Identifying and Categorising Metaphors in New Zealand Breast Cancer Discourse: Methods and Challenges

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Background of the Study

- A part of the PhD research .
- Metaphors -the first linguistic feature studied in this study (others include pronouns, verbs and speech acts)

A metaphor helps us understand something unfamiliar by comparing it to something familiar.

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Why study metaphor in breast cancer discourse?

- Research largely takes a medical focus, overlooking thoughts and emotions .
- Studying thoughts and emotions reveal speakers' experiences .

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Issue

- Identification of source domain metaphors

Why it matters?



Because there is no agreed upon consistent way of classifying metaphors (as also argued by Onysko, 2017)

Metaphor and Illness



Semino et al (2018)

*They **hit** me with radiations for 10 days* (p. 115)



Gustafsson et al (2019)

*I will not give up! [...]. I will **fight** to the last drop of blood, and that's it.* (p. 270)



Magaña & Matlock (2018)

En el año 2005 empezó la lucha 'The **battle** began in 2005' (p. 632)

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Data

Videos

46

Transcription

Whisper AI

Transcription error correction

Corpus Size



36,241 words

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Data

Various Speakers

- patients
- health professionals
- family members
- interviewers
- voiceovers
- other speakers

Narrrative topics



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Narrative Topics



- Testing Phase
- Treatment Phase
- Remission Phase
- Family support
- Campaigns and awareness efforts
- Government support and funding
- General information

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Focus of this presentation

- Metaphor
  - Identification
  - categorization
- Borderline cases
- Solution

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Methods of Metaphor identification

- Conceptual Metaphor Theory
- Metaphor Identification Procedure (Pragglejaz Group, 2007)
- Lexical Unit
- Use of Dictionary
- Metaphor identification based on breast cancer as the target domain
- Metaphor identification based on breast cancer and its aspect as the target domain

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Conceptual metaphor Theory

- Conceptual Metaphors

- Link between two domains:
  - Source domain (concrete)
  - Target domain (abstract)
- Help us understand abstract concepts

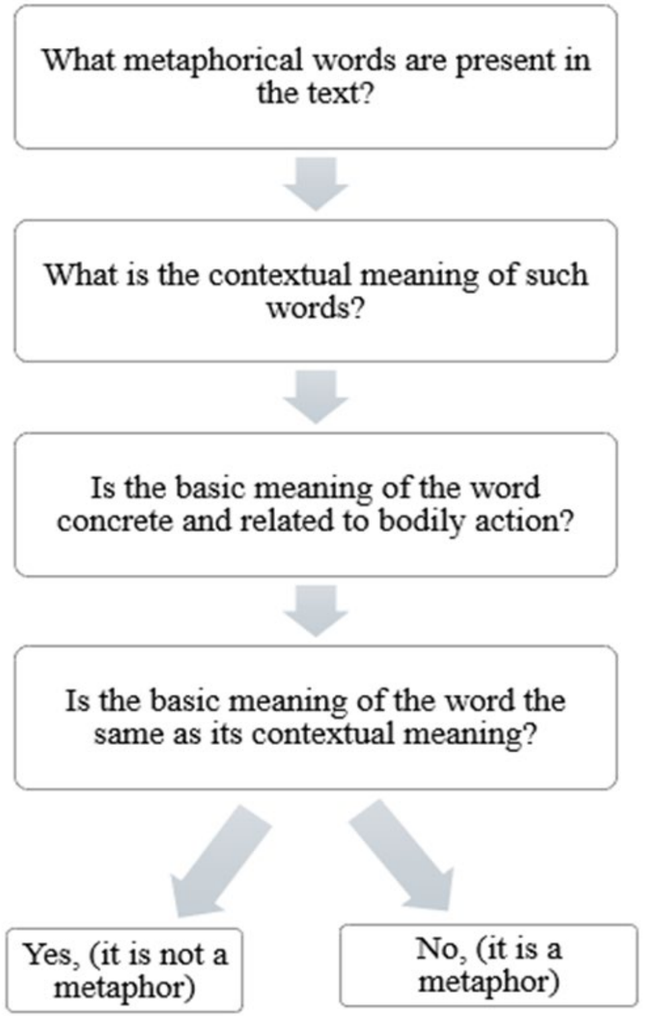


- Example:

  LIFE IS A JOURNEY

  → life understood through travel experience

Metaphor Identification Procedure



MIP adapted from Pragglejaz Group (2007)

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Lexical Unit

- Single words - *wall*
- Multiword expressions - *go through*
- compound nouns - *death sentence*

Use of Dictionary



The New Zealand Oxford Dictionary (2002)

Operationalisation of MIP on data

I don't think there's any need to be brave . Looking back on it, I've ***faced*** *a lot of, since then, a lot of sorrows because of the diagnosis* (nzbreastcancer, 2011)

- Step 1: Lexical Unit *faced* (single lexical unit)
- Step 2: Contextual meaning : to deal with / tackle

  Basic meaning (NZOD): “to look or be positioned towards a direction”
- Step 3: Comparison

  Basic meaning = physical, concrete action

  Contextual meaning = abstract (emotional experience)
- Step 4: Contrast identified →Metaphor

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Metaphor identification based on breast cancer as the target domain

Metaphor	Examples	Conceptual metaphors
Journey	We [were] very much wished my **journey** had ended then.	BREAST CANCER IS JOURNEY
Violence	I literally **crashed and burned** a year later.	BREAST CANCER IS VIOLENCE

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Metaphor identification based on breast cancer and its aspect as the target domain

Metaphor	Examples	Conceptual metaphors
Container	We discuss the tram flap and what they do is they take an area of fat and muscle **out of your stomach** and they literally bring it up the inside of your body.	BREAST CANCER (SPEAKER'S BODY) IS CONTAINER
Royal Figure	I was treated like a **queen.**	BREAST CANCER (SPEAKER) IS ROYAL FIGURE
Action	So I had to **deal with** that infection.	(DEALING WITH) BREAST CANCER IS ACTION

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Methods of Metaphor Categorisation

- A combined approach is used:
  - Source domains are used to categorise metaphors
  - Existing literature is used as a guide

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Categories found in both literature and data

- Journey
- Violence
- Container

The studies consulted include:

- Semino et al. (2017)
- Kövecses (2010)
- Semino (2008)
- Martin et al. (2024)
- Magaña & Matlock (2018)
- Vancauwenbergh & Franco (2024)
- Gibbs & Franks (2002)
- Gustafsson et al. (2020)
- Charteris-Black (2004)

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Categories found only in the data

- Action
- Royal Figure

- *I was treated like a **queen.***
  BREAST CANCER (SPEAKER) IS ROYAL FIGURE

- *So I had **to deal** with that infection.*
  (DEALING WITH) BREAST CANCER IS ACTION

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Borderline cases

- Some metaphor categories were borderline and could not be classified into a single category.
- These were considered as an extension of the existing category.

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Solution

Extensions of **Violence metaphors**

- **Battle** (e.g., fight)
- **Punishment** (e.g., death sentence)
- **Collision** (e.g., crashed)

Example of punishment

*Feeling like it was a **death sentence**, an immediate death sentence [....] that I was just going to be given a death sentence. That's it. (nzbreastcancer, 2016)*

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Solution

Extension of **Journey metaphor**

- **Progress** (e.g., next step)

Example of Progress

*The discussions were that I would move into, the **next step** would be chemo and then the **next step** was radiation (nzbreastcancer, 2011c)*

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- Until a method is developed to categorise metaphors (like MIP), it is useful to consult existing literature.
- Extension into the existing categories can help categorise borderline cases.

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Borderline cases

Some metaphor categories were borderline and could not be classified into a single category. These were considered as an extension of the existing category. For example:

1. **Violence metaphors**
- **Battle** (e.g., fight)
- **Punishment** (e.g., death sentence)
- **Collision** (e.g., crashed)
2. **Journey metaphor**
- **Progress** (e.g., next step)

Example of punishment

*Feeling like it was a **death sentence**, an immediate death sentence [....] that I was just going to be given a death sentence. (nzbreastcancer, 2016)*

Example of Progress

*The discussions were that I would move into, the **next step** would be chemo and then the next step was radiation (nzbreastcancer, 2011c)*