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Abstract

The clichéd conceptualization of cancer illness as a battle, which the patient can either win or lose, can be problematic. For patients referred to palliative care, it can cause feelings of guilt and failure. This framing of cancer, here referred to as 'the battle script', has been questioned in previous research, and there seems to be awareness among health practitioners that battle metaphors should be avoided.

*The aim of this paper is to shed light on this battle script by examining the discursive dynamics of metaphor use in a large corpus of Swedish blogs written by terminally ill patients. The study focuses on two common linguistic metaphors, *kämpa* [fight/struggle] and *ge upp* [give up]. These expressions have the potential to actualize the battle script, but do not necessarily do so, due to their ambiguous meanings. By analyzing the contextualized meaning of these two metaphors, we illustrate the normality of the battle script as well as the problem to handle the perceived normativity of the script. We also discuss discursive strategies used by the bloggers to handle the negative implications of the battle script.*

Key words: *metaphor, palliative care, cancer, battle script, normativity*

1. Introduction

The experience of having cancer is often framed as a battle in which the patient either wins or loses. Hawkins (1999) refers to this framing as 'battle myth' or 'military myth', which functions as a conceptual pattern. War-related metaphors which actualize this pattern have been extensively debated and often criticized. They have been referred to by means of different labels such as battle, war, martial or violence metaphors and described as 'masculine, power-based, paternalistic and violent' (Reisfield and Wilson 2004: 4025;

Bleakley et al. 2014: 25; see also Sontag 1978). The 'battle myth' can function as a conceptual resource to counteract feelings of power loss or helplessness that the illness gives rise to. But this conceptual construction can also cause feelings of failure and guilt, because it can position a patient referred to palliative care as someone who failed the treatment rather than someone who is failed by the treatment (Reisfield and Wilson 2004: 4025).

Previous research on the use of metaphor in the palliative care context has often focused on the metaphors used by health professionals, or theorized the use of metaphors in health care as a communicative tool. Findings from previous research in health care communication point out that by listening carefully to the patients' metaphors, physicians can 'gain an insight into their understanding of illness' (Byrne 2008: 274). Another benefit is that physicians using more metaphors gain higher ratings for their communication skills (Cassarett et al. 2010). There is also some evidence that difficult subjects, such as dying, can be more openly discussed using metaphors (e.g. Spall et al. 2001). The opposite has also been brought forth, i.e. that metaphors used in inappropriate ways can impair communication (Reisfield and Wilson 2004: 4026). Reisfield and Wilson (2004: 4026) therefore propose that physicians should tailor their use of metaphorical language to suit the individual patient's characteristics in terms of 'personal and cultural values, specific aspects of the disease, stage of illness and prognosis'. There is however a lack of empirical studies of metaphors in use, especially of the patient's own use of metaphors (Southall 2012).

Byrne et al. (2002) point to a link between a universal wish among patients to conceal distress from other people (including doctors) and the use of a language of mobilisation, strength and fighting. This fighting language was found to be mostly directed towards the emotional response to cancer – patients were mobilizing and fighting against distress – crying was described as 'giving in'. In their study, it was rare that patients themselves used fighting metaphors to describe resisting the disease itself. One of their conclusions is that the clinician's emphasis on fighting 'can reduce the opportunity for patient's self-expression and can more clearly serve the needs of clinicians than patients' (Byrne et al. 2002: 20).

Hawkins (1999) stresses the individual nature of metaphors – for some patients fighting and war is not the preferred way of coping. As an alternative to battle metaphors, the journey metaphor has been put forward, as a quieter and more positive metaphor (Byrne 2008: 276). According to Reisfield and Wilson (2004: 4026) the journey metaphor offers positive elements such as 'new sources of meaning', 'opportunities for personal growth' and 'a vision of a deeper meaning of life'.

A considerable amount of the cited literature uses Lakoff and Johnson (1980) as a theoretical foundation. Their cognitive perspective on metaphor has also influenced explorations into metaphor use in the discourses of palliative care from a linguistic point of view, as in the UK-based project Metaphor in end-of-life care (MELC). MELC's corpus-assisted analysis of online forums and interviews shows that patients as well as family carers and health professionals use both journey metaphors and violence (including battle) metaphors, and that both kinds of metaphors have the potential to be empowering or disempowering (supporting the claim of the individual nature

of metaphor use). One of their conclusions is that patients should be encouraged to use the kinds of metaphors that help them, and that a greater awareness of metaphors could help health professionals communicate more effectively with patients (Demmen et al. 2015; Semino et al. 2015). Our first exploratory qualitative investigation of Swedish data agrees with these findings: the battle metaphors used by six selected bloggers can be described as both positive, strengthening and enabling as well as negative and disempowering (Gustafsson and Hommerberg 2016). The findings from empirical linguistic studies thus support Reisfield's and Wilson's (2004: 4027) conclusion that 'metaphors that are enabling for one patient can complicate the illness experience for another'.

Based on these observations in earlier studies, it seems justified for health professionals to be particularly cautious in their use of metaphorical expressions that have the potential to activate a what we will refer to here as a *battle script* where the experience of having cancer is framed as a battle in which you can win or lose depending on how well you fight (cf. 'battle myth' in Hawkins 1999). However, in actual communication, this is not as uncomplicated as it may appear to be, since expressions with a potential to invoke what we will refer to here as the battle script can be so conventionalized that the language user does not notice that the script is being introduced. As an illustration of this phenomenon, the following example, taken from an article about motivational interviewing techniques in palliative care, shows how the clinician reiterates what the patient has said by capturing the essence of the utterance in other words (Pollak et al. 2011: 590):

- Patient: Well, I want to see my grandkids and spend time at home instead of in the hospital all the time. But I don't want to just go home and die either.
- Clinician (reflection): You don't like to be at the hospital, but you're afraid that going home means that you're giving up.
- Patient: Yeah, they just keep talking about hospice. I don't want to just give up. I know there's no chemotherapy but if I get something where there's a chance that I'll get better, sure I would do it.

To reformulate and interpret *just go home and die* as *giving up* is in our view to introduce a metaphor (*give up*) and to imply that staying at the hospital is the opposite of giving up, i.e. keep fighting. By using this expression, the clinician actualizes the battle script, and the patient reformulates his next utterance to fit this script. This in turn illustrates that the battle script is always more or less present and available for use in the minds of clinicians and patients, a normal way of talking about the cancer experience.

The aim of this article is to highlight the normality and normativity of the battle script (as described above) by analyzing and discussing the use of two very frequently used linguistic metaphors in blogs written in Swedish by terminally ill cancer patients, *kämpa* [struggle/fight] and *ge upp* [give up]. Following Cameron and Maslen (2010) we will use the label *vehicle terms* when referring to these linguistic metaphors in this paper, thus acknowledging that we understand the metaphorical meanings of these items to be dynamic and constructed in the stretch of text where the items occur.

The study is part of the research project Metaphors in palliative cancer care (MEPAC), which is inspired by the UK-based study Metaphor in end-of-life care (MELC). MEPAC is funded by the Kamprad Family Foundation.

2. Data and Method

In this paper we use a corpus consisting of approximately 2,600,000 words from blogs written by patients who have a terminal cancer diagnosis. The blogs were identified by manually scanning the Internet for relevant materials, using the broadest possible approach, such as key word searches, following links on cancer websites and forums and following links among the bloggers themselves. As a result of these searches, we ended up with 27 blogs which were deemed suitable for the purposes of our study, 21 of which were written by female bloggers and six by male bloggers. The mean age of the bloggers is 40, their age ranging from 20 to just under 70. Several of the blogs had been initiated prior to the moment where the patients were informed that their cancer was incurable. To ensure maximum relevance in relation to our purposes, each blog was processed manually in search of the post where the information about the terminal diagnosis and/or the palliative care was introduced for the first time. The entire material was subsequently downloaded using web spider techniques from this point of disclosure until the patient's death, or in the case where the patient is still alive, until April 2016. The blogs had been written sometime during the period 2007–2016.

The following ethical principles were considered as part of the data gathering procedure:

- the blogger is a publically well-known figure
- the blogger has explicitly stated he/she wants the blog to help others
- all patient bloggers who are still alive have been contacted to obtain consent
- the material is stored in a password-protected corpus managed by Språkbanken ('the Swedish Language Bank', Gothenburg University)

The choice to focus on the two expressions *kämpa* and *ge upp* is partly based on our on-going investigation of the entire blog data in combination with our intuition as native speakers of Swedish. When used metaphorically, the two vehicle terms have the potential to activate the battle script, but they do not necessarily do so, due to their vague and ambiguous meaning. The expressions can be seen as antonyms with opposite polarity, positive vs. negative, a tension that was found particularly interesting for further exploration.

To complement our qualitative and intuitive approach, we also used quantitative procedures to establish the relative prevalence of these items in our data. Our first measure was to search for all verbs in the data set and identify verbs with a potential to invoke the battle script. A lemma search using the KORP-tool at Språkbanken revealed that among those verbs, *kämpa* [struggle/fight] was the most common, with 194 instances/million tokens (compared to the second most frequent verb with the potential to invoke the battle script: *drabba* 'affect'/'hit', 160 instances/million tokens).

Our second preparatory measure was to contrast the frequency of *kämpa* and *ge upp* in the MEPAC corpus to the frequency of these verbs in three other corpora of Swedish, which are available via Språkbanken KORP: the corpus of fiction, the corpus of political manifests and campaign material and the press corpus.

The normalized frequency per million words (pmw) ¹ of <i>kämpa</i> and <i>ge upp</i> in four different corpora of Swedish	Kämpa [fight/struggle]	Ge upp [give up]
MEPAC	194	85
Fiction	70	48
Political manifesto and campaign material	70	10
Press	68	50

Table 1. Normalized frequencies of *kämpa* and *ge upp* in the MEPAC corpus compared to three other corpora in Språkbanken KORP; instances per million words (pmw)

Both *kämpa* and *ge upp* are thus significantly overused in the MEPAC corpus compared to the press and political manifesto corpora (a log-likelihood test shows a p-value of less than 0,01). Having established the particular relevance of the verbs *kämpa* and *ge upp* for our purposes, based on both qualitative and quantitative procedures, all instances of these items were extracted from the MEPAC corpus using the lemma search function of KORP, resulting in 532 hits for *kämpa* and 245 instances of *give up*.

In the processing of our data, we used a method for metaphor identification based on MIP (Pragglejaz Group 2007) and MIPVU (Steen et al. 2010). A significant step in this procedure is the use of dictionary meaning to determine whether there is a more basic or physical meaning of lexical items than the contextual meaning that they appear to have. *Svensk ordbok* (2009) (*A dictionary of Swedish*) has been chosen for this purpose, because it is a modern corpus-based source and therefore compatible with the resources recommended for metaphor identification.

Although numbers and percentage figures will be presented in the analysis sections below, we want to make it clear that these numbers are to be seen as ways of describing the data rather than as significant contributions to the investigation, which is primarily intended to be qualitative and interpretive in nature. All of our examples are translated to English with only the original form of the vehicle terms *kämpa* and *ge upp* in parentheses.

3. The Metaphoric Potential of *Kämpa* ('fight'/'struggle') and *Ge Upp* [give up] in Cancer Blogs

In this section, we offer interpretive analyses of the instances of *kämpa* [fight/struggle] and *ge upp* [give up] in the blog data, discussing the potential of these vehicle terms to actualize a battle script (see above).

3.1 The Meanings of *Kämpa* ('fight'/'struggle') in Patient Blogs

Since we are dealing here with expressions in a language other than English, we have found it useful to include the dictionary definitions. The following definitions of *kämpa* are listed in *Svensk ordbok* (2009):

- defend or enforce one's own interests (against a certain opponent, with force, in particular with physical means, often violence)
- to exert oneself physically
- to compete, esp. in sports
- abstract meaning of exertion

According to *Svensk Ordbok* (2009), the most basic and historically prior meaning of *kämpa* is thus related to a physical battle scenario. However, the dictionary also lists other concrete, physical meanings, i.e. meanings related to physical exertion and sports competition. Based on our intuition as native speakers of Swedish, we understand all of these physical meanings to be prevalent in present-day Swedish. The dictionary also lists an abstract meaning of exertion, which means that this transferred non-physical meaning of *kämpa* is conventionalized in the Swedish language.

It should be acknowledged that the verb *kämpa* occurs in a range of different contexts in the material. This is because although the bloggers are all receiving palliative treatment for their chronic cancer illness, this does not mean that they only write about their cancer experience. The blogs also include accounts of normal daily life, such as meeting grandchildren, leisure trips, playing golf or commenting on the life experiences of other people. As with all kinds of naturally occurring discourse, these accounts also involve the use of metaphorical language, including instances where the vehicle terms that are scrutinized here are used metaphorically. However, for the present purposes, due to our specific interest in the framing of the cancer experience, we are only interested in metaphorical instances where the meaning is related to cancer.

For illustrative purposes, we have chosen to translate instances of *kämpa* which invoke a form of battle scenario into 'fight', and to use 'struggle' for the instances where the meaning of exertion is foregrounded. Ambiguous meanings of *kämpa* are translated as 'fight'/'struggle'. In (1), the co-text includes an explication or extension of the vehicle term *kämpa*. This explication actualizes the archetypal form of the battle script, i.e. the framing of the cancer experience as a battle between the patient and the illness:

- (1) I fight [*kämpa*] for my life. It's the truth and it's tough. But what the hell, the cancer will never win against me. I won't allow that.

In (1), the cancer is portrayed as a combatant with the capacity to win the fight. While the outcome that the cancer should win is strongly denied by the blogger, the co-textual phrasing nonetheless clearly actualizes the battle script, including a winner and loser, thus assigning the capacity to fight to both the patient herself and the illness. Example (2) is different in the sense that the cancer enemy is left implicit.

- (2) Of course I fight [*kämpar*] in order not to have to leave my beloved [husband] (and the rest of the world) too, but I think you understand [that I fight first and foremost to live for my two-year-old daughter].

In (2), the patient is fighting for a good cause, i.e. to live for her husband but first and foremost for her baby daughter. The battle script is implied in the sense that dying and having to leave the family is framed as something that can be prevented by fighting. In (3) however, the topic is different:

- (3) We [cancer patients] must fight [*kämpa*] for our right, we must be heard, seen, noticed, shout out loudly and try in every conceivable way to eliminate the. WAITING.

In (3), the target of the battle is not the illness but the current structure of the health care system, which forces patients to wait for decisive information about the progress and prognosis of their illness. The enemy combatant in (3) is thus not the illness *per se* but the authorities in charge of the organization of health care. We do not see the types of instances exemplified by (3) as actualizing the battle script.

The vehicle term *kämpa* also occurs in stretches of text where the source domain does not seem to involve any element of battle. In (4) below, it seems that it is rather a process of physical exertion that is highlighted by the co-text in the expression *in an uphill slope*:

- (4) Heavy day today...They hugged me and kissed me and were there – as always when I'm struggling [*kämpar*] in an uphill slope.

The vehicle term *kämpa* is however also used to refer to the topic of psychological/mental exertion without any explication signalling an analogy with physical exertion. Instances such as (5) below seem instead to rely on the conventionalized abstract meaning of exertion, i.e. one of the meanings listed in *Svensk Ordbok* (2009):

- (5) Right now, I'm struggling [*kämpar*] to find some willpower.

We do not take these types of instances to invoke the battle script, because the co-text does not refer to or imply a combatant or a winning/losing scenario. It seems more reasonable to interpret these types of occurrences as relying on conventionalized mapping between physical and mental processes of exertion. However, it is not unusual for the co-text to be ambiguous, opening up for different interpretations: Example (6) illustrates such instances:

- (6) Then we are expected to fight/struggle [*kämpa*] as well. How many sick people really have the energy?

In (6), the co-text indicates that *kämpa* is something that requires *energy*. It is however not clear whether the reference to *energy* is suggestive of a process of exertion or the force needed in a battle. The phrasing *we are expected to* indicates that 'fight'/'struggle' is something the blogger feels that other people want her to do. In other words, the phrasing used in (6) implies some kind of perceived normativity, which the writer seems to express a resistance to. The normativity aspect of violence metaphors has been noted in previous research.

According to Semino et al. (2015: 5) ‘it can be particularly harmful for patients to have the role as ‘fighter’ imposed on them by external pressures’. Some of the bloggers negotiate the meaning of the vehicle term *kämpa*. In (7) for instance, the formulation used by the blogger is suggestive of two different understandings of the meaning of *kämpa*, one metaphorical, potentially actualizing the battle script, and one physical understanding, where the vehicle term is reused in the form of the noun *kamp* (‘struggle’) which in this utterance refers to actual physical exertion:

- (7) Another word that I have reflected on is the word “fight/struggle” [*kämpa*]. A piece of advice I get. Fight/struggle [*kämpa*]... Only those who have been and are where I am understand the struggle to get up from the armchair, turn around in bed and curse the fact that socks need to be put on so far away from the body.

We note that the metaphorical understanding of *kämpa* is attributed to other people and presented as a normative position, which is indicated by the expression ‘A piece of advice I get’. Engaging in a battle against the cancer enemy or possibly struggling to retain a positive attitude is something that others expect the person who is ill to do. This male blogger distances himself from these potential metaphorical understandings by introducing the concrete physical meaning of exertion. His utterance is indicative of a clash in understanding created by a difference in socio-cultural experience between patients and others.

3.2 Overview of *Kämpa* [struggle/fight] in the Whole Data Set

In this section we explore the uses of *kämpa* [struggle/fight] in the whole material. As indicated by our preliminary quantitative procedures (see section 2), this vehicle term is indeed pervasive in the patient blog data. The corpus search of the verb lemma *kämpa** resulted in hits for all bloggers except one (i.e. 26 out of 27 bloggers). Manual processing of the material subsequently revealed that 25 of the bloggers use *kämpa* in cancer-related contexts with at least one of the metaphorical meanings indicated in the previous section. Further processing of the data showed that 394 out of 532 instances, i.e. approximately 75%, are metaphorical uses in cancer-related contexts. Another 50 occurrences referred to actual physical exertion related to the cancer experience, such as for example struggling to eat. These instances were not included in the present study.

Kämpa [struggle/fight] is thus a vehicle term that is both frequently used by individual bloggers and widespread across cancer patients when describing the experience of living with the illness. As indicated in the preceding section, we are reluctant to refer to all of these uses as battle metaphors or understand them as actualizing the battle script. This is due to the fact that in addition to the battle-related meaning, *kämpa* also has another basic, physical meaning which may be historically younger but which is very much alive in present-day Swedish. *Kämpa* also has a conventionalized abstract meaning of exertion.

Our processing of the entire data set shows that 28% of the metaphorical uses of *kämpa* in the patient blogs refer to the topic of cancer-related psychological/mental exertion. A handful of these include explications anchoring the vehicle term in a meaning of physical exertion. However, the

majority are instances where the vehicle domain of physical exertion is unelaborated, as illustrated by (5) above, and interpretation relying instead on a conventionalized mapping between physical and mental exertion. We do not take these types of instances to actualize the battle script, because they do not imply a combatant or a winning/losing scenario. These metaphorical uses of *kämpa* are therefore regarded as less sensitive from the perspective of our current study. While the identified instances all occur in a cancer-related context, this use of *kämpa* is very common in other contexts as well to indicate a range of different experiences that can be seen as psychologically problematic dimensions of ordinary life.

Almost 10% of the occurrences of *kämpa* were found to be metaphorical battle-related instances where the topic portrayed was not a battle between the patient and the illness, but a battle between the patient and the health care system, as exemplified by (3) above. While this way of invoking a version of the battle scenario may be noteworthy as critique of the health care system (cf. Semino et al. 2015: 6), we do not understand these instances to actualize the archetypal battle script as understood by Hawkins (1999).

In an additional 17% of the metaphorical uses of *kämpa*, the co-text was found to include formulations that indicated some kind of ambiguity or negotiation regarding the metaphorical meaning of the vehicle term. In several of the occurrences that were regarded as ambiguous, the bloggers express resistance to what they appear to see as metaphorical frames being imposed on them, as indicated by (6) and (7) above. This resistance is not seldom expressed by means of quotation marks around the vehicle term.

The tendency is for the battle script to be univocally actualized in approximately 45% of the instances of *kämpa* identified as metaphorical. As indicated by example (2) above, we regard the battle script as being actualized also in the absence of explications pointing out the illness as combatant. Several of these instances are indicative of a taken-for-grantedness or normality of this framing of the cancer experience:

- (8) ...this is how life in cancer land works. One stands up and fights [*kämpar*] again and again and again until the monster is defeated.

As exemplified by (8), the battle is often framed as something the patient is actively engaged in doing against an appointed enemy, the cancer (here referred to by means of the vehicle explication *the monster*). While this way of framing the cancer experience can be understood as empowering if seen from the perspective of linguistic agency (Potts and Semino 2017), we acknowledge that this also means that the obligation and responsibility for defeating the illness is assigned to the patient, which is not necessarily actually perceived as empowering or positive by all patients who use language in this way to describe their experience. As proposed by Byrne et al. (2002), the language of mobilisation, strength and fighting can be a way for patients to hide distress, and use of battle metaphors, even if ostensibly empowering in their linguistic form, may thus be actually disempowering because it may make it more difficult for the patient to articulate their grief or suffering. It should also be acknowledged that the group of instances understood here to actualize the battle script also involves cases where the illness rather than the patient appears as the violent actor, which is exemplified in (9):

- (9) To find out that one has something in oneself that fights against oneself [*kämpar mot en*], that creates fear. The fear of losing will always be there. Anxiety that the body will quit, simply stop functioning.

In instances such as (9) the role of violent actor is instead assigned to the cancer illness, which positions the patient as the object of violence, i.e. in a linguistically disempowered position. The role as violent actor is also sometimes assigned to the body or body functions, as in (10):

- (10) There is a war going on in my body today in the sense that my immune system is fighting [*kämpar*] against the remaining cancer.

The purpose of this paper is however not to offer a complete analysis of linguistic agency associated with each occurrences (cf. Potts and Semino 2017), but rather to acknowledge the normality of the battle script as it is actualized by these instances of *kämpa*, regardless how semantic roles are distributed.

Overall however, our investigation of the uses of the vehicle term *kämpa* shows that it is pervasive and often used in co-texts where it seems to actualize a process of exertion rather than the battle script.

3.3 The Meanings of *Ge Upp* in Patient Blogs

We now turn our attention to *ge upp* [give up]. As pointed out above, because *ge upp* involves negative polarity in contrast to *kämpa*, it is in our view potentially more challenging, problematic and disempowering. As we saw in the initial example from a motivational interview scenario, it is also an expression that is seemingly treated as unproblematic among psychotherapists working with cancer patients. In other words, the very everydayness of the expression makes it particularly interesting for closer investigation because the ordinariness of the expression also means that its metaphorical potential may remain largely subconscious.

We start again by looking at the definitions in *Svensk ordbok* (2009), where we find the following meanings listed:

- to admit one's defeat
- to renounce or stop doing something

Due to the nature of our present data, the verbal construction *ge upp* occurs in a range of different contexts, just like *kämpa*, but we are only interested here in metaphorical instances where the meaning is related to cancer.

Example (11) illustrates how the vehicle term *ge upp* is used in a stretch of text where the battle script is spelled out in the co-text. The patient sees herself as a forceful fighter who will fight to the bitter end.

- (11) I DO NOT INTEND to give up [*ge upp*]. I will spit in my palm and roll up my sleeves [Swedish idioms]. I will fight to the last drop of blood...

The negative polarity of the battle script is activated by the use of the vehicle term *ge upp* [give up], but simultaneously strongly rejected by the reinforced denial, which is marked by means of capitals.² In passages where the vehicle

term *ge upp* [give up] occurs, a common strategy among the patient bloggers is to embrace the battle against the cancer that they perceive they are engaged in by denying the negative polarity of the script. The patient thereby becomes a heroic actor who is in control of the situation. A similar role is assigned to the patient in example (12), where a 28-year-old female patient blogger personifies the cancer illness by giving it a name, the male first name *Mårten*. In (12), the battle scenario conjured up by the vehicle term *ge upp* is more psychological than physical, i.e. the battle is conducted by challenging the personified illness by means of confrontational eye contact, repeated verbal abuse and an order framed as a pure imperative:

- (12) But you will never make me give up [*ge upp*]. Mårten, feel me starring into your eyes, challenging you and asking you to go to hell. Will keep doing so until you listen. Give up [*Ge upp*].

In (12), the perspective is shifted so that the act of giving up is something that it is possible for the cancer to choose to do. Even if physical battle attributes such as blood are absent here, the patient is still portrayed as someone who has a potent role and whose actions and words can make a difference in the combat against the cancer enemy. We therefore see the battle script as actualized here.

However, not all instances of *ge upp* are as strongly evocative of the battle script. In (13), it is rather the second, subordinate meaning of *ge upp* that is activated, i.e. to renounce or stop doing something.

- (13) The desire to lie down and give up [*ge upp*] flashes by, then comes the other desire. The desire for life and one continues to pedal one's feet and wave one's arms, anything to keep one's head above water. I think there are few who lie down and give up [*ger upp*], that goes against human survival instinct.

In this example, *ge up* [give up] is used in a scenario involving physical exertion rather than battle, namely the body's continuous motion allowing it to stay above the surface when in water. In this scenario, *ge upp* [give up] does not involve the illness as a combatant fighting the patient. Instead, the mental effort to stay positive despite trying circumstances is compared to the scenario of the struggle not to drown. This writer also speculates that not giving up is a sort of human survival instinct, a normal way of thinking and acting. It is not an extraordinary fighting spirit, but a basic requisite of our existence. In the next section, we explore the uses of *ge upp* in the whole blog corpus.

3.4 Overview of *Ge Upp* [give up] in the Whole Data Set

Manual processing of the hits retrieved by means of corpus search of the verb lemma *ge upp** reveals that the majority of the bloggers, 19 out of 27, use *ge upp* [give up] metaphorically in cancer-related contexts. 143/245 instances were found to be relevant for the purposes of this study, i.e. close to 60% of all the occurrences in the corpus. In this section we explore these metaphorical cancer-related uses of *ge upp* [give up]. A large majority of *ge upp* [give up], 108 of 143 instances, i.e. more than 75%, occur in negated co-texts. You do not give up. Based on these observations, we propose that the impossibility of giving up is normalized. In this paper, we will go one step further and argue

that the impossibility of giving up is not only normalized, but there is also a normativity aspect associated with the refusal to give up. You do not give up, and you are not allowed to. This normativity is present in the following excerpt from a male blogger, who completely embraces the battle script. The physical fight scenario is emphasized in the co-text by the expression *go down on your knees*, and the negated imperative form explicitly signals a normative approach to the script.

- (14) To everyone that's fighting! Don't stop fighting! Don't give up [*ge inte upp*]! Go down on your knees if you can't cope, it's ok to take a break, as long as you DO NOT GIVE UP [*INTE GER UPP*].

The use of negation with *ge upp* is thus the most salient trend in our data, a trend which we think signals both a perceived normality and normativity across the bloggers in our study.

However, 25% of the instances (35 cases) occur in non-negated co-texts. These instances caught our particular attention because they deviate from what seems to be a strong norm. Among these 35 instances, several occur in hypothetical constructions, as in (15):

- (15) I could have given up [*gett upp*], could already have been buried.

A number of instances assign the negative polarity activity of giving up to the illness, a phenomenon which was exemplified in (12) above (reiterated as (16) for convenience):

- (16) Mårten, feel me starring into your eyes, challenging you and asking you to go to hell. Will keep doing so until you listen. Give up [*Ge upp*].

Giving up can also be framed as something that others do. Only one instance in our entire data set is included in a non-negated declarative construction. This occurrence is presented with extended co-text in (17). This blogger's way of framing the activity of giving up highlights what we have interpreted as a perceived normativity:

- (17) To be honest, I have in a way already given up [*gett upp*]. I find myself hedging and reminding myself that I won't be cured. This may upset some people. I don't know if it would make me feel better to dare to believe in a long and good life. And just "fight/struggle"³ [*kämpa*]. But it doesn't work that way for me right now. At the beginning of my cancer illness, it was self-evident for me to aim at getting cured and "winning". But after a number of relapses, I have lost some of my fighting spirit. I think I'm more sad now.

In (17) a female blogger admits, even if in a down-toned manner (*in a way*), to having given up. In the same sequence, she also addresses her perceived expectations of other people's reactions to her position (*This may upset some people*). The apologetic manner in which this declarative construction is framed emphasizes what we see as a perceived normativity, which is particularly prominent in stretches of text where the vehicle term *give up* occurs. Example (17) also illustrates the close connection between *kämpa* [fight/struggle] and *ge upp* [give up] as opposite polarities of the battle script,

positive vs. negative. Within the frames of the battle script, you fight until you win or lose. You become a hero, a hero that loses or a hero that wins. If you give up, you are not a fighter. This is a problematic dilemma for patients in palliative care; they will not win in the sense that they will be completely cured from the illness. The blogger cited in (17) is very concerned about her quality of life and making use of the time she has left. She repeatedly problematizes the normativity of the battle script and the feelings of guilt and failure that it can entail.

In the next section, we discuss strategies to deal with these negative implications of the battle script which we have identified in the analysis of the data, in particular in uses of the vehicle term *ge upp*, which in contrast to *kämpa* highlights the negative polarity of the script.

3.5 Discussion

When processing the data selected for this study, we have paid particular attention to the potential of the selected vehicle terms to activate the battle script in different co-texts. In this section, we discuss two types of discursive strategies used by the bloggers, which we understand as ways of coping with the negative implications of the battle script. The first of these strategies has been labelled explicit rejection. Examples (18) and (19) illustrate this strategy:

- (18) That someone dies of cancer doesn't mean they didn't fight hard enough [*inte kämpat tillräckligt mycket*]...to claim that someone has "lost a battle" gives the impression that it's their own fault...
- (19) I think one has to be realistic. At least I have to be realistic. Take in reality and adapt, so as not to get a shock if the window blind should disappear. To accept IS NOT the same thing as lie down and give up [*ge upp*].

The normativity of the battle script can create a catch 22 for patients, making it difficult to imagine a way out, and even rejection of the battle script does tend to reconfirm its existence, as eloquently pointed out by Diski (2016: 10). Example (19) might be interpreted as merely a reflective comment on the use of the word *accept*, but also as a rejection of the normal understanding of the battle script. It also illustrates another dilemma associated with the battle script. There is a commonly shared view that, as part of an ideal stance, before we die, we should come to terms with the situation so that we can be at peace when we die, an idea that is propagated in the model of the five attitudinal stages towards death and dying: denial, anger, bargaining, depression, acceptance (Kübler-Ross 1969). This view has been shown to be reflected in the language used by health care professionals (Demjén et al. 2016), but the idea that the stage of acceptance is possible to attain has also been questioned in studies in palliative care (Walters 2004). As a way out of the catch 22 situation created by the battle script, a fairly common strategy across the bloggers is to frame the battle in such a way that the body, not the self, becomes the failing combatant. In fact, half of the 35 non-negated declarative instances of *ge upp* [give up] are examples of this strategy, which (20) and (21) illustrate:

(20) My body really isn't the least cooperative any more. Sometimes I wonder how much longer it will manage to fight [*kämpa*] against this illness]?!]

(21) Quite honestly, what does one say [to one's children]?? Well you know, Mummy's body is giving up [*håller på att ge upp*].

In these instances, it is the body, not the person, that fails to fight and gives up. In (22) below, the positive polarity vehicle term *kämpa* ('fight') and the negative polarity vehicle term *ge upp* [give up] are juxtaposed in such a way that the desire to fight is assigned to the patient while the tendency to give up is associated with the body:

(22) Oh, I really WANT to fight and I feel motivated to do so for a while longer, despite all the horrible side effects that I risk coming up against. But sadly it feels as if my body is gradually giving up [*mer och mer ger upp*].

This separation of the self from the body allows the patients to stay in the battle script and retain their position as fighter. They do not give up, they keep their fighting spirit and motivation to continue the battle, but their body gives up.

4. Summary and Conclusions

The aim of this paper was to shed light on the dynamics of metaphor use in a corpus of blogs written by terminally ill cancer patients. We approached the material by focusing on two antonymic metaphoric vehicle terms, *kämpa* ('fight'/'struggle') and *ge upp* [give up]. These items were selected based on their significant overuse in the blog corpus compared to other corpora of the Swedish language. In our view, these two expressions deserve special attention, due to their ambiguous meanings and in particular their potential to activate what we have chosen to call the battle script. While we acknowledge that not all uses do activate the well-known clichéd conceptualization of the patient as engaged in a battle against the illness, it still seems that this framing is very much alive in many bloggers minds. The uses of these two items illustrate the taken-for-grantedness or normality of the battle script as well as the problem to handle other people's expectations of fighting spirit, i.e. the perceived normativity of the battle script. The perceived expectation to keep fighting the battle against cancer can create a catch 22 for patients receiving palliative care, who according to the stages of the grieving process are also expected to find peace and acceptance (Kübler-Ross 1969). In the analysis of our data, we took note of two strategies to cope with the negative implications of the battle script: explicit rejection of the script and separation of body and self. Separation of body and self allows the patients keep embracing the battle script and retain their psychological status as fighters. Potential feelings of guilt and failure can thereby be detached from the self and instead projected on the body.

To conclude, we would like to return to our initial example from an article on motivational interviewing in a palliative care context and problematize the clinician's reflection as a response to the patient's utterance in the light of our data. As indicated by the interview scenario, there is both an expectation that

not giving up is a normal way of discussing the experience of having cancer, and a perceived normativity, giving up is something you do not do, which is confirmed by the patient's response. As shown in our presentation of *ge upp* [give up], this particular expression is surrounded by a cluster of perceived normalities and normativities. While *ge upp* [give up] can be seen as such an every-day expression that the metaphorical meaning is bleached, this vehicle term has the potential to actualize not only the battle script *per se* but the negative polarity of the battle script. The negative polarity of the battle script can in itself be disempowering, and to introduce it in a death talk scenario risks confirming the patient in the role as a fighter about to lose the battle rather than offering a way to handle the battle script or an alternative conceptualization. It is our hope that our corpus study of *kämpa* [fight/struggle] and *ge upp* [give up] in patient blogs can raise awareness of ambiguous and taboo meanings of everyday words such as the ones studied here and thus assist health care professionals engaged in communication in the context of palliative cancer care in Sweden and elsewhere.

Notes

- 1 In these tables, the numbers indicate the normalized frequencies of the linguistic items, not the metaphorical uses.
- 2 Capitals in original.
- 3 Quotation marks in original.

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