Lingue e Linguaggi
Lingue Linguaggi 52 (2022), 193-208
ISSN 2239-0367, e-ISSN 2239-0359
DOI 10.1285/i22390359v52p193

FRAMING NARRATIVES OF SUFFERING THROUGH METAPHORS

STEFANIA M. MACI
UNIVERSITY OF BERGAMO

Abstract: This paper aims to describe narratives of domestic violence, as found on healthtalk.org (an online platform created with the aim of helping other people in a similar situation to fill a cognitive and emotional gap), in order to detect how suffering is framed in discourse. The linguistic relation between state of mind and affect can be narratively framed through metaphorical discursive patterns. The aim of this paper is to detect these metaphorical features in abused people's narratives that best express their experiential cognitive awareness. The quantitative investigation, carried out with WMatrix, and the qualitative analysis underpin the metaphorical patterns evidenced in the described narratives. As will be see, despite various metaphors are employed in these narratives, the leitmotif supporting all these narratives is that CHANGE IS MOTION while STATES ARE LOCATIONS – the possibility for change is only given to abused people when external forces are at stake.

Keywords: framing; metaphors; discourse analysis; medical popularized discourse; corpus linguistics; online health communication.

1. Introduction

The United Nations *Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women* (1993) characterizes violence against women as a human rights violation and an impediment to gender-based equality (cf. Gray *et al.* 2019). Nevertheless, domestic violence remains a pervasive social and public health issue globally. As defined by Flitcraft *et al.* (1992) in their *American Medical Association Diagnostic and Treatment Guidelines on Domestic Violence*, domestic or family violence is the type of violence occurring among persons within family or other intimate relationships. It usually results from the abuse of power or the domination and victimization of a physically less powerful person by a physically more powerful person. This may be preceded or accompanied by emotional or psychological abuse as a means of controlling, through fear and degradation. Because the experience of abuse is degrading and humiliating, victims, in particular women, may be reluctant to discuss it with someone who may not take them seriously, who may discount their experience, who may perceive them as deserving the abuse, or who may blame them for staying with their abusers. Recognizing and treating the

effects of domestic violence can help battered women regain control of their lives (Flitcraft *et al.* 1992, pp. 39-47). Breaking away from fear and reluctance by speaking out and seeking the necessary help is not easy, but anti-domestic violence Internet fora can perform socially beneficial and progressive functions in helping to denounce violence, by providing practical mutual help, emotional support and information for victims of domestic violence; and creating a platform for social critique, advocacy, campaigning and mobilization against domestic violence (Chew 2011). This, together with official documents, such as, for instance, the *Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women* (1993), can raise people's awareness of the issue of eliminating violence against women.

Different from physical pain, the emotional and psychological suffering deriving from physical abuse is not visible (Bueno-Gómez 2020). This implicitly explains the difference between pain and suffering. While pain is defined as "[a] distressing experience associated with actual or potential tissue damage with sensory, emotional, cognitive and social components" (Williams and Craig 2016, p. 2420) which have a decisive influence on pain perception, suffering can be defined as an unpleasant or even anguishing experience, severely affecting a person at a psychophysical and existential level (Bueno-Gómez 2017).

As explained by Herzog (2020), communicating suffering means creating a social narrative containing a condensed story about the self while reflecting the objective difficult conditions of selfhood and bestowing meaning on these conditions. In other words, communicating suffering "requires considering the individual *and* the social, the public *and* the private, the cultural *and* the psychological, as well as the objective harm *and* the subjective reactions to it" (Bueno-Gómez 2020, p. 6; emphasis in the original). Pain and suffering can be seen as subjective, personal and private experiences, and can be almost impossible to assess (cf. Breivik *et al.* 2008) as they resist description in language (cf. Padfield and Zakrzewska, 2017, p. 1177).

In a situation of total absence of any coping modality, people may turn to the Web in an attempt to seek information and make sense of their condition. For most people, the importance of online communities lies in the fact that, there, relevant information can be shared and checked (Langberg 2003). This is one of the objectives of Healthtalk.org, an online forum, developed by the Dipex Charity in partnership with the Health Experiences Research Group[1] at the University of Oxford, which "help[s] millions of

[1] The Health Experiences Research Group at Oxford University's Nuffield Department of Primary Care Health Sciences is responsible for much of the research that appears on healthtalk.org (https://healthtalk.org/HERG; accessed: November 2021).

people each year to feel better prepared and informed and less alone in what they are going through".[2] Healthtalk.org has, in particular, developed a *Women's experiences of Domestic Violence and Abuse* section on their website as a resource for women who are in an abusive relationship or have been in the past, as well as for friends, family members and professionals who think someone may be in an abusive relationship and want to find out how best to help. On their site,[3] it is explained that:

> Women's accounts reveal that domestic abuse is not just about being 'battered' but is about being subjected to coercive and controlling behaviour, threats to harm the women or their families if they do not comply with their partner's demands, as well as physical, financial, sexual and verbal abuse.

From a linguistics perspective, if communication works, it facilitates positive experiences and improves information, provisions, diagnoses and support; if communication does not work, it obviously results in misunderstandings, misdiagnoses, frustration, anxiety and disempowerment (Semino *et al.* 2018a, p. 7). Support groups generally have guidelines as to empathy-giving and empathy-seeking acts; however, they do not have guidelines in relation to the discursive strategies used in communication by people who share their abuse online. In this regard, Stein *et al.* (2018) claim that people who suffer often have difficulty in articulating their suffering experience and find that the use of metaphors and figurative language can be considered a promising approach to better understand people's experiences of suffering and promote more effective communication.

As claimed by Herzog (2020), when suffering is communicated, people create a social narrative about the self, its difficult interaction with society and the meaning attributed to selfhood in these difficulties. This is seen linguistically as a *mind style*. Demjen (2015, p. 20) clarifies the notion of mind style in a very clear-cut literary overview. The notion of *mind style* was introduced by Fowler (1977, p. 103) to indicate "any distinctive linguistic representation of individual mental self'. While Leech and Short (1981, p. 188) refer to this notion as "a realization of narrative point of view" in literary contexts, the concept of mind style has been elaborated by psychology and cognitive sciences to reveal "the construction and expression in language of the conceptualizations of reality in a particular mind" (Bockting 1994, p. 159). The distinction between mind style and world view is explained by Semino (2002, p. 97), who suggests that one's world view is a representation of aspects of ideology determined by external circumstances

[2] https://healthtalk.org/About-healthtalk (accessed November 2021)
[3] https://healthtalk.org/womens-experiences-domestic-violence-and-abuse/overview (accessed: November 2021).

(such as, culture, for instance), while mind style captures "those aspects of world view that are primarily personal and cognitive in origin". Boase-Bieier (2003, p. 254) better explains mind style and indicates that "mind style [can be seen] as the linguistic style that reflects a cognitive state. In particular, it is a linguistic style characterized by distinctive and striking textual patterns." Indeed, as Demjen (2015, p. 21) states,

> In principle, almost any persistent pattern of language can be indicative of mind style, but establishing the link requires two interconnected steps: identifying distinctive and systematic linguistic patterns; and linking these patterns to representations of characteristics of an individual mind.

Furthermore, Demjen (2015) says, there is ambiguity over whether mind style refers to linguistic features or people's attribution of those as characteristics of particular minds (Semino 2007) and over whether it is an expression of an unconscious state or a manipulation of language to create the impression of a state (Boase-Beier 2003). In both cases, the two options do not seem to be mutually exclusive. Linguistic patterns and people's interpretations of those are part of the same analytical process. Mind style, as the linguistic representation reflecting a cognitive state (Boase-Bieier 2003), may also mirror the concept of *affective states* (Demjen 2015, p. 3), which "encompasses more than just feeling and might include things like curiosity, uncertainty, excitement, and worry", and which, in the Systemic Functional Grammar sense (cf. Halliday and Matthiessen 2014), are experiences of the social world and are based on specific linguistic patterns (Demjen 2015, p. 26). The relation between mind style as a linguistic style/pattern reflecting a (self) cognitive and affective states in narratives has been explored by Hargitay *et al.* (2007), and further clarified by Demjen (2015, p. 30), who, in relation to self-reference, claims that:

> in narratives of achievement, […] the self is celebrated due to the positive association of acting individually. On the other hand, in narratives of negative life events, the self becomes increasingly important due to the desire to overcome difficulties alone. In both cases it is the importance of the self that is reflected in language. This means that the same phenomenon – a focus on the self – can be representative of different psychological processes depending on the type of story one is telling.

The link between language in use in these narratives of mind style and/or affective states can be revealed through corpus analysis which identifies the linguistic features, metaphors included, used to communicate people's mental state.

Metaphors can be helpful when coming to terms with complex conceptualisations, as theorized in Cognitive Metaphor Theory (CMT) (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980): they contribute to highlighting aspects to be

presented as salient and activating alternative ways of understanding issues (cf. Semino 2008; Semino *et al.* 2018a, 2018b). In this sense, metaphors *frame* the way in which people structure reality (Ensik and Sauer 2003). In particular, metaphors frame health experiences in different ways (Demjen and Semino 2017), by drawing on areas of experience, and therefore help to understand pain and suffering in meaningful ways (Gwyn 1999; Loftus, 2011; cf. also Bullo and Hearn 2021). Furthermore, metaphors have special added value in cases of undefined or invisible illnesses (Bullo and Hearn 2021) or suffering.

Metaphors play an important role in studies of the mind (Barndern 1997). Impressionistic descriptive phenomena are presented as "subjective impressions of relations, qualities, positions and directions in space", resulting in the speaker's "linguistic choices [which] give expression to the association, attitudes, feelings and mood which phenomena release in the perceiver" (Werlich 1976, p. 47), involving, amongst others, the use of metaphors (Demjen 2015). According to CMT, a metaphor is a linguistic phenomenon whereby we speak and potentially think about one abstract entity or conceptual domain in terms of another (Semino 2010). In doing so, metaphors make sense of particular aspects of our lives. As Semino *et al.* (2018) argue, this central function of metaphor is itself often referred to metaphorically as 'framing' (Lakoff 2001; Semino 2008; Cameron *et al.* 2010; Ritchie 2013; cf. Fillmore 1975).

The notion of frame (cf. Goffman 1967; Minsky 1975; Fillmore 1975, 1985) is itself a metaphor (Ensik and Sauer 2003), in that a frame gives space to an object and separates it from its environment. Entman (1993) offers an overarching definition of framing, including the speaker, the text, the receiver and the context. As Semino *et al.* (2018b) underline, framing structures some knowledge about a particular aspect of the world, creating expectations and inferences in communication and action, while tending to be associated with particular lexical and grammatical choices in language (Semino *et al.* 2018b).

To the best of our knowledge, hardly any linguistic research has been carried out in relation to the way in which suffering is communicated in the case of family violence. Therefore, the research question at the core of our investigation is:

> How do victims of family violence linguistically *frame* their suffering experiences in metaphorical discourse?

More precisely, drawing on discourse analysis (Gee 2017), we carried out a corpus-based (McEnery and Hardie 2012; Baker and McEnery 2015) linguistic investigation of the narratives of all domestic violence, as found on healthtalk.org, with the aim of detecting how suffering experiences are framed with metaphors in victims' narratives in an attempt to raise people's

awareness of domestic violence. Drawing on Semino *et al.* (2018b), the approach to framing adopted here takes into consideration the analysis of the 'text' only, realized as choices and patterns in metaphor use in naturally occurring verbal communication. To this end, a qualitative analysis of the discursive patterns in the narratives found has been conducted.

This paper is organised as follows: Section 2 describes the methodological approach applied for the analysis of the findings explained in Section 3, where data interpretation is also discussed. A conclusion is offered in Section 4. The results suggest that the metaphorical patterns evidenced in the described narratives underpin that CHANGE IS MOTION while STATES ARE LOCATIONS – the possibility for change is only given to them when external forces are at stake.

2. Methodological approach

In order to carry out the investigation at the core of this study, we analysed a corpus of texts about domestic violence and suffering selected from a larger corpus of health and illness narratives collected online by the Health Experiences Research Group at the University of Oxford and published by the DIPEx charity.[4] Since all content published on the http://healthtalk.org site is the sole property of DIPEx, consent to use their data for the purposes of this research was sought from DIPEx, which was granted. Permission to download, use and archive collected texts from healthtalk.org to carry out the present research was granted by the Health Experiences Research Group and by the DIPEx charity that runs the website.

More precisely, we downloaded all available texts (transcriptions of the victims' oral narratives) about women's experiences for a total of 39 women aged 27–62 years, forming a corpus of 95,540 running words (5,491 types). In order to carry out a corpus linguistic investigation, all texts were read to allow a better contextualization of the content and, if video was available, this was watched. All downloaded narratives are indicated with a letter of the alphabet followed by a number indicating the person's age. All texts were transformed into .txt files to allow uploading them to WMatrix (Rayson 2008, 2009), a free online tool for corpus analysis and comparison created by the University of Lancaster[5] and with the aim of identifying key semantic categories (SemTags) to be considered for their relevance in indicating mind styles as framed through metaphors (cf. Demjén 2015 and Biber 1988; see also Patterson 2020). A comparison between our corpus and the British National Corpus sampler spoken (982,712 words) with a Log Likelihood

[4] Available at: http://healthtalk.org/home (accessed: November 2021).
[5] Available at https://ucrel-wmatrix4.lancaster.ac.uk/ (accessed November 2021).

(LL)[6] statistical test resulted in the identification of 167 key SemTags (72,017 concordance lines). A cut-off point was determined using an LL test with a value of 6.63, which indicates with 99 per cent certainty ($p \leq 0.01$) that the results are not due to chance (Rayson 2009). This yielded 84 key SemTags (307 cluster lines, showing the concordances for each word listed in the SemTags). All concordance lines in the key SemTags have been analyzed from a semantic perspective and the correspondence between each word and its semantic domain manually checked; this allowed us to check for metaphorical expressions following the Metaphor Identification Procedure (MIP) (Pragglejaz 2007), a method for recognizing metaphorically used terms in both spoken and written language by identifying a lexical unit's connection in the discourse and recognizing its use as metaphorical in a certain context.

Metaphor identification was then expanded to consider linguistic metaphorical patterns in context. This procedure allowed us to identify eight key SemTags containing 3,327 concordances with a metaphorical meaning, grouped into 119 metaphorical clusters/ expressions, as shown below:

Item	SEMTAG Meaning	O1	1%	O2	2%	LL	LogRatio	Metaphorical clusters
M1	Moving, coming and going	1,570	1.64	12,692	1.29 +	76.15	0.35	40
X8+	Trying hard	210	0.22	1,213	0.12 +	51.98	0.83	9
A1.1.2	Damaging and destroying	110	0.12	524	0.05 +	45.37	1.11	6
X2.2+	Knowledgeable	700	0.73	5,481	0.56 +	43.06	0.39	18
W2	Light	8	0.01	0	0.00 +	38.78	7.36	6
W2-	Darkness	6	0.01	0	0.00 +	29.08	6.95	5
O2	Objects generally	519	0.54	4,156	0.42 +	27.11	0.36	15
X9.2-	Failure	46	0.05	207	0.02 +	21.46	1.19	20
TOTAL		***3,327***						***119***

Table 1
Breakdown of SemTags and metaphorical clusters.

Table 1 shows the type of SemTag as indicated in WMatrix, in the first column; in the second one, the general meaning the Semtag has according to WMatrix classification. In the third column, O1 is the observed frequency in our corpus; in the fifth column, O2 is observed frequency in the BNC (sampler spoken); 1% and 2% values (fourth and sixth columns, respectively) show the relative frequencies found in the texts of our corpus (O1) and the BNC corpus (O2). Where + is shown, it indicates overuse in O1 relative to

[6] A Log Likelihood test tells us how much evidence we have for a difference between two corpora (http://cass.lancs.ac.uk/log-ratio-an-informal-introduction/ - accessed November 2021).

O2. LL indicates the Log Likelihood value, while the LogRatio column shows how big or important the difference (computed by the LL) of the relative frequency of the same item between our corpus and the BNC corpus is. The last column shows the clusters, that is the list of words per SemTag found in the corpus under investigation, which have a metaphorical realization. As Rayson indicates (2009), the frequency cut-off point is five words. Therefore, only SemTags containing ≥ 5 items have been analysed. This resulted in the identification of metaphorical patterns in the corpus under investigation as depicted in Table 2, below:

Item	SEMTAG Meaning	Metaphorical clusters	Corpus metaphorical items	Corpus metaphorical patterns
M1	Moving, coming and going	40	Journey; Move on; Go through; Step	JOURNEY /CHANGE IS MOTION
X8+	Trying hard	9	Struggle; Battle	DIFFICULTIES ARE OPPONENTS
A1.1.2	Damaging and destroying	6	Break down; Collapse	RELATIONSHIPS ARE A BOUNDED SPACE
X2.2+	Knowledgeable	18	Look back	UNDERSTANDING IS SEEING
W2	Light	6	(Absence of) Light	GOOD IS BRIGHT/BAD IS DARK
W2-	Darkness	5	Darkness	GOOD IS BRIGHT/BAD IS DARK
O2	Objects generally	15	Trigger	TRIGGERS ARE EXTERNAL FORCES
X9.2-	Failure	20	Break down (verb); Lose; Feeling lost; Getting lost	- RELATIONSHIPS ARE A BOUNDED SPACE - ATTRIBUTES ARE POSSESSIONS
	TOTAL	***119***		

Table 2
Breakdown of SemTags and metaphorical patterns.

Given that our interest in this study is not in unveiling information about the narrative genre as a whole, but about the metaphorical data characterizing our corpus, only key features of the corpus will be taken into consideration.

Where metaphorical concordances are presented, they are representative samples of complete concordances.

3. Data analysis and discussion

The metaphors found in the victims' narratives as described in the previous section (see Table 2) can be summarized as the following patterns:

1. JOURNEY/ CHANGE IS MOTION;
2. DIFFICULTIES ARE OPPONENTS;

3. GOOD IS BRIGHT/ BAD IS DARK;
4. UNDERSTANDING IS SEEING;
5. RELATIONSHIPS ARE A BOUNDED SPACE;
6. BEING CONSCIOUS IS BEING HERE;
7. ATTRIBUTES ARE POSSESSIONS;
8. EXTERNAL FORCES ARE TRIGGERS.

As can be seen, all patterns, except the last one, are quite familiar (cf. also Lakoff and Johnson 1980).

All 39 victims describe their experience as a JOURNEY they went on:

(1) Yeah, yes, it was, it was a **journey […]** You know, it was, it wasn't easy because the children didn't know, and at that point, they still had contact with their dad. (B32)

(2) I do think, not being nasty, there should be people like, how should I put it, like myself who's been **through it**. (AD50)

(3) So, I would just kind of **go through** that emotion and then a few days after an incident, I would just kind of pick myself up and I just … I always have hope. (B32)

(4) Accept what's happened to you and **move on** and do as much self-healing that [sic] you can. (AB45)

In this JOURNEY they went on (no.s 1-3), they found it difficult to end the relationship until they found some help (no. 4). It was only by completing this JOURNEY that they became aware of the possibility of change. The idea they are conveying is that there is a correlation between their location in life and how they felt: as indicated by the verbs and prepositions they are using, the spatial movement from one point to another is the metaphorical realization of CHANGE. Indeed, CHANGE IS MOTION (while STATES ARE LOCATIONS). Once they became aware of a change in the world-state around them, they could end the relationship.

As claimed by Grady (1997), in our experiences of motion through space, we constantly negotiate obstacles of every sort, choosing which way to go. In this JOURNEY leading to the end of an abusive relationship, the obstacles are seen as difficulties realized in the metaphorical pattern DIFFICULTIES ARE OPPONENTS, mixed with the WAR metaphor, with lexical items such as *struggle* and *battle*:

(5) Everything, like all my fears had come true. You know what I mean. I, I'm not safe anymore. And I was just so upset because he knew how much I **struggled** with feeling safe and he just left me vulnerable and didn't even care. (AH30)

(6) Well, it had been 20 years of just constant **battles**. (L57)

The metaphors used in excerpts (5) and (6) show the correlation existing between feelings of strain and discomfort and physical struggle. These examples suggest that the metaphorical conceptualization of an abusive relationship, perceived as an opponent problem, can be experienced as opposed to a specific sequence of tactical manoeuvres (cf. Grady 1997, p. 145). The overall picture is that of personal and subjective frustration which accompanies difficulty in achieving goals.

As victims move through their JOURNEY, they perceive that their experience is characterized by spotlights and by darkness. In this depiction, an abusive experience is also represented following a GOOD IS BRIGHT/ BAD IS DARK pattern, where it is clear there is a correlation between light and safety, dark and danger, as revealed in example (7), below:

(7) I think that probably we need to acknowledge that rather than pretending that we have, we have arrived at some – the sort of the **darkness** to life. Well, they call it the **darkness** to **light** narrative, that there was the **dark** and now we're in the **light**. You know, we're not in the **light**. We're still in the **darkness**. (X32)

As they move through safety, typically in a forwards direction, they encounter new settings which then become our "here and now". 'Here' is light opposed to 'there' as darkness. Furthermore, they can understand this because they 'look back' on their experience from the position they are in now. This is indicated by a KNOWING/ UNDERSTANDING IS SEEING pattern, showing a correlation between visual perception and conscious awareness of information:

(8) And once I realised the enormity of the situation and then **looked back** as to what I'd put up with, I couldn't believe it. You know, I was a totally different person when I came towards the end as what I was in the beginning. (J46)

Examining a previous course of action through *look back* is a sort of backwards motion (plus visual inspection). At the same time, the reference is to the past: there seems to be a cognitive correspondence between the past and the concept of 'back' or 'behind', which helps people to understand the present (cf. Grady 1997).

If one's awareness of being in an abusive relationship can be raised through a personal process indicated as a journey, where people move from one state to another through light and darkness, living in an abusive relationship is indicated by victims as a BOUNDED SPACE (excerpts 9 and 10):

(9) After I left him. I didn't know that just being controlling was abusive behaviour. And I couldn't **step outside** the relationship and see what was happening. (W54)

(10) he blamed the **breakdown** of the relationship on the fact that I, well, he said, I needed psychological help. (AJ39)

The boundaries of a space here represented as a relationship can be perceived as the walls of a container whose boundaries cannot be overpassed (9), and, if not stable, can be broken (10): exactly as shaky buildings are at risk of collapse, so are weak relationships. The relationship is seen as a system, and its collapse is perceived as a failure of the system to function.

Similarly, people are sometimes represented as if being without foundations, because, exactly like a building, they can collapse. In this way, the victim's frailty or identity is revealed as a collapsing building:

(11) …he was literally just belittling me and just trying to **break** me **down** to the point where I felt like I had to do it. (AH30)

This frailty reveals the victim's perception of the negation of the self via the metaphor ATTRIBUTES ARE POSSESSIONS:

(12) I really did think that I'd **lost** my mind. (Q35)

(13) You know, I **feel** so **lost** and so confused from being with him that I just feel like I just have to pick up the pieces. (AH30)

(14) And every time you do that a little bit of you **gets lost**. (J46)

Identity is conceived as something which can be possessed. Indeed, the pattern "ATTRIBUTES ARE POSSESSIONS arises from a recurring experience of forming gestalt impressions of people which includes the other objects closely associated with them" (Grady 1997, p. 111).

It is thanks to a TRIGGER that the victim is able to arrive at a new life, as can be seen in excerpts (15)–(17) below:

(15) The **trigger** would have been the final time when he hurt my back. (I59)

(16) Something **triggered**, something massive, I can't remember what it was exactly, but I had enough and I told him that I wanted to break up with him. (Z32)

(17) But the **trigger** […] was [when] he said to me, "The children are going to be moving upstairs and you're going to have nothing to do with them." (W54)

Although a *trigger* activates a cascade of events and gives a sense of inevitability or of inexorability, it is a mechanical external force which goes beyond the victim's control. It is true that, once the trigger is activated and the events have been set in motion, the perpetrator of the abusive relationship is defenceless and cannot do anything about that. Nevertheless, it gives the victim no power: as revealed by the examples above, the trigger is never activated by the victim but rather by some events done *to* the victim.

4. Conclusion

This study investigates how domestic violence victims' narration is framed through metaphorical representations of their experience. The quantitative analysis has revealed the exploitation of the JOURNEY metaphor to describe the experience of an abusive relationship. The presence of a JOURNEY perceives "experience" in the absence of a temporal dimension: while change to freedom is motion, experiencing an abusive relationship is like staying in a building without foundations, which can collapse. The metaphorical mapping between life or experiences and journeys is therefore based on some basic, local mappings. As it was shown in the previous section, not only is the relationship a shaky place, but also the victims are frail and weak like old ruins: they can collapse and break down. This is only understood when battered victims consider retrospectively their experience from the new 'position' which the JOURNEY has granted them. Along this JOURNEY, darkness embraces what is bad, whereas light, the place where people are at the end of the JOURNEY, is what is good.

Although the narrative of an abusive relationship and the difficult steps towards freedom are depicted with the traditional JOURNEY metaphor, by means of which the victim is able to move forwards and becomes aware of the dangers in it because the movement has allowed her to understand (by looking *back* to her previous position in the past) that the relationship has weak foundations, shakes the person's identity, and where is the main clause? the possibility to achieve the ultimate goal is triggered by something. The Oxford English Dictionary online[7] first recorded the word *trigger* in 1621 as "A movable catch or lever the pulling or pressing of which releases a detent or spring, and sets some force or mechanism in action, e.g. springs a trap." The first metaphorical use of the word dates back to 1706, with the meaning of "taking advantage of a situation". Nowadays, this figurative sense can also be used to indicate an understanding of everyday distress. However, as found in our corpus, *trigger* underlines a lack of agency – which in most cases is also evoked by its use in passive constructions. Awareness of any form of abusive behaviour is *triggered* by something else, an external force over which the victim has no control.

These narratives, while reflecting the mind style of the victims, frame the reality they have experienced, one over which they have had no control until the end of their JOURNEY.

[7] https://www-oed-com.ezproxy.unibg.it/view/Entry/206003?rskey=cwHI9I&result=2#eid (accessed November 2021)

Bionote: Stefania M. Maci (Phd, Lancaster University, UK) is Full Professor of English Language at the University of Bergamo. She is Director of CERLIS (Research Centre on Specialized Languages), and member of CLAVIER (The Corpus and Language Variation in English Research Group), BAAL (British Association of Applied Linguistics), and AELINCO (Spanish Association of Applied Linguistics). She also serves on the executive board of AIA (Associazione Italiana di Anglistica). Her research is focussed on the study of the English language in academic and professional contexts, with particular regard to the analysis of tourism and medical discourses. Recent publications include: the monographs *English Tourism Discourse* (2020); the co-edited volumes: with C. Hanganu-Bresch, M. Zerbe and Gabriel Cutrufello *Routlege Handbook of Scientific Commuication* (2022); with Larissa D'Angelo and Anna Maurauneen *Metadiscourse in Digital Communication* (2021)*;* and the papers: "Living-with-dying": the elderly's language of terminal illness (2021); The narrative of the anti-vax campaign on Twitter (2021); From #traveltomorrow to #MagicalKenya: a sociosemiotic analysis of a tourism narrative response to Covid-19 (2020, coauthored with Cinzia Spinzi).

Author's address: stefania.maci@unibg.it

Acknowledgements: We would like to thank the anonymous reviewers for their helpful and constructive comments that greatly contributed to improving the final version of the paper. We are also grateful to the editors for their support, generous help and impressive feedback.

References

Baker P., and McEnery T. 2015, *Corpora and Discourse Studies: Integrating Discourse and Corpora*, Palgrave Macmillan, London

Barnden J. A. 1997, *Consciousness and common-sense metaphors of mind*, in Nuallain S., McKevitt, P. and Mac Aogain E. (eds.), *Two Sciences of Mind: Readings in Cognitive Science and Consciousness*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins, pp. 311–40.

Biber D. 1988, *Variation Across Speech and Writing*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Bockting I. 1995, *Character and Personality in the Novels of William Faulkner: A Study in Psychostylistics*. Amsterdam: University Press of America.

Breivik H., Borchgrevink P.C., Allen S.M., Rosseland L.A., Romundstad L., Breivik Hals E.K., Kvarstein G., and Stubhaug A. 2008, *Assessment of pain*, in "British Journal of Anaesthesia", 101 [1], pp. 17–24.

Bueno-Gómez N. 2017, *Conceptualizing suffering and pain*. In "Philosophy Ethics and Humanities in Medicine" 12 [7], no pages indicated. https://doi.org/10.1186/s13010-017-0049-5

Bullo S. and Heath Hearn J. 2021, *Parallel Worlds and Personified Pain: A Mixed-Methods Analysis of Pain Metaphor Use by Women with Endometriosis*. In "British Journal of Health Psychology", 26 [2], p. e12472, doi:10.1111/bjhp.12472.

Cameron L., Low G., and Maslen R. 2010. *Finding systematicity in metaphor use*, in Cameron L. and Maslen R. (eds.), *Metaphor Analysis: Research Practice in Applied Linguistics, Social Sciences and the Humanities*. London: Equinox, pp. 116–46.

Chew M.M. 2011. *Analysis of an anti-domestic violence internet forum in China: mutual help, open communication, and social activism*, in "China Media Research", 7 [1], pp. 65+.

Demjén Z. 2015. *Sylvia Plath and the Language of Affective States: Written Discourse and the Experience of Depression*. London: Bloomsbury

Demjén Z. and Semino E. 2017. *The Routledge Handbook of Metaphor and Language.* Oxon: Routledge.

Ensink T. and Sauer C. (eds.) 2003. *Framing and Perspectivising in Discourse*. Amsterdam/ Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company.

Entman R. 1993. *Framing: Toward clarification of a fractured paradigm*, in "Journal of Communication" 43 [4], pp. 51–58.

Fillmore C.J. 1975. *An alternative to checklist theories of meaning,* in *Proceedings of the First Annual Meeting of the Berkeley Linguistics Society*, Amsterdam: North Holland, pp. 123–31.

Fillmore C.J. 1985. *Frames and the semantics of understanding*, in *Quaderni di Semantica* 6 [2], pp. 222–53.

Flitcraft A.H., Hadley S.M., Hendricks-Matthews M.K., McLeer S.V. and Warshaw C. 1992. *American Medical Association Diagnostic and Treatment Guidelines on Domestic Violence*, in "Archives of Family Medicine" 1 [1], pp. 39–47.

Fowler R. 1977, *Linguistics and the Novel*. London: Methuen.

Gee J.P. 2017, *Introducing Discourse Analysis*, Routledge, Oxon.

Goffmann E. 1967 *Interaction Ritual: Essays in Face-to-Face Behaviour*, New Brunswick (NJ): Aldine Publishing Company.

Grady J. 1997, *Foundations of meaning: primary metaphors and primary scenes*, Unpublished PhD thesis, Berkeley: University of California.

Gray A., Barrett, B.J., Fitzgerald A., and Peirone A. 2019. *Fleeing with Fido: an Analysis of What Canadian Domestic Violence Shelters Are Communicating Via their Websites about Leaving an Abusive Relationship when Pets Are Involved* in "Journal of Family Violence" 34**,** pp. 287–298, https://doi.org/10.1007/s10896-018-0023-z.

Gwyn R. 1999, *Captain of my own ship": Metaphor and the discourse of chronic illness*, in Cameron L. and Low G. (eds.), *Researching and Applying Metaphor*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 203–20.

Halliday M.A.K., Matthiessen C.M.I.M. 2014. *Introduction to Systemic Functional Grammar*. Oxon: Routledge.

Hargitai R., Naszódi M., Kis B., Nagy L., Bóna, A., and László J. 2007, *Linguistic Markers of Depressive Dynamics in Self-Narratives: Negation and Self-Reference*, in "Empirical Text and Culture Research", 3, pp. 26–38.

Herzog, B. 2020, *Invisibilization of Suffering: The Moral Grammar of Disrespect.* London: Palgrave-Macmillan.

Lakoff G. 2001, *Metaphorik.de*, available at: http://www.metaphorik.de/aufsaetze/lakoff-september11.htm. Accessed Dec. 2021.

Lakoff G. and Johnson M. 1980, *Metaphors We Live By*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Lamberg L. 2003, *Online empathy for mood disorders: patients turn to Internet support groups*, in "Journal of American Medical Association", 280, pp. 3073–77.

Leech G., and Short, M. 1981, *Style in Fiction*. Harlow: Longman.

Loftus, S. 2011, *Pain and its metaphors: A dialogical approach*, in "Journal of Medical Humanities", 32: 213–30.

McEnery T. and Hardie A. 2012 *Corpus Linguistics: Method, Theory and Practice*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

Minsky M. 1975, *A framework for representing knowledge*, in Winston P. (ed.), *Knowledge and Cognition*, Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, pp. 201–310.

Padfield, D. and Zakrzewska, J.M. 2017, *Encountering pain*, in "The Lancet", 389 [10075], pp. 1177–78.

Patterson K.J. 2020, *Understanding Metaphors through corpora. A cases study on metaphors in the nineteenth century*, Abingdon: Routledge.

Pragglejaz Group 2007, *MIP: A Method for Identifying Metaphorically used Words in Discourse*, in "Metaphor and Symbol", 22 [1]: 1–99.

Rayson P. 2008, *From Key Words to Key Semantic Domains*, in "International Journal of Corpus Linguistics", 13 [4], pp. 519–49.

Rayson P. 2009, *Wmatrix: a web-based corpus processing environment*, Computing Department, Lancaster University. http://ucrel.lancs.ac.uk/wmatrix/

Ritchie L.D. 2013, *Metaphor*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Semino, E. 2002, *A Cognitive Stylistics Approach to Mind Style in Narrative Fiction*, in Semino E. and Culpeper J. (eds.), *Cognitive Stylistics: Language and Cognition in Text Analysis*, Amsterdam: John Benjamins.

Semino E. 2008, *Metaphor in Discourse*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Semino, E. 2010, *Descriptions of Pain, Metaphor, and Embodied Simulation*, in "Metaphor and Symbol", 25 [4], pp. 205–26, doi:10.1080/10926488.2010.510926.

Semino E., Demjén Z., Hardie A., Payne S.A., and Rayson, P.E. 2018a, *Metaphor, Cancer and the End of Life: A Corpus-based Study*, London: Routledge.

Semino E., Demjén Z., and Demmen, J. 2018b, *An Integrated Approach to Metaphor and Framing in Cognition, Discourse, and Practice, with an Application to Metaphors for Cancer*, in "Applied Linguistics", 39 [5], pp. 625–45, https://doi.org/10.1093/applin/amw028.

Stein E., Pearlman R.A., and Tate T.P. 2018 *Using Metaphors and Figurative Language to Improve Communication About Patient Suffering*, in "Journal of Pain and Symptom Management", 56 [6], pp. e68–e69.

United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner 1993, *Declaration on the elimination of violence against women*, Retrieved from: http://www.ohchr.org/EN/ProfessionalInterest/Pages/ViolenceAgainstWomen.aspx.

Werlich E., 1976, *A Text Grammar of English*, Heidelberg: Quelle and Meyer.

Williams A.C. de C. and Craig K.D. 2016, *Updating the definition of pain*, in "Pain, The Journal of the International Association for the Study of Pain", 157, pp. 2420–23.