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Medical Research Genres in the English Academic Discourse

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Introduction. The research article in English has recently been under scrutiny by theoretical and applied linguists. The understanding of research article is heterogeneous: it can be defined as a scientific manuscript, an independent text type or a separate genre. In Russian academic discourse the concept of the research article usually implies a scientific publication with the definite word count which is less than a monograph. However, this broad definition comprises a variety of heterogeneous genres. The English academic discourse, on the contrary, specifies research genres manifested in Research, Review, Editorial, Commentary, Clinical Case Report and other text names. Additionally, these research genres can vary according to the scientific discipline. The objective of this paper is to identify and classify academic research genres in medical discourse.

Methodology and sources. The research corpus was collected from the original high-impact open-access medical journals, i.e., Lancet, New England Journal of Medicine, British Medical Journal, Clinical Infectious Diseases, Journal of Clinical Investigation, Brain, Pediatrics, Diabetes, Heart, Journal of Neuroscience. The research procedure involved contextual, semantic and comparative analysis of the journal requirements on the article type and content presented in typical sections About the Journal, Authors Guidelines and Table of Contents.

Results and discussion. The analysis has led to the development of differential parameters for further research genres classification. The findings have shown that a variety of research papers under different names can be classified as a system of research genres in the academic discourse represented by medical research publications. We have also found distinct correlations between medical journal requirements and linguistic characteristics of medical research genres.

Conclusion. The academic medical discourse functions in a wide spectrum of article types, which can be classified as medical research genres according to discourse parameters.

Keywords: academic discourse, medical research genres, classification parameters, article types, Research, Review, Case Report

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Оригинальная статья

Жанровые разновидности научной статьи в англоязычном медицинском дискурсе

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Введение. Научная статья на английском языке находится в фокусе внимания современной лингвистики, теории жанров и дискурса. Само понимание научной статьи неоднозначно: ее можно рассматривать как публикационный формат, как тип текста, как текстовый инвариант, как отдельный жанр научного дискурса. В российском научном дискурсе понятие «научная статья», как правило, маркирует научную публикацию определенного объема, отличную от монографии, объединяя, однако, достаточно разнородные виды текстов. В англоязычном академическом дискурсе самостоятельные виды научной статьи отражены в названиях, например, Research, Review, Editorial, Commentary, Report, Clinical Case Report. Цель нашей работы – выявление и систематизация видов научной статьи в англоязычном медицинском дискурсе.

Методология и источники. Материалом исследования стали современные медицинские журналы: Lancet, New England Journal of Medicine, British Medical Journal, Clinical Infectious Diseases, Journal of Clinical Investigation, Brain, Pediatrics, Diabetes, Heart, Journal of Neuroscience, отобранные на основе их высокого импакт-фактора и открытого доступа к публикациям. Процедура исследования предусматривала контекстуальный, семантический и сопоставительный анализ требований к научным статьям, содержащихся в постоянных рубриках – About the Journal, Authors Guidelines и Table of Contents.

Результаты и обсуждение. На основе полученных данных были определены функциональные параметры классификации научных медицинских статей. Результаты исследования выразились в выявлении и систематизации различных видов научной медицинской статьи, соотнесении разных вариантов названий с определенным видом, что позволило упорядочить их разнообразие, а также установить корреляции между требованиями журналов и жанровыми характеристиками научных медицинских статей.

Заключение. Академический медицинский дискурс функционирует как широкий спектр научных текстов, которые являются самостоятельными научными жанрами медицинского исследования.

Ключевые слова: академический дискурс, научные медицинские жанры, параметры классификации, виды научных статей, исследовательская статья, обзорная статья, клинический отчет

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Introduction. The current academic publication turnover draws heavily on the research article which is highly efficient in transmitting and disseminating new knowledge around the

expert audience in short time. This is particularly relevant for medical discourse regarding the high frequency of medical data update. Naturally, the research article as an academic genre has been the focus of linguistic scrutiny. Since J. Swales' CARS model [1], numerous studies have analyzed the cognitive and semantic means of new knowledge introduction and argumentation [2–4] as well as the researchers' involvement demonstrated by their stance, hedges or boosters in the research discourse [5, 6]. K. Hyland et al. has discussed particular discipline-related markers revealing the correlation the chose of vocabulary and the “hard” or “soft” science the research article represents [7, 8]. Numerous comparative studies on ethnocultural implications of the research papers' language [9–11] have marked an applied linguistic trend to elimination of cognitive barriers for nonnative research writers participating in the academic communication.

Thorough as it has been, the linguistic examination of the research text in current Russian studies has rarely addressed specific varieties or subgenres of research papers. Analyzing academic discourse features in scientific publications on philological or economic issues [12–14] the researchers might attribute their research corpus to a research article without specifying its particular type, i.e., research, review, debate etc. While for humanities this specification may not be relevant, it is crucial for medical research papers as the genre type directly correlates with the content and structure of the article, the authors' presentation and argumentation of the message as well as the word choice and other language means [15, 16]. Even a brief overview of the recent studies of the research article shows that quite a few of them focus on the research genre identification and analysis [17, 18] along with a limited number of studies devoted to specific genres of scientific medical discourse [19–23].

The issues of disciplinary specificity of a medical research paper are addressed in a number of international studies [24–28]. However, they also do not fully clarify the principles for distinguishing certain types of research papers, the differential parameters that make it possible to distinguish, for example, a Research Article from a Review Article or a Case Report from a Report. Additionally, the current medical publication practice is characterized by a variety of genre names which might relate to the same research genre. This creates additional obstacles for a non-native speaking author who would probably need to have linguistic competence to attribute their paper to appropriate genre or differentiate between different names yet relating to the same genre.

Therefore, a large proportion of medical publications in English compared to the global academic turnover and a growing number of non-native writers publishing in English determine the need to examine the medical research paper in English from the genre perspective. We hypothesize that preconception about the research article as a homogeneous genre many non-native academic writers of English have needs updating with regard to current academic publication practice. Although the research article as a separate academic genre can be contrasted to monograph or essay, in medical research discourse it functions as a variety of types demonstrating distinctive features of content, structure and language origin. The awareness of the medical research genres' variety can enhance the access to the global discourse of medical publications in English for non-native academic writers. In this view research journals can be representative and reliable resource for functional criteria search along with linguistic methods of genres interpretation and analysis. Thus, the objective of this study is to provide functional criteria for the present medical research genre classification, to identify and analyze particular research genres in medical discourse.

Methodology and sources. Functional criteria development requires representative material sources which obviously include leading research journals in medical, biological or health sciences. Our corpus included ten international medical journals: Lancet [29], New England Journal of Medicine [30], British Medical Journal [31], Clinical Infectious Diseases [32], Journal of Clinical Investigation [33], Brain [34], Pediatrics [35], Diabetes [36], Heart [37], Journal of Neuroscience [38]. The journals were selected by the high impact factor as an objective marker of the journal authority, open access and peer-revision, and genre diversity of the journal contents. In case the journal name covers a collection of journals (e.g., The Lancet Group or BMJ), the inclusion parameters were measured by the brand title of the group. The table below shows the journals inclusion characteristics (see Table 1).

Table 1. Medical Journals' Inclusion Parameters

The Journal Title	Impact Factor	Open Access and Peer-Revision (+/-)	Article Types by Contents (n)
Lancet	202.7	++	10
New England Journal of Medicine	176.07	++	9
British Medical Journal	96.2	++	12
Clinical Infectious Diseases	20.9	++	10
Journal of Clinical Investigation	19.4	++	4
Brain	15.2	++	9
Pediatrics	9.7	++	15
Diabetes	9.3	++	5
Heart	7.3	++	5
Journal of Neuroscience	6.7	++	4

By the context analysis of the journal's websites, we have identified three sections i.e. About the Journal, Authors Guidelines and Table of Contents, concerning research article types and giving their names and description for the authors. We used quantitative and qualitative techniques to establish the correlation between article type titles and their description presented in each journal.

We have also applied classification parameters, i.e., communicative purpose, topic, structure, author, audience, universally used for text description [39–41]. In addition to these, we have introduced two parameters which would be specific for the research article to provide genre differentiation. One of them concerns the completeness of research representation in the paper. Any research paper by nature is a verbal representation of the research, the stages (from hypothesis to conclusion) of which can be either manifested in full or partially (some are missing as the research is not completed yet). Some research papers may only contain reference to the original research as they are to debate its strength and limitations. Apparently, the completeness of research representation in the text type has proven a distinguishing feature which we used for medical research genre classification. The other characteristic specifies the research paper composition: whether its format is rigid, i.e., standard that cannot be changed by the author or flexible it can be subject to the authors' variations. As we will show further on, this feature can also be in-genre differentiating, so it was included in the methodology of the study. All in all, the full list of genre classification parameters included topic-content, communicative purpose, author, audience, research representation, composition format and volume (word count).

Results and discussion. The overview of international medical journals included in this study has demonstrated that their requirements for research papers almost fully correlate with the

classification parameters we applied for this research. The journals usually specify what topic-content is expected from the author; they either describe or illustrate by templates what paper format is to be followed; the requirements concerning citation standards, language standards, ethical principles, etc. are always present in any biomedical journal. The authors seem to be expected not only scientifically original, but also linguistically competent.

Our analysis of requirements concerning the research article type was focused on three sections – About the Journal, Authors Guidelines and Table of Contents of each journal. We searched the sections for general description of journal publications, article type name, article type description, the number of headings in the table of contents. We have also established whether the headings in the table of contents have the name as the article type. The study has shown that the content of these sections varies significantly, e.g., the article type has a thorough or a brief description, the article type description can be found in different sections depending on the journal, the same article type can have different names depending on the journal. The findings below (see Table 2) demonstrate certain associations between the journal sections and the article type characteristics mentioned above.

Table 2. The Journal Genre Requirements: Distribution Across Sections

The Journal Title	About the Journal	Author’s Guidelines	Table of Contents
British Medical Journal (BMJ)	general description of all publications	12 article type names; brief description of each	12–18 headings; <i>not all</i> headings’ names coincide with the article type name
Brain	general description of all publications	9 article type names; brief description of each	8–10 headings; <i>not all</i> headings’ names coincide with the article type name
Clinical Infections Diseases	general description of all publications; article type names	10 article type names; brief description of each	8–9 headings; <i>not all</i> headings’ names coincide with the article type name
Heart	general description of all publications; article type names	5 article type names; brief description of each	10–11 headings; <i>not all</i> headings’ names coincide with the article type name
Lancet	general description of all publications; article type names	10 article type names; detailed description of each	10 headings; <i>all</i> headings’ names coincide with the article type name
New England Journal of Medicine (NEJM)	general description of all publications	9 article type names; brief description of each	8–10 headings; <i>not all</i> headings’ names coincide with the article type name
Journal of Clinical Investigation	general description of all publications	4 article type names; brief description of each	4–7 headings; <i>not all</i> headings’ names coincide with the article type name
Diabetes	general description of all publications	5 article type names; brief description of each	10–12 headings; <i>not all</i> headings’ names coincide with the article type name
Journal of Neuroscience	general description of all publications	4 article type names; brief description of each	3–4 headings; <i>all</i> headings’ names coincide with the article type name
Pediatrics	general description of all publications; article type names	15 article type names; brief description of each	13–14 headings; <i>all</i> headings’ names coincide with the article type name

Our findings demonstrate that About the Journal section in all the journals contains the general description of all publications with only four journals, i.e., Clinical Infectious Diseases, Heart, Lancet, Pediatrics, including article type names in this section. The Author’s Guidelines has proven the key section to contain research genre instructions specifying the article type name and providing its brief description.

Our data show the quantitative variation in the article type numbers: Pediatrics, BMJ, Lancet have 15, 12, 10 article types respectively which are the highest numbers compared to 5 article types in Heart and Diabetes and 4 article types in Journal of Clinical Investigation and Journal of Neuroscience. The most plausible explanation of this variation comes from the journals scope: while Pediatrics, BMJ, Lancet are multidisciplinary journals with a wide range of medical branches and research designs, Journal of Clinical Investigation and Journal of Neuroscience are focused on particular medical branches or specialties, which types of research can be represented by 4–5 article types.

As for the correlation between the headings in the Table of Contents and the article type names, we have revealed that only Lancet, Pediatrics, and Journal of Neuroscience are completely consistent in this aspect, e.g., Editorial, Articles, Clinical pictures are the heading in the Table of Contents and the article type name in Lancet. However, most journals have a wide range of headings in table of contents than the article types they expect from the authors. E.g., the BMJ Table of Contents has section under the headings Editor's Choice which publishes commissioned essays, features or interview-based publications which are not medical research but discuss current issues related to health and social care.

The findings of the headings and papers have revealed a wide range of article types which need regulation and classification as many of them though having different names belong to the same research article genre. We have analyzed and compared their basic parameters, i.e. topic-content, communicative purpose, author, audience, research representation, composition format and volume (word count). Table 3 provides the fragment of the descriptive procedure illustrated by a few common types of medical research articles.

Table 3. Parametric Description of the Research Article Type

Parameter	Research Article Types		
	Systematic Review	Original Article	Case Report
Topic-content	an overview of previous research in a particular area of current interest. A thorough meta-analysis of fundamental or clinical concepts	an investigation of an original medical problem according to conventional research designs (clinical trials, observational studies, modelling studies etc.)	an original clinical case, clinical signs, diagnosis or treatment which might lead to a further full-scale study
Communicative purpose	to update the knowledge in a particular medical field or branch; to contribute to evidence – based medicine	to inform medical community about the results of the evidence-based study which might lead to update of clinical guidelines and protocols of treatment	to inform medical community about remarkable clinical cases; to update empirical data in a disease clinical manifestation, treatment or diagnostics
Author	medical or biological scholar/ researcher/a team of researchers	medical or biological scholar/ researcher/a team of researchers	medical doctor/clinician/ researcher/a team of medical doctors/clinicians/researchers
Audience	academic community of medical scholars/researchers/ experts	academic community of medical scholars/researchers/ experts	medical doctors/clinicians/ researchers/academic community
Research presentation	complete (all research stages are manifested)	complete (all research stages are manifested)	incomplete (introduction into research, research question and empirical data are manifested)

End of table 3

Parameter	Research Article Types		
	Systematic Review	Original Article	Case Report
Composition format	Flexible (the author is entitled to variations within IMRaD, including paragraphs, descriptive subheadings)	Rigid (IMRaD) Introduction Methods Results Discussion Conclusion	Rigid (BCpDC) Background Case Presentation Discussion Conclusion
Volume (word count)	2 500–9000 words	4000–9000 words	1500–2500 words

After all other article types underwent the same procedure. They were classified as medical research genres – an umbrella term for the group comprising article types – research articles variants sharing the same characteristics though having different names. The overall classification of medical research genres associated with their functional article types is displayed in the table below (see Table 4). Each genre is accompanied with a brief description.

Table 4. Medical Research Genres: Article Types and Genres Description

Medical Research Genres: Article Types	Brief Description
Research: Research Article, Research, Original Article, Major Article, Original Research, Regular Article, Article, Research Paper	The Research explores an original medical problem related new knowledge discovery and addressed to medical scholars and researchers. The results of the research might lead to update of clinical guidelines and protocols of treatment. The research is completely manifested in the papers, the composition format is rigid. The text ranges from 4000 to 9000 words
Review: Review Article, Living Systematic Review, Clinical Practice Review, Methodological Review, Systematic Review, State-of-the-Art Review	The Review is a meta-analysis on a current clinical or fundamental problem based on the previous studies aimed at knowledge update. It has a flexible composition and complete manifestation of the research procedure. The authors are academic experts on the topic who are usually commissioned by the journal to perform the study. The text volume ranges from 2500–9000 words
Report: Report, Brief Report, Short report, Research Briefs	The Report is a brief description of a high-quality research aimed at informing medical community about its preliminary results. It can have either rigid or composition and partial manifestation of the research procedure often limited to the reference. The author and audience are medical researchers and clinicians, and experts on a medical problem. The text volume ranges from 700 to 2500 words
Case Report: Case Report, Clinical Case, Clinical Problem Solving, Clinical Picture, Endgames, Case Review Articles, Endgames Spot Diagnosis Articles, Minerva Pictures Articles	The content of the Case Report covers an original clinical case, its clinical signs, diagnosis or treatment. The genre is both to inform healthcare community on the original case and to offer clinical recommendations on how to deal with such cases. Presented in the rigid format, the Case Report has partial manifestation of the research procedure. The average volume of the text ranges between 1500 and 2500 words
Analysis: Analysis, Perspective, Viewpoint	The Analysis is to inform the medical community about debatable political social or ethical aspects of an urgent medical issue, which may be presented from opposite viewpoints. It has a flexible composition and partial manifestation of the research in the text. The author is medical expert or healthcare executive, while the audience from medical to non-medical community. The volume is 1200–4000 words

End of table 4

Medical Research Genres: Article Types	Brief Description
Commentary: Commentary, Correspondence, Research Letter, Letter to the Editor, Rapid response, Personal View, Opinion	The Commentary is to polemically discuss the previously published research with a particular focus on the author’s opinion. Demonstrating the diversity of types with flexible composition, the Commentary also exists in the letter format. The research manifestation is a reference to the discussed study. The authors and audience can be academic researchers and practicing physicians. The average text volume is 750–1200 words
Editorial	Editorial is to inform the medical and non-medical community about the author/journal position on a burning medical or social problem. It is addressed to a wide medical and non-medical community and usually commissioned to medical or healthcare expert. The composition is flexible, the research manifestation is incomplete and usually limited to the reference to previous studies relevant to the discussed issue. The average volume of the text is 750–1500 words

This classification shows that the research article is one of the numerous research genres functioning in the medical segment of the global academic discourse. The research article can be manifested in various article types which, nevertheless, share basic genre and discourse characteristics. It is also evident that the term research article is not synonymic to review article, report, etc. although the latter are scientific genres based on research. They are separate genres which distinctive features were identified according to the classification parameters and summarized in Table 4. Thus, these data have confirmed the initial hypothesis suggesting that the research article as a universal term for a variety of research genres can be misleading and that it should be classified as a medical research genre along with review, report, case report, editorial, analysis, and commentary.

Conclusion. The overall results of the study can be summarized as follows. The global academic medical discourse now functions in a wide spectrum of article types. The diversity of article types, names and formats is mainly determined by international research journals which represent the current publication requirements. However, various article types can be classified and grouped as medical research genres according to discourse parameters of topic-content, communicative purpose, author, audience, research representation, composition format and volume (word count). Having applied these parameters to article types from ten medical research journals, this study has classified them into seven medical research genres, i.e., Research, Review, Report, Case Report, Analysis, Editorial, Commentary. Most genres are represented by article types which might have different names but share genre characteristics. This classification can be expanded by other article types which might be added to the research genres identified by this study or even form new genres. In any case, this seems a promising direction of the further research.

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