

Dramatizing Medical Communication: Conceptual Metaphor of Disease in American Television Medical Drama *House M.D.*

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Abstract

Medical terminology is complex and often hard to be understood. This makes medical practitioners need medium to accommodate patient's health information inside the terms whenever they speak to the patients or even to the other medical practitioners. Thus, they are easier in understanding the medical terms. Metaphor is kind of alternative medium which can be used by medical practitioners. It used to be seen as non-literal or figurative languages which are largely used in literature, such as poems and novels. However, metaphor comes frequently in everyday life nowadays. In the American Medical Television Drama *House M.D.*, the medical communication is found rife with conceptual metaphors. This study applies the parameters of the Conceptual Metaphor theory of Lakoff and Johnson (1987) to identify the underlying disease metaphors spoken by doctor House M.D. The analysis results that conceptual metaphors of disease are portrayed as a puzzle to be solved, warfare, criminals, animal, and people.

Keywords: Conceptual Metaphor, Disease, Medical Communication, Drama, House M.D.

Introduction

Conceptual metaphor as proposed by Lakoff and Johnson (1999) are often used in medical communications to accommodate the transfer of hearer's understanding on health condition, disease, treatment, or human body works. Conceptual metaphor expressions in medical communication are made by the speaker as medium to make the hearer has better understanding on what speaker says by considering the hearer's experience towards the expressions. Lakoff and Johnson (1999) state that the reason behind the use of conceptual metaphor is the most important thing to understand it. In other words, there is always motive behind the use of conceptual metaphor in speech. Warren (1991:39) conveys the conceptual metaphor influences attitudes, moral beliefs, and actions relating to the physician-patient relationship and to the medicine generally.

The conceptual metaphor "BODY IS A MACHINE" is often heard whether it is spoken by doctors or hearer's surrounding people which emphasizes the vision that BODY IS A MACHINE consisting of many parts which can break but can be fixed (Johnson 1987). Medical specialist notice this use of conceptual metaphor that can be beneficial for the whole medical world. By using conceptual metaphor, medical language can be easier understood among the medical practitioners during the diagnosis process, by the patients and family or sympathizer. It can also build the interations among medical practitioners and patients and their family and sympathizers.

The aim of the present paper is to analyse the conceptual metaphors on disease in the American television medical drama *House M.D.* which aired on the Fox network since 2004. This drama tells about diagnosticians team solving difficult and unusual cases. The main character is doctor Gregory House played by Hugh Laurie. He is uniquely portrayed in the drama. While medical drama doctors are presented as caring and empathic, House is presented as genius, physiological unstable, sarcastic, cynical, and seems doesn't care about this patients. He tries to avoid personal contacts with most of his patients. On the other hand, House will attempt to discover what is actually happened to his patients. Making a diagnosis for him is like having a challenge, the more difficult the case, the more he will feel challenged. He will put all of his efforts to solve the patient's case which sacrifice his time, relationship, and sometimes even his health. *House M.D.* is often compared to Sherlock Holmes for House's efforts presented in the drama.

Method

This article will focus on the conceptual metaphors of disease in the five seasons of *House M.D.* whose scripts were analyses for the needs of the present paper. The names of the main character is House with which helped by his assistants: Cameron, Chase, and Foreman, his true friend, an oncologists: Wilson, and his boss, hospital

administrator and dean of medicine: Cuddy. The method used is a descriptive-qualitative method. The conceptual metaphor is analysed by theory of Lakoff and Johnson (1980), blending theory of Fauconnier and Turner (1996, 1998).

Discussion

After analysing the scripts of the drama, the conceptual metaphor of disease in House M.D. are portrayed in analogies as below.

Disease is a puzzle to be solved

House M.D. is often compared to Sherlock Holmes for the drama presents the doctors as if decectives. The drama shows how doctors solve the cases like solving a puzzle, where every symtom is a piece of puzzle. The metaphors are revealed in the scripts below.

- (1) *House: New puzzle piece, always good news. What's the bad news?*
Foreman: We've got 2 puzzle pieces from 2 different puzzles.
Foreman: What if there really are two puzzles?
Cameron: You think she had 2 unrelated rare conditions in one week?

Disease as warfare

Another conceptual metaphor treats diseases as warfare. The main scene in House M.D. is the situation when doctors talking to doctors (the diagnostic team lead by House) which about patients' cases, instead doctors to the patients. The doctors talks about what's happened in the patients' body. The conceptual metaphor expressions are used to figure out what's going on. House usually uses analogy of war for explaining the allegation. House is usually the one confusing the team, but sometimes one of them rise to the challenge. The side in the war such as viruses, patient's immune system which defends the whole body by attacking the disease nad fighting of it (2-6)

- (2) *House: The immune system wakes up and attacks the worm and everything starts to swell, and that is very bad for the brain.*
- (3) *House: It's peripheral. Guillain-Barre syndrome attacks there, not the brain.*
- (4) *Foreman: An infectious agent's molecular structure can resemble the spinal cord's. When the immune system attacks the infection, it ends up attacking the spinal cords as well.*
- (5) *House: His new HIV meds kicked his system out of a sound sleep. When it doesn't find an active infection, starts attacking the harmless remnants of old infections.*
- (6) *Wilson: The body recognized that infection, increase the white count and send in the troops to start fighting and the initial infection would get caught in the cross-fire.*

Disease as criminals

By considering House M.D. is a medical drama which has similar plot with Sherlock Holmes, then MEDICATION is portrayed A DETECTIVE STORY. This can be observed that diseases are personified either as suspects or criminals which attack patients' immune system. Hence, patients' immune system with doctors are personified as soldiers fighting them of. The personifications are presented in (6-9).

- (7) *House: All potentially treatable. Question is which. We need to catch the little bastards in the act. What's the largest organ?*
- (8) *House: Nothing explains everything. What if it's a crime syndicate? Let's say Ritalin and the fertility meds plotted a caper.*
- (9) *House: The tumor is Afghanistan, the clot is Buffalo. Does that need more explanation? OK, the tumor is Al-Qaeda. We went in and wiped it out, but it had already sent out a splinter cell--a small team of low-level terrorists quietly living in some suburb of Buffalo, waiting to kill us all. . . . It was an excellent metaphor. Angio her brain for this clot before it straps on an explosive vest.*

Disease as animal

In House M.D. diseases are also treated like animals. When the doctors speak about viruses for example, they speak about them as if they were animals which can be haunted. The diseases are personified as what animals can do, such as eating brain cells, run out food, sit at some place in the human body, and travel inside human body (10-15).

- (10) *House: Get up! We're going hunting.*
- (11) *House: (...) now it's back, and the spirochetes that cause syphilis are eating away at your brain cells.*
- (12) *House: Will the guardian convince the disease to hold off eating her brain until we can get the legalities worked out?*
- (13) *House: Instead of Dan having a fever and a rash the virus travels to his brain and hides like a time bomb.*
- (14) *Foreman: In rare cases the fungi travel up the blood stream and into the brain causing a lesion or inflammations.*
- (15) *House: Pheochromocytoma sits on top of the adrenal gland, randomly spits out oodles of the stuff.*

Disease as people

Besides treating disease as animals, House M.D. also views diseases as people. The diseases are personalised as if they have human behaviours. The doctors draw analogies between diseases and people which is listed below.

- (16) *House: Little bacteria cauliflowers clinging to his bowels. Except something they can't hold on. They go swimming in his bloodstream. Thursday, one breaks off, goes to his right hand. Black fingers, gangrene. Friday's child heads for the kidneys. We all know what Saturday's are all about. Party with the left hand. Also explains the fever.*
- (17) *House: Or a bacteria lurching on his heart. Or cardiac myopathy or some other very bad thing. He needs an EHG.*
- (18) *Chase: Get a sample of his CSF before the little bugs that are now feasting on his brain move on to dessert*

Personalised diseases made by House or other doctors display typical human behavior like moving in, getting married, build a wall, shut down the body's immune response. The analogy are shown below.

- (19) *House: Exactly. Creates a perfect world for fungus ... Moves in, gets married..*
- (20) *House: The worm builds a wall, uses secretions to shut down the body's immune response and control fluid flow.*

Conclusion

Based on analysis results that conceptual metaphors of disease are portrayed in House M.D. as a puzzle to be solved, warfare, criminals, animal, and people. The conceptual metaphors are often used by House as main character as alternative to translate complex medical conditions into language that his colleagues can understand. House as the 'sick' doctor uses metaphor actually to avoid pain. He is scared of being hurt by others. He also takes drugs to remove his pain. He calls drugs he takes as "painkiller". Sarcasm and cynism are to keep him away from pain. So nobody can hurt him. However, House is a kind of genius and good doctor who are very concerned with his patients. The metaphorical language of medicine he uses is supposed to make the medical notions are more concrete and comprehensible to the member of the diagnostic team. This drama is not only made to amuse the audience but also to give them knowledge on medical conditions. The conceptual metaphors here can be reference for medical practitioners in the real world, so they the complex language of medicine can be easily understood.

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