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"BEST DENTIST EVER" — EVALUATION STRATEGIES IN THE HEADLINES OF DANISH AND GERMAN POSITIVE ONLINE CONSUMER REVIEWS

Over the last few decades, computer-mediated communication (CMC) has become a significant element of our reality and, subsequently, an item of interest for researchers within many disciplines. CMC's rapid development has resulted in the emergence of new, multimodal means of expression, text genres, and communication styles. Among the new genres are online consumer reviews, which impact the behavior of online consumers to a large extent, but are also valuable for linguistic researchers due to their structure, content, and functions. The headlines of online consumer reviews seem to be of particular importance, although they have not received much attention in linguistic research so far. This paper offers a contrastive analysis of 200 headlines of positive online customer reviews for Danish and German dental care providers. Because of the way consumer reviews are displayed and consumed online, their headlines can be treated as separate texts and are analyzed as such throughout the paper. The investigation's overall goal is twofold: (i) to identify the basic communicative functions of the headlines, and (ii) to describe the linguistic means employed to express those functions. The analysis seeks to find potential similarities and differences between the headlines of positive reviews written in Danish and German. The findings show that there is little variation between the two subsets of the analyzed corpus as far as communicative functions and employed linguistic means are concerned. This may indicate that the identified features could be treated as characteristic of the genre rather than language-specific.

Keywords: online consumer reviews, eWOM, evaluation strategies, consumer review headlines, communicative functions, computer-mediated communication, Danish, German.

1. INTRODUCTION

Owing to the rapid technological development that has taken place over the past few decades, it is now easier to communicate "across both space and time" [Fussell, 2010, p. 133] than ever before. Computer-mediated communication (CMC) "has woven its way into the core fabric of our social lives" [Nielsen, 2017, p. 555] and changed the way we communicate in a number of ways. It has also become a vast area of study across disciplines such as linguistics, sociology, psychology, and media studies.

The last decades' CMC boom has included the emergence not only of new communication forms and strategies, but also of new genres such as blog posts and online reviews. The latter genres have become immensely frequent in the online world, as online customer reviews are to be found in virtually every online store, as well as on dedicated online platforms. Consulting such reviews before making a decision is considered standard procedure for more and more consumers. At the same time, online customer reviews have become an extremely powerful tool that can have a significant impact on products and businesses [cf. Vasquez, 2014, p. 2]. Also known as *eWOM* (electronic-word-of-mouth), online consumer reviews provide first-hand user-generated knowledge that spreads quickly to reach the global audience, and they are not as ephemeral as traditional word-of-mouth recommendations as they leave a digital record online [cf. Vasquez, 2014, p. 3].

The aim of this paper is to analyze the headlines of positive online consumer reviews written in Danish and German about Danish and German dental care providers. The main goal is to identify basic communicative functions of the headlines, as well as the linguistic means employed to express those functions. We also hope to be able to observe similarities and differences between the Danish and German data.

In section 2 we provide a brief general description of the headlines of online consumer reviews, as well as an explanation of the reasoning behind our choice to analyze them as separate texts. Section 3 offers a presentation of our corpus, the methods we employed in order to select the data as well as our analytical approach. Sections 4 and 5 are the analytical core of our investigation and deal with headlines of Danish and German reviews, respectively. We provide a summary and a brief discussion of our findings in section 6, where we also make suggestions regarding further research.

2. WHY INVESTIGATE THE HEADLINES OF ONLINE CONSUMER REVIEWS?

Structurally, an online review typically consists of a headline and the main body. The verbal content is often supplemented with a rating system, most often numerical or "star-based." On some platforms headlines are obligatory, while in other cases (e.g. *dk.trustpilot.com*) the first few words of a review seem to be automatically pasted as the headline if no headline is provided by the user. The structure and functions of press headlines have been the subjects of numerous investigations [e.g. Pisarek, 1967; Sandig, 1971; Oberhauser, 1993; Dor, 2003; Blom, Hansen, 2015; Kuiken, Schuth, Spitters, Marx, 2017], but to the best of our knowledge no studies of the headlines of online consumer reviews have yet been conducted. In this section we provide an overview of the reasons for which we see the headlines of online consumer reviews as an interesting, albeit unexplored, research subject.

To a certain extent the headlines of online consumer reviews resemble press headlines. According to White [White, 2011, p. 96] headlines "are privileged by the initial position they occupy […], the space they command, the bold print and size they are allotted." Owing to their text-initial placement, headlines are relatively independent elements of online press texts [cf. Burger, Luginbühl, 2014, s. 492]. This is indeed characteristic of online content in general, where the headline may be the only or close to the only part of the text visible for the reader. It applies to the headlines of online consumer reviews as well — in many cases a user needs to click on the headline in order to access the full text.

As observed by Burger and Luginbühl [cf. Burger, Luginbühl, 2014, s. 148], the headlines of online news items need to be content-oriented, as they are meant to make the selection of content easier for the readers, which can and often is also true with regards to the headlines of online consumer reviews. For this reason, both types of headlines tend to convey information in a highly condensed way, which in the case of press headlines often translates into "syntactic and semantic unorthodoxy" as well as "morpho-syntactic density". [White, 2011, p. 96]

The headline-full text relations in online consumer reviews are outside the scope of this study, although the issue of whether or not they share the above functions with press headlines deserves to be investigated elsewhere. In the case of online consumer reviews one can and

should assume that the potential reader is interested in the matter at hand and does not need to be lured to read or click[1]. What seems to be of more significance in terms of the headlines of online consumer reviews, though, is the way they are displayed and consumed online.

As noted, the headline of an online consumer review may be the only part of the review available for the user at first encounter with the text. Moreover, Internet users tend to scan websites for information that is potentially interesting/useful for them rather than read the entire content of a website, which seems to boost the significance of headlines and the impact they have on users. Some users (the authors of this paper included) often seem to intuitively treat headlines as abstracts for the reviews and more often than not to read the headlines rather than the entire reviews. For these reasons we believe that headlines of online consumer reviews can be analyzed as separate texts, without any explicit reference to the headline-full text relations.

3. THE DESIGN OF THE STUDY

3.1. The corpus

The analyzed dataset has been excerpted from a body of online reviews regarding dental care providers in Denmark and Germany, the texts being produced in Danish and German, respectively. Given the scope of the present study, we analyze the headlines of online consumer reviews and make references to their remainder portions only occasionally, when necessary for the purpose of our study.

The data we have selected for analysis are headlines of positive reviews of dental care providers for each of the two languages in question (n = 200 overall). The German material stems from *jameda.de*, an online platform for reviewing medical care providers in Germany, while the Danish reviews have been retrieved from the Danish section of *dk.trustpilot.com*, a multi-language, all-purpose review platform. The subjects of the analyzed reviews are both small (potentially also one-man) and large dental clinics, and no distinction is made in the data between the two types.

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[1] Contrary to the headlines of online press content, where the eye-catching function seems to be dominant, cf. Kuiken et al. [Kuiken, Schuth, Spitters, Marx, 2017, p. 1300] as well as Blom and Hansen [Blom, Hansen, 2015, p. 87].

We assume that each of the reviews has been written by a unique author, although this is impossible to verify [cf. Vasquez, 2014, p. 7]. The reviews published at *jameda.de* are all anonymous, which is not the case at *dk.trustpilot.com*, but in both cases all the reviews selected for analysis seem to have been published using unique user accounts. Therefore, the assumption regarding the authors' uniqueness seems justified. Table provides an overview of the analyzed data.

Table. **An overview of the analyzed data**

Language	Source	Reviews
DANISH	dk.trustpilot.com	100
GERMAN	www.jameda.de	100

3.2. Methods applied for data selection and analysis

As mentioned in section 3.1, the analyzed headlines have been extracted from a set of online consumer reviews retrieved from *jameda.de* and *dk.trustpilot.com* in the fourth quarter of 2019.

At *dk.trustpilot.com* users have the opportunity of providing both a written review of their experience and rate the product/service on a scale between one and five stars (one being the lowest and five the highest rating). Searching in the category *tandlæge* 'dentist' returns a list of dental care providers sorted by TrustScore (from highest to lowest). Clicking the name of a service provider allows to see all reviews regarding that service provider, which then can be filtered by rating. The positive reviews of Danish dental care providers that we have chosen to analyze are the first 20 reviews for each of the five dental care providers with highest TrustScores.

The rating system at *jameda.de* is somewhat more complicated, in that users are expected to provide ratings in several categories on a scale between one and six (six being the lowest rating), which is equivalent to the grading system in German schools. The ratings contribute to that user's overall average rating of that particular medical care provider (expressed numerically). Apart from that the users are expected to provide a written review but, contrary to *dk.trustpilot.com*, at *jameda.de* they are provided with extensive guidelines as to what the review should (not)

include and/or focus on. The analyzed positive reviews have been chosen analogically to their Danish counterparts.

For each of the languages in question we investigate what communicative functions are represented in the analyzed headlines. This is followed by an analysis of the linguistic means employed with the purpose of expressing those functions. As mentioned in section 2, we treat the headlines as independent texts and make no specific reference to the remainder portions of the reviews unless it is necessary.

4. FINDINGS FROM THE DANISH DATA

In terms of function the vast majority of the analyzed Danish online review headlines are explicitly evaluative. The reviewers provide their accounts of what experience they have had with the given dental care providers by means of stating their opinion with regards to that experience. In doing so the reviewers tend to focus on different aspects of the experience. Consider the following examples:

(1) a. *Godt sted*[2]
          'good place'
     b. *Topprofesionelle tandlæger*
          'top professional dentists'
     c. *Super sød og dygtige…*
          'super sweet and talented'
     d. *God behandling og service*
          'good treatment and service'
     e. *Virkelig et lækkert sted!*
          'really a nice place!'
     f. *Den bedste oplevelse!*
          'the best experience'

Example (1a) is generic in that the reviewer refers to the institution in question using the noun *sted* 'place' and makes no reference to any particular aspect of the experience. In (1b), however, the focus is on the dentists' professionalism, while emphasis can also be put on the reviewed care provider's personality, e.g. (1c). (1d) combines an evaluation of both the treatment and the non-medical portion of the interaction and (1e) seems to focus on the clinic's appearance and/or equipment

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² We have kept the original spelling and punctuation in all examples.

rather than the provided treatment or service. (1f) is a holistic summary of the entire experience.

The Danish dataset also includes a few positive reviews whose headlines are purely referential, as they contain general information about the dentist-patient interaction (2a) or the name of the performed procedure (2b):

(2) a. *Mit første besøg hos [name of dental clinic]*
        'my first visit at [name of dental clinic]'
     b. *Skulle have lavet røntgen*
        'needed to get an X-ray done'

A number of headlines in the dataset are functional hybrids as they are both referential and evaluative, e.g. (3a):

(3) a. *knækket Fortand SUPERKLINIK.*
        'cracked front tooth SUPER CLINIC'
     b. *Jeg er fast kunde.*
        'I am a regular customer'
     c. *Jeg er meget tilfreds indtil videre.*
        'I am very satisfied so far'

In (3a) the reviewer makes reference to the problem he/she experienced and that needed treatment, but the headline also contains a condensed general evaluation of the clinic in question.

The referential function of (3b) and (3c) is based on the fact that reviewers seem simply to provide readers with information about themselves. Given the communicational context and pragmatic goal, however, the two headlines need to be treated as evaluative as well. In these cases, the reviewers, being a regular client and one that is satisfied, respectively, seem to be sending a message that the subjects of the reviews provide satisfactory dental care-related experiences. In fact, the statements in (3b) and (3c) also seem to be implicitly persuasive in that the reviewers, by means of their declarations, seem to be trying to convince the reader(s) of the given dental care providers' worthiness. In such situations it is implied stronger than elsewhere that the reviewer is to be treated as a reliable source of knowledge.

Among the analyzed Danish positive reviews, we have not been able to identify ones whose headlines would be explicitly persuasive. However, implicit persuasiveness can be observed in a number of headlines

containing the performative verb *anbefale* 'recommend', cf. example (4) below:

(4)   *kan varmt anbefales*
       'can be warmly recommended'

Examples like (4) are, at the same time, evaluative, as through the act of recommending a dental care provider the person making the recommendation also seems to be expressing their positive opinion about the subject of the review.

In most of the analyzed headlines of Danish positive reviews, the evaluative function is manifested by means of evaluative adjectives, which Vasquez [Vasquez, 2014, p. 32] considers to be "one of the most common and explicit devices" employed for that purpose. The English adjective *good* appears to be the most frequent one used across her data [Vasquez, 2014, p. 32], and the same is the case in the Danish positive reviews in our dataset, where different forms of the adjective *god* 'good' appear in just under a third of all analyzed examples.

In most cases the adjective *god* refers to the received treatment (*behandling*), the general experience (*oplevelse*), and the service provided (*service*). In a few cases it is the dental clinic in general that is considered good and is even referred to, somewhat generically, as *sted* 'place', while we only found a single occurrence of a dentist (*tandlæge*) being evaluated as good using the positive form of the adjective *god*.

The adjective *god* often occurs with an intensifier in the form of an adverb, e.g. *rigtig* or *virkelig* (both meaning 'really' in this context), *helt sikkert* 'definitely', the adjective *super* as in *super god oplevelse*[3] 'super good experience' or the adverb *så*, e.g. *Så godt!* 'so good!'.

As many as 8 % of the headlines contain the superlative form of *god*, i.e. *bedst*. In these cases, however, reference is made to the dentist or clinic being reviewed (*tandlæge*, *tandlægeklinik*), the dental care providers being deemed e.g. the best in town, the best in Copenhagen, the best in Denmark or even the best dentist ever (*Bedste tandlæge ever*).

Apart from the adjective *god*, the sentiment of which seems to be generically positive and neutral (hence the use of intensifiers), a number of more specific evaluative adjectives can be found in our data. These

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[3] In contexts like this one *super* is predominantly used as the first element of a compound (e.g. *supergod*), which most likely also was the reviewer's intention here. Writing compounds as two words is otherwise a common error in written Danish.

range from adjectives whose sentiment is generally positive but whose overall meanings are also more intense than that of *god*, i.e. *flot* 'great', *fremragende* 'excellent' and *fantastisk* 'fantastic', to more context-dependent adjectives referring to various aspects of the experience.

Depending on which aspect is of greater importance for a given reviewer, the evaluative adjectives used may refer to the dental care provider's professional skills, e.g. *professionel* 'professional', *dygtig* 'skillful/ proficient', *kompetent* 'competent', *troværdig* 'trustworthy' or their interpersonal skills, e.g. *sød* 'sweet'/'nice', *venlig* 'friendly', *behagelig* 'pleasant', *beroligende* 'calming' and *smliende* 'smiling'. We have also found a single reference to the price of treatment by means of the adjective *billig* 'cheap', cf. (5) below:

(5) *Profesionel og billig som gør jeg har råd*
     'professional and cheap which is why I can afford [it]'

Even though the adjective in question is one whose function is by default referential, we perceive (5) as an instance of using this adjective for evaluative purposes.

In a few other cases the reviewers referred to various qualities of the reviewed clinics, some of which were generic, e.g. (6a), while others contained more specific references to the clinic's general ambience (6b) or equipment (6c):

(6) a. *Virkelig et lækkert sted!*
        'really a lovely place!'
     b. *Super betjening i rare omgivelser*
        'super service in nice surroundings'
     c. *Veludstyret moderne klinik med smilende…*
        'well-equipped modern clinic with smiling…'

In (6c), the otherwise referential adjective *moderne* 'modern' is contextually evaluative because of occurring in coordination with the evaluative *veludstyret* 'well-equipped', much like the adjective *billig* 'cheap' in (5).

A few of the reviewers express their approval of the received dental care by giving an account of their mental state related to the experience at the clinics in question. The adjective *tilfreds* 'satisfied' is employed for that purpose, more often than not with an adverbial intensifier, e.g. *meget* 'very' and *fuldt ud* 'entirely'. The adjective *tryg* 'safe' and the noun *tillid* 'trust' are used analogically in other examples.

Other non-generic evaluative adjectives used in the Danish dataset also occur with intensifiers, e.g.:

(7) a. *Yderst prossesionelle tandlæger med…*
        'extremely professional dentists with…'
     b. *Topprofessionelle tandlæger*
        'highly professional dentists'
     c. *På alle måder en positiv oplevelse*
        'in all ways a positive experience'
     d. *Helt igennem fantastisk dejlig…*
        'all the way fantastic lovely/nice…'

As we have shown above, the intensifiers in our data take different forms as this function can be expressed by means of e.g. adverbs and more complex adverbial constructions, cf. (7a) and (7c–d), respectively. The first elements of compounds can convey an intensifying meaning as well, cf. (7b). (7d) is particularly interesting in that it can potentially be interpreted as an example of employing a double intensifier as the adjective *fantastisk* itself is also sometimes used as an intensifier[4].

In a single example in the Danish data, positive evaluation is expressed by means of the noun *ros* 'praise', i.e. *stor ros til* [dentist's first name] ("high praise for [dentist's first name]"). A syntactically similar but less explicit example included thanking the dentist, i.e. *tak til* [dentist's first name] *og hendes team for…* 'thanks to [dentist's first name] and her team for…'.

According to Vasquez [Vasquez, 2014, p. 56], the "desire to repeat a positive experience" is a "productive form of evaluation" in online reviews. In our dataset we have found instances of using the adverb *altid* 'always' for which Vasquez's observations seem relevant. Consider the following examples:

(8) a. *Jeg har altid været fuldt ud tilfreds…*
        'I have always been completely satisfied'
     b. *Altid en fornøjelse*
        'Always a pleasure'
     c. *Altid god behandling og godt arbejde…*
        'Always good treatment and good work…'
     d. *Stadig super god behandling*
        'Still super good treatment'

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⁴ Cf. *Den Danske Ordbog.* Available at: https://ordnet.dk/ddo/ordbog?query=fantast isk&tab=for]

The use of *altid* in (8a–c) indicates not only the reviewers' mere desire to repeat the experience but it actually helps emphasize the fact that these reviewers have repeatedly had satisfactory interactions with the subjects of the reviews. In fact, the use of *altid* implies that they have not had any bad experiences, thus intensifying the otherwise positive evaluative meaning of the headlines. While the use of *stadig* 'still' in (8d) is less powerful than the use of *altid*, it also provides a sense of continuity with regards to the good treatment mentioned in the headline.

From the syntactic point of view, the majority of the headlines have no finite verbs, the exceptions being sentences in the passive voice with the verb *anbefale* (cf. example (4) above) and reviews where the users had not posted a headline and the first few words of the review were copied and pasted as the headline by the system. We have also identified two instances of subject ellipsis in the headline, cf. (2b) and (4).

Quite frequently the headlines are comprised of two coordinated phrases connected with the additive conjunction *og* 'and', cf. the examples below:

(9)   a. *God service og rigtig god behandling*
        'good service and really good treatment'
     b. *Flot arbejde og god oplevelse*
        'great work and a good experience'
     c. *Super søde og rigtig god behandling!!!*
        'super sweet and really good treatment!!!'

What is characteristic of such headlines is that reference is usually made to two different aspects of the patient-dentist or patient-clinic interaction, which allows to provide a more extensive and yet compact review in the headline itself. It can also be perceived as an attempt on the reviewers' part to make the headline "optimally-relevant for the readers" [cf. Dor, 2003, p. 696].

It appears that in some cases the reviewers were aware of the headlines' importance and potential eye-catching role and therefore made an attempt at making the headlines of their reviews attractive for their readers. For example, (10a) seems to be a reference to a popular beer commercial, which makes the headline stand out because of its intertextuality. In (10b) and (10c) the reviewers resorted to using the eye-catching direct loanwords from English, the relatively frequent use of

which can be observed in the informal speech of the Danish youth [cf. Rathje, 2010, s. 173]:

(10) a. *Måske Danmarks bedste tandlægeklinik :p*
   'perhaps Denmark's best dental clinic'
b. *Bedste tandlæge ever…*
   'best dentist ever'
c. *Kæmpe hive five herfra !*
   '[a] huge high five from here'

The combination of informal style and the use of an emoji makes (10a) a perfect example of modern written online discourse. Apart from using emojis some reviewers also resorted to other (typo)graphic methods of boosting the expressive load of their texts, thus signaling their personal engagement in the matters at hand as well as the importance of their message. Among these strategies, which are typical for online discourse [Hougaard, 2014, s. 47–48], the use of exclamation marks (often multiple ones) is quite frequent as well as using capitals to emphasize the words that the reviewers deemed especially important.

6. FINDINGS FROM THE GERMAN DATA

The evaluative function seems to be dominant also in the analyzed headlines of German consumer reviews. In this portion of our data, it is often not only the dental care providers themselves (their politeness, dedication, holistic approach, trustworthiness) that are subject to review, but also the clinic's remaining staff.

With regards to the dentists themselves the criteria that are evaluated most often are competence and professionalism as well as politeness when interacting with patients, all of which are exemplified below:

(11) a. *Sehr kompetente, freundliche Zahnärztin*
   'very competent, friendly dentist'
b. *Kompetenter und sehr netter Arzt*
   'competent and very nice doctor'
c. *Sehr kompetent, hört vor allem zu und nimmt den Patienten ernst*
   'Very competent, listens above all and takes the patient seriously'
d. *Fachlich höchst kompetent und menschlich sehr angenehm*
   'Highly competent in technical matters and very pleasant in human terms'
e. *Professionell und Kundenfreundlich*
   'Professional and customer-friendly'

The analyzed headlines also contain direct evaluations of the clinics' remaining staff, which can entail emphasizing the staff's politeness (12a). Just as often it is both the dental care provider and the remaining staff that are being evaluated (12b–c):

(12) a. *Freundliche Ausnahmepraxis*
   'Friendly, exceptional practice'
 b. *Netter Arzt, tolles Team*
   'Nice doctor, great team'
 c. *Kompetente und sehr freundliche Ärztin und tolles Team!*
   'Competent and very friendly doctor and great team!'

Occasionally the headlines offer objective information rather than the author's subjective evaluation, the information provided referring to the clinic itself or the service/procedures available at the clinic in question. In the analyzed material headlines of this type contain mostly information on the performed procedures or recommended treatment. In this portion of our corpus they are most often implant-related ones:

(13) a. *2 Inplatate gesetzt*
   '2 implants were set'
 b. *Setzen zweier Zahnimplantate*
   'Placement of two dental implants'

An extreme case of such information condensation is the example below, which only consists of one word and the only information the reader is offered is the name of the procedure. The actual evaluation of the dental care provider is in the review's full text:

(14) *Implantat*
  'Implant'

Similarly to the corresponding Danish data, the German headlines also tend to combine the informative/referential and evaluative functions. We have found headlines in our dataset where information about the performed procedure (inserting an implant or extracting a wisdom tooth) is accompanied by the patients' subjective opinions:

(15) a. *Erstes Implantat — sehr zufrieden*
   'First implant — very satisfied'
 b. *Problemlose Weisheitszahnentfernung und OP Implantat*
   'Problem-free wisdom tooth extraction and upper jaw implant'
 c. *Implantat OP bei [doctor's name] erfolgreich*
   'Implant upper jaw at [doctor's name]'s successful'

In (15a) the author directly expresses his/her satisfaction related to the performed procedure by using the adjective *zufrieden* 'satisfied' with the intensifier *sehr* 'very', while in (15b) and (15c) the otherwise referential adjectives *problemlos* and *erfolgreich* are pragmatically evaluative.

One of the subsidiary functions assigned to the headlines of online consumer reviews is the persuasive function, the idea behind which is an attempt at affecting the reader's behavior. In our German data this function is more often than not realized through evaluative elements. Usually, this strategy entails an explicit recommendation made by using the performative verb *empfehlen* 'recommend' or the adjective *empfehlenswert* 'recommendable':

(16) a. *Zu empfehlen*
           'recommendable'
      b. *Absolut empfehlenswert*
           'Absolutely recommendable'
      c. *Empfehlenswerte Praxis*
           'Recommendable practice'

In (16) the persuasive function is implicit and, in a way, intertwined with the evaluative one. The fact that a patient (here, the review's author) is satisfied with the received treatment can be put in the following modal frame: "I am satisfied with it and therefore I recommend it."

Satisfaction with the received treatment can also be articulated through the speech act of thanking, which by default is an expression of the sender's mental state in connection with the his/her relation to the addressee [cf. Wierzbicka, 1983]. In the analyzed material the speech act of thanking is expressed by means of the particle *danke* or the noun *Dankeschön*, both of which express gratitude:

(17) a. *Sehr Kompetent und Zuvorkommend. Danke*
           'Very competent and courteous. Thank you'
      b. *Ein herzliches Dankeschön*
           'A heartfelt thank you'

As it transpires from the analyzed corpus data, the evaluative function can be manifested in the use of primarily evaluative lexemes, which by definition and context-independently assign a certain rating or evaluative value to the object they refer to, as well as lexemes that are pragmatically evaluative. The primary function of pragmatically evaluative

lexemes is to describe the referent, while the evaluative portion of their meanings is context-dependent. Adjectives are the largest group among primarily evaluative lexemes, which is due to their inherent ability to assign attributes and rating values to their referents. In practice this translates into presenting these referents through an evaluative lens.

The adjective *gut* 'good' is a typical primarily evaluative lexeme. In our German data it occurs most often as an attributive adjective referring to the dental care provider (18a), the clinic (18b) or the care provider's medical approach and the treatment's effect (18c–d):

(18) a. *Sehr guter Arzt*
        'Very good doctor'
      b. *Sehr gute Zahnartz-Praxis!*
        'Very good dental practice!'
      c. *Wahnsinnig gute Leistung, die allerdings ihren Preis hat*
        'Insanely good performance, but it has its price'
      d. *Viele gute, Behandlungen mit guter Aufklärung in dieser schönen Praxis*
        'Many good treatments with good explanation in this beautiful practice'

In most of the analyzed cases the adjective *gut* occurs in the positive form, but grading particles such as *sehr* 'very' and *einfach* (in this context 'just') are often used in order to intensify its meaning.

The features signalized by the used adjectives are also intensified by means of the comparative and superlative forms, the use of which automatically entails a reference to a subjective scale/grade system. The comparative form of *gut* — *besser* — only occurs once in this portion of our data, in which case it is negated, giving the headline an overall positive meaning:

(19) *Es geht wirklich nicht besser !!*
        'It really cannot be better !!'

In 6 of the analyzed headlines we have observed the use of superlative forms of *gut*, i.e. *beste(r)*, and in all of the occurrences the adjective refers to the dental care provider in question. In two cases the meaning of the superlative is intensified by the adverbs *überhaupt* 'ever', cf. (20a), and *ever* in (20b), making it a kind of absolute superlative:

(20) a. *FÜR MICH DER BESTE ZAHNARZT HIER ÜBERHAUPT!!!!!*
        ….SPITZE!!!
          'for me the best dentist here of all!!!!!! ….great!!!'

b. *Für mich die beste Zahnärztin ever*
       'For me, the best dentist ever.'

As an alternative to the generically positive *gut* the authors of the analyzed reviews also resort to using the otherwise colloquial evaluative lexeme *top*[5] (*Top Zahnarzt* 'top dentist', *top Behandlung* 'top treatment', *Sehr gutter Arzt* 'very good doctor', *handwerklich top* 'craftmanship-wise top'). The author of one of the headlines used the adjective *top* four times accompanied by *einfach* 'simply' and *nur* 'just' in order to intensify the evaluation's expressive load, cf. (21):

(21) *Top TopTop einfach nur Top*
      'top top top just simply top'

In our corpus we have also found instances of evaluative adjectives being graded with the use of the grading particles *sehr*, *super* and the adverbs *äußerst* 'extremely' and *höchst* 'highly'. The meaning of the last two is that the intensity of whatever feature is expressed by the adjective or adverb following the two adverbs in question is beyond what is commonly considered to be the norm [cf. Glück, 2000, s. 689]. The following headline is an example of how the adverb *höchst* is used in the analyzed corpus as an intensifier of a positive feature:

(22) *Fachlich höchst kompetent und menschlich sehr angenehm*
      'Highly competent in technical matters and very pleasant in human terms'

Compound-initial *lieblings-* 'favorite' and *erst-* 'best…' as well as compound-final *-wert* can also be used as intensifiers. All of the above suggest a referent of high quality — a first-rate service (*erstklassig*), something worth recommending (*empfehlenswert*) or a referent that is the sender's favorite one (*Lieblingszahnärztin*).

The meanings of adjectives can also be intensified by other adjectives, e.g. *extrem (kompetent)*, *wahnsinnig (gute Leistung).* The intensity of the positive feature expressed by the one adjective is augmented by the other adjective, which expresses a high intensity.

Among the analyzed evaluative adjectives *kompetent* 'competent' is particularly frequent, as it occurs in 22 % of all headlines, including

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[5] Cf. "top" in *Digitale Wörterbuch der deutschen Sprache.* Available at: https://www.dwds.de/wb/top#2.

20 occurrences where it refers to the dental care provider, a single instance of it referring to the received treatment and one where it referred to a clinic's personnel.

Another evaluative adjective that is quite frequent in this portion of the corpus is *zufrieden* 'satisfied', which occurs in 13 % of the headlines, all of which are phrases (as opposed to sentences) expressing the author's mental state. Moreover, we have not found a single occurrence of the adjective in question without a modifier — all of the observed occurrences include the use of an intensifying particle, e.g. *sehr* 'very much', adverb, e.g. *rundum* 'entirely', or an adjective, e.g. *vollkommen* 'completely,' 'totally'. In a single case the numeral 1000 was used in the expression *1000 % zufrieden* '1000 % satisfied', which is a pragmatic modification of the expression *100 percent*. The purpose of the mentioned modification is to articulate a satisfaction level above the usual, and it also gives the evaluation a more expressive character [cf. Burger, 2003, s. 79].

As many as 9 of the headlines contain the adjective *freundlich*, which in 7 occurrences refers to the dental care provider and in the remaining two examples — to the clinic and the atmosphere in the clinic.

On the syntactic level most of the analyzed headlines are phrases (90 %), while 7 % are simple and 3 % complex sentences. Accumulation of evaluative elements with the same syntactic function (i.e. elements belonging to the same class of syntactic constituents) is one of the phenomena worth mentioning in this context. Among evaluative syntactic structures acting as carriers of values and emotions, Błachut [Błachut, 2014, s. 176] mentions triads and additive double structures, which we have found examples of in our data, cf. (23):

(23) a. *Toller Arzt // Tolle Mitarbeiter // Toller Praxis*
        'Great doctor // Great employees // Great practice'
    b. *Einfühlsam und kompetent*
        'Empathetic and competent'

Accumulation can take place by means of using a coordinating conjunction, e.g. *Sehr Kompetent und Zuvorkommend. Danke* 'Very competent and courteous. Thank you', or a comma, e.g. *Sehr kompetente, freundliche Zahnärztin* 'Very competent, friendly dentist'. The accumulation of isomorphic elements allows one to assume that the structure in question is highly emotive [cf. Engel, 1994, s. 273; Błachut, 2014,

s. 175–176] — especially when the evaluative element is repeated more than twice:

(24) *Top TopTop einfach nur Top*
       'top top top just simply top'

The purpose of such an iterative model of the triad [cf. Błachut, 2014, s. 194] is to articulate the evaluative message in a way that is highly expressive, the goal being reached by using multiple repetitions of the evaluative lexeme. In the example above emphasis is put, somewhat generically, on the review subject's unspecified positive feature(s).

7. CONCLUDING REMARKS

The aim of this study has been to analyze the headlines of positive online consumer reviews regarding Danish and German dental care providers. It was our assumption that potential similarities and differences can be identified between the Danish and German subsets of the analyzed corpus. In this section we conclude our investigation and provide a brief discussion of our findings.

We have not been able to identify any significant differences with regards to the basic communicative functions of the analyzed headlines. Overall, the analyzed headlines are predominantly evaluative, which is in line with the general genre characteristics of online consumer reviews [cf. Vasquez, 2014, p. 29]. Even in cases when the function seems to be predominantly persuasive or referential, more often than not the headlines are implicitly evaluative. The few examples in the dataset whose function has been identified as purely referential/informative, e.g. (2), (13) and (14), seem to be exceptions from the general trend.

In several cases persuasiveness is expressed implicitly, typically by using various forms of the performative verbs *anbefale* and *empfehlen* 'recommend'. That said, even these headlines are to an extent evaluative.

On the general syntactic level most of the analyzed headlines are phrases rather than sentences, although a difference can be observed between the Danish and German data. While 90 % of the analyzed German headlines are phrases and sentences occur seldom, the Danish data seem more balanced in that respect with 26 % of all headlines consisting of sentences. The numbers for the Danish data can be somewhat

distorted, though, as some of the headlines consisting of sentences are clearly not meant as headlines by the users but were copied and pasted as headlines by the system due to the lack of an explicit headline.

On the lexical level evaluative lexemes (mostly adjectives) are the most commonly occurring means employed throughout our data in order to evaluate the subjects of reviews, which is also in line with Vasquez's findings [Vasquez, 2014, p. 32]. Among these the Danish and German equivalents of *good* (*god*/*gut*) are the most frequent ones. Across the data these and other evaluative adjectives refer to the dental care providers themselves, other staff members at the clinics in question, the treatment and advice, the non-medical elements of the experience or the experience in general, which is similar to the findings of Emmert et al. [Emmert M., Meier F. and etc., 2014].

In order to increase the expressive force of their headlines, the reviewers often employ various types of intensifiers, a strategy which, again, is fairly consistent across the two subsets of our data. In a number of cases we observed inflectional intensification of the meanings of adjectives by using the superlative, while in other headlines lexical means are used for that purpose in the form of adverbial intensifiers or particles. Occasionally, online reviewers also resort to word-formational intensification mechanisms by using compounds, where the first element intensifies the meaning of the second element.

In the headlines of positive reviews satisfaction is the most frequently referenced feeling, which is typically expressed using the Danish and German equivalents of the adjective *satisfied* (*tilfreds*/*zufrieden*) and in German, occasionally, the noun *satisfaction* (*Zufriedenheit*).

Owing to the use of vocabulary referring to the author's (i.e. patient's) feelings or mental state, the evaluative and informative functions are intertwined with the (implicit) persuasive function, which can be put in the following modal frame: "I am satisfied, I would recommend it."

The headlines of the analyzed positive reviews appear to be rather neutral and to the point, although some of them are very enthusiastic and do seem to be highly emotive as well.

Maximum information condensation in the headlines is achieved by limiting them to even single lexemes and by means of cumulation. The carriers of values and emotions are additive double structures in which the headlines are comprised of two coordinated phrases connected with the conjunction *and* (*og*/*und*).

Triads are a different type of cumulations in that they are comprised of three isomorphic elements used for expressive articulation of values. The occurrence of such structures has only been observed in the German portion of the corpus, most often as an iterative structure where intensification is achieved by means of multiple repetition of an evaluative lexeme, e.g. *Top Top Top einfach nur Top*.

As it transpires from our investigation, the two subsets of our corpus have similar evaluation strategies. In most cases the analyzed headlines have the same communicative functions (the evaluative function being dominant and virtually omnipresent), and the authors touch upon similar subjects. Moreover, the authors of the analyzed headlines across our corpus tend to evaluate dental care providers in analogous ways as far as linguistic means are concerned, the differences being most likely a matter of the authors' personal preferences rather than general tendencies.

Through our investigation we hope to have contributed to a better understanding of online consumer reviews as a genre. The analyzed headlines are undoubtedly rich in ways of content, and because of the way they are displayed online, they can be treated as separate texts. However, in order to gain a more profound understanding of the nature of online consumer reviews, further research is necessary regarding the full texts of the reviews as well as the relations between the headlines and the full texts of the reviews. What we have been able to observe so far is that only those few of the analyzed headlines that are stylistically marked (e.g. (10a) where a pop-cultural reference is made to a known commercial) seem to have the eye-catching function, which is otherwise said to be characteristic of the headlines of online news content. Most often the headlines of the analyzed reviews seem to be functioning as abstracts or summaries of the full texts. More detailed investigations are needed, however, in order to corroborate these preliminary findings.

Lastly, we would like to stress the relevance and importance of contrastive studies, the findings of which seem to not only provide very valuable insight, but they also seem to encourage (if not force) researchers to look at the results of their studies in a wider context.

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«ЛУЧШИЙ СТОМАТОЛОГ НА СВЕТЕ» — СТРАТЕГИИ ОЦЕНКИ В ЗАГОЛОВКАХ ДАТСКИХ И НЕМЕЦКИХ ПОЛОЖИТЕЛЬНЫХ ОТЗЫВОВ ПОТРЕБИТЕЛЕЙ В ИНТЕРНЕТЕ

За последние несколько десятилетий компьютерно-опосредованная коммуникация (СМС) стала важным элементом нашей действительности и, следовательно, предметом интереса представителей многих дисциплин. Быстрое развитие СМС привело к появлению новых мультимодальных средств выразительности, текстовых жанров и стилей коммуникации. Среди новых жанров можно назвать отзывы потребителей в Интернете, оказывающие большое влияние на поведение потребителей в сети. Благодаря своей структуре, содержанию и функциям, они ценны для лингвистов. Особенно важную роль, как кажется, играют заголовки вышеупомянутых отзывов. Однако стоит отметить, что до сих пор они не пользовались особым вниманием в лингвистических исследованиях. В данной статье проводится контрастивный анализ 200 заголовков положительных отзывов потребителей в Интернете, касающихся датских и немецких поставщиков стоматологических услуг. В зависимости от способа отображения и восприятия отзывов потребителей в Интернете их заголовки могут трактоваться как самостоятельные тексты. Именно в таком ключе они анализируются в данной статье. Цель исследования двоякая: (1) определить основные коммуникативные функции заголовков и (2) описать языковые средства, используемые для их выражения. Анализ должен выявить потенциальные сходства и различия между заголовками положительных отзывов, написанных на датском и немецком языках. Результаты исследования показывают, что между двумя подмножествами анализируемого корпуса существует незначительная разница в плане коммуникативных функций и используемых языковых средств. Это может означать, что обнаруженные особенности следует рассматривать как характерные для анализируемого жанра, а не как специфические для исследуемых языков.

Ключевые слова: отзывы потребителей в Интернете, стратегии оценки, заголовки отзывов потребителей, коммуникативные функции, компьютерно-опосредованная коммуникация, датский язык, немецкий язык.

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