

Metaphors for ‘good’ and ‘bad’ deaths in interviews with hospice managers

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In this presentation we discuss the metaphors that fifteen hospice managers produced during semi-structured interviews in response to the following questions: ‘How would you describe a good death?’, ‘How would you describe a bad death?’ Metaphor involves talking and, potentially, thinking about one thing in terms of another. It is often used to communicate about experiences that are subjective, complex and sensitive, including the emotions around death (e.g. Kövecses 2000). Analysing the metaphors people use can contribute to an understanding of their feelings, views, needs and attitudes, not least with regard to death and dying. As part of an ESRC-funded project on ‘Metaphor in End-of-Life Care’, we apply a well-established analytical method (Pragglejaz Group 2007) in order to investigate the metaphors in our data. In the interviews, the contrast between ‘good’ and ‘bad’ deaths is partly expressed via contrasting metaphors. These include, for example, the contrast between death as the accepted end of a ‘journey’ and death as an opponent against which to ‘struggle’, ‘battle’ or ‘fight’ in order to ‘keep going’. Similarly, while a good death is described as involving many ‘open’ conversations, a bad death is described as involving problems ‘in the background’ or in a ‘place’ inside the patient that hospice staff are not allowed to ‘reach’. We finish our presentation by considering the implications that the metaphors we have identified can have for professional views and practices in end-of-life care.

References

Kövecses, Z. (2000) *Metaphor and Emotion: Language, Culture, and Body in Human Feeling*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Pragglejaz Group (2007) MIP: A method for identifying metaphorically used words in discourse. *Metaphor and Symbol*, 22 (1), 1-39.