

Military metaphors in newspaper communication on cancer in southern Africa: The case of Lesotho press

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Abstract

This paper examines military metaphors used in cancer illness discourse in Lesotho. The paper focuses on metaphors used in Sesotho newspapers' communication and the ideologies encoded by the identified metaphors. Through a qualitative content analysis approach, analysis of the data reveals that the role of military metaphors employed by the Sesotho press in cancer communication is to highlight the government's and institutions' commitment to spearheading massive mobilisation of efforts towards addressing this social ill. However, this paper argues that cancer discourse in the Sesotho press should not be dominated by military metaphors. This is based on a view that militarised language promotes a dichotomous world view where there are winners and losers, and this may promote dichotomous thinking where cancer is presented as a contest of either winning or losing. This paper maintains that this framing is problematic because, as it has been observed, cancer is a deadly disease, and therefore must be treated with caution including the use of language that is devoid of stigmatisation.

Keywords: *military metaphors, cancer communication, Sesotho newspapers*

Introduction

One of the major contributions of the Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT) is highlighting that metaphor influences thinking and attitudes (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). The understanding of metaphor as not just a matter of language but as part of human thinking has revolutionised the way metaphor is treated by scholars (Kovecses, 2010). Over the years, there has been an increase in the number of studies that explore the ideological functions of metaphors employed in different texts. This type of research has revealed that there is a relationship between the use of certain metaphors and the way people think about several issues such as the economy (Koller, 2003), politics (Charteris-Black, 2004) and immigration (Musolf, 2014). Quite

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importantly, psychological tests have shown that metaphor shapes not only attitudes but behaviour as well (Hendricks & Boroditsky, 2017).

Research on illness has also revealed that the discussion of diseases such as tuberculosis, cancer and HIV/AIDS is full of metaphors that reflect and promote society's attitudes towards these diseases (Norton et al., 1991; Semino et al., 2017; Sontag, 1979). In Southern Africa, much of the concentration has been on metaphors used in communication about HIV and AIDS (Connelly & Mcleod, 2003; Seepheephe, 2019; Thuube & Moloji, 2012). Very little has been done on metaphors that are used in communication about cancer, including cancer military metaphors.

This study aims to contribute to the research on military metaphors in illness by examining this area that has been under-researched, namely, the use of military metaphors in cancer discourse in Southern Africa. We explore the use of military metaphors in Sesotho newspapers' communication on cancer. The study aims to answer the following questions:

1. Which linguistic military metaphors are used in Sesotho newspapers' communication on cancer?
2. What conceptual metaphors are these linguistic metaphors based on?
3. What ideologies are encoded and promoted by these linguistic metaphors?
4. What functions do the military metaphors serve?

Literature Review

Research examining metaphors in illness discourse predates the cognitive-based approaches towards metaphor. Sontag (1979)'s seminal paper on illness discourse was published a year before Lakoff and Johnson (1980) introduced the Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT). Sontag's (1979) work, which was theoretical, compared the metaphors used in communication on tuberculosis and cancer in the West. Sontag (1979) argued that the metaphors used to talk about cancer frame the disease in a positive way, aligning with the positive perceptions of cancer in the West.

Following the practice seen in Sontag (1979), several researchers conducted research on metaphor in illness discourse around the early 1990s (Norton et al., 1991; Radley, 1993; Sontag, 1989). The majority of the studies employed the cognitive-based approaches to metaphors, using theories such as CMT as their framework (for example, Norton et al., 1991). This research revealed two important issues regarding the illness discourse: that it is filled with linguistic metaphors that are reflections of more generic conceptual metaphors, and that the linguistic metaphors are highly ideological, and, as observed by Sontag (1979), the metaphors reflect society's beliefs and attitudes towards a particular illness (Norton et al., 1991).

With regards to cancer, the majority of the studies took place after 2000. Some of the studies used discourse on cancer to explore the relationship between conceptual metaphors and illness metaphors (for example, Semino et al., 2004). Some explored the implications of using different approaches, such as cognitive-based approaches and discourse-based approaches in the study of metaphor in cancer discourse (for example, Semino et al., 2016). Other studies explored the forms and functions of linguistic metaphors used in cancer discourse (Semino et al., 2017; Semino & Demjen, 2017). These studies reveal that cancer discourse is proliferated by military metaphors which work in a variety of ways (Semino et al., 2017).

Scholars such as Semino et al. (2017) show that some war metaphors empower people with cancer while other metaphors do not. The research shows that there are other metaphors, such as journey metaphors, which work in a similar way. Semino et al. (2017) conclude that all metaphors, regardless of type, have the capability to work in a positive or negative way. They, therefore, recommend an approach similar to the one they took, where a discourse-based approach is used in the analysis of metaphor (Semino et al., 2017). This approach

enables the researcher to examine each specific metaphor in its context of use (Cameron & Deignan, 2006).

In Southern Africa, the majority of the studies have concentrated on the use of metaphor in HIV and AIDS discourse (Connelly & McLeod, 2003; Seephephe, 2019; Thuube & Moloji, 2012), with the communication about other diseases receiving very little attention from metaphor researchers. For instance, Seephephe (2019) examined metaphors used in Sesotho newspaper communication on HIV and AIDS. The study employed the discourse-based approach towards metaphor in which contextual factors are included in the analysis of linguistic metaphors (Seephephe, 2019). Also, to explore the sociocultural factors behind the use of metaphors, the study employed the tenets of Critical Discourse Analysis. The study reveals that Sesotho newspaper communication on HIV and AIDS is filled with metaphors that stigmatise people living with HIV and AIDS while praising government departments, churches, international donors and NGOs in the fight against HIV and AIDS, (Seephephe, 2019). Seephephe (2019) argues that the ideologies encoded and promoted by the metaphors are shared by the Basotho society.

The current study advances the research on illness discourse by examining metaphors used in cancer illness in Lesotho. Although the use of metaphors in talking about cancer has been explored in the past, studies such as those carried out by Semino et al. (2017) have focused on illness discourse in the West. Apart from the fact that research on illness discourse in Lesotho is quite patchy, studies such as those that have been carried out by Seephephe (2019) and which have focused on HIV and AIDS are few. Therefore, it is not clear how metaphorical language is used in military cancer discourse and what ideological functions does such a language play. The study aims to contribute to this line of research by providing information on this issue.

Methodology

This study employed a qualitative content analysis approach. According to Hsieh and Shannon (2005), a qualitative content analysis is an approach to an empirical analysis of texts within their context of communication by following content analytic rules and step-by-step models. Patton (2002) explains that qualitative content analysis allows researchers to understand social reality in a scientific manner. It also helps researchers to explore the meanings underlying physical messages (Patton, 2002). The study also employed the discourse-based approach towards metaphor in which contextual factors are included in the analysis of linguistic metaphors. Further, in order to investigate the socio-cultural factors behind the use of the metaphor, this study employed the tenets of Critical Discourse Analysis.

The population of this study was three Sesotho newspapers, namely, *Moeletsi oa Basotho*, *Lentsoe la Basotho*, and *Mosotho*. The focus was on newspapers published in 2019. The reason for this was to allow the researchers to study the phenomena of cancer discourse over one year. Again, this was based on the assumption that during this period, the efforts of cancer sensitisation were a topical issue in the media landscape of Lesotho.

To address the purpose of this study, the researchers purposively selected articles on cancer discourse from the 3 Sesotho newspapers. The researchers collected data from a corpus of three Sesotho newspapers. These newspapers are archived by the National University of Lesotho library. Pictures of the articles were captured with a cell phone camera; they were then transcribed into typed documents. Using a metaphor identification tool, Metaphor Identification Procedure Vrije University (MIPVU) which was adjusted by Seephephe et al. (2019), the researchers identified the metaphors used by the Sesotho press in cancer discourse. The importance of using a metaphor identification tool is to assist the researchers to avoid biased and subjective judgments of what could be metaphors.

Findings

Table 1 below presents some of the military metaphors that appear in the articles of the Sesotho newspapers.

Table 1

Military metaphors in the articles of the Sesotho newspapers

Sentence	Military Metaphor	English Translation
O re o bua sena hobane a ithutile hore lefu la mofets'e le hlasetse sechaba, 'me ha bosebeletsi bo ka etsoa Maseru feela, seo e tlabana bothata ka ha e se batho bohle ba ka tsebang hotla Maseru ba tsoang libakeng tse hole joaloka seterekeng sa Qacha's Nek, ha lingaka li le teng.	Hlasela	attacking
O re litaba tsa mafu ohle tsa batho ba ileng ba isoa naheng ena ho fumana thuso li tsamaile hantle, kahare ho tsona o qollotse ea ngoana ea lilemo li 'ne ea neng a lokela ho fuoa phieo ke motsoali oa hae hore taba tseo li tsamaile hantle, le ba neng ba tšoeroe ke mofetše o hlotseng le lingaka ba tiile ba folile.	Hlotseng	Defeated
India e futuhetse mofetše Lesotho	Futuhetse	To launch an attack
E mong oa mahlasipa a lefu la mofets'e ebile ele mothei oa Mokhatlo oa Action Against Cancer Association, mofumahali 'Mamahlako Lekhatla, o re mosebetsi o sa namme khahlanong le lefu la mofets'e moo sechaba se anngoeng ke lefu lena se sa ntsane se le tlokotsing e kholo, kaha se na le liqholotso tse 'maloa tseo se thulanang le tsona ho kenyeletsa tlhokahalo ea setsi sa kalafo ea lefu lena.	Mahlasipa a lefu la mofetše	Casualties of cancer
O re batho ba jang mobu ba tlokotsing ea lefu la kankere kaha le hlahella ho bona ho se ho felile, le litho li se li sena matla a ho itoanela ho latela phokolo ea tsona.	Itoanela	Fight for self
A supa ha lingaka tsena lekhetlong lena, li tletse feela ho tla shebana le bakuli ba loantšang mofetše.	Bakuli loantšang mofetše.	ba Patients fighting cancer
O re litaba tsa mafu ohle tsa batho ba ileng ba isoa naheng ena ho fumana thuso li tsamaile hantle, kahare ho tsona o qollotse ea ngoana ea lilemo li 'ne ea neng a lokela ho fuoa phieo ke motsoali oa hae hore taba tseo li tsamaile hantle, le baneng ba tšoeroe ke mofetše o hlotseng le lingaka ba tiile ba folile.	Hlotseng	Defeated
E mong oa mahlasipa a lefu la mofetše ebile ele mothei oa Mokhatlo oa Action Against Cancer Association, mofumahali 'Mamahlako Lekhatla, o re mosebetsi o sa namme khahlanong le lefu la mofetše moo sechaba se anngoeng ke lefu lena se sa ntsane se le tlokotsing e kholo, kaha	Khahlanong lefu la mofetše	le Attack cancer against

se na le liqholotso tse ‘maloa tseo se thulanang le tsona ho kenyeletsa tlhokahalo ea setsi sa kalafo ea lefu lena.

H’a bua le Moeletsi oa Basotho ka la 24 ‘Mesa monongoaha, Lekhatla o hlalositse hore lefu la mofetše le bonahala ntse le totile haholo kahar’a naha le ha ho ntse ho etsoa maoala mona le mane, ho leka ho thusa ba amehileng le ho fenyha lefu lena

Fenya

Defeat

H’a bua le Moeletsi oa Basotho ka la 24 ‘Mesa monongoaha, Lekhatla o hlalositse hore lefu la mofetše le bonahala ntse le totile haholo kahar’a naha le ha ho ntse ho etsoa maoala mona le mane, ho leka ho thusa ba amehileng le ho fenyha lefu lena

Amehileng

Affected

O re o ketekile le batho ba ntseng ba loanela bophelo ba bona le batho ba tlokotsing ea lefu lena moo teng ba neng ba eletsana hore na lefu lena ba ka le fenyha joang, ba seng ba le hlotse ba atlehile joang, le hore na ba ntseng ba hena-henana le lona na liqholotso tseo ba thulanang le tsona ke li feng.

loanela

Fighting

O re o ketekile le batho ba ntseng ba loanela bophelo ba bona le batho ba tlokotsing ea lefu lena moo teng ba neng ba eletsana hore na lefu lena ba ka le fenyha joang, ba seng ba le hlotse ba atlehile joang, le hore na ba ntseng ba hena-henana le lona na liqholotso tseo ba thulanang le tsona ke li feng.

hena-henana

Battling

O re liji tse neng li jeoa moketeng ona, ke tsona tse khothalletsoang hore li lokela ‘mele oa motho bakeng sa bophelo bo bottle le thibelo ea lefu lena, joaloka litholoana, meroho, koro le nama ea likhoho tsa Sesotho har’a tse ling.

thibelo

Stopping

O re o ne a rupela batho joalo e le ha ne a shebile ka ho khetholoha hore batho batle ba folofele ho ea litekong tsa lefu lena kaha ha le potlaketsoe, ‘me le fumaneha le le teng ka nako, ke lefu le laolehang le ho phekoheha.

laolehang

Can be controlled

There are metaphors that portray cancer as an invading army. In such cases, expressions that describe the actions of an invading army, such as *hlasela*, are used to describe the activities of cancer. An example is Sentence (1), which has used the expression *hlasetse* (attacked), to describe the process of high transmission of cancer among Basotho, causing diseasing and high mortality rate.

(1) *O re o bua sena hobane a ithutile hore lefu la mofetše le hlasetse sechaba, ‘me ha bosebeletsi bo ka etsoa Maseru feela, seo e tlabo bothata ka ha e se batho bohle ba ka tsebang hotla Maseru ba tsoang libakeng tse hole joaloka seterekeng sa Qacha’s Nek, ha lingaka li le teng.*

The use of ‘hlasetse’ in (1) and in similar cases is metaphoric since it contrasts with the more basic meaning of the expression. In its more basic meaning, *hlasetse* refers to ‘use violence

to harm' (Macmillan, 2007). This meaning is listed as the first one in MacMillan, as is usually the case with the more basic meanings of words.

In some instances, the newspapers frame cancer as a powerful opponent that defeats its enemies. In Sentence (2), the author portrays cancer as an enemy that manages to 'defeat' many doctors until it loses when the patients are taken to India (in this country).

(2) *O re litaba tsa mafu ohle tsa batho ba ileng ba isoa naheng ena ho fumana thuso li tsamaile hantle, kahare ho tsona o qollotse ea ngoana ea lilemo li 'ne ea neng a lokela ho fua phieo ke motsoali oa hae hore taba tseo li tsamaile hantle, le baneng ba tšoeroe ke mofetše o hlotseng le lingaka ba tlile ba folile.*

In (2), cancer is not defeating Basotho but the doctors who try to launch a counter-attack against it. The use of defeat in (2) is metaphoric. While the expression is usually used to refer to a process of winning against someone or something in sports, in this instance, it refers to a disease's/virus's ability to prevail despite attempts to get rid of it. The use of this expression is metaphoric.

War metaphors are also being used in instances where the fighting is not done by cancer but by the patients, their organs and institutions such as governments and NGOs. For instance, in Sentence (3), people who have cancer and are trying to get a cure are metaphorically framed as 'fighting' the disease.

(3) *A supa ha lingaka tse na lekhetlong lena li tletse feela ho tla shebana le bakuli ba loantsang mofetše.*

Sentence (4) shows that these people 'fight' because they may lose their lives. This highlights how crucial this fight is. In addition, example (4) shows that there is a possibility of 'defeating' the disease, with some people labelled as victors who have 'defeated it'.

(4) *O re o ketekile le batho ba ntseng ba loanela bophelo ba bona le batho ba tlokotsing ea lefu lena moo teng ba neng ba eletsana hore na lefu lena ba ka le fenyja joang, ba seng ba le hlotse ba atlehile joang, le hore na ba ntseng ba hena-henana le lona na liqholotso tseo ba thulanang le tsona ke li feng.*

However, defeating the disease requires a lot of effort, including the knowledge of how to defeat it, hence the need for advice from those who have defeated it. This idea is seen again in Sentence (4), where there is the mention of 'assistance' given to those fighting the disease so that they can 'defeat' it.

(5) *H'a bua le Moeletsi oa Basotho ka la 24 'Mesa monongoaha, Lekhatla o hlalositse hore lefu la mofetše le bonahala ntse le totile haholo kahar'a naha le ha ho ntse ho etsoa maoala mona le mane, ho leka ho thusa ba amehileng le ho fenyja lefu lena.*

Seemingly, the use of 'fighting' in reference to attempts to get a cancer cure and not fall sick from it is based on the view of cancer as an enemy force that has attacked these people. However, the metaphors that show cancer patients fighting back are more numerous, and as shown by examples (2) to (5), more varied than the ones in which cancer is attacking.

In example (6) below, a cancer patient's organs are thought to be weakened by cancer to an extent where they cannot do the 'fighting' anymore. In this instance, 'fighting' is used to refer to the organs' efforts to prevent cancer from causing destruction in one's body. In this case, too, the use of military metaphor seems to be influenced by the view that cancer is an enemy force. As the destruction caused by cancer is metaphorically treated as 'fighting', so are any efforts made to counter this destruction.

(6) *O re batho ba jang mobu ba tlokotsing ea lefu la kankere kaha le hlahella ho bona ho se ho felile, le litho li se li sena matla a ho itoanela ho latela phokolo ea tsona.*

Sentences (4) and (5) are examples of situations in which a country is framed as 'fighting' against cancer. In (4), India's efforts against cancer are framed as 'attacking' cancer. And, in (5), a group of doctors from India is framed as fighting on behalf of Lesotho.

(7) *India e futuhetse mofetše Lesotho*

(8) *Motlatsi oa Letona la tsa Bophelo Lesotho, Mohlomphehi 'Manthabiseng Phohleli, o re Basotho ka Lekala la Bophelo ba lebelletse baeti bao e leng lingaka ho hlaha naheng ea India ho jela paate kalafong ea bakuli ba lefu la mofetše*

The use of these metaphors, which are based on the perception of cancer as a villain that has attacked Basotho and their bodies, highlights the amount of effort and sacrifice made by India and its doctors.

Lastly, the military metaphors are used to describe programs and bodies that have been designed to contain cancer and other diseases. An example is given in (9), where one branch of government is given the title of Lefapha la Taolo le Toantšo ea Mafu.

(9) *Puisanong le Dr. Liang Maama, hotsoa Lekaleng la Bophelo Lefapheng la Taolo le Toantšo ea Mafu, ka mohala ka la 7 Pherekhong monongoaha, o tiisitse hore mobu ha o'a etsetsoa ho jeoa.*

The use of military metaphors in naming these bodies corresponds with the view of cancer, and clearly other diseases as enemy forces.

Discussions

When situating the results of the current study within previous literature, the analysis of data shows that the findings of the current study are in line with the findings of previously conducted studies that explored the ideological functions of metaphors used in illness discourse. The observation is that in the Sesotho press, military metaphors are pervasive in cancer communication. This view is supported by Flusberg et al. (2018) who note that military metaphors are prevalent in natural discourse. In explaining this phenomenon, previous studies suggest that war metaphors have been used in different communications of social issues, and the majority of studies have highlighted that there are possible benefits and negative consequences to employing war metaphors in the framing of significant social issues (Norton et al., 1991; Seephephe, 2019; Semino et al., 2019).

In this study, it has been revealed that the military metaphors used by Sesotho press in cancer discourse are representative, and they are a phenomenon signifying a society's experiences, attitudes and belief systems. Portraying cancer as an attacking enemy force that has invaded Lesotho portrays it as very dangerous and mobilises the whole nation into action. It is positioned as an enemy force which is regarded as a very dangerous entity that may cause great damage unless people come together and launch a counter-attack against it. Christoyannopoulos (2020) substantiates this by pointing out that this framing may assist in highlighting the extraordinary circumstances posed by cancer.

Further, the use of the metaphors in which people with cancer are portrayed as 'fighting' the disease highlights the high amount of effort that is involved in trying to get a cure against cancer and making efforts not to get sick from it. However, the downside of the use of this metaphor is that it gives an impression that a cancer patient is responsible for what happens to them and that those who do not get cured from it did not fight enough. This finding is consistent with Semino et al. (2019) assertion that pervasive usage of military metaphors in

cancer discourse works in a variety of ways, while some military metaphors empower cancer patients, others stigmatise cancer patients (Semino et al., 2018).

In exploring the dynamic of stigmatisation of cancer patients through the usage of military metaphors, this study bases its argument on Flusberg et al. (2018) analogy of war. A notion of war embroils a fight between opposing forces with a clear division between conflicting sides who are engaged in a tug of war to achieve different goals (Flusberg et al., 2018). Warfare metaphors create dichotomies of fighter versus enemy, winner versus loser, good versus evil (Flusberg et al., 2018). Through this logic, this framing of cancer portrays cancer patients as perpetual victims who may even become losers when succumbing to the disease.

Moreover, this paper maintains that militarised language which is employed by Sesotho press in cancer may have negative consequences of framing cancer patients in a dehumanised manner where they are side-lined (othering). Upon closer inspection, this phenomenon is observed in Sesotho's press messaging where the roles played by the government, institutions and organisations are put on a pedestal while cancer patients are on a larger scale presented as helpless victims. In this manner, military metaphors used by Sesotho press in cancer communication covertly disempower cancer patients because they assure the state's and organisations' hypervisibility while perpetuating cancer patients' invisibility and consequently erasure. Van Dijk (2004) indicates that analysis of ideology looks at what information gets highlighted while the other gets downgraded.

Although it could be maintained that the role of military metaphors employed by Sesotho press in cancer communication is to highlight government's and institutions' commitment in spearheading massive mobilisation of efforts towards addressing this social ill, this paper argues that cancer discourse in Sesotho press should not be proliferated by military metaphors. This is because as Christoyannopoulos (2020) notes, "the more we use military language, the more we normalise the mobilisation of the military, and the more we entrench military hierarchies" (p. 16).

Further, militarised language promotes a dichotomous world view where there are winners and losers, and this may promote dichotomous thinking where cancer is presented as a contest of either winning or losing. This is problematic because, as it has been observed, cancer is a deadly disease, and it must be treated with caution that is devoid of stigmatisation. Dividing the world view (or perception of disease) into winners and losers closes off other alternatives of conceptualising and understanding cancer.

Conclusion

The aim of this study was to explore the use of military metaphors in Sesotho newspapers in cancer discourse. Key findings that have emerged reveal that cancer communications of Sesotho newspapers are proliferated by military metaphors. These metaphors are based on ideas of defeating a deadly disease that poses a threat to the well-being of Basotho's society. It is revealed that these military metaphors promote ideologies of encouraging massive mobilisation efforts to combating this social ill through involvement of different stakeholders in the society. It is observed that although militarised language is employed for sensitisation purposes, a dire consequence of adopting this framing of the disease is that this conceptualisation of cancer has a negative impact of stigmatising patients. As a result, this paper maintains that Sesotho press should make efforts of steering away from pervasive usage of military metaphors in cancer discourse by adopting a medical discourse in framing this disease in the minds of Basotho. A contribution this paper has made is to offer an understanding on the functions of military metaphors in cancer discourse in Southern African region by focusing on Sesotho newspapers.

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