‘Violence’ and ‘journey’ metaphors revisited

Elena Semino and Veronika Koller (Lancaster University)
Structure of this presentation

- ‘Violence’ metaphors in end-of-life care:
  - ‘Battle/fight/war’ metaphors in English generally
  - Violence metaphors and (terminal) illness
  - Findings from our study
- ‘Journey’ metaphors in end-of-life care:
  - Findings from our study
- Conclusions:
  - Empowerment and disempowerment
  - Wider implications
Metaphorical uses of ‘battle’, ‘fight’ and ‘war’ in English

- Military/War/Battle metaphors are conventional in relation to difficult enterprises generally, and (terminal) illness in particular:
  - ‘Battle against’: hunger, autism, cancer, etc.
  - ‘Fight against’: corruption, homophobia, cancer, etc.
  - ‘War on’: terrorism, drugs, cancer, etc.

- We prefer the broader term ‘Violence’ metaphors.
‘cancer’ and ‘battle’ in the Oxford English Corpus (2.4 billion words)
(phytochemicals) have shown promise in the fight against cancer, albeit in limited trials in the laboratory and in animal models, but I wasn’t. I think the diet helped me fight the cancer and it was the one thing I could do something about in my active ingredients. How does each one fight or prevent cancer - and are any of the alleged benefits scientifically plausible? Avon has been committed to the fight against breast cancer since 1993, and through 1999 we’ve raised $55 million.

In the fight against cancer, then, the message is clear: legitimate science is leading the way. As he advocates increases in medical research to fight cancer, he should also mention the fight against HIV/AIDS.

Inhibitors, Morris got worse, unable to fight off bladder cancer that had spread to his lungs. As the two worked feverishly, show your true love how much you care and fight breast cancer with Kate Spade’s Ford Scarf. The 60s-inspired print is perfect for student and academic affairs.

But my fight with cancer had changed my life: I wanted to help other cancer patients of the AIDS pandemic. Her own long fight with cancer gave her pitiless insights into illness and into the psyche of the patient. Later that year, Etheridge’s fight against breast cancer inspires an Advocate cover story of another kind.

She undergone six weeks of intensive radiotherapy to fight throat cancer. He has now been given the all-clear. A source added, “We were on hand to raise money for the fight against colon cancer. The event, dubbed Hollywood Meets Motown, was notable.”

Mayor Rudy Giuliani has an update on his fight against colon cancer and some observations about the Clinton-Lazio Senate biggest individual fund-raising day in the fight against breast cancer in this country. Ann Curry, the news anchor for national Denim Day 2000, fund raising for fight against breast cancer.

October is Breast Cancer Awareness Month. Medical decision, no Democratic or Republican way to fight cancer or ease the pain of HIV and AIDS. This is not the time to say his daughter, Maureen lost her brave fight with cancer in August. Sarah Brady, wife of former Reagan Press Secretary, it can take so you quickly. I - I feel like I can fight this cancer, and I also feel like it’s not worth my worrying about something I have a personal subject tonight, her fight against lung cancer. We hope you found tonight informative, and hopeful.
‘cancer’ and ‘war’ in the Oxford English Corpus

on, including the middle class, war, marriage, cancer, and corporations. Like Alexis de Tocqueville stark fact is that we are not winning the war against cancer. Many cancers are still escalating at epidemic proportions that we are not winning the war against cancer. Many cancers are still escalating at epidemic proportions. In public into believing we are winning the war against cancer, when nothing could be further from the truth. health consequences. In our war against cervical cancer, we need to send out clear and unmistakable messages.

There has been a vast growth in the number of cancer cases since the Gulf War - one hospital shown reported a former soldier in Richard Nixon’s famous War on Cancer, Duesberg - Ellison maintains - is blind to the lose a lot of taxpayers’ money cause their War on Cancer was going nowhere - the Sainted Doctor Gallo, while Doctor Gallo, while he was engaged in the War on Cancer, discovered a retrovirus which caused leukaemia area. In the 1970s, President Nixon’s “War on Cancer” had seen sensationalist reporting of the latest - taxpayers’ money had been wasted on the War on Cancer, so the triumph of AIDS research was advanced in they dropped in the last Gulf War has caused a lot of cancer deaths in Iraq. Cancer has gone up four percent it was two to four years after the 1991 war before cancer and birth defect rates began to rise dramatically lepleted uranium used in the last Gulf War has increased cancer rates exponentially. It was the US army which patented , a cancer is gnawing at his presidency, and that cancer is the war in Iraq. The American people are now to protest against Russia’s war in Chechnya, the cancer on our country’s soul, why should they protest to protest against Russia’s war in Chechnya, the cancer on our country’s soul, why should they protest alone, the airwaves have been full of the “war on cancer”, the “war on crime”, the “war on drugs”. The trillions of dollars expended in the “war on cancer” have yielded almost nothing by way of a cure, that there has been a tragic and marked increase in cancer since World War II. During the 1930s there was a
Violence metaphors for (terminal) illness

Rita SMITH (The Times, Mar. 1, 2013): ‘Rita, died peacefully after a brave battle against cancer on 20th February 2013, aged 83 years. Beloved wife of the late Victor, mother of Quentin...’
Criticism of Violence metaphors

- ‘Military’/ ‘War’/ ‘Battle’/ ‘Fight’ metaphors have been widely criticised, especially in relation to cancer (e.g. Sontag 1979), for their associations with violence and aggression, for the implication that the enemy is inside and that not getting better is defeat, and so on.

- They have been systematically avoided in some recent official documents in the UK: e.g. the 2007 Cancer Reform Strategy contains no references to ‘war’, ‘battle’ or ‘fight’, but rather talks about a cancer ‘journey’, with clinical ‘pathways’ delineated as models of care.

‘Six Strategies for Beating Cancer’
Voices in favour of Violence metaphors for (terminal) illness

’Soo we fought, we struggled, we triumphed. It was an exhilarating fight, and I’d repeat the fight today without a moment’s hesitation. We fought together, we lived together’

‘And during Terence’s illness, I, we, we wanted to believe the story of our fight together too. Giving up the fight ... meant giving up not only his life but also our story, our story of us as fighters, the story of us as invincible.’
Violence metaphors in our data: raw frequency by stakeholder group

- Patients: 971
- Carers: 887
- Professionals: 410
Violence metaphors: frequency per 1,000 words

- Patients: 1.62
- Carers: 1.52
- Professionals: 1.19

Difference statistically significant at $p < 0.05$
A concordance of Violence metaphors in the patient data
The patient data: too many battles...

- **Disease against patient**: ‘But the emotional side of cancer and of BC in particular is the real killer - it strangles and shocks your soul’
- **Treatment/doctors against patients**: ‘what did i think all my normal little cells were doing after being hit by a sledgehammer of both toxic chemicals and radiation’
- **Patient against disease**: ‘I’m ... also sharpening my weapons in case I have to do battle’
- **Patient against (hospital) situation**: ‘my secret weapon is keeping the ultra sound at the hospital on side’
The patient data: too many battles...

- **Patients against health professionals**: ‘We *won* that *battle* but imagine what would have happened if she hadn’t had a family to *defend* her?’

- **Patients against family/friends**: ‘Although he has been really caring we still *snipe* and argue out of the blue nearly every day.’

- **Patients against themselves**: ‘I am *destroying* myself with my mind right now, *torturing* myself’;
  ‘So I woke up this morning and gave a very large *kick* to myself!’
Violence metaphors: disempowering or empowering?

(Dis)empowerment:

- An increase or decrease in the degree of agency that somebody has.
- Agency can be as a reaction to something that happens (outside of the person’s control) or control over what happens in the first place.
- Such agency can be used for the person’s own benefit.
- Agency (or lack thereof) can be expressed semantically and/or grammatically.
...but are all the battles bad?

Violence metaphors and disempowerment

‘I feel such a failure that I am not winning this battle.’

‘it must be dispiriting when you are battling as hard as you can, not to be given the armour to fight in.’

‘I am a walking time bomb.’
Violence metaphors and empowerment

‘I am such a fighter’

‘my consultants recognised that I was a born fighter’

‘we are young women with families but that is our trump card, that alone is my desire to fight and win’

‘Your words though have given me a bit more of my fighting spirit back. I am ready to kick some cancer butt!’

‘I don’t intend to give up; I don’t intend to give in. No I want to fight it. I don’t want it to beat me, I want to beat it. ... It’s a hard job but in the long run I hope to achieve ... we’ll achieve something.’
Mutual solidarity and encouragement

- ‘Soldier on everybody’
- ‘you are such a fighter’
- ‘I ... wanted to know if there are any other younger bowel cancer fighters amongst us’
- ‘let me hear you scream the battle cry to spur us on to win this war.’
- ‘Glad to hear you’re still smiling, still winning that battle.’
Mutual solidarity and encouragement

11 occurrences.

what the top one is ... I think Brigadier is my favourite ... what 's yours And which numbers would those be? Brigadier eh? eh? you saying we are mental? ha ha Brigadier , you found it ! Did the sat nav have stine is too busy out boozing and . ha ha Brigadier , you found out my smuggling secre Sleep tight Brigadier and a big hug xxx </post> <post that 11-08-26 21:23:00" words="273"> commandant in the next room ... but I do n't care cos and I ' m not worried about back an s ) so you are all invited to come over for a few days ... you can stay at the commandant but I just do n't listen ... we are brother for a few days ... you can stay at the commandant, power gone to your head and you n ly want to be my sister ... Touche eh? ha ha ... and I am quite open and modern here 11-09-03 10:15:00" words="198"> commandant Christine has been around ) but y i am safe for a while longer ... Commandant Christine is too busy out boozing Brigadier John , even being camp commandant wo n't save you from this lot ...

‘I would promote you but a) i think you have reached top rank already and b) I can’t think of other ranks’
The persistence of ‘Adversarial’ metaphors for illness

“She lost her brave fight.” If anyone mutters those words after my death, wherever I am, I will curse them.

[...]

In my world, having cancer is not a fight at all. It is almost a symbiosis where I am forced to live with my disease day in, day out. Some days cancer has the upper hand, other days I do. I live with it and I let its physical and emotional effects wash over me. But I don't fight it. After all, cancer has arisen from within my own body, from my own cells. To fight it would be "waging a war" on myself. I have used chemotherapy on two occasions to bring the cancer back under control and alter the natural history of the disease. I submitted myself to this treatment gently, and somewhat reluctantly, taking whatever each day had to throw at me. I certainly didn't enter the process "with all guns blazing". (Kate Granger, The Guardian, 25/4/2014)
Cancer is a journey, some people have similar experiences to others on that journey, but by and large the journey has many twists and turns that means no two people go the exact same route. I think it is like trying to drive a coach and horses uphill with no back wheels on the coach. You do need to stop occasionally and rest the horses, review the situation with your husband.

‘A Caregiver’s View from the Passenger Seat’
Mutual solidarity and encouragement

Patients/Carers are travelling companions

- ‘I feel exactly as you described, this is an awful journey we are going through but we are all here for each other’
- ‘Safe journey’
- ‘you are not alone, I have walked the same pathway as you for the last three years’
- ‘Continued strength to everyone on this journey, whatever your situation, we are united in our journeys to slay the BC Beast : )’
Mutual solidarity and encouragement

Patients/Carers guide each other

- ‘The rocks in our paths are easier to handle when we’re all in it together ... the best people to help you are the ones who’ve been there before or are heading there with you’
- ‘you extend you [sic] hand and kind thoughts helping people find their own path but aided by the light you shine for them’
- ‘we will try to help you on this journey you have been forced to take’
Journey metaphors and empowerment

**Illness is a travelling companion:** ‘On my journey so far with cancer I have learnt to expect the worst.’

**Grieving is a journey:** ‘After all you have been through while he was ill you have stepped onto a different kind of journey now.’

**Professionals guide patients:**
- ‘Marie Curie nurses ... did everything for me and made Terry’s journey a lot less stressful.’
- ‘As doctors we are both the mechanics of the car and counsellor to the driver. We have been trained to repair the car and to help the driver travel as far as they may. We do not like to abandon a vehicle by the side of the road without at least trying to gain an extra mile or so for the driver.’
'I only pop by every now and again because it saddens my heart to read of the passengers nearing the end of their journey and those recently having finished their journey.'

'Well, I have not done so well with my own “cancer journey” through the wilderness of my own local hospitals.'

'[the family] now appeared to be in a strange and uniquely vulnerable state, waiting to be told what would happen next, waiting to be led forwards'

'After much discussion the patient was discharged home on a palliative pathway with a life expectancy of a few weeks'
Concluding remarks on Violence and Journey metaphors

- Both Violence and Journey metaphors are (still) regularly used by all three stakeholder groups.
- There is no single ‘War metaphor’ or ‘Journey metaphor’: patients use a variety of Violence and Journey metaphors to talk about a wide range of experiences.
- Violence metaphors can sometimes have a positive, empowering function, such as expressing personal determination and mutual solidarity.
- Journey metaphors can sometimes be used in disempowering ways, with little semantic and/or grammatical agency for patients and carers.
- The specific meanings, associations and functions of particular uses of metaphors can only be properly explained in terms of the individual linguistic expressions and the scenarios they evoke.
Both the negative and the positive attitudes, emotions and experiences that are expressed by means of Violence and Journey metaphors need to be addressed in the provision of healthcare. A blanket rejection of Violence metaphors would deprive some patients of the positive functions that these metaphors can have. An uncritical acceptance of Journey metaphors overlooks the disempowering ways in which it can be used. Criticisms often relate to a few words, but the larger concept (e.g. illness as adversary) may be inevitable. The problem is not individual words or a particular broad metaphor, but the passivisation of the patient that may result from some specific uses of metaphor.
Thank you.

Any questions?

http://ucrel.lancs.ac.uk/melc/