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***Metaphors we suffer by***  
**A comparative study of health-related metaphors in French and English everyday language**

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**Abstract**

This paper is a comparative lexicological analysis of the words and phrases that refer to the human body and illnesses in French and English everyday language based on the identification of the main metaphors (Lakoff & Johnson 2003 [1980]; Turner & Fauconnier 2002), so as to demonstrate that both languages carve up the world in the same way when it comes to health. Because for practical and ethical reasons, the access to a corpus has proved difficult, we chose to exploit a series of lexicons and dictionaries. While it aimed at demonstrating that, through their lay language, French and English patients shared a mechanistic view of the body and an embarrassment for the same diseases (cancer, venereal diseases and diarrhoea) and bodily functions (urination, menstruation, defecation and vomiting), our analysis led us to highlight the metaphorical concept that underlies our present Western medical paradigm (MEDICINE IS WAR). In our conclusion, we mention the terminology that has recently entered the medical language (*biocompatibility, bioartificial organ, actient* [Jarlaud *et al.* 2014]), which leads us to wonder whether we might not soon see a shift of paradigm in which medicine would no longer be seen as a declaration of war (*body's defences, a heart attack, killer T cells, therapeutic armamentarium, casualty* [Hodgkin 1985]) but rather as a way to restore the balance of an ecosystem at the heart of which the patient will stand (Bissell & Hines 2011; Chandel 2015).

**Key-words:** metaphor, taboo, human body, illness

**Résumé**

Cette contribution est une analyse lexicologique comparative des mots et des expressions qui font référence au corps et à ses maux, dans la langue courante anglaise et française, à partir de l'identification des principales métaphores (Lakoff & Johnson 2003 [1980]; Turner & Fauconnier 2002), afin de démontrer que les deux langues partagent le même découpage du monde lorsqu'il s'agit de la santé. Parce que, pour des raisons pratiques et éthiques, l'accès à un corpus authentique s'est révélé difficile, nous avons choisi d'exploiter une série de lexiques et dictionnaires. Alors qu'elle visait à démontrer qu'à travers la langue courante, les patients français et les patients anglais partagent une vision mécaniste du corps humain et une gêne pour les mêmes maladies (cancer, maladies vénériennes et diarrhée) et fonctions physiologiques (miction, menstruation, défécation et vomissement), notre analyse nous a permis de mettre en évidence la métaphore qui sous-tend le paradigme actuel de la médecine, à savoir LA MEDECINE, C'EST LA GUERRE. Dans notre conclusion, nous évoquons la terminologie récemment entrée dans la langue médicale (*biocompatibilité, organe bioartificiel, actient* [Jarlaud *et al.* 2014]), ce qui nous amène à nous interroger sur un éventuel changement de focal, dans lequel la médecine apparaîtrait moins comme une déclaration de guerre (*body's defences, a heart attack, killer T cells, therapeutic armamentarium, casualty*) (Hodgkin 1985) que comme le rétablissement de l'équilibre d'un écosystème au cœur duquel se trouverait le patient (Bissell & Hines 2011 ; Chandel 2015).

**Mots clés :** métaphore, tabous, corps humain, maladie

## **Introduction – The Conceptual Metaphor theory and the Blending theory: A brief overview**

Assuming that the mapping between conceptual domains corresponded to the brain's neural mappings, cognitive linguists have devoted much of their work to the understanding of metaphor.

We owe the Conceptual Metaphor theory (CMT), on which this paper is based, to George Lakoff and Mark Johnson. It has been fully described in their book *Metaphors we live by*, which was first published in 1980 and later on, in a revised version, in 2003. For the authors, the concept of “metaphor” goes well beyond the scope of stylistics as “metaphor is a natural part of human thought” (: 247) and “[o]ur ordinary conceptual system [...] is fundamentally metaphorical in nature” (: 3), a principle called “the Invariance principle”.

Some metaphors, all of which share a common experiential basis (*embodiment*), appear to be cross-linguistic, which tends to demonstrate the existence of image schemata in our cognitive processes. These image schemata motivate conceptual metaphor mappings (Johnson 1987). For instance, both in English and in French, illness is usually associated with the notion of DOWN: *fall ill* and *tomber malade*, illness forcing people to lie down. On the contrary, health is often UP: *feel up*, *rev up*, *lift up/pick up*, *be looking up* with the meaning of ‘recover/feel better’, and *back on one's feet*, in English, and *se relever d'une maladie* ‘recover from a disease’ and *remettre sur pieds* (lit. “put back on one's feet”, meaning ‘make [someone] better’), in French.

According to George Lakoff, we use metaphors intuitively to understand abstract concepts: “Because we reason in terms of metaphor, the metaphors we use determine a great deal about how we live our lives” (: 244). This means that if metaphors structure our thought, they depend on how we interact with our environment and therefore on our ability to perceive. In other words, metaphors greatly depend on our body and on how we deal with it. And if, as human-beings, our experiences are often universal, we notice that some may vary accordingly to our culture. Therefore, based on the physical environment and the culture, “[e]ach language may carve up the world in different ways” (: 204).

In CMT, the metaphor comprises two domains (the source and the target) and the mapping is purely unidirectional (it goes from the source to the target). For instance, in the metaphoric blend *he is green around the gills*, the source domain is “fishery” and the target domain is “health”.

Because they deemed the conceptual metaphor theory to be insufficient – in the metaphor above, CMT does not explain how the notion of “sickness” is projected from the source to the target –, Gilles Fauconnier and Mark Turner (1998; 2002) designed the Blending theory (BT), a framework aimed at unifying the analysis of metaphor and that is considered to be complementary.

According to BT, “the organisation unit is not a domain but the mental space, a partial and temporary representational structure which speakers construct as they speak” (Grady 1999). The mental space is four-dimensional. There are two input spaces (the source and the target), a generic space (a structure shared by both inputs) and a blend space, where the two inputs combine. For instance, in the metaphoric blend above *he is green around the gills*, the two inputs are “fishery” and “health”, the generic space is made up of elements like “lack of freshness”, “vomit”, etc. and the blended space is the combination of both inputs opening up onto the notion of “sickness”, which derives directly from juxtaposing a rotten fish and an individual.

In CMT, simple metaphors interact to give birth to more elaborate conceptualisations, a process called “binding of metaphors” (Grady 1999). Metaphors as surface products can result from complex integration networks with multiple metaphorical mappings, metonymic mappings and blended spaces. In other words, both conceptual metaphor and image metaphor involve mapping concepts from one domain to another. The difference lies in the fact that image metaphors are conceptually simple in that only one concept of the source domain maps onto the target domain, whereas conceptual metaphors are more complex. As such, image metaphors are based on a sense-perceived resemblance between two entities, and are the result of image-to-image mappings, which results in one expression. In contrast, conceptual metaphors (also known as multiple-correspondence metaphors) are extremely productive, and emerge from the entire projection of one domain of experience onto another (domain-to-domain mapping).

To illustrate how conceptual metaphors can structure everyday life, we suggest taking the metaphor MEDICINE IS WAR, which, according to Susan Sontag (1978), occurred in part because of the rise of the germ theory during the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. This domain-to-domain metaphor is exemplified in the French and English languages – medical and, to a lesser extent, lay – with a vast variety of words and expressions (e.g. in English: “It’s an **overwhelming** infection; she’s got an **infiltrating** carcinoma; the body’s **defences**; he’s having a heart **attack**; **killer** T cells; we must treat him **aggressively** and use everything in [the] therapeutic **armamentarium**; we’ve **wiped out** smallpox; go to casualty and the **house officer** will deal with you” [Hodgkin 1985]). In French, we use *un arsenal thérapeutique* ‘a therapeutic armamentarium’; *une maladie invasive* ‘an invasive disease’; *les défenses immunitaires* ‘the immune defences’; *la barrière placentaire* ‘the placental barrier’; *combattre une infection* ‘fight an infection’; *bombarder une tumeur* ‘bombard a tumour’; etc. We do not only speak of medicine in terms of war but we can actually win (Eng. *he/she won his/her fight against the disease* and Fr. *il/elle a gagné son combat contre la maladie*) or lose (Eng. *he/she lost his/her fight against the disease* and Fr. *il/elle a perdu son combat contre la maladie*). It is in that sense that the conceptual metaphor MEDICINE IS WAR is the one that, in our culture, structures what we do when we treat or when we are treated.

When we analyse the lay terms that refer to the human body and to illness in the French language and in the English language, we observe that not only is metaphor pervasive in both languages but it is also cross-linguistic.

### 1. Image-to-image metaphor and explicit analogy: Mother Nature

As mentioned above, most cross-linguistic primary metaphors derive from our interaction with our environment. Therefore, Nature is a major source for elaborating image-to-image metaphors and explicit analogies.

Although man tends to be seen as moving away from his natural roots, Nature is still quite present in the lay terminology that is used to describe organs. For example, because of its round shape, the head is associated to all sorts of round vegetables: *apple*, *coconut*, *lemon*, *melon*, *onion*, *potato*, *prune* and *pumpkin* in English, and *citron* (‘lemon’), *poire* (‘pear’), *citrouille* (‘pumpkin’) and *pomme* (‘apple’) in French. In English, the male genitals may be called *the rhubarb*\* and the penis is also referred to as *the cucumber*\*, both fruit/vegetable having a long shape; and the testicles bear sometimes the names of *nuts*\*, *plums*\* and *love apples*\*, all the fruit sharing a round shape. In French, *poireau*\* (‘leek’) may designate the penis, *abricot* (‘apricot’) can be used to refer to the vagina, *noix*\* (‘nuts’) and *prunes*\* (‘plums’) may stand for the testicles, and *oignon*\* (‘onion’) may designate the anus.

The cabbage and one of its varieties, the cauliflower, are used to describe misshapen ears both in English and in French (Eng. *cauliflower ears*; Fr. *oreilles en chou-fleur*). *Cabbage* is also an offensive way to refer to a patient in a coma in English. In French, we use the term *légume* ('vegetable'), a vegetable (and therefore a cabbage) being totally motionless.

In American English, green apples are associated with diarrhoea (e.g. *green-apple trots*, *green-apple quickstep*, *green-apple two-step*, etc.) as eating sour fruit might cause an inflammation of the colon.

Man is an animal, and it is only natural that zoomorphic metaphors should be present in the lay language, especially when referring to body parts. For instance, *beak* or *bill* are synonyms for *nose*, and the term *dogs* stands for *feet*, in English, and *les pattes* ('the paws') is a word used to describe the legs, in French.

Among the numerous examples we found in our corpus, let us name the face or the mouth which can be referred to as *muzzle* in English and *museau* in French; the arms which can be described with the word *fins* or *wings* in English; in French, the fingers or the feet which may be designated by way of the term *les pinces* ('the claws') as in *aller à pinces* ('go on foot'); in slang, the penis which can be called *queue\** ('tail') and the vagina *chatte\** ('cat') in French. Terms from marine life can be used for the female genitals: *oyster\** in English and *moule\** ('mussel') in French both describe the vulva.

Though different from image-to-image metaphors, explicit analogies are common in the lay language and are often based on a source domain that pertains to Nature. One example is when the concept of "dog" is associated with that of "sickness" (e.g. Eng. *sick as a dog* and Fr. *malade comme un chien*; Eng. *dog-tired*, a term which describes extreme fatigue) and "misery" (e.g. Fr. *être d'une humeur de chien* ['be in a bad mood'] and *avoir un caractère de chien*; Eng. *the black dog* to describe depression – the French opt for the cockroach ["avoir le cafard"] probably for its dark colour – and *a dog's life* or *dog days*). Most of our expressions with *dog* go back to times when dogs were used to watch and hunt, kept outside, fed scraps, beaten and had a short miserable life.

Pigs are associated with "sweat" in both languages (e.g. Eng. *sweat like a pig* and Fr. *suer comme un porc*<sup>1</sup>), although excessive sweating is also associated with the ox in French (e.g. *suer comme un boeuf*) and the bull in English (e.g. *sweat like a bull*). Likewise, in French and in English, the pig is also associated with "excess bleeding" (e.g. Eng. *bleed like a pig* and Fr. *saigner comme un porc*, as a reference to the slaughter of the animal) and "obesity" (e.g. Eng. *fat as a pig* and Fr. *gras comme un cochon*, referring to the fattening of pigs in agriculture). Yet, only in English, is the "pig" associated with "pregnancy": *be in pig\**.

To describe a high fever, the French say *avoir une fièvre de cheval* (lit. "have a horse fever"). The concept of "horse" is also used, in French, to describe a strong treatment (e.g. *un remède de cheval*). In both languages, the concept of "horse" is often associated with the idea of "strength" (e.g. Eng. *eat like a horse* and *strong as horse*). In English, *a charley horse*<sup>2</sup> is a sudden, painful tightening of a muscle in the arm or leg.

In French, impaired vision is associated with "moles" (*myope comme une taupe* lit. "short-sighted as a mole") and not with "bats" as in English (*blind as a bat*), although both animals

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<sup>1</sup> Pigs do not have sweat glands. The expression comes from the "pig iron" in iron smelting (source: <http://www.neatorama.com/2011/08/29/the-expression-sweating-like-a-pig-has-nothing-to-do-with-pigs/>).

<sup>2</sup> *Charley horse* seems to have been a name for a horse or a type of horse (probably a lame one) at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. (source: [www.etymonline.com](http://www.etymonline.com))

are known for their poor visual acuity. “Foul smelling” is linked to the “skunk” in both languages (e.g. Eng. *stink like a polecat* and Fr. *sentir comme un putois*), the skunk’s tail having two internal walnut-sized glands that produce a foul-smelling oily spray to deter a predator. To describe hoarseness, the English would say *have a frog in one’s throat* (from the “croaking” sound) when the French say *avoir un chat dans la gorge*<sup>3</sup> (lit. “have a cat in one’s throat”). The term *rabbit teeth* and its French equivalent *dents de lapin* describe buck teeth by analogy to the animal’s long incisors. Both in French and in English, a cleft-palate is a condition associated with “hares” in the lay language (e.g. *hare-lip* in English and *bec de lièvre* [lit. “hare beak”] in French) by analogy with the slanted shape of the hare’s muzzle.

In French, menses are related to “bears” (e.g. *avoir ses ours*), a metaphor that dates back to the end of the XIX<sup>th</sup> century and that might be due either to the bad temper menstruating women are supposed to be in or to an analogy between the words *jours* (‘days’) and *ours*, the vowel sound of which was pronounced in the same way<sup>4</sup>.

Some zoomorphic metaphors will depend on the geographical area. For instance, Australian English will do a good use of “kangaroos”: *have (kanga)roos in one’s (top) paddock* (‘be demented’) and *kangaroo care* (‘a form of close-up care given to premature babies’), a term that has crossed borders.

## **2. Culturally-entrenched metaphor: THE BODY IS A MACHINE**

There is a class of entrenched metaphors that are not only based on similarity and analogy but that are also deeply rooted in culture. One the most yielding conceptual metaphors of this type is THE BODY IS A MACHINE metaphor, which is cross-linguistic for it has been part of our Western scientific paradigm for more than four centuries.

In this era of nanomedicine, artificial heart and bionic arm, it does not come as a surprise that what prevails, in the language, is a mechanistic view of the human body, through the conventional metaphor THE BODY IS A MACHINE. This European conception dates back to the 17<sup>th</sup> century and René Descartes<sup>5</sup> with his treatise *De l’homme* in which he separates the matter (*res extensa*) from the thought (*res cogitans*) and gives a thorough description of the human body comparing it to an automaton. This seminal work opened the way to a whole new conception of man, which greatly inspired physicians like William Harvey and his circulation of the blood, and which still influences modern medicine.

In English, the lay terms used to refer to body parts are often image-to-image metaphors for pieces of equipment that pertain more to mechanics than to biology. Although many lay terms are the direct translation of Latin and Greek terms that were already metaphorical (e.g. Eng. *hammer* for ‘malleus’, *anvil* for ‘incus’, *stirrup* for ‘stapes’, *eardrum* for ‘tympanum’, or *blind gut* for ‘caecum’; Fr. *bassin* for ‘pelvis’; *ventre* for ‘abdomen’; etc.), some derive from new metaphors like *receptors* and *transmitters* that both pertain to the domain of communication or “bioinformation” (Sontag 1978).

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<sup>3</sup> According to Pierre Guiraud (*Les Locutions françaises, Que sais-je ?*, 1973), in the XI<sup>th</sup> century, the word *maton* designated curdled milk and was then used to refer to any lump. But it also meant “cat”. The idiom derives from a confusion between the two meanings.

<sup>4</sup> Source: [www.expressio.fr](http://www.expressio.fr).

<sup>5</sup> René Descartes (1596-1650) was a French philosopher, physicist and mathematician.

Many of our organs – and thence many of our systems – are tube-shaped and therefore, lay terms are made up with words like *tube* or *pipe*: e.g. in English, *windpipe* to designate the trachea; *food pipe* or *swallow pipe* for the throat; *bagpipes* to refer to the lungs; *the tubes* to refer to either the lungs or the uterine tubes; *birth canal* for the vagina; and in French, *le tube digestif* lit. “the digestive tube” to designate the digestive tract; and respectively in American English and in French, *plumbing* and *tuyauterie* to refer to the urinary system (Faure, 2015; 2017); and Eng. *bowels* and Fr. *boyaux* – both already metaphorical since they descend from the Latin *botulus* ‘sausage’, itself from the Proto-Indo-European root *\*gwet-/\*geut-* ‘intestine’ – to designate the intestines).

Many organs have a bag-like structure and hence, are, in the lay language, identified to all sorts of containers (e.g. in English, the lay term *voice box* for the larynx; the term *bellows* that designates the lungs and descends from the Proto-Germanic root *\*balgiz* ‘bag’<sup>6</sup>, which also gave the word *belly*, a synonym for *abdomen*; *air sac*, a synonym for *alveolus*; *bag\** and *ballbasket\**, which can be used to designate the scrotum; *can*, *brain-pan*, *nous-box* and *brainbox*, which all refer to the head; *pan* for the face; *box* for either the mouth, the uterus or, in slang, the vagina; *trunk*, *chest* and *barrel*, all of which can refer to the thorax; and *cage* as in *rib-cage*). The French lay language resorts to the same metaphor: e.g. *coffre* (‘trunk’), *caisse* (‘box’) and *baquet* (‘tub’) are used to refer to the thorax; *bidon* (‘can’), *bedaine* (‘vase’) and *buffet* (‘side-board’) designate the abdomen; *caisson* (‘box’) is used, in some contexts<sup>7</sup>, to refer to the head; and *poche* (‘pocket’) as in *la poche des eaux* to describe the amnion and the chorion and in *les poches sous les yeux* (lit. “pockets under the eyes”), a syntagm which refers to the excess of skin that sometimes appear under the eyes and which is also called *valises* (‘suit-cases’) (Faure 2015; 2017).

In both languages, the source domain of metaphors used to describe the cardiovascular system is mechanics: e.g. *pump* (Fr. *pompe*), *valves* (Fr. idem), *circuit* (Fr. idem), *discs* (Fr. *disques*) *supply system* (Fr. *système d’alimentation*), *conduction system* (Fr. *système de conduction*), *propel* (Fr. *propulser*), *eject* (Fr. *éjecter*) and *electric impulse* (Fr. *impulsion électrique*), a lot of which date back to the XVII<sup>th</sup> century with William Harvey’s theory of the circulation of the blood.

### 3. Metaphonymic blends

As mentioned above, metaphoric blends may contain figurative links that are not metaphoric. There is a frequent interaction between metaphor and metonymy – cognitivists even use the term *metaphonymic* – and metonymy plays a crucial part in the elaboration of metaphor. For instance, the relationship between *poitrine* (Eng. *chest*) and *seins* (Eng. *breasts*) in French, and *top part* and *breasts* in English, is not metaphorical but metonymic (THE WHOLE FOR THE PART).

In cognitive linguistics, metonymy is defined as inferential and comprises one domain from which both target and source are extracted. Therefore, metonymy is a mapping within one functional domain in which source and target are linked by a pragmatic function (Barcelona et al. 2011).

The human body and some of its natural functions are a major source of taboos. In the lay language, replacing a taboo word with a vaguer one, using a metonymic mapping, is a common way to make the former more socially acceptable (Tournier 2004). Among the body parts that

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<sup>6</sup> Source: etymonline.com.

<sup>7</sup> For example: *se faire sauter le caisson* ‘blow one’s head’.

are considered to be taboo, genitals figure prominently (e.g. in English, the terms *organ*, *thing\**, *private parts*, *privates*, *groin*, *loins*, *down below*, and *down there*). The French lay language has the same strategy to refer to the genitals: *le membre* (lit. “the limb”), *les parties intimes* ‘the private parts’ and *en bas* (‘below’).

Likewise, the anal and vaginal areas are difficult to refer to, and metonymy-based metaphoric mapping is a prime strategy to do so (e.g. in English, *back passage* for the anal area and *front passage* or *up inside* for the vaginal area; in French, *derrière* [‘behind’] for the anus and *devant* [‘front’] for the vagina). (Faure, 2017)

Among the bodily functions that are considered to be taboo, defecation is quite prominent in both languages, especially when it is associated with a sense of urgency whether it is diarrhoea or incontinence or both.

Diarrhoea is a main source of metaphors. When analysing our corpus, we observed that both in English and in French, lay terms are underlain by the same idea of urgency: e.g. *the runs*, *the trots*, *the scours* in English and *la courante* (lit. “the running”) in French. Faecal incontinence is referred to by way of terms like *mess oneself* in English, and *se souiller* in French, both languages sharing a strategy behind which we observe the same idea of filth. Urinary incontinence is not related to the concept of filth but rather that of a lack of control as well as the idea of moisture in both the English and French languages (e.g. *I can’t hold my water* and *wet oneself* in English, and *ne pas pouvoir se retenir* ‘be unable to hold oneself’, *faire sous soi* [lit. “do it under oneself”] and *être mouillé* ‘be wet’, in French).

In English, the expressions *do one’s business* and *do a job/jobbie* illustrate the metaphorical concept of vagueness in relationship with defecation. Defecation is also associated, in both languages, with the concept of need (e.g. *faire ses besoins* in French, and *do one’s duty* and *nature’s call* in English). Moreover, both languages share the same idea of relief (e.g. Eng. *relieve oneself* and *have a clear-out* and Fr. *se soulager*). Yet, English can be a lot more cryptic than French: e.g. *number two* refers to defecation as opposed to *number one*, which stands for urination.

Menstruation is also considered to be taboo and is a source of interesting metonymy-based metaphoric blends. In French, *mes affaires* [lit. “my businesses”], *mes histoires* [lit. “my stories”] and *mes trucs* [lit. “my things”] highlight a need for intimacy and privacy reinforced by the use of the personal pronoun *mes*. In English, *the thing*, *thingies*, and *the other* convey the idea of unspeakability and distance – even antagonization. In French, a girl may say *je suis indisposée* (lit. “I’m indisposed”) or *j’ai mal au ventre* (lit. “I have a stomach-ache”) when she is menstruating. When the menses have failed to occur at the expected time, we may say *je suis en retard* in French and *I’m late* or *I’m overdue* in English.

French and English both resort to terms that are underlain by the metaphorical concepts of “month” and “moon”: *monthlies* and *that time of the month* in English, and *ses lunes* (lit. “one’s moons”) or *ses mois* in French, as the word *menses* itself comes from the Proto-Indo-European *\*me(n)ses* (‘month, moon’). Both languages also share the same idea of regularity: *the usual* and *period* in English, and *avoir ses règles* (lit. “have one’s rules”) and *avoir ses périodes* in French. In French and in English, we can observe the verb *see* (Fr. (*se*) *voir*) to refer to menses (e.g. “I usually see 5 days”), a metaphoric blend based on visual perception that can lead to ambiguous situations such as that encountered by a patient when a (albeit French) doctor sent her to an ophthalmologist because she was telling him: *Je ne vois rien depuis plus d’un mois* (‘I have not seen anything for over a month’)<sup>8</sup>. (Faure, 2017)

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<sup>8</sup> This anecdote was reported by one of our medical colleagues.



Phrasal verbs are, in English, a common way to refer to taboo issues among which we find death (*pass away*, *blow out\** and *kick out\**), vomiting (*throw up\**, *be sick up*, *cough up* and *bring up*), passing gas (*blow off\** and *let off\**), diarrhoea (*bowel off\** and *fly off\**), miscarriage (*come away* as in *It came away*), abortion (*do away with* as in *I did away with it*), menstruating (*come around*), and skin lesions (*come out in* as in *I came out in*). We notice that death is often associated with the concept of OUT, vomiting with UP, and breaking gas and diarrhoea with OFF, all of which are orientational metaphors.

The use of the pronoun IT is also remarkable (e.g. *buy it\**, *cool it\**, *cop it\**, *eat it\**, *kick it\**, *quit it\** and *tail it\**) to refer to dying, evidencing how difficult an issue death is in our culture. The same pronoun can be found in relationship with venereal disease (e.g. *get it* [‘catch an STD’]) or dementia (e.g. *lose it* [‘lose one’s mind’]), that is to say whenever the concept appears too difficult to name.

#### 4. Anthroponym and toponym-based metaphor

Because some of our organs may sometimes seem to have a life of their own, the conventional metaphor OUR ORGANS ARE PEOPLE has marked the lay (and slang) language both in English and in French. For example, *fanny\** refers to the anus in American English and to the vagina in British English. To refer to his penis, a man may use the names *will\**, *willie\**, *dick\**, *Peter\** and *Percy\** (Green 2001: 333). Breasts might be referred to as *charleys\** in English, although the word is also used for ‘testicles’, and *roberts\**<sup>9</sup> in French.

In the American slang, the concept of “visit” is quite an interesting way to talk about taboo issues. For instance, *a visit from Uncle Hershal/Floyd\** designates haemorrhoids, *a visit from Nancy\** (an abbreviation: *Nancy* for ‘pregnancy’), *a visit from Uncle Ralph\** (or *call for ralph\**) is an onomatopoeia for vomiting, and *visit Uncle Grumpy\** relates to defecation. By extension, *Hershey squirt\** describes diarrhoea. Menstruation is a good opportunity for visit-construed metaphoric blends: *a visit from Aunt Flo\** (by analogy with *flow*); *Aunt Minnie is visiting\**; *Aunt Jodie has come with her suitcase\**; *grandma’s coming\**; *Kit has come\**; *my little friend has come\**; etc. (see Green 2001).

We found other examples of anthroponym-based metaphoric blends in the naming of diarrhoea (e.g. *Suryavarman’s revenge*<sup>10</sup> and *Montezuma’s revenge*<sup>11</sup>), although toponyms are more common (Lettau 1997): e.g. *Delhi belly*<sup>12</sup>, *Bombay belly*<sup>13</sup>, *Havana omelet*<sup>14</sup>, *Mexican foxtrot*, *Patagonian pasodoble*, *Cairo two-step*<sup>15</sup>, *Kathmandu quickstep*<sup>16</sup>, *Karachi crouch*<sup>17</sup> and *Kabulitis*. These names depend on the place where diarrhoea was supposedly caught, and we observe that many imply the concept of fast dancing movements (Faure 2012; 2015).

Beyond the individual, the lay language sometimes resort to metaphors that encompass all the people of a given nationality. Indeed, in French, menstruation can be referred to by way of the phrase *avoir ses Anglais* (lit. “have one’s English people”) and *les Anglais ont débarqué* (lit. “The English have landed”) seemingly a metonymic relationship with the red colour of the

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<sup>9</sup> From *Robert*, a famous brand for feeding bottles (source: <http://www.languefrancaise.net>).

<sup>10</sup> A king from the Khmer empire.

<sup>11</sup> The Aztec emperor.

<sup>12</sup> From Delhi in India.

<sup>13</sup> From Bombay in India.

<sup>14</sup> From Havana in Cuba.

<sup>15</sup> From Cairo in Egypt. Two-step derives from polka.

<sup>16</sup> From Katmandu in Nepal. Quick step derives from Foxtrot.

<sup>17</sup> From Karachi in Pakistan.

uniform English soldiers were wearing during the Napoleon wars. In English, the lay term for *a condom* is *a French letter* but in French, we say *une capote anglaise* ('an English hood'). Because, in England, syphilis was long associated with French soldiers, we find, in the English slang language, terms such as *frenchified\** ('infected with a venereal disease') or *take French lessons\** ('catch a venereal disease').

### **5. Shortening-based metaphor: LESS OF FORM IS LESS OF CONTENT**

Sometimes, the language has to become even more cryptic by resorting to shortening, a strategy we identified as being linked to the LESS OF FORM IS LESS OF CONTENT metaphor (Lakoff and Johnson 2003). The two main devices we met in our corpus were back clipping (*miss* for *miscarriage* in English, and *blenno* for *blennorragie* in French) and initialization (*VD* for *venereal disease* in English, and *IVG* for *interruption volontaire de grossesse* ['abortion' in French]). We even found the use of the first letter such as in *the big M* for *menopause*, *the big C* for *cancer* and *the big X* for *menses* in the English language, and *p* for *pisser\**, in the French language.

Another illustration is the contraceptive pill, a term that is clipped (ellipsis of the word *contraceptive*) and thematised with the definite article in both languages: *the pill* in English and *la pilule* in French. Total hysterectomy seems to be another difficult issue in both languages. Indeed, in English, we say *total hys* and in French *la totale*.

Most back clippings concern either concepts that are considered to be familiar (e.g. in English, *doc* for *doctor* and in French, *hosto* for 'hôpital') or taboo (e.g. in English, *syph* for *syphilis* and in French, *gastro* for *gastroentérite*). In French, words that refer to specialists have almost always a shortened version ending with /o/: *gynéco* for *gynécologue*, *ophtalmo* for *ophtalmologiste* or *rhumato* for *rhumatologue*. The only example of initialisation we found in our corpus to refer to a specialist was *ORL* for *otorhinolaryngologiste* although in French, we also use *otorhino*. In English, apart from *OB-GYN* for *obstetrician and gynaecologist*, *ENT* for *oto-rhino-laryngologist* and *onc* for *oncologist*, most lay terms that are used to refer to specialists are compound words that are borrowed from the vernacular language: *eye doctor* for *ophthalmologist*, *spine specialist* for *orthopaedist*, *heart specialist* for *cardiologist*, etc. (Faure 2015)

Initialisation is not as common in the lay language as it is in the technical language, and most initialisms and acronyms found in the lay language are borrowed from the latter (e.g. Eng. *AIDS* and Fr. *SIDA*). Yet, we found a few interesting examples such as *b.m.* for *bowel moment* 'defecation', *b.d.t.\** for *back door trot\** ('diarrhoea'), *D&C* for *dilatation and curettage* ('abortion'), *I.R.S.\** for *itchy ring syndrome\** ('haemorrhoids'), and *STs* for *sanitary towels*. In American English, the abbreviation *AF\** (*Aunt Flo*) itself from the metaphor *a visit from Aunt Flo\** (see above) refers to menses.

Many back clippings we found in our corpus were related to venereal diseases (e.g. *herp* for *herpes*, *chlam* for *chlamydia* and *hep* for *hepatitis*). Some were even thematised by way of the definite article: *the c(h)lam* and *the clap* ('gonorrhoea'), a word that descends from the French *clapoire* ('a rabbit hutch' and, by extension, 'a brothel') (Faure 2012; 2017).

The examples above allow us to claim that English and French share the same mechanistic view of the human body through the metaphor THE BODY IS MACHINE. Although they might not be exactly the same, in both languages, animals are quite present in lay terms especially when it comes to describing organs, and so are vegetables and fruit. In both languages, diseases like venereal diseases, diarrhoea and, to a lesser extent, cancer, and natural bodily functions related

to the genitourinary system (urination and menstruation) and to the digestive system (defecation and vomiting) induce embarrassment and shame.

### **Conclusion – From war to medical ecology, towards a shift in the paradigm of medicine?**

Be it English or French, the lay language referring to the human body and illnesses is marked by a mechanistic vision, a sense of shame towards particular diseases and bodily functions, and an identification of medicine with war through the conventional metaphor MEDICINE IS WAR, all of which reflects a certain form of reality that goes well beyond the scope of healthcare.

In a recent article that was published in *Nature*, Colin Macilwain was warning against the negative impact of the war metaphor on the health of cancer patients and the danger it might represent when applied to other diseases. Indeed, this metaphor that serves the interests of the pharmaceutical industry by promoting expensive and aggressive drug treatments prevents the focus from being put on the search for environmental causes and therefore on prevention.

But [the 'war on cancer' metaphor] is still in widespread use. And despite its weak track record, the war is a model that politicians are now in danger of adopting for another great health-care challenge for rich countries: neurodegenerative disease. [...] The wolves are already circling around neurodegenerative disease. The usual suspects — drug companies, equipment makers, university departments — all want a seat at the table. Policy-makers should be wary of them. The priority instead must be to improve quality of life. (Macilwain 2015)

In *Metaphors we live by* (2003) [1980], Lakoff and Johnson claimed that “[n]ew metaphors, like conventional metaphors, can have the power to define reality” (: 157). And, as early as 1985, Paul Hodgkin was writing:

If we are to humanise medicine and create institutions that encourage the full participation of patients, while offering them the best of traditional medicine, we need to incorporate new images into our thinking. Essential to this process would be new metaphors around which we can reconstrue both our present and our emerging knowledge. (Hodgkin 1985: 1821)

The recent awareness of the role played by the intestinal microbiota in the regulation of the expression of certain genes and thereby in the onset of diseases like cancer or obesity, together with the genomic revolution and the resurgence of the metabolic theory of cancer<sup>18</sup> (Chandel 2015) suggest that medical ecology, that is to say the interactions between man and his environment, and their repercussions in terms of health (Bissell & Hines 2011), will be at the heart of tomorrow’s medicine. This novel approach does not consider the human body to be a battlefield anymore but rather an ecosystem whose good health depends on a balance between all its endogenous and exogenous components. Everyone’s ecosystem is unique, which should impel medicine to be individualized and more patient-centered.

Do we notice, in the language used in 2015, early signs of the novel metaphor THE BODY IS AN ECOSYSTEM? In the technical language, we do. Indeed, we now talk about *biocompatibility*, *bioartificial organs* and *actient* (from *patient* and *actor*) (Jarlaud *et al.* 2014). To describe the bacteria that are being *harboured* in our human *host* system, thus making up our *microbiome*, we now use the term *ecological community* – an infection being the *disruption* of ecological *balance*. Treatments now consist of *probiotics* and more surgical procedures aimed at being *conservative*. This novel terminology does suggest that in tomorrow’s medicine, the patient will become more involved in the healing process and that our own nature will serve as a base for new treatments and procedures. There remains to be hoped that this humanised approach will translate into the lay language. It will then mean that it has become the standard.

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<sup>18</sup> This theory was first introduced by the Nobel laureate Otto Warburg in 1924.

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