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TALKING ABOUT DEPRESSION:
EXPERIENCE AND FIGURATIVE LANGUAGE

This paper analyzes the metaphors and metonymies of depression in a personal account written in Modern Greek describing the experience in retrospect which is drawn from a corpus of similar accounts published online. Its main aim is to check how the figurative expressions are distributed in a single narrative, thus exploring their function in emotional discourse. Furthermore, this study broadens the scope of the analysis, as it investigates the role of metonymy in the production of this discourse. The results suggest that metonymy plays an instrumental role in showcasing the day-to-day experience of depression by highlighting the symptoms. They also suggest that the emotional involvement of the subject stimulates the use of figurative language.

Keywords: depression, metaphor, metonymy, figurative language

1. INTRODUCTION

In this paper I examine the conceptualisation of depression in a single narrative in Modern Greek. I present and analyse 39 figurative instantiations that were found in a personal account written by an individual who suffered depression in the past and is describing his experience in retrospect. I will analyse the metaphors and metonymies in text, as I'm interested to see how the two mechanisms develop in the course of the narrative and how they interact in the talk about the experience of depression. This patterning is important for research on the interaction of metaphor and metonymy (see Goossens 1990), and also sheds light on the role of figurative language in expressing intense emotion (Theodoropoulou 2012; Foolen 2012). Furthermore, it will contribute to research on depression as it is the first attempt at studying metonymy, alongside metaphor, on naturally occurring discourse, the only other –non-empirical– study being

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Barcelona (1986). Lastly, drawing from my MA thesis (Αποκατανίδου 2022), it is a first attempt on the figurative language of depression in Modern Greek.

2. EMOTION AND FIGURATIVE LANGUAGE IN COGNITIVE LINGUISTICS

This paper follows the discussion on the relationship between language and emotion via the Conceptual Metaphor Theory (Lakoff & Johnson 1980). Contrary to the traditional view on metaphor as an ornamental linguistic device, this theory postulates that metaphor and metonymy are in fact cognitive mechanisms through which we understand/conceptualize abstract concepts in terms of concrete concepts. In this process, information from a concrete conceptual domain (source) is mapped to a less concrete conceptual domain (target). Emotions and emotional states are considered such abstract conceptual entities that can only be conceptualized through metaphor and metonymy (Kövecses 1990, 2000). For example, we talk about sadness in terms of a downward orientation; this instantiates the metaphorical mapping SADNESS IS DOWN, which is proposed as a major conceptual metaphor from Lakoff and Johnson (1980: 15–18) and is also listed in Kövecses (2000: 25–26). We use the knowledge we have about downward orientation (source domain) to talk about feelings of sadness (target domain), as illustrated in the following expression: *I'm feeling **down***. In the case of metonymy, a mental entity provides access to another one, but, different to metaphor, the metonymic mapping takes place within the same conceptual domain. The most prominent metonymic principle for emotion concepts is, according to Kövecses (1990: 70), the metonymy THE (PHYSIOLOGICAL/BEHAVIOURAL) REACTION FOR EMOTION, as is indicated by the expression: *he was **shaking** with fear* (PHYSICAL AGITATION FOR FEAR).

Critical to this approach to emotions are other studies from the cognitive paradigm itself (Foolen 2012; Theodoropoulou 2012), and from neuroscience (see LeDoux 1998). These studies propose a different approach, one that doesn't equate emotion with cognition disregarding its experiential aspect. This paper is in line with these approaches that postulate that metaphor and metonymy in emotion discourse are motivated by the need for expressing aspects of the emotional experience (Θεοδωροπούλου 2004; Theodoropoulou 2012; Foolen 2012: 360). Following Theodoropoulou (2012: 457), focus is placed on the word choice as a marker of the subject's emotional involvement. This notion brings into mind the recent view on metaphor as a secondary construal of reality, according to which all linguistic expression, including figurative language, is inherently viewpointed (Dancygier & Sweetser 2014: 3). In this context, the various linguistic choices directly correlate with the subject's beliefs, attitudes, and emotions.

2.1. Figurative language and depression

The literature on the figurative language of depression has focused primarily on metaphor, with the exception of Barcelona (1986). Though not an empirical study, Barcelona managed to trace the conventional ways in which English speakers talk about depression. Regarding the role of metonymy, he found the EFFECT FOR CAUSE metonymy to be the most prevalent, where the CAUSE is depression, and the EFFECTS are the various physiological and behavioural responses. As for metaphor, depression is conceptualised as a FORCE (physical or violent), a BURDEN or NUISANCE, a LIVING ORGANISM (among which a monster), an ENEMY and a BOUNDED SPACE (generally a container). Regarding the last source domain, there is a further conceptualisation in which the person suffering from depression is the container and depression is the substance it contains. These findings were confirmed by later empirical studies, which have mostly focused on English, and to a lesser extent on Chinese (Pritzker 2007), Spanish (Reali, Soriano & Rodríguez 2016) and Catalan (Coll-Florit et al. 2021). In addition, other source-domains were established as conventional, namely DESCENT, DARKNESS, CAPTOR.

The studies drew their data from different types of corpora, like therapy session recordings (McMullen et al. 2002), interviews with patients (Charteris-Black 2012), reporting data mostly from the perspective of the people who experienced the disorder, but also from the press (Reali, Soriano & Rodríguez 2016) and from radio broadcasts of depression (Semino 2008). The latter included metaphors from people other than patients like family members, friends, and therapists. Other studies focused on books, both fiction and non-fiction (Demjén 2011; Schoeneman, Schoeneman & Stallings 2004). This paper follows Coll-Florit et al. (2021) who focused on first-person accounts but differs from them by examining the role of metonymy alongside metaphor.

3. DATA AND METHOD

The present study seeks to investigate the figurative language in usage (Stefanowitsch 2006), and so the data under study is drawn from naturally occurring discourse. Specifically, the linguistic instantiations that will be presented were drawn from a small corpus of written natural discourse, that was constructed for the purposes of my MA thesis. This corpus consists of three such accounts published in online blogs describing the individuals' experience with the disorder in retrospect. The collection of the data was made through a Google search of the phrase "depression and me" in Modern Greek, so that I could find personal accounts of depression from Greek speakers; all data is accessible online without the need of authorized entry. From the original three accounts, I selected one because my aim was to examine the distribution of figurative language in a single narrative. The identification of the metaphorical and metonymic instantiations

was made word-by-word with the use of MIPVU (Steen et al. 2010). I utilize a lexical method because I search for and examine any qualitative differences between different linguistic instantiations of the same source-domain. Since I'm examining the metaphors and metonymies in context, particular attention is placed on the various patterns in which they manifest in text (for metaphor, see Semino 2008; for metonymy, see Denroche 2018). Due to space limitations, only a sample of the narrative is presented here. The narrative in its entirety can be found in Apokatanidou (Αποκατανίδου 2022).

4. RESULTS

In the sample presented in this section, 39 figurative instantiations were identified. These include 23 metaphorical and 11 metonymic instantiations; the remaining five are cases of interaction. I call these metaphorical-metonymic because I think both mechanisms are at play. The results will be presented in small extracts so we can better trace any patterns in text. The linguistic metaphors are marked with bold characters and the metonymies are underlined. Whenever an expression is both bold and underlined, it is a case of interaction. This first extract shows three such cases.

(1)
a. ***Πνίγεσαι***, *αδυνατείς να ανασαίνεις, νιώθεις* ***την καρδιά σου να θέλει να βγει έξω***,
   'You're **drowning**, unable to breathe, you feel **your heart wanting to come out**'

b. ***μουδιάζεις*** *και όλο αυτό το σκηνικό είναι καθημερινό ακόμα και περισσότερο από μια φορά.*
   'you're **numb** and all of this is happening multiple times a day'

c. *Δεν σε νοιάζει τίποτα, αδιαφορείς για όλους και όλα.*
   'You don't care about anything, nothing and no one matters'

In this section, the individual is describing his experience at the onset of the depressive episode. He's addressing people who haven't experienced depression before, as is also indicated by the title of the narrative ('No, you don't know what depression is'). In a series of three consecutive metonymies, which form a *metonymy cluster* (Denroche 2018: 9), the individual reports physiological and psychological symptoms of depression, i.e., inability to breathe, increase in heart rate and loss of interest. These symptoms are seen as more elaborated versions of the metonymy THE PHYSIOLOGICAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL EFFECTS FOR

DEPRESSION. The first two also instantiate the metonymy THE PHYSIOLOGICAL EFFECTS FOR ANXIETY. Furthermore, these metonymic expressions can also be seen as metaphorical. This could be an instance of the 'metaphor within metonymy' pattern documented in Theodoropoulou (Θεοδωροπούλου 2004). In this pattern, metonymy highlights the body, and metaphor expresses the emotional intensity. Specifically, in the expression *πνίγεσαι* 'you're drowning' the inability to breathe is further conceptualized as DROWNING, which highlights the intensity of the experience.

Likewise, the increase in heart rate in the expression *την καρδιά σου να θέλει να βγει έξω* 'your heart wanting to come out' foregrounds a part of the body, the heart, which then is personified as a MOVING ENTITY. In addition, the body is conceptualized as a CONTAINER in the expression *να βγει έξω* 'to come out'. The personification highlights the loss of control from the subject; a bodily reaction is seen as intended action of the body which is separated from the self. The same interactive pattern is instantiated in the expression *μουδιάζεις* 'you're numb'. The difference here is that a psychological symptom (loss of interest) is metaphorized as PHYSICAL NUMBNESS.

(2)
a. <u>*Δεν έχεις κουράγιο, νιώθεις πολύ κούραση λες.*</u>
   '<u>You don't have the motivation, you say you feel very tired</u>'

b. *Σαν να **κουβαλάς** ένα φοβερά **βαρύ φορτίο**.*
   'It's like you're **carrying** a very **heavy load**'

c. *Και **κουβαλάς** εκείνο της **αρρώστιας**, γιατί η κατάθλιψη είναι αρρώστια και μάλιστα σοβαρή.*
   'And you're **carrying** that of **illness**, because depression is an illness and a serious one at that'

In the next extract, we have another example of the metonymy THE PHYSIOLOGICAL EFFECT FOR DEPRESSION. This time the interaction occurs at the textual level. This metonymy is immediately followed by an *extended* (direct[2]) *metaphor* (Semino 2008: 25), which seems to serve an explanatory function. The fatigue and the loss of energy come from a heavy burden that the individual feels like he's carrying in the expressions *κουβαλάς* 'carry' and *βαρύ φορτίο* 'heavy load' (DEPRESSION IS CARRYING WEIGHT). The metaphorization of depression as a physical burden could be influenced by the general metaphor ILLNESS IS WEIGHT instantiated in the expression *κουβαλάς εκείνο της αρρώστιας* 'you're carrying

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[2] *Direct metaphors* are the ones that are signalled by metaphor markers like *σαν* 'like'.

that of illness'. The use of both literal and figurative language in this section could be indicative of the expressive function of metaphor. The individual knows that depression is an illness, yet at the same time he chooses to portray it as a physical burden. Moreover, he uses multiple source domains to describe it, as we can see in the extract (3):

(3)
a. ***Την βλέπεις σαν ένα τέρας*** *με* ***τεράστια*** *δύναμη*
'**You see her[3] as a monster** with **enormous** power'

b. *που όσο και αν προσπαθείς να* ***το καταπολεμήσεις, αυτό*** *γίνεται ακόμα πιο ισχυρό.*
'that no matter how hard you try **to fight it**, **it** gets even stronger'

c. *Νιώθεις πως* ***δεν θα ησυχάσει*** *αν* ***δεν σε κατασπαράξει****, αν* ***δεν σου κάψει*** <u>*τα σωθικά*</u>.
'You feel that **it won't rest** until **it devours you** whole, until **it burns** <u>your insides</u>'

Depression is now a fire-breathing monster threatening the individual, as is instantiated from the expressions *τέρας* 'monster', *ησυχάσει* 'rest', *κατασπαράξει* 'devour' and *κάψει* 'burn' (DEPRESSION IS A FIRE-BREATHING MONSTER). The use of multiple words from the same source domain of MONSTER showcases the sizeable difference in strength in this uneven confrontation between a human and a beast growing stronger by the minute. This direct metaphor highlights the futility in fighting an all-empowering enemy. It's interesting to see how the two direct metaphors function in context (DEPRESSION IS CARRYING WEIGHT/ A FIRE-BREATHING MONSTER). We could argue that the first one serves an explanatory function elaborating on the reasons behind the feelings of tiredness of the individual, while the second one highlights his feelings of powerlessness.

(4)
a. <u>*Κλαις πολύ, συχνά, έντονα σπαραχτικά με λυγμούς που δεν μπορείς να σταματήσεις.*</u>
<u>'You cry a lot, often, intensely heartbreakingly sobbing and unable to stop'</u>

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[3] The pronoun *her* is influenced by the grammatical gender of the words 'depression' and 'illness' in Modern Greek, both of which are feminine (e.g., *η κατάθλιψη, η αρρώστια*).

b. *Σαν να έχεις πολλά και **μεγάλα** παράπονα, σαν να έχεις **πένθος**.*
   'As if you have many and **big** complaints, as if you're **mourning'**

c. *Και στην ουσία έχεις, **χάνεις εσένα, το θηρίο σε καταπίνει, βυθίζεσαι όλο και πιο πολύ στο σκοτάδ**ι.*
   'In fact, you are, you're **losing yourself**, **the beast swallows you whole**, **you're sinking deeper and deeper in the darkness**'

In extract (4) we notice the same level of density in figurative expressions and the same interactive pattern at the textual level. (4a) marks another psychological response with the *extended metonymy* (Denroche 2018: 15) DEPRESSED MOOD FOR DEPRESSION. The extension pattern highlights the escalating aspect of this emotional outburst. And at this point, come two more direct metaphors, like the ones mentioned above, instantiating the metaphor DEPRESSION IS LOSS OF THE SELF. The expressions *σαν να έχεις πένθος* 'like you're mourning' and *χάνεις εσένα* 'you're losing yourself' both mark the death of the self, elaborating on the previous metonymy; the uncontrollable sobbing is grief for the lost self.

Interestingly, the LOSS OF SELF metaphor is part of another textual pattern, a *metaphor cluster* (Semino 2008: 25), instantiating the metaphors DEPRESSION IS A MONSTER/SLOW DESCENT INTO DARKNESS. The combined use of these three metaphors highlights an opposition of power; one is powerful, the other is lost. In addition, in just a single expression *βυθίζεσαι όλο και πιο πολύ στο σκοτάδι* 'you're sinking deeper and deeper into darkness' we have three overlapping metaphors. Specifically, the word *βυθίζεσαι* 'to sink' instantiates the CONTAINER and DESCENT metaphors and the word *σκοτάδι* 'darkness' the DARKNESS and CONTAINER respectively. This overlap between the domains DESCENT and DARKNESS is very common in the literature (McMullen et al. 2002). What is notable in Modern Greek is that the verb *βυθίζεσαι* 'to sink' also adds the element of water, perhaps to capture a sense of drowning and to highlight the feeling of helplessness that is already present in the narrative. The case of a single expression simultaneously instantiating multiple metaphors is a phenomenon also documented in Dancygier and Sweetser (compositionally complex metaphors 2014: 47–48).

(5)
a. *Δεν **βλέπεις** να υπάρχει για σένα ούτε παρόν, ούτε μέλλον.*
   'You don't **see** a present, nor a future available for you'

b. *Χάνεσαι, βουλιάζεις, φυτοζωείς.*
   'You're **lost**, you're **sinking**, you're **barely existing**'

Another instance of interaction at the phrasal level is illustrated in (5a). Here the DEPRESSED MOOD FOR DEPRESSION metonymy is further conceptualized as INTERFERENCE WITH ACCURATE PERCEPTION, a metaphor that highlights the difficulty of the depressive experience as it distorts the sufferer's perception of reality. In (5b) we spot another metaphor cluster consisting of three metaphorical expressions instantiating three metaphors. Two have depression as their target domain, namely DEPRESSION IS LOSS OF SELF/SINKING, and one has the depressed person as target, namely THE DEPRESSED PERSON IS A RUDIMENTARY EXISTENCE. This density in metaphor clusters serves specific purposes according to the genre. In a similar example on a personal account on depression, Semino (2008: 179) addresses this issue suggesting that in this type of emotional discourse clusters are common (130 per 1.000 words). She attributes this to the particularly complex nature of the disease which is difficult to express in non-figurative language.

(6)

a. *Δεν **λειτουργείς** φυσιολογικά, <u>δεν μπορείς να σκεφτείς, δεν μπορείς να δεις καθαρά</u>,*
'You don't **function** normally, <u>you can't think straight, you can't see **clearly**</u>'

b. *τίποτα θετικό και όμορφο.*
'nothing positive or pretty'

c. *Το **σκοτάδι** που έχεις επιλέξει να **μείνεις δεν σε αφήνει**, φυσικό δεν είναι;*
'The **darkness** you've chosen to **inhabit doesn't let you go**, isn't it normal?'

This inability for accurate perception is reiterated in (6a) to portray the individual as a MALFUNCTIONING MACHINE (Semino 2008). What is striking in this segment is the way the individual uses the DARKNESS metaphor in (6c). It is instantiated as a PLACE one can inhabit by choice, as shown in the expression *το σκοτάδι που έχεις επιλέξει να μείνεις* 'the darkness you've chosen to inhabit'; and as a PHYSICAL ENTITY that keeps the individual trapped. It is both sentient and non-sentient. This incongruence highlights the helplessness than can arise from such a challenging mental experience.

In the last segment of the sample, the metaphoric activity is more sparce while the metonymies are absent. At this point in the narrative, the individual reaches the end in his retelling, consequently leaving the here-and-now of the depressive experience. Since metonymies were used to convey the symptoms of depression, their absence is expected.

(7)

a. *Όμως βαθιά μέσα σου, ξέρεις πως υπάρχει λύση, πως είναι ένας επίμονος **αγώνας**,*
'But deep down, you know there is a solution, it is a persistent **struggle**'

b. *που θα σε **γονατίσει**, θα σε **ματώσει** αλλά αν το θες **θα βγεις από αυτό το αδιέξοδο**.*
'that will **get you to your knees**, **bleeding** but if you want **you'll come out of this dead-end**'

c. *Μπορεί η κατάθλιψη να μην **παλεύεται**, όμως το σίγουρο είναι ότι θεραπεύεται.*
'Depression may be hard to **battle**, but it can surely be cured'

In the end, depression is conceptualized as a DIFFICULT STRUGGLE. This metaphor signifies a shift in perspective. The person here is not lost, nor is he fighting a mighty monster. Here, in (7b) he is portrayed as struggling yet capable to win the battle (A BEATEN DOWN WINNER). In particular, the change from figurativity to literality is striking in (7c). It highlights the traumatic experience while also leaving room for hope. This could be seen as a prime example of the expressive function of metaphor in emotional discourse.

5. CONCLUSION

To conclude, the above data showed dense metaphorical and metonymic activity as well as a great deal of interaction between the two mechanisms at the level of the word/phrase and at the textual level. Most of the activity was located at the centre of the narrative with the use of multiple and overlapping metaphors, where the subject was in the here-and-now of his retelling and dispersed towards the end of the narrative. A shift in perspective was also noticed in the metaphors used, with depression at first being presented as a powerful FIRE-BREATHING MONSTER and a LIVING DARKNESS to a STRUGGLE one can and will eventually surpass. Additionally, the depressed person went from a LOST SELF to a BEATEN DOWN WINNER of the fight. This interpretation is in line with Dancygier and Sweetser (2014: 187) who postulate that perspectivisation could even be the primary function of figurative mechanisms. In fact, the distribution of figurative activity could be seen as confirmation of the expressive function of metaphor in emotional discourse with emotion stimulating the metaphor/metonymy production. Regarding the different patterns of interaction, I speculate that the cases occurring at the phrasal level could be special instances of the pattern 'metaphor within metonymy' documented in other emotions in Modern

Greek (Θεοδωροπούλου 2004; Theodoropoulou 2012; Xioufis 2017). In the case of depression, metonymy highlights the symptom (instead of the body), and metaphor intensifies how the symptom feels like to the individual. Although the metaphors found were mostly elaborations of the ones established in the literature, these results go one step further. Regarding metonymy, the EFFECT FOR CAUSE principle appears to serve an instrumental part in showcasing the day-to-day experience of depression, confirming Barcelona (1986). Future studies could further explore the role of metonymy in providing a better understanding of how the symptoms affect the individual.

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ΜΙΛΩΝΤΑΣ ΓΙΑ ΤΗΝ ΚΑΤΑΘΛΙΨΗ: ΒΙΩΜΑ ΚΑΙ ΜΗ ΚΥΡΙΟΛΕΚΤΙΚΗ ΓΛΩΣΣΑ

Περίληψη

Το άρθρο αυτό εξετάζει τις μεταφορές και τις μετωνυμίες της κατάθλιψης σε φυσικό γραπτό λόγο στη Νέα Ελληνική με βάση την προσωπική μαρτυρία. Συγκεκριμένα, εξετάζεται μια εκ των υστέρων αφήγηση του καταθλιπτικού βιώματος δημοσιευμένη στο διαδίκτυο, η οποία αντλείται από ένα σώμα κειμένων αντίστοιχων αφηγήσεων. Ειδικότερα, διερευνάται η κατανομή της μεταφορικής και μετωνυμικής δραστηριότητας καθώς και ο ρόλος των δυο μηχανισμών στην πλαισίωση του βιώματος της κατάθλιψης. Παρατηρείται εκτεταμένη χρήση της μετωνυμίας και μεγάλος βαθμός διεπίδρασης με τη μεταφορά σε επίπεδο λέξης/φράσης και σε επίπεδο κειμένου. Τα αποτελέσματα υποδεικνύουν τη συναισθηματική εμπλοκή του υποκειμένου ως παράγοντα που επηρεάζει την παραγωγή της μη κυριολεκτικής γλώσσας.

Λέξεις-κλειδιά: κατάθλιψη, μεταφορά, μετωνυμία, μη κυριολεκτική γλώσσα