Conceptualising medicine in German and English: a functional, text-typological perspective

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The pervasiveness of metaphors in specialised domains and their role in shaping scientific thinking has been widely recognised and investigated (e.g. Brown 2003; Drewer 2003; Hermann & Sardinha 2015). Many metaphors used in medical communication are deeply rooted in medical thinking (e.g. Bauer 2006; Sander 2012 among others) and they are still used at every level of communication, thereby showing different functions: for example, they can be heuristically used in theory building and /or explanation as well as in the communication with laymen (e.g. Fleishman 2008; Schachtner 1999; Semino 2021 among others). Following new pragmatic perspectives (Steen 2008, 2015) on the Conceptual Metaphor Theory (Lakoff & Johnson 1980), they might, in turn, be linked to the more general function(s) of the text(s) and be ultimately linked to the function of the genres (e.g. Berger 2016, Skorczynska & Deignan 2016 among others). Specialised knowledge and cognitive models are created, in fact, through texts, which, in turn reflect and reinforce those schemes. Moving from these assumptions this study investigates the role played by medical metaphors in different genres belonging to three fundamental levels of specialised communication: research, academic-didactic communication, and popularisation. More specifically, following research questions have been addressed in the study: What metaphors are used for coronaviruses (and related phenomena such as virus mutation and vaccination) in popularised articles, textbooks, and research papers? How are they verbally and/or non-verbally expressed? What is their function and how does such function relate to function of the text(s) in which they occur? Do they differ in frequency and / or linguistic form, i.e., how do they reflect genre differentiation?

The MIP (Nacey, Dorst, Krennmayr, & Reijnierse, 2019; Pragglejaz Group 2007; Steen, Dorst, Hermann, Kaal, Krennmayr, & Pasma, 2010) has been used to identify metaphors for coronaviruses in (German) textbooks of virology, (English) research articles and (German) popularised texts. The study sheds light on genre-specific metaphor use in medicine and, since English research papers are compared to German texts, it also adresses contrastive issues which might be integrated into further wider investigations.

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