

Analyzing the communication through metaphors between nurse and patients- Isabel Alvarez-Autonomous University of Barcelona, Spain

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Introduction: This study incorporated a theoretical framework based on four worldviews, each with an underlying foundational metaphor (root metaphor). The use of these root metaphors (formism, mechanism, contextualism, and organicism) can have an explanatory function and serve to impart new meanings, as each type of metaphor can lead to a particular interpretation. The study aimed to extract and discuss the root metaphors, with a view to analyzing the communication between health professionals and patients. **Methods:** In a case study in Spain over a six-month period, we analyzed the content of recorded, transcribed interviews conducted by one nurse with 32 patients who had chronic illnesses. We inductively extracted five categories that emerged from the interviews: blood sugar, cholesterol, exercise, blood pressure and diet. **Results:** The results show that the nurse tended to primarily use two worldviews: mechanism and formism. In contrast, patients tended to favor mechanism when discussing cholesterol, blood pressure and blood sugar levels, whereas contextualism was predominant when the category was diet or exercise. **Conclusions:** This study adds to the existing literature on health professionals and patients Communication. It shows how the use of Peppers root metaphors helps to analyse the communication between the nurse and patients. Furthermore, it shows they are both using different root metaphors when they are talking about illness and treatments especially regarding blood sugar, cholesterol, exercise, blood pressure and diet. Further qualitative and quantitative studies are needed to solidly these findings.

Background

Metaphors in communication can serve to convey individuals' backgrounds, contexts, experiences, and worldviews. Metaphors used in a health care setting can help achieve consensual communication in professional-patient relationships. Patients use metaphors to describe symptoms, or how disease affects them. Health professionals draw on shared understanding of such metaphors to better comprehend and meet patient needs, and to communicate information that patients can more easily integrate into their lives.

This study incorporated a theoretical framework based on four worldviews, each with an underlying foundational metaphor (root metaphor). The use of these root metaphors (formism, mechanism, contextualism, and organicism) can have an explanatory function and serve to impart new meanings, as each type of metaphor can lead to a particular interpretation. The study aimed to extract and discuss the root metaphors, with a view to analyzing the communication between health professionals and patients.

Methods

In a case study in Spain over a six-month period, we analyzed the content of recorded, transcribed interviews conducted by one nurse with 32 patients who had chronic illnesses. We inductively extracted five categories that emerged from the interviews: blood sugar, cholesterol, exercise, blood pressure, and diet. We then examined these categories from the standpoint of each of the four root metaphors using two approaches: A series (deductive) and an emergent (inductive) approach.

Results

The results show that the nurse tended to primarily use two worldviews: mechanism and formism. In contrast, patients tended to favor mechanism when discussing cholesterol, blood pressure, and blood sugar levels, whereas contextualism was predominant when the category was diet or exercise.

Conclusions

This study adds to the existing literature on health professionals and patients' communication. It shows how the use of Pepper's root metaphors helps to analyze the communication between the nurse and patients. Furthermore, it shows they are both using different root metaphors when they are talking about illness and treatments especially regarding blood sugar, cholesterol, exercise, blood pressure, and diet. Further qualitative and quantitative studies are needed to solidly these findings.

Keywords: Communication, Metaphors, Worldviews, Chronic patients, Educational health consultations

Background

Metaphors are figures of speech that, although not used consciously, constitute the roots of human knowledge [2]. Published studies have analyzed the use of metaphors by health professionals and patients [3, 4], in patient explanations of their symptoms [5, 6], and in describing the effects of diseases . Literal metaphors are present in all aspects of the health sector [8].

Most investigations that analyze communication between health professionals and patients stress the importance of metaphors in a positive care relationship [9-12]. Previous studies have focused on the purpose of communication or the analysis of communication in medical and patient-specific behaviors [13-15], the influence of the communication of results to patients [16], verbal and nonverbal communication, the language used by professionals and instrumental and effective communication [17].

There are several factors that can challenge interpersonal communication between nurses and patients because such communication involves unequal positions (with respect to one party having greater knowledge), involuntary relationships, concern issues of vital importance that require close cooperation [15], and in some cases, language barriers [18].

These issues sometimes also involve an inability of the written word to adequately convey complex ideas. Nurses often feel they lack effective communication skills, resulting in a lack of confidence among novice nurses who have recently completed their educational programs [20].

Patients as well as nurses connect new knowledge with lived experiences and weave it into existing narratives of meaning [21, 22]; however, this process is difficult if a person has not had the experience before. The use of metaphors helps to create that narrative process and convey new meanings [1, 23]. Setting up context and providing patients with stories can enable them to embed new ideas (follow new treatments, understanding protocols) and ultimately, to understand and better accept their health condition [21, 24].

Successful self-management of chronically ill patients depends on behavioral changes, which, among other things, in turn depends on effective communication with health professionals [25, 26]. The paradigm of high-quality chronic illness care now seeks to promote a fuller understanding of the patients' life and preferences [27] and empowering patients [28, 29], helping them with continuous adjustments. In this study, we will show how communication potentially can be more effective if we are aware of the root metaphors and show that knowing and understanding root metaphors could be a starting point for helping chronically ill patients to empower themselves. Chronically ill patients who are thus empowered would, once adequate communication has developed, help clinicians and researchers achieve greater success when a new treatment needs to be introduced.

The aim of this study is to analyze the communication between a nurse and her 32 chronically-ill patients from the standpoint of Stephen Pepper's root metaphors, as they discuss the treatment and nature the patients' illness.

Theoretical framework

In this study, we applied a theoretical framework based on Pepper's four root metaphors [30] to the emerged categories (blood sugar, cholesterol, exercise, blood pressure, and diet). Pepper distinguishes poetic metaphors from root metaphors. Root metaphors are primarily explanatory and poetic are an important but aesthetic device. This framework is useful with respect to both precision and scope; precision because each root metaphor leads to a way of seeing the truth and reality, to a certain kind of interpretation. Each root metaphor leads to a way of interpreting reality, and each has legitimacy throughout the intellectual history of humankind [31]. Consequently, his work has considerable scope for monitoring issues of meaning and communication [31]. However, working with such a complex theoretical framework requires an abbreviated and workable approach that would give greater practical value to research. An approach of this kind has been elaborated by Kilbourn (see Table Table1),1, who called his distillation of Pepper's framework an "analytical scheme" [32]. Briefly, these four root metaphors are as follows:

Table 1
Adaptation of Kilbourn's analytical scheme to four worldviews and keywords

	Formism	Mechanism	Organicism	Contextualism
<i>Root Metaphor</i>	<i>Form</i>	<i>Machine</i>	<i>Organ</i>	<i>Context</i>
	Convention	Cause	Coherence	Change
	Ideal	Efficiency	Connection	Fusion
Keywords	Norm	Frequency	Integration	Intensity
	Plan	Location	Resolution	Relativity
	Similarity	Parts	Synthesis	Vividness
	Tradition	Quantity	Unity	Whole
	How is this item/event similar to other items/events?	How does this item/event work?	How integrated is this item/event?	How intense is the experience of this item/event?

Formism is a worldview whose basis is similarity. The root metaphor of this view is resemblance, comparison or parallelism. On the basis of an intuitive recognition of similarity, the person who holds to formism believes that they can understand things better if they can fit them into a category or specific model. The cognitive process goes from the particular to the general.

The root metaphor of mechanism is the machine. This metaphor is projected as the operation of a mechanism, consisting of large and small pieces which possess autonomy and meaning in their own right, without being a part of the whole to which they belong.

The root metaphor of organicism is integration. It is a hypothesis derived from the recognition that a body is somehow more than the sum of its parts. The basic operation is integrating structures. This worldview is that everything is an organism that lives and moves; organicism is concerned with a

sense of process. Its primary source of motivation is from within the individual. Participants are organized and self-regulated in a coordinated and active manner.

The view of contextualism is based on the historical phenomenon. It is never static but is always in perpetual

evolution. At the same time, we recognize that if the context changes, so does the event. In this worldview, there are no stable, universal, or exhaustive categories