



Metaphorical patterns in Norwegian doctoral dissertation acknowledgements

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This paper investigates patterns of systematic metaphors used to characterize various aspects of the Norwegian doctoral education period, based on analysis of a corpus of dissertation acknowledgements (DAs). The primary research question addressed here asks which metaphors doctoral students in Norway use to describe their educational experience. The DAs were collected from all doctoral dissertations produced between 2014-2019 from four programs at a Norwegian university. Between them, these programs cover widely varying academic disciplines. The corpus contains nearly 27,000 words in 49 dissertation acknowledgements, 24 written in English and 25 in Norwegian.

Dissertation acknowledgements “act as a means of demonstrating academic credibility, recognizing debts, and achieving a sense of closure at the end of a long and demanding research process” (Hyland, 2003, p. 243). While their main purpose is ostensibly to express gratitude to individuals and institutions, acknowledgements also provide insight into the persona of the writers, allowing them space for reflection and expression of personal and professional identity.

This study is grounded in the Conceptual Metaphor Theory. By this view, metaphor is a frequently used as a resource by which we discuss abstract, complex concepts in terms of more concrete entities, whereby certain real or perceived qualities from a (typically concrete) 'source' domain are mapped onto a (typically abstract) 'target' domain (see e.g. Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). Put simply, metaphor represents a way in which we talk about one thing in terms of another. Cognitive linguists would add that metaphors also represent ways that we actually conceive of the world around us. Metaphors facilitate communication, as they “can be used to persuade, reason, evaluate, explain, theorize, offer new conceptualization of reality and so on” (Semino, 2008, p. 31).

This study adheres to a discourse dynamics approach to metaphor identification and analysis, (Cameron, 2010; Cameron, Low, & Maslen, 2010; Cameron & Maslen, 2010a). This process involves a three-step procedure, consisting of 1) identifying linguistic metaphors (so-called 'metaphor vehicles', 2) sorting the identified vehicles into vehicle groups, and 2) linking the vehicle groups with their topics. As a whole, the discourse dynamics approach allows for the identification of sets of related linguistic metaphors employed by different people about the same topics (that is, 'systematic metaphors'; see Cameron & Maslen, 2010b), as well as metaphors that are less commonly employed about these topics (e.g.



'one-shot' metaphors). Given the nature of the data in question, fairly equally divided between Norwegian and English discourse, the analysis also has the potential for revealing cross-linguistic similarities and differences.

An overview of the systematic metaphorical patterns in DAs is intended to provide empirical evidence concerning how such students view the doctoral education process in general, as well as the assistance they receive along the way. Furthermore, this investigation may also provide insight into alternative ways in which they could think about these issues —that is, the metaphors uncovered could be used as the starting point for discussing hitherto implicit attitudes, addressing and possibly reframing potentially problematic conceptualizations.