o czosnku leczącym raka XD⁴⁷ MB8

‘I am of the opinion that a quite silly theory is described here <http://www.forumonkologiczn...> about garlic curing cancer XD’.

The following sections present the discussion of less frequent epistemic verbs in the research data.

3.5. *Sądzić, że* ‘reckon that’

In general, *sądzić, że* ‘reckon that’ is an epistemic verb whose meaning, on the one hand, is close to *think*, but on the other, has a more philosophical sense of the expression *make judgements*. It is characteristic for conducting a reasoned argument and is used in contexts where a difference in stance is marked, or when there is a need for a stance to be taken. The epistemic subject is aware that his/her knowledge is sufficient to take a stance⁴⁸. There are single examples of *sądzić, że* ‘reckon that’ in the corpus, used to mark a firm stance, with a hint of irony, in difficult discussions about the relations between particular health practitioners, such as medical caregivers vs. doctors in (23), or about the inadequacies of the healthcare institutions in Poland, as in (24). The verb can also be used impersonally, again in accordance with the conventions found in more ‘traditional’ forms of scientific communication (25).

(23) Sądzę, że wszyscy dobrze wiemy w jaki sposób podchodzą lekarze do naszych rozpoznań. MB2

‘I reckon that we all know well in what way doctors treat our diagnoses’.

⁴⁷ XD functions like an emoticon used to express mocking disbelief or surprise.

⁴⁸ Ibidem, 140.

(24) Sądzę, że to w najbardziej właściwy sposób opisuje mentalność PTMR: ważne żeby każdy pomysł zniszczyć, doczepić się i uniemożliwić działanie bez jakiegokolwiek konstruktywnej krytyki. MB2

‘I reckon that this describes the mentality of PTMR [=The Polish Society of Family Medicine] in the most appropriate way: it is important to destroy every idea, find fault with it and make it impossible to act, without any constructive criticism’.

(25) Z powodu podobieństw w funkcjonowaniu mózgow u wszystkich zwierząt, są podstawy sądzić, że i u nas proces zachodzi w ten sam sposób. MB9

‘Because of the similarities in how the brain functions in all animals, there is a basis for reckoning that also in us the process occurs in the same way’.

3.6. *Być przekonanym, że* ‘be convinced that’

Być przekonanym, że ‘be convinced that’ is a strong epistemic verb used for persuasive purposes. It implies that the epistemic subject managed to overcome doubts by finding good justification. Although its use is subjective, conviction is built not only on the basis of particular knowledge about a given state of affairs, but also on more general knowledge⁴⁹. In the corpus, the bloggers take an authoritative position in making a claim: about the reforms in the healthcare system, as in (26), or in scientific discussions of medical issues, as in (27). The use of *być przekonanym, że* ‘be convinced that’ in example (27) additionally supports the popularization function of blogs. Example (28) illustrates the use of the verb in a more private context, where the blogger engages in a personal narration to entertain the audience. Such elements of self-expression and self-disclosure characteristic to blog discourse serve to diminish the distance between bloggers and their diverse audiences.

(26) Jestem przekonany, że zapoznając się z pismami zgłoszonymi w trakcie konsultacji społecznych można przekonać się, kto jest ‘przyjacielem’ naszego zawodu. MB2

‘I am convinced that while getting acquainted with the documents submitted during the public consultations one can find out who is a ‘friend’ of our profession’.

(27) Jestem przekonany, że każda ze skomplikowanych relacji pomiędzy substancjami regulacyjnymi w organizmie ma głęboki sens ewolucyjny ustalony podczas doskonalenia się do przetrwania w niesprzyjającym środowisku. MB9

‘I am convinced that each of the complicated relations between regulatory substances in the organism has a deep evolutionary sense that was established while improving to survive in an unfavorable environment’.

(28) A dzisiaj, ze względu na wczorajszy wolny piątek (wolny, ale z wieloma sprawami do załatwienia, większość w Gdańsku – wyszłam z domu po 10, wróciłam koło 16), jestem święcie przekonana, że jest niedziela. MB4

⁴⁹ Ibidem, 230–238.

‘And today, because of yesterday’s Friday off (a day off but with many errands to run, the majority of which were in Gdańsk, I left home after 10am, and returned about 4pm), I am deeply convinced that it is Sunday’.

3.8. Suspicions and fears: a negative mindset

Podejrzewać, że ‘suspect that’ and *obawiać się, że* ‘fear that’ represent the epistemic verbs which presuppose negative valuation of the state of affairs referred to in the complement clause, as states which are negative or unwelcomed by the epistemic subject. Specifically, *podejrzewać, że* ‘suspect that’ is in opposition to belief, and *obawiać się, że* ‘fear that’ is in opposition to hope⁵⁰. The use of these verbs gives evidence of the subject’s (emotional) engagement and is potentially face-threatening. Example (29) includes a reader’s comment on a post on the ambiguities of newspeak used by companies to deliberately mislead customers. In the post, the blogger mocks this use of newspeak, and by means of expressive, ironic language and rhetorical questions, enacts a conversation with the audience. In reply, the commenter attempts to speculate about the meaning of the ambiguous sentence quoted from the post. Example (30) comes from the introductory part of the post about the tetanus vaccines. The blogger is critical of anti-vaccination attitudes. The use of *obawiać się, że* ‘fear that’ in the first-person singular in combination with a colorful (and difficult to render in translation) expression (for example, “fajerwerki pomysłów” ‘fireworks of ideas’, idiomatic “z cicha pęk” ‘out of the blue’, or ironic “wydumanych niebezpieczeństw” ‘airy-fairy threats’) serve to arouse the audience’s interest in the post’s topic.

(29) Reader’s comment: “Proces logistyczny – jest to uporządkowany łańcuch operacji związany z przepływem materiałów.” podejrzewam że może chodzić też o składowanie. MB6

“A logistic process – it is an orderly chain of operations connected with the flow of materials.” I suspect that it may also concern storage’.

(30) Nie żeby czekała na jakieś fajerwerki pomysłów – obawiam się, że mimo iż ludzka pomysłowość często nie ma granic, a ludzie bywają z cicha pęk i w rzeczy samej nadzwyczaj zmyślni, to akurat w wypadku szczepionek lista wydumanych niebezpieczeństw jest jednak skończona. MB10

‘It is not that I’m waiting for some fireworks of ideas – I fear that despite the fact that human resourcefulness often has no limits, and people can be, out of the blue and indeed, extraordinarily clever, in case of vaccinations, the list of airy-fairy threats is finite’.

⁵⁰ Ibidem, 276–297.

Summary and conclusions

In summary, the variety of the usage patterns of epistemic verbs in the research data reveals the roles which healthcare practitioners act out in their blogs and the purposes for which they engage in blogging. The epistemic verbs in focus are used to express engagement in current public life, especially in the functioning of the healthcare system in Poland; to report on (new) medical discoveries and to evaluate them; to debate and argue; to present a structured reasoning; to show awareness of the blog's diverse audiences and to minimize the distance between them.

To construct their professional identity, the healthcare practitioners draw on discursive strategies of distancing-mitigation (cf. the use of *mieć/odnosić wrażenie, że* 'have/get the impression that', *wydaje się [komuś], że* 'it seems [to sb] that', *podejrzewać, że* 'suspect that' and *obawiać się, że* 'fear that'), legitimization (cf. the use of *myśleć, że* 'think that', *uważać, że* 'be of the opinion that', *sądzić, że* 'reckon that', *być przekonanym, że* 'be convinced that') and self-disclosure (cf. the use of *wierzyć, że* 'believe that', *mieć nadzieję, że* 'hope that', *liczyć [na to], że* 'count that' and *oczekiwać, że* 'expect that', *podejrzewać, że* 'suspect that' and *obawiać się, że* 'fear that'). The analysis of epistemic predicates demonstrates the healthcare practitioners' overlapping and shifting roles in the medical weblog: they position themselves as expert specialists who follow their professional ethos, as researchers who extend their knowledge, and advice givers who are willing to share knowledge with their non-specialist audience and to educate their patients. They authenticate their expertise through references to their own medical practice and experience. Healthcare practitioners' professional identity is often constructed around struggles to balance patients' expectations and the professional ethos attached to their roles, impeded by institutional barriers⁵¹. The bloggers also aim to minimize the distance between their audience, enact conversation with them and integrate a blogging community. In response, the audience actively participates in the co-construction of knowledge and experience-sharing, and thus contributes to community building. The commenters sometimes take a voice in a discussion with responsibility and confidence (cf. the use of *uważać, że* 'be of the opinion that'), and, perhaps more frequently, with a degree of mitigation (cf. the use of *mieć/odnosić wrażenie, że* 'have/get the impression that' or *wydaje się [komuś], że* 'it seems [to sb] that'). It seems that the use of epistemic predicates by the audience confirms a more conversational, spontaneous and expressive style of interaction present in the comment section of the weblog (cf. the use of *wierzyć, że* 'believe that', *myśleć, że* 'think that', or *podejrzewać, że* 'suspect that').

In general, this study appears to prove that healthcare practitioners treat their online identity in the weblog, regardless of whether it is anonymous or not, as an extension of their

⁵¹ Agnieszka Sowińska, "Even if there were procedures, we will be acting at our own discretion... General practitioners' struggle about identity", in: *Identity struggle: Evidence from workplaces across the world*, ed. Dorien Van Den Mierop, Stephanie Schnurr (Amsterdam–Philadelphia: John Benjamins, 2017), 281–298.

offline professional self, crafted carefully in order to maintain their good reputation in the evolving context of the social media, where the blogs' followers play an important role. The institutional and private, self-disclosive aspects of identity intertwine in medical blogs, which results from their inherent technological features. Further investigations are needed which can take into consideration specialization-, status- and genre-dependent use of epistemically relevant expressions in the challenging contexts of health communication online.

References

- Ädel, Annelie. *Metadiscourse in L1 and L2 English*. Amsterdam–Philadelphia: John Benjamins, 2006.
- Atkinson, Dwight. *Scientific discourse in sociohistorical context*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum, 1999.
- Benwell, Bethan, Elizabeth Stokoe. *Discourse and identity*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2006.
- Blanchard, Antoine. “Science blogs in research and popularization of science: Why, how, and for whom?” In: *Common knowledge: The challenge of transdisciplinarity*, ed. Moira Cockell, Jérôme Billotte, Frédéric Darbellay, Francis Waldvogel, 219–232. Lausanne: EPFL Press, 2011.
- Bolander, Brook, Miriam A. Locher. “Doing sociolinguistic research on computer-mediated data: A review of four methodological issues”. *Discourse, Context & Media* 3 (2014): 14–26.
- Brown, Penelope, Stephen C. Levinson. *Politeness: Some universals in language usage*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987.
- Crismore, Avon. *Metadiscourse: What is it and how is it used in school and non-school social science texts*. Urbana–Champaign: University of Illinois, 1983.
- Dafouz-Milne, Emma. “Metadiscourse revisited: A contrastive study of persuasive writing in professional discourse”. *Regreso al metadiscursio: estudio contrastivo de la persuasión en el discurso profesional. Estudios Ingleses de la Universidad Complutense* 11 (2003): 29–52. <http://revistas.ucm.es/index.php/EIUC/article/view/EIUC0303110029A>.
- Danielewiczowa, Magdalena. *Wiedza i niewiedza: Studium polskich czasowników epistemicznych*. Warszawa: Katedra Lingwistyki Formalnej UW, 2002.
- De Fina, Anna, Deborah Schiffrin, Michael Bamberg. *Discourse and identity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006.
- Englebretson, Robert, ed. *Stancetaking in discourse*. Amsterdam–Philadelphia: John Benjamins, 2007.
- Facchinetti, Roberta. “Modal verbs in news-related blogs: When the blogger counts”. In: *English modality: Core, periphery and evidentiality*, ed. Juana Isabel Marín-Arrese, Marta Carretero Lapeyre, Jorge Arús Hita, Johan van der Auwera, 359–377. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, 2013.
- Giner, Diana. “Rhetorical strategies of persuasion in the reasoning of international investment arbitral awards”. In: *Power, persuasion and manipulation in specialised genres: providing keys to the rhetoric of professional communities*, ed. Maria Ángeles Orts Llopis, Ruth Breeze, Maurizio Gotti, 243–265. Bern: Peter Lang, 2017.
- Grieve Jack, Biber Douglas, Friginal Eric, Nekrasova Tatiana. “Variation among blogs: A multi-dimensional analysis”. In: *Genres on the web. Computational models and empirical studies*, ed. Alexander Mehler, Serge Sharoff, Marina Santini, 303–322. Berlin: Springer, 2010.
- Harré, Rom, Luk van Langenhove, eds. *Positioning theory. Moral contexts of intentional action*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1999.
- Harvey, Kevin, Nelya Koteyko. *Exploring health communication. Language in action*. London–New York: Routledge, 2013.

- Herring, Susan, Ann Lois Scheidt, Sabrina Bonus, Elijah Wright. "Weblogs as a bridging genre". *Information, Technology & People* 18 (2005), 22: 142–171.
- Hidalgo Downing, Laura, Begoña Núñez Perucha. "Modality and personal pronouns as indexical markers of stance: Intersubjective positioning and construction of public identity in media interviews". In: *English modality: Core, periphery and evidentiality*, ed. Juana I. Marín-Arrese, Marta Carretero, Jorge Arús Hita, Johan van der Auwera, 379–410. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, 2013.
- Hübler, Axel. *Understatements and hedges in English*. Amsterdam–Philadelphia: John Benjamins, 1983.
- Hunston, Susan, Geoff Thompson, eds. *Evaluation in text: Authorial stance and the construction of discourse*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000.
- Hyland, Ken. *Metadiscourse*. London–New York: Continuum, 2005.
- Hyland, Ken. "Writing without conviction? Hedging in science research articles". *Applied Linguistics* 17 (1996), 4: 433–454.
- Kärkkäinen, Elise. *Epistemic stance in English conversation. A description of its interactional functions, with a focus on "I think"*. Amsterdam–Philadelphia: John Benjamins, 2003.
- Luzón, María José. "Recontextualising expert discourse in weblogs: Strategies to communicate health research to experts and the interested public". In: *Insights into medical communication*, ed. Maurizio Gotti, Stefania Maria Maci, Michele Sala, 331–351. Bern: Peter Lang, 2015.
- Maci, Stefania Maria, Michele Sala, Maurizio Gotti. "Introduction". In: *Insights into medical communication*, ed. Maurizio Gotti, Stefania Maria Maci, Michele Sala, 9–24. Bern: Peter Lang, 2015.
- Marín-Arrese, Juana I. "Effective vs. epistemic stance and subjectivity in political discourse: Legitimising strategies and mystification of responsibility". In: *Critical discourse studies in context and cognition*, ed. Christopher Hart, 193–223. Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins, 2011.
- Marín-Arrese, Juana I. "Stancetaking and inter/subjectivity in the Iraq Inquiry: Blair vs. Brown". In: *English modality: Core, periphery and evidentiality*, ed. Juana I. Marín-Arrese, Marta Carretero, Jorge Arús Hita, Johan van der Auwera, 411–445. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, 2013.
- Marín-Arrese, Juana I., Laura Hidalgo Downing, Silvia Molina. "Evidential, epistemic and deontic modality in English and Spanish: The expression of writer stance in newspaper discourse". In: *English modality in perspective: Genre analysis and contrastive studies*, ed. Roberta Facchinetti, Frank Palmer, 121–139. Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 2004.
- Markham, Anette, Elizabeth Buchanan. "Ethical decision-making and Internet research. Recommendations from the AoIR Ethics Working Committee (Version 2.0)" (2012). <http://www.aoir.org/reports/ethics2.pdf>.
- Markkanen, Raija. "Hedging and modality". In: *Probleme der Modalität in der Sprachforschung (Studia Philologica Jyväskyläensia 23)*, ed. Ahti Jäntti, Jyväskylä, 137–148. Jyväskylä University Press, 1989.
- Markkanen, Raija, Hartmut Schröder. "Hedging: A challenge for pragmatics and discourse analysis". In: *Hedging and discourse. Approaches to the analysis of a pragmatic phenomenon in academic texts*, ed. Raija Markkanen, Hartmut Schröder, 3–18. Berlin–New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1997.
- Martin, James R., Peter R.R. White. *The language of evaluation: Appraisal in English*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005.
- Myers, Greg. *The discourse of blogs and wikis*. London: Continuum, 2010.
- Myers, Greg. "The pragmatics of politeness in scientific articles". *Applied Linguistics* 10 (1989): 1–35.
- Nuyts, Jan. *Epistemic modality, language and conceptualization. A cognitive-pragmatic perspective*. Amsterdam–Philadelphia: John Benjamins, 2000.
- Palmer, Frank Robert. *Semantics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981.
- Prestin, Abby, Wen-ying S. Chou. "Web 2.0 and the changing health communication environment". In: *The Routledge handbook of language and health communication*, ed. Heidi E. Hamilton, Wen-ying S. Chou, 184–197. New York: Routledge, 2014.

- Prince, Ellen F., Joel Frader, Charles Bosk. "On hedging in physician-physician discourse". In: *Linguistics and the professions. Proceedings of the Second Annual Delaware Symposium on Language Studies*, ed. Robert J. di Pietro. Norwood, NJ: Ablex Publishing Corporation, 1982.
- Puschmann, Cornelius. "Blogging". In: *The handbook of pragmatics of computer-mediated communication*, ed. Susan. C. Herring, Dieter Stein, Tuija Virtanen, 83–108. Berlin–New York: Mouton de Gruyter, 2013.
- Puschmann, Cornelius, Merja Mahrt. "Scholarly blogging: A new form of publishing or science journalism 2.0?" In: *Science and the Internet*, ed. Alexander Tokar, Michael Beurskens, Susanne Keuneke, Merja Mahrt, Isabella. Peters, Cornelius Puschmann, Timo van Treeck, Katrin Weller, 171–181. Düsseldorf: Düsseldorf University Press, 2012.
- Rettberg, Jill W. *Blogging*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 2008.
- Salager-Meyer, Françoise. "Hedges and textual communicative function in medical English written discourse". *English for Specific Purposes* 13 (1994): 149–170.
- Sokół, Małgorzata. "'Have you wondered why sportspeople die?' The medical weblog as a popularisation tool". *Discourse, Context & Media* 25 (2018): 13–24.
- Sowińska, Agnieszka. "'Even if there were procedures, we will be acting at our own discretion...' General practitioners' struggle about identity". In: *Identity struggle: Evidence from workplaces across the world*, ed. Dorien Van Den Mieroop, Stephanie Schnurr, 281–298. Amsterdam–Philadelphia: John Benjamins, 2017.
- Stermieri, Anna. "Knowledge dissemination in genetics blogs". In: *Insights into medical communication*, ed. Maurizio Gotti, Stefania Maria Maci, Michele Sala, 391–413. Bern: Peter Lang, 2015.
- Thomas, Jenny. *Meaning in interaction: An introduction to pragmatics*. London–New York: Longman, 1995.
- Thompson, Geoff, Laura Alba-Juez, eds. *Evaluation in context*. Amsterdam–Philadelphia: John Benjamins, 2014.
- Turnbull, Judith. "Knowledge dissemination online: The case of health information". In: *Insights into medical communication*, ed. Marina Bondi, Silvia Cacchiani, Davide Mazzi, 290–314. Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2016.
- van Dijk, Teun A. *Discourse and knowledge: A sociocognitive approach*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014.
- Vande Kopple, William. "Some exploratory discourse on metadiscourse". *College Composition and Communication* 36 (1985): 82–93.
- Varttala, Teppo. "Remarks on the communicative functions of hedging in popular scientific and specialist research articles on medicine". *English for Specific Purposes* 18 (1999), 2: 177–200.
- Vázquez, Ignacio, Diana Giner. "Contrastive study of international commercial arbitration awards and court judgments: Intertextuality through metadiscourse in action". In: *Arbitration awards: Generic features and textual realisations*, ed. Vijay K. Bhatia, Giuliana Garzone, Chiara Degano, 171–191. Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2012.
- White, Peter R.R. "Evaluative semantics and ideological positioning in journalistic discourse – a new framework for analysis". In: *Mediating ideology in text and image: Ten critical studies*, ed. Inger Lassen, 37–69. Amsterdam–Philadelphia: John Benjamins, 2006.

Appendix

List of blogs used in the study:

MB1 <http://szczecin-okulista.pl>.

MB2 <http://emergencycardiology.blogspot.com>.

MB3 <http://doktorb.pl>.

- MB4 <http://thekfiles.pl>.
 MB5 <http://kardio-log.blogspot.com>.
 MB6 <http://szamangalicyjski.blogspot.com>.
 MB7 <http://foropter.pl>.
 MB8 <http://www.blog.endokrynologia.net>.
 MB9 mathmed.blox.pl.
 MB10 <http://sporothrix.wordpress.com>.

Knowledge and identity construction in medical weblogs: A study of epistemic predicates

Summary

Following the discourse-based, interactional approaches to modality and identity, and recognizing that knowledge is social, relative and contextual, this paper aims to explore epistemic predicates in a corpus of Polish medical weblogs run by healthcare practitioners. The focus is put on the role of epistemic predicates in identity work performed by the bloggers and their audience. The study reveals the variety of the usage patterns of epistemic verbs, the diversity of the roles which healthcare practitioners act out in their blogs and the numerous purposes for which they engage in blogging. To construct their professional identity, healthcare practitioners draw on discursive strategies of distancing-mitigation, legitimization and self-disclosure. In this way, they position themselves as expert specialists who follow their professional ethos, as researchers who extend their knowledge and advice givers who are willing to share knowledge with their non-specialist audience and to educate their patients. They authenticate their expertise through references to their own medical practice and experience. The bloggers also aim to minimize the distance between their readers and engage in conversation with them. In response, the audience actively participates in the co-construction of knowledge and experience-sharing, and contributes to community building.

Konstruowanie wiedzy i tożsamości w blogach medycznych: studium predykatów epistemicznych

Streszczenie

Wykorzystując interakcyjne podejście do badania modalności i tożsamości w dyskursie, artykuł analizuje konstruowanie wiedzy i tożsamości na przykładzie użycia czasowników epistemicznych w korpusie polskich blogów medycznych. Analiza wykazuje różnorodność użycia czasowników epistemicznych, a przez to różnorodność ról, jakie lekarze odgrywają na swoich blogach, oraz liczne cele, dla których prowadzą blog. Blogerzy konstruują tożsamość specjalisty-eksperta, który kieruje się swoim etosem zawodowym, a także badacza i doradcy, który zgłębia wiedzę, dzieli się nią i edukuje swoich pacjentów. Lekarze uwiarygodniają swoją wiedzę poprzez odniesienia do własnej praktyki medycznej i doświadczenia, ale dążą również do zminimalizowania dystansu między czytelnikami blogów i nawiązania z nimi rozmowy. W odpo-

wiedzi czytelnicy aktywnie uczestniczą we współtworzeniu wiedzy i wymianie doświadczeń, a także przyczyniają się do budowania społeczności.

Cytowanie

Sokół, Małgorzata. „Knowledge and identity construction in medical weblogs: A study of epistemic predicates”. *Studia Językoznawcze. Synchroniczne i diachroniczne aspekty badań polszczyzny* 20 (2021): 161–180. DOI: 10.18276/sj.2021.20-12.