

# THE USE OF CONCEPTUAL METAPHOR IN CANCER PATIENT STORIES ON A CANCER CENTER WEBSITE

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## Abstract

*This research is conducted to analyse conceptual metaphor of cancer found in the stories of cancer patients. This research is aimed at explaining: (1) the source domain used to convey cancer, (2) the meaning of conceptual metaphor used by cancer patients to describe their experiences. The researcher uses a descriptive qualitative method. Therefore, this research uses content analysis as the research method. The sources of data are 5 selected stories taken from a Cancer Center Website. The results of this study show that there are three source domains of conceptual metaphors used to convey cancer. The source domains used to convey cancer are journey, blessing, and lesson. The meaning of the conceptual metaphor varies depending on the context and how it is used by the patients. As shown in the results, journey is the most frequently used source domain, with 19 metaphorical expressions, while blessing is the least frequently used source domain, with 7 metaphorical expressions. It is suggested that this research be used as a support or comparison in future research, particularly when discussing conceptual metaphors in communication. Subsequently, this research has benefited cognitive linguistics by identifying conceptual metaphors that exist in one-way communication, in this case, the cancer patients' experiences on a website.*

**Keywords:** Conceptual Metaphor, Story, Cancer

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The recent language trend is the use of figurative language. Figurative language is used to convey messages or information in an implicit way. Metaphor is a type of figurative language that is commonly used. Metaphor, according to Lakoff & Johnson (1980), is common in daily life, not only in language but also in thought and action. Our everyday conceptual system, which guides both our thinking and our actions, is

fundamentally metaphorical. People interact with one another in a language without realizing that their words may contain metaphor.

Metaphors can be found in a wide range of contexts, including novels, songs, speeches, and poetry. Metaphors can also be found in an online diary written by patients of specific disease. Metaphors pervade patients' thoughts, feelings, and writing. When discussing specific diseases and their subjective experiences with illness, patients use a variety of metaphorical expressions, either to lead to an understanding of illness experiences or to provide a framework for understanding a subjective and complex experience through the perspective of another more relatable experience.

One of the major public health problem around the world is cancer, it remains a mysterious disease, with no clear cause and cure that remains uncertain. Cancer can have an impact on nearly every aspect of a person's life. A cancer diagnosis causes complicated feelings and lifestyle changes that can be overwhelming for patients and those who are close to them. As reported by World Health Organization (WHO), men are more likely to develop lung cancer, while women are more likely to develop breast cancer. Thus, the "Cancer Treatments Center of America" website provides a forum for patients to share their cancer experiences. It is well understood that no two cancer patients are alike, and neither are their treatment journeys. As a tribute, the website provides a platform for the patients to tell their stories in their own words.

This research explores what source domains are used to describe cancer and The objectives of this research are to find out the source domains that are used by cancer patients to describe cancer and to explain the meanings of conceptual metaphors of cancer that are used by patients in their stories. This research only focuses on the positive metaphorical expressions used by the patients.

## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

In this section it includes the discussion of some theories, definition and also previous studies which are related to the research of this study. Related theories which have links with this analysis are conceptual metaphor and meaning.

### **2.1. Conceptual Metaphor**

A conceptual metaphor, also recognized as a conceptual metaphor theory (CMT), is a metaphor in which one idea (or conceptual domain) is interpreted through the lens of another, as presented by Lakoff and Johnson in their book *Metaphor We Live By*. Lakoff & Johnson (1980) identify two main components when analyzing metaphors: the target domain and the source domain. Similarities in characteristics must be found in both the target and source domains to comprehend the metaphor's intentions.

According to Kövecses (2010), the conceptual domain from which we draw metaphorical expressions to understand another conceptual domain is referred to as the source domain, while the conceptual domain that understands this way is referred to as the target domain. The concept of target domain is an abstract concept that must be explained by the structure of the source domain using conceptual metaphor. In other words, the target domain is perceived to be more abstract and implicit. Meanwhile, the source domain appears to be found in everyday life, intimate and explicit to the readers.

### **2.2. Meaning**

Bloomfield (1933) expounds meaning as "the situation in which the speaker utters it and the response elicited in the hearer." Meaning is an idea or concept that can be transferred from the speaker's mind to the hearer's mind and embodied in the forms of one or more languages. Meaning is inextricably linked to how humans think logically and comprehend. As a result, when we attempt to analyze meaning, we are attempting to analyze our own ways of thinking and comprehending our own ability to create meaning. A word's meaning is influenced not only by its placement in a sentence, but also by the field of knowledge in which it is used. Every communicator must be able to define a sentence's meaning based on its context.

Meaning can be defined as something that exists in the mind rather than the world, and that it must be more abstract than pictures and that it must be more abstract than just features (O'Grady et al., 1996). Meaning is a systematic process of thinking toward the core meaning of lexical words, implying that something abstract exists in the mind and is expressed by the speaker in discussions as a type of relationship between language and nature outside of language.

### **2.3. Previous Study**

Research on conceptual metaphors has been done before but with different source of data. Irwansyah et al. (2019) describe how love metaphors are conceptualized in Taylor Swift's song lyrics. The descriptive qualitative and cognitive semantic conceptual approaches were used. According to the findings of the study, several conceptualizations can be found in love metaphors, including the concept of love as a cry, love as a song, love as a hidden object, love as a necessity, love as a beauty, and love as perfection in Taylor Swift's song lyrics.

Febriansyah (2020) explored the conceptual metaphor of anger emotion in grunge musicians' song lyrics. The study takes a qualitative approach because the data is collected in the form of words rather than numbers, and it is based on cognitive semantics research's conceptual metaphor theory and emotion concept theory. The most common conceptual metaphors for the emotion of anger used by grunge musicians, according to the findings of this study, are Anger is Fire, Anger is an Opponent in a Struggle, Anger is a Natural Force, and Anger is a Hot Fluid in Container.

Sarjono and Bram (2021) sought to analyze the Coronavirus through metaphors in three online news headlines. The data were analyzed using a qualitative approach. The findings revealed that in 30 different headlines, ten various kinds of metaphors were used. The two most frequent conceptual metaphors for the virus were Coronavirus as War and Coronavirus as Enemy.

This research shares several similarities with previous studies, including research method and the application of Lakoff and Johnson's Conceptual Metaphor Theory. What differentiates this research is that it uses stories from cancer patients obtained from the Cancer Center Website as the source of data.

## **3. METHODS**

This research is a descriptive qualitative research. The term qualitative method, according to Taylor et al. (2016), refers to research that produces descriptive data in

the form of one's own written or spoken language and observable human behavior. The source of data of this research is five Patient Stories on Cancer Center Website. The five stories are selected from the same cancer category, breast cancer, and gender, with all patients being women, and the length of the story ranging from two to three pages word document. Meanwhile, the data of this research are words, phrases, and sentences that contain metaphorical expressions in the patient stories.

The data were collected by using documents which were the stories of cancer patients. The stories were taken from Cancer Center Website ([www.cancercenter.com](http://www.cancercenter.com)). The steps taken in collecting the data are as follows: typing the Cancer Center Website link on the internet, then going to the Patient Stories section, then reading and selecting five stories from the cancer patients which were chosen under the category of breast cancer, and finally copying and pasting the stories on a word document.

This research's data analysis technique is content analysis.. Content analysis is used to explain the meaning of the data in the text to determine the important aspects of the content. In this research, content analysis is used to describe the conceptual metaphor of cancer in patient stories on cancer center website. The steps taken in analyzing the data are first reading the data several times to learn everything to know about the story's content, then identifying the words, phrases and sentences that contain metaphorical expressions, and after that categorizing the data into a table based on their source domains, then interpreting the conceptual metaphors found in the patient stories on cancer center website, and last is drawing conclusion.

#### **4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

This research intends to analyse the source domain used to describe cancer and the meaning of the conceptual metaphors used by cancer patients in telling their experiences. According to the results, three source domains were used: the first is a journey, the second is a blessing, and the third is a lesson.

##### **1. CANCER IS JOURNEY**

According to the Oxford Dictionary, a journey is the act of traveling from one location to another, especially when they are far apart. Treating cancer as a journey represents cancer patients with a sense of acceptance, purpose, and control, which may lead to them noticing some positive aspects of their illness.

###### **Data 1**

A couple of weeks later, I *returned* for a follow-up visit and the surgeon reported that the incision was healing nicely. (P1)

###### **Data 2**

Even from dealing with the initial paperwork, I could see the dedication that went into patient care at *every step of the way*. (P1)

###### **Data 3**

I *went* for an initial consultation and met with my medical oncologist, who explained the particulars of cancer very clearly, even drawing pictures to make sure I understood exactly what he was telling me. (P1)

**Data 4**

He wanted to do an imaging test just to be certain that all problematic *areas* were detected. (P1)

**Data 5**

It turned out that he found two new trouble *spots*. (P1)

In the data above, it can be shown how cancer is conceptualized as a journey. It can be seen from the various participants who told about their journey in dealing with cancer and gave some conceptualization signals from the journey they went through. In data 1, the word “*returned*” is shown when she describes a follow-up visit as a form of journey when she has cancer. Data 2 shows the phrase “*every step of the way*” to emphasize a step taken by cancer patients in their efforts to follow patient care. Data 3 describes a patient who is required to go through a consultation phase regarding her cancer with her “*went*” to the consultation. Data 4 shows a different way of stating “*areas*” to describe the spread of cancer, as one of the phases of the cancer journey in life. Data 5, similar to the previous data, describes a situation in the cancer journey with the word “*spots*”. Lakoff & Johnson (1980) explained that the conceptual metaphor is to explain two domains: source and target domains. Data 1 until data 5 shows how the target domain is the state, situation and experience of cancer and the source domain is their journey in cancer.

**Data 6**

With this procedure, a balloon-type device is inserted into the area where the cancer cells are *located*. (P1)

**Data 7**

I am so thankful that my *journey* brought me to CTCA. (P1)

**Data 8**

My *first encounter* with breast cancer came in 2010, when I was diagnosed with ductal carcinoma in situ (DCIS), or stage 0 breast cancer. (P2)

**Data 9**

When we *come* to CTCA, the staff remembers our names and why we are there. (P2)

**Data 10**

I just felt like I was in the right *place*. (P2)

Kövecses (2010) explains that a conceptual metaphor becomes a metaphor that emphasizes a comparison in the target domain in a more abstract and implicit form. In the above data, it is known how the target domain refers to the journey given in each word and phrase in an implicit and abstract form as a metaphor for their cancer journey. Data 6 shows the word “*located*” which is often referred to a trip and used by the participants. Data 7 explains the word “*journey*” which clearly and explicitly refers to the journey of cancer, one of which brought it to CTCA. “*My first encounter*” in data 8 refers to the initial journey from when she realized that she had breast cancer. Data 9 refers to a journey where the participants “*come*” to CTCA as one of the moments in their journey. Lastly is “*place*” which, similar to data 6, is a familiar word and is directly associated with journey. The results of this study are in line with what was found by Sarjono and Bram (2021). In that study, it was found how the source domain and target domain refer to situations that are both detrimental. In this case, cancer as journey becomes a journey that is meaningful but still painful for the sufferer and, in this case, for the participant.

#### **Data 11**

I had been able to handle the logistics when Mark was having his surgery two weeks before mine, but now we both *headed* home for six weeks of recovery together. (P2)

#### **Data 12**

*Going through* cancer changes you. (P2)

#### **Data 13**

Today, we try to make a difference *wherever we go*. (P2)

#### **Data 14**

No matter who we come across or *where we are*, we try to carry good things with us. (P2)

#### **Data 15**

And I knew right then that I would do whatever it took to get through whatever was *headed my way*. (P4)

In the above data, it is found how each journey begins to be emphasized in a more intense and explicit use of words, even though it still refers to cancer as journey as how cancer is one of their life journeys. In data 11, it is shown when the participants “*headed*” home from how she came home to recover. Data 12 denotes the phrase “*going through*” which, according to the Oxford Dictionary, refers to “*undergoing a difficult situation and situation*”, which in this case is a cancer. Data 13 emphasizes that “*wherever we go*” they will seek to find a journey that will lead them to change. In data 14, the participants mentioned “*where we are*” to emphasize how they tried to keep the will to live in their cancer journey to encourage themselves on the journey. Data 15 explains about “*my way*”, emphasizing that the participant will go through anything that gets in the way or tries to be a challenge that comes her way. O’Grady et al. (1996) explains that meaning is something that is generally given in an abstract

form in the mind. In this case, each participant explains their thoughts which makes each of them also abstract, especially considering how this is a journey that cannot really be put into practice back in an actual visualization.

**Data 16**

Cancer Treatment Centers of America® (CTCA) was the *second place* I called. (P4)

**Data 17**

That question allowed me to stop worrying, to pray and give thanks to God, and *keep going* with my day. (P4)

**Data 18**

I used my nursing skills to try to *navigate* her cancer care. (P5)

**Data 19**

But there was no doubt in either of our minds where she *would go* for treatment. (P5)

In the last cancer as journey, each data shows a movement to emphasize each of the journeys they went through when they had cancer. In data 16, it is shown how the participant mentioned CTCA as the “*second place*” visited during her cancer journey. In data 17, it is shown how the participants “*keep going*” with their day to always be positive even though cancer is a detrimental and unpleasant journey in their lives. In data 18, it is shown the use of “*navigate*” as a familiar word and tied to “journey” in its literal sense, which in this case, is used to observe the performance of cancer in the patient's body. The final one is data 19, “*would go*” is used to refer to treatment. It can be seen how the overall results of cancer as a journey in this study are similar to what was shown by Febriansyah (2020), where the conceptual metaphor used in each study refers closely to emotion. In this study, emotions play a role in how participants’ journey in dealing with cancer becomes a journey of mixed emotions, most of which are sadness, suffering, and the desire to heal from the cancer that they are experiencing.

## **2. CANCER IS A BLESSING**

Blessing denotes God’s help and protection, or a prayer asking for this (Oxford Dictionary). Addressing cancer as a blessing expresses the cancer patient's acceptance of the illness. This emphasizes the patient's positivity in dealing with cancer, because not everyone is capable of perceiving a life-threatening illness as a blessing or a grace from God.

**Data 1**

I also want to acknowledge *the faith* that helped carry me through my fears. (P1)

**Data 2**

*The prayers, meals and calls—and just having them there—helped get me through a rough part of my life. (P1)*

**Data 3**

*I thank God for the friends and family in my life who support me. (P3)*

**Data 4**

I don't let the little things bother me anymore, and I *appreciate* so much more than I ever did. (P3)

Metaphor is a device that is used to strengthen and create meaning in a text. Therefore, Lakoff & Johnson (1980) stated that the source and target domains in the conceptual metaphor should be similar. In the results of this study, it was found that cancer becomes a blessing. The similarity between cancer and blessing is that they both come from God. Everything that happens in the world is from God and cancer patients believe that God has a purpose behind their disease. In data 1, it is shown that the conceptual meaning is referred to by using the phrase "*the faith.*" When the participant tries to convince her that what she holds is faith to overcome all fears. In data 2, "*the prayers*" are what the participant does. When she suffers from cancer, she sees cancer as a blessing. The reference to blessings was also shown by data 3 by feeling grateful and saying "*thank God*" after she saw how their closest family showed support in her going through her cancer recovery period. Data 4 as the last data mentions the word "*appreciate*" to emphasize how she appreciates everything in more quantity after she has cancer, which makes cancer a blessing for these participants.

**Data 5**

For me, *faith* became that tool. (P4)

**Data 6**

It was a very *spiritual experience* to connect with others, and it helped renew my faith. (P5)

**Data 7**

I'm *grateful* for the care I received at CTCA and for the support I had from my family and friends during my treatment. (P5)

Lakoff & Johnson (1980) mentions that metaphor is a phenomenon encountered in everyday life that not only includes language as its main interest, but also involves actions and thoughts. In the results of this research, it is known how the use of cancer as a target domain and blessing as a source domain indicates that thought plays a major role in the conceptual metaphor in the research results. Data 5 describes blessing in using the word "*faith*" to emphasize how she survived because of faith. In data 6, it is shown how the "*spiritual experience*" she experienced and made her connected became what made her endure her suffering. The last is data 7 which uses the word "*grateful*" as an expression that is very bound and directly related to blessing. The



results of this study show a slight difference with what was found in the results of Febriansyah's (2020) study, both of which discussed emotions, however, the previous study discussed emotions in a negative form, which was anger, and in this study, emotions and the thoughts conveyed are positive emotions and thoughts, namely about blessings.

### 3. CANCER IS A LESSON

Lesson is a period of time during which someone is taught something (Oxford Dictionary). Cancer patients see their illness as a learning experience that has taught them more about the disease and life.

#### Data 1

I remember going into the MRI machine *thinking* about how my doctors had done all they could up to that point, how I had tried to take care of myself and that we had all done our best. (P4)

#### Data 2

I *explained* to her that this was temporary, and we always emphasized the short-term nature of the treatment. (P4)

#### Data 3

I've *learned* to take things a bit more lightly. (P4)

#### Data 4

I tried to gather as much *information* as possible. (P5)

#### Data 5

I went online to *read* about my cancer and the treatment options available.

Lakoff & Johnson (1980) emphasizes that how people often communicate using language without realizing that what they convey has a metaphor in it. In this case, participants told about their experiences when they suffered from cancer and they did not realize that what they communicated became a lesson for the listeners as well as showing how they received lessons indirectly from how they had cancer. In data 1, it is shown how the participant uses the word "*thinking*" which means, as long as they have cancer, they use their thinking ability to do what they have to do. In data 2, the word "*explained*" is used to emphasize how the participant tries to give awareness to the patient that it will be something temporary. Data 3 shows a more explicit use of the word "*learned*" which is where a lesson is taken when they have cancer. Data 4 also uses a word that is directly related to the lesson, namely "*information*". The last is "*read*" in data 5 which clearly shows how the participant collects information about her illness by reading the information online. As mentioned by Kövecses (2010), the

metaphorical expressions used in each data are described and produce a conceptual domain so that it is understood how the context of suffering due to cancer accepts another domain or refers to another domain which becomes a lesson for each participant.

#### **Data 6**

In my *online research*, Cancer Treatment Centers of America® (CTCA) was always included in my search results. (P5)

#### **Data 7**

We *discussed* my treatment options. (P5)

#### **Data 8**

I have *learned* to let the little things go. (P5)

#### **Data 9**

I *focus* on healthy living. Most of what my family and I eat is not bought from the grocery store. (P5)

Further, cancer as a lesson is shown in data 6 which refers to participants who are trying to find out about CTCA in “*online research*” that she is doing as a form of learning that she wants to do to find out more about her disease. In data 7, the lesson is given in a more complex form, in which it is not only studied, but also “*discussed*” to find out the best implementation of the treatment options offered to cancer patients. Data 8 uses word references that are directly related to the lesson, namely “*learned*”. Data 9 as the last data emphasizes the consistency that is carried out in her life where the participant uses the word “*focus*” to describe her desire to become a healthy living individual. From this finding, it is known that the target domain given in the research is cancer and the source domain obtained is lesson. As stated by Lakoff & Johnson (1980) how the source domain is delivered in a more explicit form, it is important for the researcher to understand the use of the word and the actual meaning of the word before understanding the source domain that the participant is trying to emphasize in each data provided.

## **6. CONCLUSION**

In conclusion, based on the results of research found regarding conceptual metaphors in what source domains are used to describe cancer and the meaning of the conceptual metaphors used by cancer patients in telling their experiences, it can be concluded that there are 3 conceptual metaphors found in patient stories on a cancer center website which is classified into: cancer as a journey, cancer as a blessing and cancer as a lesson. In cancer as a journey, 19 data were found that refer to the use of words or phrases that refer to the journey as the source domain. In cancer as a blessing, there are 7 records that refer to blessing as the source domain. Finally, in cancer as a lesson, 9 data were found that refer to the lesson as the source domain. From these

results, it is known that journey is the most used source domain and blessing is the least used source domain.

It is recommended for further research to be able to fill the limitations of this research by submitting research that gets data from direct subjects rather than using secondary sources as used in this research. It is recommended that this research can also be used as a support or comparison in future research, especially in discussing conceptual metaphors in communication. Lastly, this research has contributed to cognitive linguistics, especially in knowing the conceptual metaphors that exist in a one-way communication, in this case the experiences of cancer patients on a website.

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