Metaphorical and metonymical expressions of health and disease: a corpus illustrated study

Despite being intensely researched in medicine, psychology, pedagogy, sociology, and many other disciplines preoccupied with the human condition, unequivocal definitions of health and disease remain as elusive as they are fundamental to our existence. Taking into account data found in the British National Corpus, the Corpus of Contemporary American English, and the National Corpus of Polish, this paper discusses the concepts of health and disease as a single dimension of experience mapped metaphorically and metonymically onto UP–DOWN and STRONG–WEAK scales via the cognitive embodiment. Contrasting properties between health and disease can be represented in terms of a scale running between two opposing poles. From this perspective, the meanings of health and disease are closely related to each other and form a gradable antonymy. Thanks to the use of these scales, a particular state of one’s health can be reduced (or objectified to use an alternative nomenclature) to a physical dimension of embodied experience.