INVISIBLE WOUND: DEPRESSION CONCEPTUAL METAPHORS IN THAI PATIENTS' FACEBOOK POSTS

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ABSTRACT

Depressed individuals often use metaphorical expressions to convey their experiences to others. However, research on the conceptual metaphors of depression in the Thai context has been limited. This study aimed to investigate conceptual metaphors for DEPRESSION. In Facebook posts by depressed Thai patients and explore to identify the most salient conceptual metaphors among them. the study followed the Metaphor Identification Procedure Vrije Universiteit (MIPVU) developed by Steen et al. (2010) and incorporated salience-based metaphor analysis (Kövecses et al., 2015). A total of 659 posts, published in 2023 (comprising a corpus of 56,942 words) were collected from a Thai Facebook group dedicated to mental illnesses. The findings revealed ten conceptual metaphors reflecting the metaphorical conceptualisation of depression. Three of these were found to be the most salient: DEPRESSION IS AN OPPONENT, DEPRESSION IS A JOURNEY, AND DEPRESSION IS A WOUND. These metaphors illustrate Thai patients' perceptions of depression as a struggle, a personal journey, and a psychological wound. This study provides insights into how depressed Thai patients conceptualise depression, contributing to a better understanding of depression in Thai mental healthcare communication.

Keywords: conceptual metaphor; depression; Facebook posts; metaphorical salience; Thai context

Introduction

Depression is a common mental illness affecting many people globally. Depressed individuals suffer greatly from this condition and are unable to perform their daily activities properly (Gilbert, 2007; World Health Organisation [WHO], 2021). WHO (2024, para. 2) highlights depression as "a major contributor to the overall global burden of disease," with nearly 300 million sufferers. Depression is also one of the most common mental disorders in Thailand. The number of patients diagnosed with depression is as high as approximately 1.4 million (Thai Depression, 2022). However, misunderstanding of depression in Thai society is still prevalent. Many people think that patients with depression are insane (BBC Thai, 2019) while others believe that sufferers are weak, or that they overthink, exaggerate their condition, or use their condition in order to attract attention (Angkapanichkit et al., 2019). Such perceptions of depression can worsen patients' conditions.

Metaphor studies regarding experiences of both physical and mental illnesses have become of much interest worldwide, reflecting an increasing desire to understand complex experiences of illnesses in terms of simpler experiences (e.g., Semino et al., 2017, 2018). As DEPRESSION is an abstract concept that is difficult to explain, it has garnered the attention of some researchers in this cognitive linguistic field.

To gain insights into conceptual metaphors for DEPRESSION, Charteris-Black (2012) identified four main concepts in his corpus: DESCENT, CONTAINMENT AND CONSTRAINT, WEIGHT AND PRESSURE, and DARKNESS AND LIGHT. The author suggested that metaphorical expressions might be a powerful device for eliciting the feelings of those experiencing depression. Similarly, Angkapanichkit et al. (2019) revealed that using metaphors is another strategy used by depressed Thai patients to make themselves better understood during the interviews conducted for their research. Metaphorical expressions in patients' narratives included, for instance, "down" and "fail", clearly indicating the conceptual metaphor DEPRESSION IS DOWN. This type of usage is also compatible with the physical appearance of patients with depression, whose heads tended to droop during the interview sessions.

However, Fullagar and O'Brien (2012) discovered some other conceptual metaphors for DEPRESSION during their interviews: IMMOBILITY, BATTLE, and JOURNEY. These scholars suggested that their findings might help mental health clinicians to better understand patients' interpretations of their experiences through the use of metaphorical expressions. Similar findings can be found in the work of Coll-Florit et al. (2021), who conducted research by compiling a corpus of blog posts narrated directly by patients with depression. The most prominent source domains included WAR, JOURNEY, LIVING ORGANISM, and CONTAINER. The researchers remarked that expressing feelings through blogging might empower patients in terms of enhancing their overall mental well-being.

Previous studies (e.g., Charteris-Black, 2012; Coll-Florit et al., 2021; Semino et al., 2017) employed the Metaphor Identification Procedure)MIP(developed by the Pragglejaz Group (2007) as a framework for metaphor analysis. Nevertheless, this current study differs from earlier research in its adoption of MIPVU, which is an

extension of MIP developed by VU University Amsterdam (Steen et al., 2010), a refined version of MIP that aims to enhance the reliability and validity of metaphor identification.

Moreover, salience-based metaphor analysis (Kövecses et al., 2015) was also applied in order to derive the most salient conceptual metaphors for DEPRESSION in the Thai context. In addition, while there has not been much research conducted on conceptual metaphors for depression in the Thai context, the figure of patients with diagnoses of depression is still high, according to earlier reports. Since little is known about the pain, conceptual metaphors for DEPRESSION might aid in understanding patients' thoughts and feelings, fostering empathy, and facilitating more effective communication in the Thai setting.

Therefore, this study aimed to 1) investigate conceptual metaphors for DEPRESSION in depressed Thai patients' Facebook posts; and 2) investigate the most salient conceptual metaphors in Thai patients with depression.

Literature Review

Metaphors serve a variety of functions in all types of communication including mental health, such as expressing one's feelings, thus allowing insights into speakers' hidden emotions (Cameron, 2008; Colston, 2015; Demjén & Semino, 2017; Knowles & Moon, 2006; Low, 2008; Semino et al., 2018).

Conceptual Metaphor Theory

Conceptual metaphor theory (CMT) was initially mentioned in Lakoff and Johnson's (1980) pioneering work, *Metaphors We Live By*. The core of conceptual metaphors, as defined by Lakoff and Johnson (1980), involves understanding one concept in association with another. A conceptual metaphor basically consists of two "conceptual domains" of experience, in which one domain (typically abstract) is understood in terms of another domain that is more concrete (Kövecses, 2008, 2010, 2017; Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). These two domains are the "source domain" and the "target domain." The more abstract target domain is the domain that we try to understand through the more concrete source domain.

Three main types of conceptual metaphors were identified: orientational, ontological, and structural (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). An orientational metaphor is a metaphor that involves physical space, such as "down". An ontological metaphor is a metaphor in which abstract concepts are understood in terms of physical concepts such as MIND IS A MACHINE. A structural metaphor is a metaphorical system in which one complex concept is presented in terms of a more concrete one such as DEPRESSION IS WAR. Metaphorical expressions and conceptual metaphors are closely related but operate at different levels of analysis within language and cognition. Metaphorical expressions are metaphorical linguistic expressions of underlying conceptual metaphors that structure our understanding of abstract concepts. For instance, DEPRESSION IS WAR structures our understanding of depression by mapping elements from the domain of warfare onto the domain of

depression. Metaphorical expressions such as "fight," "battle", and "confront" are linguistic manifestations of DEPRESSION IS WAR.

Cognitive linguists Lakoff and Johnson (1980) emphasised that our conceptual system is grounded in bodily experiences. Our understanding of abstract concepts often arises from and is structured by our physical interactions with the world. Conceptual metaphors are thus not arbitrary but part of a systematic network of mappings between different domains of experience. Conceptual mappings between two different domains are therefore embodied, meaning they are grounded in our sensory motor (e.g., bodily movement) as well as in our cultural experiences. This means that our physical experiences shape the way we understand and use metaphorical expressions. Culture also plays a crucial role in the formation and understanding of conceptual metaphors within a particular community. Different cultures may emphasise different aspects of experience or use different metaphorical expressions to conceptualise the same phenomena, reflecting cultural variations in thought and language.

According to CMT, metaphorical expressions are not just linguistic expressions but cognitive structures that shape our understanding of the world. They highlight certain aspects of a concept while simultaneously hiding others. For example, in DEPRESSION IS A JOURNEY, the properties of a journey (e.g., moving on) are highlighted in our understanding of depression, whereas certain aspects, such as buying a ticket, are not compatible with depression and are therefore hidden. Mapping involves establishing systematic correspondences between elements of source domain and those of a target domain, based on non-preexisting similarities. To illustrate, elements of the source domain JOURNEY such as traveling, navigating paths, and overcoming obstacles, are systematically mapped onto those of the target domain DEPRESSION, allowing to understand DEPRESSION in terms of JOURNEY.

Major Depressive Disorder

Depression, or Major Depressive Disorder (MDD), is a common and serious mental illness that negatively affects many people worldwide. Most patients with depression typically experience the onset of a depressive episode shortly after a traumatic event involving loss, stress, humiliation, neglect, or extreme disappointment (Herrman et al., 2022). Common symptoms typically found in patients with depression are persistent sadness, insomnia or hypersomnia, withdrawal from usual activities, lack of energy, low self-worth, changes in appetite or weight, poor concentration, feelings of hopelessness, and thoughts of death, due to an inability to cope with the invisible pain of depression (National Institute of Mental Health [NIMH], 2021; Torres, 2020; WHO, 2021).

Methodology

Research Instruments

The MIPVU (Steen et al., 2010) was adopted in order to identify metaphorical expressions. Salience-based metaphor analysis (Kövecses et al., 2015) was subsequently used to obtain the most salient conceptual metaphors.

The MIPVU is a systematic method for metaphor identification. It is an extended version of the MIP developed by the Pragglejaz Group (2007). As in the case with the MIP, the procedure involves examining a text on a word-by-word basis to find metaphor-related words (Steen et al., 2010, pp. 25-26(. However, this procedure is claimed to be more exhaustive in that it includes other forms of metaphor, such as the simile, to cover a wider range of metaphorical forms.

Metaphor identification is mainly conducted by finding metaphor-related words (i.e., words used indirectly). For a word to be considered metaphorical, a contrast must exist between its contextual meaning and its more basic meaning. This means that these two meanings should be sufficiently distinct from each other while understood in comparison with one another. The contextual meaning of a word is known as "the meaning it has in the situation in which it is used" (Steen et al., 2010, p. 33) whereas its basic meaning involves "a more concrete, specific, and human-oriented sense in contemporary language use" (p. 35). For instance, in "that is the deepest wound in my heart", the contextual meaning of "wound" is the psychological wound created by depression, while the more basic meaning involves a damaged area of the body. As such, these meanings are considered sufficiently distinct in terms of their dictionary definitions (i.e., those found in standard, nationally distributed Thai dictionaries). Apart from words used metaphorically, similes were also considered in this study. This was done by simply looking for signal words such as "like."

Kövecses et al. (2015) proposed a new complex measure of metaphorical salience (i.e., salience-based metaphor analysis) to determine the cultural importance of conceptual metaphors, arguing that word frequency alone was not sufficient when identifying the most salient conceptual metaphors. Consequently, three factors were introduced for the calculation of aggregate values (p. 344) as follows:

1. "Mapping" refers to conceptual mappings belonging to a particular conceptual metaphor. This first factor requires the total number of mappings within a conceptual metaphor.
2. "Type" refers to different metaphorical expressions used to express a particular conceptual metaphor. Type analysis helps in understanding the variety of types.
3. "Token" refers to all occurrences of a type in the corpus. For a clearer illustration of type-token distinction, the type "heal", for example, appeared four times in the corpus. Then there were four tokens of "heal" whereas the type of frequency was still counted as one.

Finally, an aggregate value is derived by summing up percentages of the previous three factors to represent the metaphorical salience of each conceptual

metaphor. The conceptual metaphor with the highest aggregate value is therefore the most salient.

Procedures

The online platform can foster a patient's sense of being able to express their emotions more freely than in face-to-face interactions (Demmen et al., 2015). Therefore, a self-compiled corpus was created to facilitate this study. Conforming to the research objectives, the data were purposively drawn from a Thai-based Facebook group, dedicated to mental illnesses because it consists exclusively of Thai diagnosed patients, and excludes family carers and members of the public while other groups do not.

Posts concerning depression directly produced by depressed patients were selected manually for inclusion in the corpus. The posts published in the target group were thoroughly examined based on their relevance to patients' lived experiences of depression such as complaints related to depression, comments about their emotions, conditions, and needs, and remarks concerning their medication. A total of 659 posts all written in Thai were compiled with permission from 82 writers in the target group, published from January to August 2023, resulting in a corpus of 56,942 words. Next, identification of metaphors was conducted, along with the formation of conceptual metaphors. Finally, the salience of each conceptual metaphor was calculated.

The study was conducted according to the guidelines of the research and publication ethics regulations approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee of Srinakharinwirot University (Protocol Code: SWUEC-662004 (Approval date: 25 July 2023)). The identities of participants were anonymised prior to the collection of data to help ensure that the findings reported in this study would not be able to be traced back to any individual post writers.

Data Analysis

After identifying WOUND-related metaphorical expressions (e.g., pain and heal), for example, in the first stage of analysis, conceptual mappings were formed based on similarities at the cognitive level between the properties of the source domains and those of the target domains. The previously identified metaphorical expressions systematically determined the numbers of mappings (i.e., four mappings for WOUND), depending on the variety of properties found between two different domains. These mappings contained metaphorical expressions that specified them. For instance, "pain" and "suffer" were categorised under the mapping PAIN FROM A WOUND→PAIN FROM DEPRESSION because of their shared properties.

Subsequently, the conceptual metaphor DEPRESSION IS A WOUND was then formulated from the identified metaphorical expressions and the formation of conceptual mappings in the previous steps. Besides the case of WOUND, these steps were followed throughout the analysis to derive other conceptual metaphors. Finally, the numbers of mappings, types, and tokens of each conceptual metaphor were

calculated separately to derive percentages. Aggregate values were then computed to obtain the most salient conceptual metaphors.

Results

Conceptual Metaphors for DEPRESSION

In relation to the first research objective, the Thai corpus yielded 10 conceptual metaphors, illustrating the metaphorical conceptualisation of depression. Each conceptual metaphor was capitalised in order to represent concepts instead of metaphorical expressions. For each mapping, an arrow was inserted to link the source domain with the target domain. Finally, the numbers of tokens were attached to their types and displayed in parentheses.

DEPRESSION IS A WOUND

Depression was conceptualised as a physical wound, a damaged area of the body. Just like a person suffering from the pain of a physical wound, a depressed patient also suffers psychologically from depression, despite its invisibility. However, depression can also be healed through medication and mental support as well as by the passage of time, just like a physical wound. Depressed patients usually felt more relief from their depressive symptoms if their psychological wounds had disappeared. A sample sentence containing a metaphorical expression is: "I need encouragement to <u>heal</u> my mind," suggesting similarities between HEALING A WOUND and HEALING DEPRESSION**.** The four mappings, along with 21 types, are as follows:

A PHYSICAL WOUND →DEPRESSION
       i.e., wound (3), psychological wound (1), recur (8)

PAIN FROM A WOUND →PAIN FROM DEPRESSION
       i.e., painful (1), pain (2), suffer (6), suffering (3), distressed (1), hurt (3), indignant (1), struggle (1), injured (1), endure (2), endure suffering (1)

HEALING A WOUND →HEALING DEPRESSION
       i.e., heal (4), cure (3), get better (1), relieve (2), rest (2)

DISAPPEARANCE OF A WOUND→RELIEF FROM DEPRESSION
       i.e., disappear (10), completely gone (2)

BEING DEPRESSED IS DESCENT

Being depressed was conceptualised as descent, an act of going down. For example, the statement "I can't move on. I'm <u>falling straight down</u>" indicates descent in a straight direction. Patients usually felt down when experiencing depression because of the difficulty they experienced in getting up. However, references to the ability to

pull oneself up pointed to patients' attempts to get away from being depressed. The five mappings with 15 types are:

FALLING INTO A HOLE→BEING DEPRESSED
      i.e., down to the hole (2), fall into a hole (1), black hole (1)

FALLING STRAIGHT DOWN→BEING DEPRESSED
      i.e., fall straight down (23)

SINKING→BEING DEPRESSED
      i.e., sink (4)

FALLING DOWN TO A LOWER LEVEL→BEING DEPRESSED
      i.e., fall down (1), bottom out (2), come down to (1), fall into hell (1), fall off (1), down (1), fall (6), down to hell (1)

PULLING ONESELF UP→TRYING TO GET AWAY FROM BEING DEPRESSED
      i.e., pull up (1), get up (3)

DEPRESSION IS A VISITOR

The patient acted as a host offering a place for a visitor to stay. The patient became depressed whenever depression visited. Acceptance of depression as a visitor may thus enable patients to live with it more comfortably. In the statement "Depression has <u>stayed with</u> me so long," depression acts as a visitor living together with the patient. The two mappings with 11 types are:

A VISITOR→DEPRESSION
      i.e., return (4), temporary (1), visit (1), meet (3)

ACCEPTING A VISITOR→LIVING WITH DEPRESSION
      i.e., should adjust (1), live (1), admit (8), adjust the mind (1), stay with (4), live together (1), stay together (1)

DEPRESSION IS AN OPPONENT

Depression was conceptualised as an opponent with which the depressed patient fought over a certain period. Patients used various methods (e.g., medications) to fight depression. Controlling depression, just as controlling an opponent, was also necessary in order to prevent it from becoming too intense. Patients might win or lose the battle, depending on the many factors they faced. The statement "Let's <u>fight</u> it together" reflects a belief that depression can be fought as an opponent. The five mappings with 18 types are:

FIGHTING AN OPPONENT→DEALING WITH DEPRESSION

i.e., battle (5), fight (31), grit teeth and fight (1), fight hard (1), confront (2), not give up (1), exert oneself (1)

A WAY TO FIGHT AN OPPONENT→A WAY TO DEAL WITH DEPRESSION
i.e., method (1), all the ways (1)

CONTROLLING AN OPPONENT→CONTROLLING DEPRESSION
i.e., take charge of (8), protect (1), inhibit (1)

A FIGHTER→A DEPRESSED PERSON
i.e., fighter (1)

BEING A LOSER→BEING DEFEATED BY DEPRESSION
i.e., routed (1), surrender (5), lose (1), weak (3), weakness (1)

DEPRESSION IS A JOURNEY

While some might perceive depression as a journey, others might regard it as a journey without a destination. Other depressed patients in the group were considered traveling companions on the same journey due to their shared experiences. Moving on was a part of a journey in which patients tried to relieve themselves from depression. Patients also had to get through depression, no matter how hard this might be. In the statement "I have to <u>pass</u> (overcome) it," for instance, the type "pass" was frequently used to indicate the ability to recover from depression. The five mappings with 19 types are:

BEING ON A JOURNEY→HAVING DEPRESSION
i.e., traveling (1)

A JOURNEY WITHOUT DESTINATION→BEING DEPRESSED
i.e., pointless (1), aimless (2), no goal (1), no path (1), midway (1), without destination (1)

TRAVELING COMPANIONS→OTHER DEPRESSED PATIENTS
i.e., by your side (1), rest beside you (1), right here (1), await (1), be with (1), hold hands (1)

MOVING ON→RELIEF FROM DEPRESSION
i.e., move on (3), keep walking forward (1), way to walk (1)

ABILITY TO UNDERTAKE A JOURNEY→ABILITY TO RECOVER FROM DEPRESSION
i.e., pass (32), pass through (3), step over (1)

DEPRESSION IS A HEAVY LOAD

Depression can cause emotional pressure on patients; thus, they commonly feel that everything is heavy due to their inability to handle the illness. The weight of the load might vary depending on the severity of depression. However, relief from depression was thought of as removing a heavy load, as seen in the following statement: "The doctor says I have to <u>let it go</u>." The three mappings with six types are:

A HEAVY LOAD→DEPRESSION
      i.e., heavy (8)

BEARING A HEAVY LOAD→EXPERIENCING DEPRESSION
      i.e., move slowly (1), carry (1), hold me back (1)

REMOVING A HEAVY LOAD→RELIEF FROM DEPRESSION
      i.e., lay down (2), let go (2)

DEPRESSION IS A CONTAINER

Depression was conceptualised as a container. Patients found themselves trapped in a container. If patients were able to move out of the container, they might recover from depression, as in the following example: "I used to suffer a lot because I couldn't <u>slip out of</u> it." The three mappings with 10 types are:

A CONTAINER→DEPRESSION
      i.e., unlock (1)

BEING INSIDE A CONTAINER→EXPERIENCING DEPRESSION
      i.e., slip into (1), circle around (1), realm (1), round and round (1)

COMING OUT OF A CONTAINER→RELIEF FROM DEPRESSION
      i.e., slip out of (2), bring oneself out (1), pull oneself out (1), exit (1), disjoin (1)

DEPRESSION IS A SUBSTANCE IN A CONTAINER

Depression was also conceptualised as a substance in a container. Pressure is related to this concept because it builds up inside the container. Some patients attempted to control their depression, just like someone trying to keep a substance inside a container despite the presence of intense pressure. However, when control is lost, the substance may exit the container or explode. A sample sentence includes "So depressed, I can't <u>restrict</u> (control) it." The three mappings with 14 types are:

A PRESSURISED SUBSTANCE IN A CONTAINER→DEPRESSION

i.e., pressured (7), cramped (5), choke up (2), accumulate (2), repressed (3), keep (1), repression (1)

TRYING TO KEEP A SUBSTANCE INSIDE A CONTAINER→CONTROLLING DEPRESSION
i.e., restrict (4), repress (4), control (7)

A SUBSTANCE LEAVING A CONTAINER→LOSING CONTROL OF DEPRESSION
i.e., release (37), deflate (1), explode (9), break (2)

A DEPRESSED PERSON'S MIND IS A CONTAINER

In some cases, patients perceived their minds as empty containers since there were perhaps no feelings in their minds, as in "Feeling so <u>empty</u> like a <u>leaky glass</u>." Some patients' minds, however, appeared to be closed containers, in that patients were probably not ready to open their mind to anyone. The two mappings with nine types are:

AN EMPTY CONTAINER→A DEPRESSED PERSON'S MIND
i.e., weightless (1), empty (3), leaky glass (1), fill (1), not full (1), hollow (1)

A CLOSED CONTAINER→A DEPRESSED PERSON'S MIND
i.e., close my mind (2), open my mind (2), open my mind slightly (1)

A DEPRESSED PERSON'S MIND IS A MACHINE

Patients perceived their minds as broken machines that could no longer be repaired, as in "My mind is <u>broken</u>." However, if perceived as a dysfunctional machine, the mind might still be fixed, enabling the sufferer to live a normal life again. The two mappings with eight types are:

A BROKEN MACHINE→A DEPRESSED PERSON'S MIND
i.e., wreck (1), cracked (1), ruined (1), broken (2), torn (1)

A DYSFUNCTIONAL MACHINE→A DEPRESSED PERSON'S MIND
i.e., fix (2), repair (1), adjust (1)

The Most Salient Conceptual Metaphors for DEPRESSION

In relation to the second research objective, Table 1 presents aggregate values representing the metaphorical salience of each conceptual metaphor.

The three most salient conceptual metaphors for depression in Thai ranked according to metaphorical salience were found to be DEPRESSION IS AN OPPONENT, DEPRESSION IS A JOURNEY, and DEPRESSION IS A WOUND with aggregate values of 45.46%, 43.39%, and 42.74% respectively.

The calculation, following the metaphorical salience-based corpus analysis, indicated that DEPRESSION IS AN OPPONENT was the most salient conceptual

metaphor, with the highest aggregate value (45.46%) among all conceptual metaphors. It was also a highly elaborated conceptual metaphor, with different mappings (14.71%), types (13.74%), and tokens (17.01%).

The second most salient conceptual metaphor (i.e., DEPRESSION IS A JOURNEY) closely followed, with a similar percentage of mappings for the source domain OPPONENT. However, a slightly higher percentage of types (14.5%) and a lower percentage of tokens (14.18%) yielded an aggregate value of 43.39%.

Table 1

Metaphorical Salience of Each Conceptual Metaphor

Conceptual metaphor	Mapping	%	Type	%	Token	%	Aggregate value
DEPRESSION IS AN OPPONENT	5	14.71	18	13.74	66	17.01	45.46
DEPRESSION IS A JOURNEY	5	14.71	19	14.5	55	14.18	43.39
DEPRESSION IS A WOUND	4	11.76	21	16.03	58	14.95	42.74
DEPRESSION IS A SUBSTANCE IN A CONTAINER	3	8.82	14	10.69	85	21.91	41.42
BEING DEPRESSED IS DESCENT	5	14.71	15	11.45	49	12.63	38.79
DEPRESSION IS A VISITOR	2	5.88	11	8.4	26	6.7	20.98
DEPRESSION IS A CONTAINER	3	8.82	10	7.63	11	2.84	19.29
DEPRESSION IS A HEAVY LOAD	3	8.82	6	4.58	15	3.87	17.27
DEPRESSED PERSON'S MIND IS A CONTAINER	2	5.88	9	6.87	13	3.35	16.1
DEPRESSED PERSON'S MIND IS A MACHINE	2	5.88	8	6.11	10	2.58	14.57
Total	34		131		388		

DEPRESSION IS A WOUND, with a total aggregate value of 42.74%, was salient to a similar degree as the conceptual metaphor JOURNEY. This third-ranking salient conceptual metaphor had fewer mappings than the first two. However, it recorded the highest figure for types (16.03%). It received 58 tokens, fewer than the figure for the most salient conceptual metaphor, but slightly higher than that for the second-ranking one.

In addition to the top three, two more conceptual metaphors also obtained a similar percentage for aggregate value as the third-ranking one: DEPRESSION IS A SUBSTANCE IN A CONTAINER (41.42%) and BEING DEPRESSED IS DESCENT (38.79%). It is remarkable that, while only three mappings of the source domain A SUBSTANCE IN A CONTAINER were identified in the corpus, the highest number of tokens (85 out of 388) was generated, much larger than that for DEPRESSION IS AN OPPONENT. BEING DEPRESSED IS DESCENT was one of only three conceptual metaphors, in addition to the two most salient conceptual metaphors, that exhibited the highest

number of mappings among all (i.e., five), regardless of its type and token frequencies.

Discussion

Results associated with the initial research objective yielded altogether 10 conceptual metaphors while those associated with the second revealed the following three conceptual metaphors to be the most salient: DEPRESSION IS AN OPPONENT, DEPRESSION IS A JOURNEY, and DEPRESSION IS A WOUND. The findings are consistent with previous studies in terms of the main conceptual metaphors (e.g., Angkapanichkit et al., 2019; Charteris-Black, 2012; Coll-Florit et al., 2021; Fullagar & O'Brien, 2012; McMullen & Conway, 2002), especially in relation to the concepts DESCENT, OPPONENT, JOURNEY, HEAVY LOAD, and CONTAINER. According to the metaphorical salience, the statistics revealed that even though some conceptual metaphors were also present in this study, others were not salient among the Thai patients.

DEPRESSION IS AN OPPONENT appears to be the most salient conceptual metaphor in the Thai context. The use of various word choices such as WAR, BATTLE, and VIOLENCE can also be seen in other scholars' works. However, the OPPONENT concept in this study was carefully formulated to illustrate patients' motivation to fight and control depression–the target opponent. The work of Fullagar and O'Brien (2012) is particularly relevant in this regard, as the BATTLE concept involves depressed patients' attempts to control the depression that is overwhelming them, their struggle with depression seen as an ongoing battle. Similarly, Coll-Florit et al. (2021) posited that patients are in an inferior position, with depression having control over them.

Taken altogether, depression is conceptualised as an opponent that patients must fight against and control; otherwise, it can damage their lives due to its superior power. If patients can defeat their opponent, they will consider themselves as winners; however, if they are defeated, they may end up thinking that they are losers and might therefore discontinue taking their medications and reject all forms of treatment. This conceptual metaphor reveals a shared embodied experience across cultures in that all elements of the source domain OPPONENT are mapped onto those of the target DEPRESSION by virtue of similarities at the cognitive level. For instance, the experience of "fighting an opponent" is mapped onto "dealing with depression" through the use of several types, such as "battle," "fight," and "confront", suggesting similarities in the conceptual mapping in the sense that depression has to be fought, just like an opponent.

In the Thai context, this conceptualisation is frequently found in peer support aimed at encouraging the sufferer to keep fighting the illness. Moreover, metaphorical expressions associated with VIOLENCE have been previously found in Semino et al.'s (2017) work, used by cancer patients to offer encouragement to one another as "fighters." Thus, the OPPONENT concept might be regarded as a good portent for recovery that helps boost the self-esteem of patients.

DEPRESSION IS A JOURNEY is the second most salient conceptual metaphor. The way depression is conceptualised as a journey obviously relates to our everyday

experience of moving from one place to another, which we are all familiar with. This concept is evidence of depression as an embodied experience even though patients are not physically moving. The source domain JOURNEY involves physical experiences such as traveling while the target domain DEPRESSION involves complex emotional dynamics. Elements of JOURNEY, based on similarities in terms of cognition, are thus systematically mapped onto elements of DEPRESSION, allowing us to understand and reason about depression in terms of a journey.

According to the findings, assistance can also be obtained from traveling companions (i.e., other depressed patients in the Facebook group) along the way during the depression journey. This positive aspect of the concept JOURNEY that involves having friends was also discovered in previous research on cancer patients (Semino et al., 2017) and can be viewed as a source of empowerment. However, depression sometimes seems to be a journey without destination, as seen in the expression "no path," indicating uncertainty about recovery. The results of the study therefore confirm that both conceptual metaphors (OPPONENT and JOURNEY) are indeed pervasive, not only in relation to the experiences of physical illnesses such as cancer, but also in relation to psychological states such as depression.

Unlike OPPONENT and JOURNEY conceptual metaphors, it is worth noticing that DEPRESSION IS A WOUND was not mentioned in other studies despite the salience found in the current study. This might reflect the profound influence of Thai patients' embodied experience of physical wounds, as revealed in the use of various WOUND-related metaphorical expressions to conceptualise depression in the Thai context. This might also be due to the restricted acceptance of depression as a real sickness in Thai society, its conceptualisation as a wound being an indicator that it does exist. The concept WOUND is considered culture-specific to the Thai context, as different cultures may use different metaphorical expressions to conceptualise depression. The conceptualisation of depression as a wound represents how patients suffer from depression just as they would from a physical wound. Interestingly, even though it ranked third in terms of aggregate value according to metaphorical salience, this conceptual metaphor had the greatest quantity of types (i.e., 21 out of 131) related to the concept WOUND through similarities at the cognitive level, such as "heal," "wound," and "suffer." Properties of the source domain WOUND include its concrete nature, its familiarity, and its association with bodily experiences while those of the target domain DEPRESSION include its abstract nature, its complexity, and its association with concepts that may not have direct sensory-motor correlates. Consequently, some properties, such as "pain from a wound", are highlighted in our understanding of depression. Use of metaphorical expressions related to the concept WOUND should help others to understand that depression really exists even though it is invisible to the naked eyes and is unknown to those who have never experienced it. In addition, given Thai people's long-standing attachment to Buddhism, the concept of WOUND may perhaps have some connection to the belief in Dhamma Medicine—the teachings of the Buddha—to alleviate suffering from the invisible wound. The statement "I need encouragement to *heal* my mind," for instance, reveals that depressed patients themselves believe depression can also be healed, just like a physical wound. This implies that they realise that depression should receive some form of treatment, whether it be

medication or mental support. The WOUND concept eventually contributes to a proper understanding of the illness in terms of its existence and curability.

DEPRESSION IS A SUBSTANCE IN A CONTAINER, despite its fourth-placed ranking in metaphorical salience, yielded the highest percentage of tokens (21.91%). This figure is much higher than that for the top three conceptual metaphors if the token percentage alone is considered. This phenomenon results from repeated use of some metaphorical expressions among the Thai patients; for instance, "release" was used 37 times, leading to 37 tokens. This expression is in relation to the notion of losing control of overwhelming feelings. The patients might release these emotions by talking to others. If this conceptual metaphor were to be combined with the other two container-related conceptual metaphors (i.e., DEPRESSION IS A CONTAINER and A DEPRESSED PERSON'S MIND IS A CONTAINER), the overall aggregate value would be the largest, adding up to 76.81%. Nevertheless, these three conceptual metaphors had to be kept separate because DEPRESSION and DEPRESSED PERSON'S MIND are different target domains. However, this is in line with Charteris-Black's (2012) containment model, which states that depression and the depressed patient (i.e., the embodied self) can each act as a container. To illustrate, depression can be conceptualised as a container inside which patients find themselves; alternatively, patients may conceptualise themselves as containers containing thoughts, feelings, and emotions.

BEING DEPRESSED IS DESCENT is another significant conceptual metaphor relevant to depression and is recognised as one of the most dominant in seminal studies (e.g., Charteris-Black, 2012; McMullen & Conway, 2002). DESCENT is fundamentally in accordance with Lakoff and Johnson's framework regarding the orientational conceptual metaphor (i.e., SAD IS DOWN), which involves physical stance, the authors stating that "drooping posture typically goes along with sadness and depression" (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980, p. 15). Accordingly, descent is, globally, one of our most mundane physical experiences. People tend to lie down physically when they are ill, so they can also be thought of as feeling "down" mentally when depressed. As for the Thai context, DESCENT was previously mentioned in Angkapanichkit et al.'s research (2019) with the mutual use of "down" which relates to patients' physical posture. Indeed, it represents one of the most salient conceptual metaphors universally when referring to depression. Despite sharing the same concept, the current research, however, identified various actions associated with DESCENT, such as falling down to a lower level, as in "down to hell." The expression "hell" appears in conjunction with "down," indicating a lower level. This might result from the influence of religious belief prevalent among Thai people (i.e., Buddhism) regarding "hell." Since "hell" is an extremely unpleasant place full of suffering, it is understandable that this expression was used among Thai patients to communicate their agony.

The remaining conceptual metaphors, namely, DEPRESSION IS A VISITOR, DEPRESSION IS A CONTAINER, DEPRESSION IS A HEAVY LOAD, A DEPRESSED PERSON'S MIND IS A CONTAINER, and A DEPRESSED PERSON'S MIND IS A MACHINE, are not as salient as the ones mentioned previously. Their aggregate values ranged from 20.98% down to only 14.57%. However, the findings also revealed the influence of embodied and cultural experiences on these conceptual metaphors.

Also, according to CMT, there is no need for pre-existing similarities between any mapping, rather similarities at cognitive level. Evidence of the embodiment of depression, for example, can be found metaphorical expressions associated with the concept HEAVY LOAD, such as "let go" and "lay down," which both possess the same meaning related to "unloading" in their Thai equivalents. They demonstrate our physical experience of offloading a heavy burden. Likewise, this experience is also thought of as relief from depression as we do not feel depressed anymore afterwards.

While only two concepts (i.e., WOUND and DESCENT), as discussed above, are considered culture-specific to the Thai context particularly in relation to Buddhism, others are thought to be universal, meaning they are also prevalent in other cultures. All of the 10 conceptual metaphors, however, may help us make sense of abstract ideas of depression through our embodied experiences, cultural conventions, and linguistic usage. Although conceptual metaphors provide a flexible framework for understanding abstract concepts, not all elements of the source domains in this study are mapped onto those of the targets. This process of highlighting properties is a fundamental aspect of how conceptual metaphors shape our understanding of depression.

Conclusion

This study investigated the conceptual metaphors for DEPRESSION in Facebook posts by depressed Thai patients to enhance understanding of their experiences. The study also aimed to identify the most salient conceptual metaphors to gain insights into the typical conceptualisation of DEPRESSION within the Thai cultural context. Ten conceptual metaphors were derived from the metaphorical expressions identified. Some of these metaphors are prevalent in other cultures, while others are unique to the Thai context. The most salient source domain was OPPONENT, followed closely by JOURNEY, and WOUND. While the first two have been acknowledged in previous studies on depression, *wound* appears to be more specific to this context.

The findings have significant implications for mental healthcare communication, offering insights into how depression is conceptualised through the metaphorical language used by patients. Understanding these metaphors can aid others in comprehending the thoughts and emotions of patients with depression. The findings may benefit linguists interested in cross-cultures studies of metaphorical expressions related to mental health. Given the close relationship between language and illness, this research contributes to a broader understanding of mental illnesses, such as depression, highlights the role of metaphor in human cognition and communication.

Despite its contributions, the study acknowledges certain limitations, including challenges in generalising the findings due to the data being sourced from only one Facebook group. Although the group restricts membership to patients, it includes individuals with other mental illnesses, such as anxiety disorder, which could introduce variability in the data. A more rigorous screening of posts may be required in future studies. To improve the generalisability of future research, larger

sample sizes should be used, and the target groups should consist exclusively of patients diagnosed with depression.

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