

Complex Metaphor, Agency and Chronic Pain

In this paper I examine metaphors in a corpus of interviews with people experiencing chronic pain. I identify a range of different types of complex metaphor including mixed metaphors, repeated metaphors, extended and elaborated metaphors. I interpret the motivation for such complex metaphors with reference to speaker's agency and rhetorical purpose.

When describing how they gain control over pain by therapy or medication, speakers tend to use repeated or elaborated and extended metaphors that involve conceptual blending. So when speakers discuss aspects of pain that *can be controlled* they use semantically convergent metaphor vehicles. The greater the convergence of metaphor vehicles, the greater the agency of the speaker over the pain and the more speakers represent themselves as *in control of* the pain. Conversely, when speakers emphasise the intensity of pain they represent it as being *out of control* by using mixed metaphors. The greater the semantic divergence of metaphor source domains, the greater the agency of the pain over the speaker and the more speakers communicate the intensity of the embodied experience of pain.

An important communicative purpose for people experiencing chronic pain is to gain acknowledgement of its reality. The emergence of a metaphor theme through all types of complex metaphor enhances the overall credibility of the lived experience of chronic pain - either by allowing others to experience its chaotic nature or by offering a glimpse into the resolution of such chaos through the restoration of agency.