

Vargas-Sierra, Chelo (2024): Framing menopause from negative emotional language: A study of metaphors in medical discourse. *Cultura, Lenguaje y Representación*, Vol. xxxiv, 15-36  
ISSN 1697-7750 · E-ISSN 2340-4981  
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.6035/clr.7890>



## **Framing menopause from negative emotional language: A study of metaphors in medical discourse**

Marcos de la menopausia desde el lenguaje emocional negativo:  
Estudio de las metáforas en el discurso médico

CHELO VARGAS-SIERRA  
UNIVERSIDAD DE ALICANTE, IULMA<sup>1</sup>  
<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4026-4372>

Artículo recibido el / *Article received*: 2024-01-15

Artículo aceptado el / *Article accepted*: 2024-04-07

**ABSTRACT:** This study adopts a corpus-based approach to the analysis of how the discourse of menopause is framed metaphorically, with a specific focus on negative emotional language. Using Wmatrix for the corpus analysis, the study takes as a starting point semantic tags for the most frequent emotions. Metaphorical expressions related to different aspects of menopause are extracted from the corpus and analyzed, in terms of biological processes and associated emotional and mental states. The aim is to reveal the most prominent metaphorical frames that emerge in such discourse, assessing their influence in shaping the conceptualization of menopause and underscoring their effect on societal perceptions of this stage in women's life. Key findings highlight four dominant framings: menopause as EMOTIONAL TURBULENCE, as DISRUPTIVE CHANGE, as HORMONAL CONFLICT, and as a CHALLENGE TO SOCIETAL AND PERSONAL IDENTITY. The study concludes that dominant metaphorical framings of menopause reinforce stereotypes about women by presenting this stage of life as marked by emotional turmoil, loss of identity and symptoms of various kinds, thus shaping social perceptions that oversimplify and negatively color this important life transition.

<sup>1</sup> This publication forms part of the research project «Digitisation, processing and online publication of open, multilingual and gender-sensitive terminology resources in the digital society (DIGITENDER)» (TED2021-130040B-C21), funded by Ministerio de Ciencia e Innovación, Agencia Estatal de Investigación (10.13039/501100011033) and by the European Union «NextGenerationEU»/Plan de Recuperación, Transformación y Resiliencia.

**Key words:** corpus-based analysis; semantic tags; emotions; conceptual metaphor; metaphorical framing; menopause.

**RESUMEN:** Este estudio emplea un enfoque basado en corpus para analizar los marcos metafóricos de la menopausia en el discurso, específicamente a través del lenguaje emocional negativo. Utilizamos Wmatrix para el análisis de corpus, centrándonos inicialmente en las etiquetas semánticas de las emociones más frecuentes. A partir de estas, hemos extraído y examinado las expresiones metafóricas relacionadas con diversos aspectos de la menopausia, incluidos sus procesos biológicos y los estados emocionales y mentales que se le asociaban. El objetivo es descubrir los marcos metafóricos predominantes, evaluando cómo influyen en la conceptualización de la menopausia y su impacto en la percepción social. Los resultados destacan cuatro marcos principales: la menopausia como TURBULENCIA EMOCIONAL, CAMBIO DISRUPTIVO, CONFLICTO HORMONAL y DESAFÍO PARA LA IDENTIDAD SOCIAL Y PERSONAL. El estudio concluye que estos marcos metafóricos dominantes contribuyen a reforzar estereotipos negativos sobre las mujeres al caracterizar esta etapa de la vida por la confusión emocional, la pérdida de identidad y una amplia gama de síntomas. Esto resulta en una simplificación excesiva y una representación negativa de esta transición vital.

**Palabras clave:** análisis de corpus; etiquetas semánticas; emociones; metáfora conceptual; marcos metafóricos; menopausia.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

A woman's life journey is marked by key biological milestones, including the onset of menstruation, the beginning of reproductive capacity, pregnancy, childbirth, and the transition through menopause, each with its own positive and negative connotations. In Western cultures, menopause is often seen as a sign of aging and the end of fertility, a perspective not universally shared across societies around the globe (Niland, 2010: 6). Currently, a common biomedical perspective on menopause is that it constitutes disease-like condition arising from estrogen deficiency (Martin, 1994, 1997; Lyons and Griffin, 2003: 1630). Such a DISEASE concept of menopause began to take shape in 1870, when the Irish physician Edward J. Tilt published *The Change of Life in Health and Disease: A Practical Treatise on the Nervous and other Affections Incidental to Women at the Decline of Life*. Tilt refers to menopause as a stage in a woman's life that brings with it a multiplicity of symptoms and afflictions and presents a bleak and pessimistic view of the issue, indeed asserting that his book will reveal «the evil effects of this time of life» (Tilt, 1870: 212<sup>2</sup>). His work goes on to detail various physical and mental problems which are claimed to occur in women due to menopause. Such a negative medicalized view of menopause was reiterated by many other medical professionals over the years (see Greer, 1993; Vélez and Figueredo, 2016). Framing menopause as a DISEASE illustrates how medical ideology shapes our conceptualization of this natural phenomenon and ultimately impacts the lives of women.

---

<sup>2</sup> The page number corresponds to the Kindle version of the book.

Metaphors work both conceptually and cognitively by creating new meanings and helping us to understand the world. This process involves comparing and projecting knowledge onto mental mappings, akin to creating a mental diagram that links abstract concepts with more familiar experiences for easier understanding. This essential function of metaphor is itself described metaphorically as ‘framing’ by Semino et al. (2018), who highlight its ability to shape our perception and interpretation of specific aspects of our lives. According to Entman, in order to create a frame, we need to «select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation for the item described» (1993: 53). Framing explains the mechanisms by which language and selected images in the construction of a specific kind of discourse promote a particular interpretation of the presented events (Entman, 1993; Bogetić, 2018; Porto, 2023). These frames go beyond mere reasoning and have the power to influence or shape our understanding, realities, and beliefs. This is so because metaphor involves a «highlighting and hiding» facet (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980), selectively emphasizing certain aspects while downplaying others, and thus contributing significantly to the ideological relevance of metaphors. Research by Thibodeau (2016) and Jiménez et al. (2021) underlines the profound impact of metaphorical framing on perceptions in the field of public policy. Thibodeau showed that framing crime as a VIRUS rather than a BEAST influenced a shift to the favoring of social reforms over punitive measures, whereas Jiménez et al. found that depicting immigration as a FLOOD, as in «a wave of refugees», could lead to increased support for barriers on the US-Mexico border. Both studies illustrate how language shapes not only our understanding of societal issues but also our responses to them.

Menopause can be defined by highlighting its positive and/or its negative aspects. Any description will be influenced by particular points of view or ideologies, in that variation in any description is likely to reflect the individual or collective perspectives that come into play. On the positive side, for example, we can find examples where menopause is framed as a SECOND PUBERTY, suggesting a parallel with the hormonal fluctuations of adolescence and implying, among many things, that it can bring about positive changes and mark the beginning of a new chapter in life. In addition, the metaphorical frame of the HORMONAL DANCE emphasizes the dynamic and rhythmic nature of hormonal changes, depicting the ups and downs as graceful movement, thus evoking a sense of vitality and happiness. On the negative side, menopause is sometimes referred to as PLANNED OBSOLESCENCE –carrying with it the metaphor A WOMAN IS A PRODUCT WITH BUILT-IN OBSOLESCENCE– associated with the loss of ovarian function; it suggests that, just as manufactured products reach a point at which they are no longer useful or effective, women lose value or relevance after this stage.

In addition, describing hormonal changes as HORMONAL CHAOS implies a perception of disorder and confusion, emphasizing instability and unpredictability during menopause. As these examples illustrate, and as other studies on menopause have shown (Martin, 1993, 1994; Niland, 2010; Vargas-Sierra, 2024), negative frames may contribute to a view that this stage is a period of decline or even an illness, potentially overshadowing some of its positive aspects, such as the end of menstrual discomfort and freedom from reproductive concerns.

In the analysis of metaphor, the use of corpora and digital tools has marked a significant and well-documented methodological shift (Charteris-Black, 2004; Deignan,

2005; Koller et al 2008; Stefanowitsch, 2008; Deignan and Semino 2010; Sardinha, 2012; Vargas-Sierra and Moreno-Sandoval, 2021; Zeng and Ahrens, 2023, among many others). This not only enhances our ability to analyze linguistic patterns more effectively through the adoption of an empirical approach, but also expands the potential scope of research, as shown by Ho and Cheng (2016) in their work on analyzing a corpus for frequent words in a specific semantic category: emotion. Within this evolving framework, the study of emotions, particularly in relation to metaphor, has become increasingly significant. Thus, Kövecses notes that «the most conspicuous feature of emotion language in English is its metaphorical and metonymic nature» (2003: 191). Indeed, our present corpus analysis has revealed a predominance of negative emotions, and as such provides a compelling point of departure for an exploration of the predominant metaphorical frames in discourse on menopause, one in which we seek to highlight the intricate relationship between emotional language and metaphorical conceptualization.

In what follows, we first outline the theoretical assumptions underpinning the study, focusing in particular on Conceptual Metaphor Theory and associated concepts with particular relevance to our research, along with Critical Metaphor Analysis. We then describe the corpus and methodological framework adopted, before presenting the findings of our analysis and offering some conclusions.

## 2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: CONCEPTUAL METAPHOR THEORY AND FRAMING

Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT), pioneered by Lakoff and Johnson (1980), has been a dominant approach to metaphor research since its inception. A conceptual metaphor (CM) is a cognitive mechanism in which a source domain (the domain from which the metaphor is derived) is conceptually represented in a target domain (the domain being described metaphorically). During this process, knowledge from a familiar conceptual domain (such as WAR, HEALTH, JOURNEY or MACHINE) is used to structure and understand another domain that is more abstract or distant (Barcelona, 2003; Kövecses, 2010). This ‘conceptual mapping’ manifests itself in language as metaphorical expressions, taking the form of *A is B*. For example, in the metaphor MENOPAUSE IS A DISEASE, expressions that are often mapped are those relating to the concepts of ‘symptoms’, ‘treatment’, ‘discomfort’ and ‘diagnosis’. Here, the target domain MENOPAUSE uses the source domain DISEASE to emphasize the concept of ‘pathology’ or ‘medical condition’. The mapping principle for the MENOPAUSE IS A DISEASE metaphor is that menopause is understood as a disease in that, just as diseases involve symptoms and require treatment and medical management, menopause is often perceived as a phase requiring medical intervention and characterized by a variety of physical and emotional symptoms.

In this way Lakoff’s frames (2000: 24) serve as indicators that guide us in understanding events or situations. As such, frames not only offer a perspective on a specific issue but also actively influence our alignment to it, thereby shaping our understanding and judgment. Lakoff (2006) goes on to argue that «every word evokes a frame» and that «frames trigger meaning», which underlines the significance of framing in both general comprehension and the specific context of linguistic interpretation. Within the context of menopause discourse, the framing function of CMT becomes particularly relevant, since it helps us to understand how metaphors shape perceptions and representations about this life stage. It is also pertinent to critically assess these

metaphorical frames, in the sense that they can influence societal attitudes towards menopause, sometimes reinforcing stereotypes or oversimplifying complex experiences.

Critical Metaphor Analysis (CMA), as proposed by Charteris-Black (2004: 34), draws on cognitive linguistics to establish a relationship between linguistic expressions and the cognitive system; it uses pragmatics as a means of understanding how metaphors function within specific contexts; and it uses the empirical methods of corpus linguistics, based its analysis on real linguistic data, for the detection of patterns in language. CMA focuses on the correspondence between linguistic expressions and ideology to reveal the evaluative and cultural implications of metaphors and how they can influence the perception of reality.

Metaphors, as a linguistic resource, are fundamental in the formation and transmission of ideologies, which in turn are manifested and reinforced through language and thought in specific social contexts, such as the biomedical one. As such, metaphor has ideological dimensions at the conceptual, cognitive and pragmatic levels (Maalej, 2011: 97). Conceptually, it represents a source domain in a target domain, stabilizing meaning within discourse. Cognitively, it can both highlight and conceal aspects of meaning and understanding (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980), affecting their ideological relevance, and can be classified as either conventional or creative (Charteris-Black, 2004: 21-22). Conventional metaphors, rooted in our culture, go unnoticed (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980: 140; Kövecses, 2010: 33) and establish social and ideological realities, whereas creative ones tend to be somewhat more prominent or noticeable in the discourse. Pragmatically, metaphors have an impact on listeners or readers, depending on the connection between source and target concepts and the context in which they are used.

From a critical linguistic perspective, ideology involves the interaction between language, thought and social context (Simpson, 2005: 5). It is based on beliefs and values shared by social groups, with dominant ideologies typically arising from powerful or otherwise influential groups. Ideological discourse often uses conventional metaphors to transmit ideologies and construct social realities. According to Simpson (*ibid*), ideology emerges from group beliefs and values and is linked to society through language and thought. Dominant ideologies, influenced by political and social institutions, including medicine, have linguistic, cognitive and social dimensions. Metaphor is crucial in the construction and shaping of medical discourse, exerting control over the debate and establishing power relations therein (Segal, 1997: 220). A critical analysis of metaphors in medical discourse, then, is essential in understanding their valuational and cultural implications and their impact on perception and decision-making in the context of health.

To gain deeper insights into the role of metaphors in constructing the social reality of our subject field, a brief examination of the imagery associated with women during menopause is necessary. Images in picture banks, for example, tend to depict women at this life stage in a state of suffering, characterized by symptoms such as headaches, anxiety, sweating and fanning themselves, or taking medication. Such portrayals, along with metaphors like MENOPAUSE IS A DISEASE, MENOPAUSE IS SUFFERING and MENOPAUSE IS PHYSICAL AFFLICTION, align with the ideological narratives prevalent in biomedical discourse and in popular media. Such metaphors, often chosen for commercial purposes, as noted by Segal (1997: 221), contribute to the promotion of treatments like hormone replacement therapy (HRT), metaphorically framed as an ELIXIR OF YOUTH (Vargas-Sierra, 2024: 196). This framing can also be seen in the use of contrasting images on medical websites, for example, by depicting a woman's face in two

halves: one appearing younger (due to HRT) and the other showing the natural aging process<sup>3</sup>. Such representations, portraying menopause as a decline in physical and mental health, reflect societal biases against the aging process in women. Consequently, women experiencing menopause often face negative sociocultural attitudes and feel pressure to conform to unrealistic standards of youth and beauty.

3. CORPUS AND METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

The use of corpora in metaphor research is a fairly recent method, dating back to around 1999 (Sardinha, 2011: 330), and having gained popularity among scholars, not least those who have used corpus techniques to examine and validate hypotheses in conceptual metaphor theory. The analysis of corpora in metaphor research has a great many benefits, and as Tissari (2017: 117) notes, a corpus is now considered essential here, much like it is in a wide range of other linguistic fields. The present study used a specific approach for characterizing the corpus, following the principles initially proposed by Vargas-Sierra (2006).

The DIGITENDER project has involved the compilation of several corpora of specialized texts, including medical literature and webpages, which deal with a number of topics relating to women’s health (see Vargas-Sierra, 2024). The corpus on menopause comprises a range of biomedical texts, including research articles, monograph chapters and specialized web pages in English, which were carefully selected to provide a comprehensive view of menopause discourse. The selection criteria include relevance to the topic of menopause, the credibility of sources, and diversity of content. The table below presents a details breakdown of the corpus data:

Table 1. Quantitative overview of corpus content

<i>Items</i>	<i>Numbers</i>
Tokens	3,369,618
Words	2,675,672
Sentences	148,114
Paragraphs	40,183
Documents	624


This study employs a hybrid approach, integrating quantitative semi-automated corpus methods with detailed manual qualitative analysis, to explore the dominant metaphorical framings of menopause. We analyze a corpus of some 2,675,672 million words (Table 1), encompassing a diverse range of biomedical texts with varying degrees of specialization. One challenge in metaphor research arises due to the current limitations in fully automating the identification of metaphorical expressions in texts, and in this case we used Wmatrix5 for this purpose. Developed by Paul Rayson’s team at UCREL, University of Lancaster, and available online, Wmatrix shares common features with other corpus tools, such as generating concordances, collocations, keyword lists, and frequency lists. A notable aspect of Wmatrix is its integration of the UCREL Semantic Annotation System (USAS) (Archer *et al.*, 2002), which enables the automatic semantic

<sup>3</sup> <https://newlifemedcenters.com/hormone-therapy-for-women/>

tagging of words, compound words, and multiword expressions in a corpus. In the present study, we used Wmatrix5's semantic tagging function to examine the use of metaphor (Demmen *et al.*, 2015). From 21 USAS semantic domains, we focused on the Emotion (E) semantic tag (E-semtag) (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Complete list for Emotion

Save



i

Search term: '^E'.

Sorted on USAS tag.

You are viewing a frequency profile.

Click on a column heading to sort on that column.

Click on a 'Concordance' link to see concordance lines.

Click on a 'list' link to see the frequency list of words within that tag.

Search shortcuts:

Show complete list

Search this list:

Enter the word or tag you wish to search for here:

(you can also search for part of a word or tag; enter '.' or leave blank for complete list)

Remember your last search:

To remember the search currently shown on the right, give it a name in the box below and press Go.

The search will be saved in the advanced folder view:

You can use regular expressions in the search box.

Help on regular expressions is available at many websites, e.g. [regular-expression.info](#).

Please note that each new search looks through the entire list. Searches do not apply to the results of your previous search.

Sentag	Frequency	Relative Frequency	
E1	3944	0.23	<a href="#">Concordance</a> <a href="#">List</a>
E2	99	0.01	<a href="#">Concordance</a> <a href="#">List</a>
E2+	632	0.04	<a href="#">Concordance</a> <a href="#">List</a>
E2++	589	0.03	<a href="#">Concordance</a> <a href="#">List</a>
E2+++	9	0.00	<a href="#">Concordance</a> <a href="#">List</a>
E2-	80	0.00	<a href="#">Concordance</a> <a href="#">List</a>
E3+	893	0.05	<a href="#">Concordance</a> <a href="#">List</a>
E3++	5	0.00	<a href="#">Concordance</a> <a href="#">List</a>
E3-	1838	0.11	<a href="#">Concordance</a> <a href="#">List</a>
E4.1+	869	0.05	<a href="#">Concordance</a> <a href="#">List</a>
E4.1++	7	0.00	<a href="#">Concordance</a> <a href="#">List</a>
E4.1+++	3	0.00	<a href="#">Concordance</a> <a href="#">List</a>
E4.1-	6657	0.38	<a href="#">Concordance</a> <a href="#">List</a>
E4.1--	3	0.00	<a href="#">Concordance</a> <a href="#">List</a>
E4.2+	284	0.02	<a href="#">Concordance</a> <a href="#">List</a>
E4.2-	86	0.00	<a href="#">Concordance</a> <a href="#">List</a>
E5+	21	0.00	<a href="#">Concordance</a> <a href="#">List</a>
E5-	466	0.03	<a href="#">Concordance</a> <a href="#">List</a>
E6+	298	0.02	<a href="#">Concordance</a> <a href="#">List</a>
E6-	3772	0.22	<a href="#">Concordance</a> <a href="#">List</a>

Summary information:

Number of types shown: 20

Total frequency of types shown: 20555 (1.18%)

Total frequency overall: 1747724

Number of items shown with a given frequency:

Frequency	Types	Tokens
1	(0.00%)	(0.00%)
2	(0.00%)	(0.00%)
3	2 (10.00%)	6 (0.03%)
4	(0.00%)	(0.00%)
5	1 (5.00%)	5 (0.02%)
6	(0.00%)	(0.00%)
7	1 (5.00%)	7 (0.03%)
8	(0.00%)	(0.00%)
9	1 (5.00%)	9 (0.04%)
10	(0.00%)	(0.00%)
> 10	15 (75.00%)	20528 (99.87%)

We examined the specific words that each E-semtag contained and then considered the concordances of these to identify examples of metaphorical segments. It was often not the seed word itself that was used metaphorically, but rather the surrounding words and phrases. The use of USAS semantic tagging for finding metaphors provided valuable insights, in that it allowed us to quickly elicit emotions, but it is also important to note the challenges inherent in this approach, especially given the huge volume of data involved. The size of our corpus meant that exhaustive metaphor extraction was a considerable task, and this was reflected in the high frequency of certain emotional tags in the corpus. For example, the tag E4.1- (Sadness) had 6,657 occurrences (Figure 2). Consequently, our analysis does not cover every instance of the use of metaphor related to these emotions, but only those that represent a repeated pattern. This limitation highlights the difficulties of balancing the depth of qualitative analysis with the breadth of data available in a large corpus. Moreover, it underscores the need to conduct a selective examination of metaphorical expressions, especially in the context of very specific pathologized topics like menopause.

**Figure 2. Occurrences for E4.1- (Sadness)**

6657 occurrences.		Extend context
of disturbances, ranging in intensity from mild feelings of	sadness	and downheartedness to severe depression . xviii However, re 1 More   Full
from mild feelings of sadness and downheartedness to severe	depression	. xviii However, research has shown that not all women who s 2 More   Full
ch were all healthy mid-aged women who were not , or had not	suffered	from any major depressive episodes attributed to their menopa 3 More   Full
aged women who were not , or had not suffered from any major	depressive	episodes attributed to their menopausal transition . While St 4 More   Full
s , cold sweats , vertigo ( dizzy spells ) , feeling blue or	depressed	, headaches , insomnia ( trouble sleeping ) , palpitations ( 5 More   Full
arrhoea and/or constipation , persistent cough , backaches ,	upset	stomach , aches/stiffness in joints , shortness of breath , s 6 More   Full
o reported irritability , and one fifth reported feelings of	depression	. Using principal component factor analysis , the largest var 7 More   Full
Muhlen , et al . termed psychological symptoms ( irritability ,	depressed	, weepy , unable to sleep well ) . While vasomotor symptoms a 8 More   Full
ing ( 11.9% ) was accounted for by nervous tension , feeling sad	or downhearted , difficulty in concentration , lack of energy	9 More   Full
3.9% ) was accounted for by nervous tension , feeling sad or	downhearted	, difficulty in concentration , lack of energy and trouble sl 10 More   Full
tiredness , irritability , tearfulness , nervous tension and	depression	. 2.2 Symptom Definitions Used in this Study : While von Muhl 11 More   Full
of symptoms covered by sleep disturbance , irritability , 21	depression	and tearfulness , other researchers ( Shaver , et al. , 1991 12 More   Full
1993 ) grouped the menopausal symptoms of nervous tension ,	sadness	or downheartedness , difficulty in concentration , lack of en 13 More   Full
even suggested that the best predictor of both well-being and	depression	in mid-aged women is tiredness ( Cawood , & Bancroft , 1996 14 More   Full
visits , symptoms such as tiredness , exhaustion , fatigue ,	depression	, anxiety , nervousness , muscular aches and pains and dizzin 15 More   Full
ub-scale Profile of Mood Scale ( POMS ) scores for fatigue ,	depression	, tension and confusion . However , there were no significant 16 More   Full
Check List ( MAACL ) . The MAACL provided for self-rating of	depression	, anxiety , hostility , positive affect and sensation seeking 17 More   Full
positive affect ( and sensation seeking ) , hostility , and	depression	as the dependent variables of the construct well-being . They 18 More   Full

For the identification of metaphorical expressions, we used the Metaphor Identification Procedure (MIP), developed by the Pragglejaz Group (2007) and further refined by Steen *et al.* (2010). In the next phase of the analysis, the metaphorical expressions identified in the concordance were incorporated into a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet, where an additional manual analysis was carried out to determine the source and target domain, plus the mappings and metaphorical frames that each expression suggested. To assign source and target domains we used MetaNet Metaphor Wiki, a comprehensive repository of conceptual metaphors (Dodge et al. 2013) in which these two domains are conceptualized as frames, essentially schematic representations that encompass a variety of experiences, objects, and events. The procedure involved examining each metaphorical phrase to identify applicable domains and to categorize them using the predefined classifications available from this repository<sup>4</sup>. The unique nature of our target domain, menopause, demanded a tailored approach to labelling, so we created new tags that could comprehensively capture the various aspects of menopause that arose. Selected examples from these segments will be used to describe our findings in the subsequent analysis.

Charteris-Black (2004: 34-41) outlines a three-step process for conducting CMA analysis: first, identification, which entails deciding if specific words or phrases are used metaphorically; second, interpretation, which includes both establishing a connection between metaphors and their cognitive and pragmatic features, and identifying conceptual metaphors and keys; and third, explanation, which involves determining the social agents responsible for producing the metaphors and understanding their role and function in the discourse. Our analysis follows Charteris-Black's three-step model of metaphor examination.

In the following section, we will present the quantitative data obtained from the corpus, focusing specifically on the semantic tags of emotions and citing a selection of words from each emotional category. This corpus data will then be used to conduct a qualitative analysis of the metaphors identified. Our focus here will be on the most dominant metaphorical frames, detailing their source (SD) and target domains (TD) and exploring their meaning in the discourse. Due to space constraints, our presentation will be limited to the most illustrative examples of each frame. In addition, we will interpret the domains and metaphorical framings and how they shape our perception and interpretation of menopause.

<sup>4</sup> Available at: <https://metaphor.icsi.berkeley.edu/pub/en/index.php/Category:Frame>



## 4. ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

### 4.1. E-TAGS

Table 2 below sets out the relevant alphanumeric tags (with one or more ‘pluses’ or ‘minuses’ to indicate a positive or negative position on a semantic scale) and the frequencies of these, thus providing a general overview of the emotional categories extracted from the menopause corpus:

**Table 2. Emotional tags of menopause corpus**

<i>E semantic tag</i>		<i>Frequency</i>
E4.1-	Sad	6,657
E1	General Emotional Actions, States, and Processes	3,944
E6-	Worry	3,772
E3-	Violent/Angry	1,838
E3+	Calm	893
E4.1+	Happy	869
E2+	Like	632
E2++	Like	589
E5-	Fear/Shock	466
E6+	Confident	298
E4.2+	Contentment	284
E2	Liking	99
E4.2-	Discontent	86
E2-	Dislike	80
E5+	Bravery	21
E2+++	Like	9
E4.1++	Happy	7
E3++	Calm	5
E4.1+++	Happy	3
E4.1--	Sad	3

A quantitative analysis of the emotion words in the corpus indicates a significant disparity in their prevalence. Words tagged as positive emotions (*Happy*, *Like*, *Confident*, *Contentment*, *Bravery*, *Calm*) account for only 21.86% of the total, with 3,610 occurrences. By contrast, negative words dominate, with 78.14% (12,902 occurrences). Such a disparity indicates that the discourse within the corpus is heavily framed by negative emotional language, suggesting that experiences and states related to menopause

are often conceptualized negatively. Table 3 below sets out the negative emotional tags that will be the focus of our study:

**Table 3. Negative emotional semantic tag by frequency**

<i>Emotion semtag</i>	<i>Total Frequency</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Sad (E4.1-)	6,657	51%
Worry (E6-)	3,772	29%
Violent/Angry (E3-)	1,838	14%
Fear/Shock (E5-)	466	4%
Discontent (E4.2-)	86	1%
Dislike (E2-)	80	1%
Sad (E4.1--)	3	0%

As can be seen here, the most frequent Emotion tag is *Sad*, with more than half the cases (51%), with *Worry* the second most frequent (29%). *Violent/Angry* emotions also have a notable presence (14%), followed by *Fear/Shock* (4%) and *Discontent* (1%), indicating that although these latter emotional frames are less frequent, they are still present. *Dislike* (E2-) also has 1%, indicating a lower presence of more overtly negative language. Indeed, a particularly intense form of sadness, tagged as *Sad* (E4.1--), appears to be infrequent, with only 3 occurrences, which could indicate that while sadness is frequently mentioned, extremely high degrees of this emotion are not usually expressed or are not the focus of attention in the texts contained in our corpus. These frequencies suggest that menopause is depicted largely through a lens of negative emotions, with a significant emphasis on sadness and worry. The presence of anger and fear, although less frequent, adds to the complexity of the emotional experiences conveyed.

Next, a selection of our seed words<sup>5</sup> as automatically classified under specific emotional tags by Wmatrix5 is presented, together with the frequency of their occurrence in the corpus:

- Sad\_E4.1-, e.g. depression (3,644), depressive (1,731), depressed (427), suffer (173), suffering (119), suffered (58), sad (53), sadness (45), trauma (42), miserable (32).
- Worry\_E6-, e.g. anxiety (1,317), stress (675), concerns (264), distress (214), concern (150), trouble (146), tension (102), stressful (94), anxious (69), care (64), distressing (54), worry (53), bother (50), concerned (49), nervous (46), disturbed (42), bothered (40), worried (37), nervousness (35), caring (28), concerning (16), stress-related (15), worrying (12), disturbing (11), unbalanced (11).
- Violent\_Angry\_E3-, e.g. disturbances (346), disturbance (320), irritability (229), bothersome (173), irritation (72), abuse (55), anger (53), irritable (43), hit (37), attacks (30), rage (29), toxic (24), aggressive (21), attack (20), angry (20), force (18), irritated (16), agitation (16), threat (14), annoying (14), violence (10).

<sup>5</sup> Due to space considerations, only a selection is shown here. A comprehensive list, including the total number of unique terms (types) and their frequencies across each emotion category, is available for download at: <https://personal.ua.es/es/chelo-pargas/documentos/ewords.docx>

- Fear\_E5-, e.g. fear (84), inhibition (56), panic (51), cold\_sweats (25), afraid (22), scary (20), fears (18), scared (18), shock (15), dread (12), alarming (12), fearful (8), terrified (8), scare (7), shocks (7), angst (6), frightening (6), inhibited (6), dreaded (5), panicky (5), panicked (4), terrifying (4), fearing (4), freaked\_out (4), shocked (3)
- Discontent\_E4.2-, e.g. frustrating (34), frustration (20), dissatisfaction (9), dissatisfied (4), disappointing (3), disappointed (3), disappointment (3), frustrations (2).
- Dislike\_E2-, e.g. hate (18), antagonism (10), self-criticism (9), antagonizes (6), antagonistic (6), antagonize (3), can\_not\_stand (3), resentful (2), disapprove (1), averse (1), dislike (1), is\_against (1), leave\_cold (1), disliked (1).
- Sad\_E4.1--: mourn (3)

It should be noted that while frequency played a role in selecting emotion-related words and expressions for analysis, our approach was not solely quantitative. We also conducted a qualitative review of concordances to discern metaphorical patterns, including less frequent but semantically rich terms such as ‘mayhem’ and ‘mourn’. This nuanced approach allowed us to identify authentic metaphorical usage distinct from technical jargon. For example, terms that superficially seemed metaphorical due to their emotional connotations, such as ‘antagonism’, ‘poisoning’, and ‘toxic’, were in fact not emotional or metaphorical, since they were used in their technical sense.

#### 4.2. METAPHOR FRAMINGS

Next, we introduce the main metaphorical framings identified in our study, with the emotional seed words that led to each metaphor’s identification provided in brackets. We then present an example of each one, accompanied by a detailed analysis of the specific domains and framing involved. This approach seeks to explore in detail how menopause is shaped and conceptualized. The frames we discuss primarily reveal the intricate interplay between physiological and psychological experiences of menopause, often portrayed pathologically, as evidenced by ‘symptom’ (11,412 occurrences), this being the second most frequent word in our corpus, after ‘woman’. The target domains most frequently encountered were BRAIN FUNCTION, EMOTIONAL INTENSITY, HORMONAL CHANGE/FUNCTION, MENOPAUSE EXPERIENCE/TRANSITION, and MENTAL HEALTH, among others. Correspondingly, the source domains paint a narrative of menopause through lenses of CHAOS, LOSS, BURDEN, DOWNWARD/NON-LINEAR MOTION, IMBALANCE, INSTABILITY, OBSTACLE/IMPEDIMENT TO MOTION, MACHINE/FUNCTIONALITY, MECHANISM, TURBULENCE, PHYSICAL CHALLENGE/COMBAT, UPHEAVAL and DISRUPTION, each underscoring the challenging and often negative depicting of this life stage.

**(I) MENOPAUSE AS EMOTIONAL TURBULENCE** (seed words: ‘mood swings’, ‘depression’, ‘anxiety’, ‘disturb’, ‘embarrassment’, ‘discomfort’, ‘disturbance’):

- (1) A woman with mood swings is like a roller coaster; she is up one minute and down the next and never able to get off the ride that easily. (...) Periods of intense elevation are suddenly followed by severe depression.

The focus in example (1) is on the experience of mood swings, particularly their unpredictable and fluctuating nature. The source domain is ROLLER COASTER (NON-LINEAR MOVEMENT), used metaphorically to describe the dynamic and unpredictable nature of mood swings. The ups and downs of a roller coaster ride symbolize rapid and extreme changes in mood, so the metaphorical mapping in this context is drawing a parallel between the unpredictable and rapid changes in direction of a roller coaster ride and the similarly unpredictable and extreme changes in a woman's mood during mood swings. Thus, metaphorical framing of a woman's mood swings represents someone who is unpredictable, variable, with ups and downs, and as such does not contribute to a positive image of women in general or at this stage of life, instead highlighting emotional turmoil and the difficulty of achieving stability, with mood swings portrayed as a tumultuous (negative) experience. This sentence also carries implications of helplessness, in that riders on a roller coaster cannot control the experience («get off the ride that easily»), and this can also influence how mood swings are perceived by others, potentially minimizing women's perceived agency here. The description of «periods of intense elevation are suddenly followed by severe depression» emphasizes the intensity of these mood changes and its framing highlights the extreme and often sudden shifts in emotional states, akin to the rapid transitions experienced on a roller coaster. This metaphorical language suggests that the woman's emotional fluctuations are like a journey which is difficult to escape from or control.

- (2) Women with high anxiety at premenopause may be more often anxious and are not at increased risk for high anxiety at specific stages of the menopausal transition, while women with low anxiety at pre-menopausal transition may be more susceptible to high anxiety during and after the menopausal transition.

Example (2) focuses on the levels of anxiety and the changes in these that women experience before, during, and after menopause. Anxiety is portrayed as a FLUCTUATING CONDITION due to the description of varying levels of anxiety («high anxiety at premenopause», «low anxiety at pre-menopausal transition», etc.). This framing suggests variability and changeability in the experience of anxiety, and the use of terms like *risk* and *susceptibility* metaphorically frames the experience of anxiety as something that can be measured in terms of VULNERABILITY. The framing here stresses the variability and unpredictability of menopause-related anxiety as part of a complex transitional phase which has notable in mental health implications.

- (3) Menopause is a natural biological process, but the physical symptoms such as hot flashes and certain emotional symptoms may disturb the sleep, lower down energy and affect the emotional health.

The source domain in example (3) involves the concepts of NON-LINEAR MOTION or INTERFERENCE («disturb the sleep») and REDUCTION (in energy). These expressions and the underlying domains are used to describe how menopause-related symptoms can disrupt normal function and well-being. The interruption of the natural sleep cycle is mapped onto the disruption of emotional well-being. The expression «lower down energy» is used to describe the energy-draining effect that emotional symptoms can have on a woman's overall vitality. Here, the concept of an object descending is mapped onto

the notion of reducing energy levels, illustrating the transition from a state of vitality to one of fatigue. Describing symptoms as things that «disturb the sleep» and «lower down energy» uses a framing that suggests INTERFERENCE and REDUCTION, implying that the symptoms of menopause disrupt normal sleep patterns and deplete energy levels, much like an external disturbance or a draining force.

- (4) Hot flashes often cause embarrassment and discomfort, as well as sleep disturbances and emotional lability, especially if they are intense and occur frequently.

The expression «emotional lability» frames the emotional effects of hot flashes in terms of INSTABILITY or VARIABILITY. It involves the source domain INSTABILITY, referring here to rapid and often unexpected fluctuations in emotions. The unpredictability and inconsistent nature of INSTABILITY is mapped onto the FLUCTUATING EMOTIONAL STATES caused by hot flashes during menopause. Just as something unstable is prone to sudden changes or lacks a consistent pattern, emotional lability here is characterized by rapid, unpredictable shifts in mood and feelings. The metaphorical framing serves to position such emotional experiences as inherently unstable and unpredictable, suggesting that just as one cannot predict or control an unstable situation, the emotional responses triggered by hot flashes are also beyond a woman's control and can change swiftly and unexpectedly.

**(II) MENOPAUSE AS DISRUPTIVE CHANGE** (seed emotions: depression, anxiety, embarrassed, anxious, disruptive; misery)

- (5) They may experience depression, anxiety, feel like their brain isn't fully functioning (...).

This sentence (5) relates BRAIN FUNCTION during menopause to that of a MACHINE. Such a comparison likens the brain to a complex mechanism, in which menopause affects its operational efficiency and overall FUNCTIONALITY. Thus, the woman's brain is compared to a machine that is malfunctioning. Such a framing suggests that the brain's usual functioning capacity is impaired or reduced, implying that menopause may lead to a diminished mental state, one in which cognitive abilities are compromised, and thus reinforcing notions of mental decline associated with this stage of life.

- (6) (...) the face reddens and many women feel embarrassed and anxious about having a flash, which can stop them in their tracks.

The target domain here is the impact of menopause on daily life, both physically and emotionally. The source domain is OBSTACLE/IMPEDIMENT TO MOTION, suggesting that menopause is a significant barrier to the natural flow of a woman's life, and symbolically represents the transition as a DISRUPTIVE FORCE that can interrupt or alter her normal patterns of behavior. This framing portrays menopause as a disruptive event, as an unpredictable force that can derail a woman's usual existence, and also emphasizes the notion that menopause has a challenging and often unanticipated impact on daily life.

- (7) (...) women who are typically accomplished and capable in so many areas of their lives, simply stumble into menopause, their second hormonally disruptive stage (...).

In the first part of this sentence (7), the target domain is the MENOPAUSE TRANSITION, especially concerning its impact on women who are otherwise accomplished and capable. The source domain OBSTACLE/IMPEDIMENT TO MOTION is consistently used, as in the phrase «simply stumble into menopause», which frames menopause as an unexpected obstacle or hurdle in life. It conveys the notion of a sudden and unprepared encounter which brings with it difficulties, akin to encountering a physical stumbling block that unexpectedly disrupts one's path. In the second part of the sentence, we again see the term 'disruptive', already noted in (3) where it was applied to sleep, and now mapped onto the menopause transition, likening it to a significant disturbance in a woman's life. Such a framing portrays menopause as a period of substantial change and upheaval, one characterized by hormonal imbalances that disrupt the normal flow of life, and again emphasizing the challenging nature of this transition.

- (8) (...) with the most current (...) scientific information available to help safeguard against menopause misery and long-term health problems associated with low levels of the hormones estrogen, progesterone and testosterone.

In the analysis of metaphorical language surrounding menopause, one striking pattern emerges in which menopause is framed through the lens of conflict and adversity. This is exemplified in the previous sentence (8) with the expression «safeguard against menopause misery» which implies a defensive course of action against potential harm or danger. The metaphor, then, draws on the source domain THREAT and ENEMY to describe the target domain EMOTIONAL INTENSITY, in which «menopause misery» is perceived as a hostile force or adversary that could impact women's emotional state. The term «menopause misery» frames this life stage extremely negatively as a time of great discomfort and unhappiness, assuming without nuance that menopause is *per se* a state of extreme sadness and emotional distress. The phrase «safeguard against menopause misery» coordinated with «long-term health problems» frames menopause as a RISK or THREAT to long-term health.

These metaphors present menopause not only as a biological transition, but as a formidable challenge or opponent, infusing the experience with a sense of struggle or confrontation. Such a metaphorical pattern highlights the intense emotional experiences often associated with menopause, portraying these as battles to be fought or dangers to be defended against. This framing can significantly shape perceptions and attitudes towards menopause by highlighting a number of issues that can cause disruption and distress.

- (9) (...) women vulnerable to develop mood and anxiety symptoms when the levels of gonadal hormones are chaotic or unpredictable – such as during the menopausal transition.

The source domain CHAOS evokes a sense of disorder, confusion and lack of control in the fluctuation of hormone levels which impact on women's emotional and psychological well-being. The target domain here is that of the HORMONAL CHANGES,

particularly changes in gonadal hormones, with the sentence «hormones are chaotic or unpredictable» mapping the characteristics of chaos and uncertainty (commonly associated with unpredictable and disorderly states) onto the hormonal changes that occur during menopause.

Through this metaphor, the sentence frames menopausal hormonal changes as inherently disordered and unpredictable, contributing to a perception of menopause as a period marked by instability and uncertainty, and as such potentially influences how menopause is perceived and discussed.

**(III) MENOPAUSE AS HORMONAL CONFLICT** (seed emotions: depression, irritability, sadness, mayhem, throw\_off\_balance)

- (10) As progesterone levels fall, estrogen may become the dominant hormone, leading to irritability and depression.

The target domain in (10) is HORMONAL CHANGE, focusing on those biochemical substances in the body that influence psychological states. The notion of estrogen becoming the «dominant» hormone suggests a power or dominance dynamic, where one hormone assumes a controlling role over others, leading to certain effects. This concept aligns with source domains COMPETITION and CONFLICT, where the increasing influence of estrogen compared to other hormones is seen as a form of competition or struggle for dominance. This metaphorical framing illustrates the relationship between hormone levels and symptoms as a cause-and-effect dynamic. The decrease in progesterone and the dominance of estrogens are presented as direct causes of irritability and depression, suggesting a chemical imbalance. Thus, the role of hormones is metaphorically conceptualized as a controlling force significantly impacting a woman's emotional state during hormonal changes.

- (11) Irritability and sadness may be triggered by (...) low levels of progesterone.

In (11) we can observe the intricate interplay between the source domain of a TRIGGER MECHANISM and the target domain HORMONAL CHANGE. The concept of a trigger mechanism, typically associated with the initiation of a precise and immediate action in machinery or weaponry, is used to conceptualize the initiation of hormonal changes. In the biomedical narrative, hormonal changes, particularly the decrease in levels of progesterone, are often presented as central to the understanding of the menopause experience. This metaphorical framing carries with it notions of the immediacy and impact of hormonal changes, framing them as critical triggers of emotional and physical reactions. Just as a trigger elicits an immediate and predictable reaction in a mechanism or weapon, a decrease in progesterone levels is presented as having a direct and almost inevitable impact on emotional states, emphasizing the power and influence of hormonal fluctuations on mental and emotional well-being, and thus implying a lack of control over such reactions.

- (12) For women going through perimenopause, more hormonal mayhem is the last thing they need.

HORMONAL CHANGE is the target domain in (12), where the term «mayhem», a typically negative and chaotic state, is used to imply the source domain CHAOS, DISORDER, or CONFUSION. It is used metaphorically to characterize the nature and impact of hormonal fluctuations during perimenopause. In this way, the sense of chaos experienced during a state of mayhem is mapped onto the emotional distress and disruption caused by hormonal fluctuations during perimenopause, and the destructive and disruptive nature of mayhem is mapped onto the negative impact of hormonal changes on women's emotional well-being. This metaphorically frames the perimenopausal hormonal changes as disruptive and undesirable.

- (13) (...) article reviews how hormones work, what can throw them off balance, signs and symptoms of a hormone imbalance.

The underlined phrases in (13) are used metaphorically to describe the state of hormonal equilibrium and its potential disruption, and hence the source domain involves the concepts NON-LINEAR DYNAMICS and IMBALANCE. The discussion of how hormones work in the context of balance and imbalance frames the endocrine system metaphorically as a balanced scale or a finely-tuned mechanism, implying that hormones need to maintain a certain equilibrium for optimal functioning. The phrase «throw them off balance» suggests an action or condition that can disrupt this equilibrium. Such framing implies the action of a carefully balanced object being knocked over or destabilized, thus emphasizing the sensitivity of the hormonal system to external or internal changes. The metaphorical framing of menopause in biomedical discourse often casts it in a light of imbalance and instability, portraying this natural life stage as a period of disequilibrium and disorder, rather than a normal physiological transition.

- (14) Because estrogen plays an important role in the nervous system, it is thought that these electric shocks result from the misfiring of neurons in response to decreased levels of estrogen in the body.

The «misfiring of neurons» here represents the brain's electrical activity (TD: BRAIN FUNCTION), which when not functioning properly can lead to symptoms that are likened to receiving «electric shocks», a concept commonly associated with ELECTRICAL SYSTEMS. When neurons «misfire» it implies a disruption or error in this process, akin to the malfunction of a complex MACHINE. So, the mapping in (14) associates the electrical nature of neurons with the unexpected and unpleasant experience of an electric shock. It implies a failure in the normal functioning of the brain's neurological pathways, similar to a short circuit in an electrical system. By describing hormonal changes as causing neurons to misfire, it implies a loss of the regular, healthy brain function, contributing to a perception of menopause as a period of decline or deterioration. The framing emphasizes uncomfortable or distressing symptoms («electric shocks») as a direct consequence of menopause, potentially heightening fear and anxiety about this transition. «Misfiring of neurons» also suggests a lack of predictability and control over bodily functions, reinforcing a narrative that views this stage of life negatively.

This narrative suggests a heightened sensitivity to hormonal disruptions, depicting menopausal women as fragile and vulnerable to various internal influences that could further destabilize their condition. Such a conceptualization contributes to a «loss of control narrative», where menopausal women are seen as struggling to maintain



hormonal balance, thus reducing their agency over their own bodies. Furthermore, the emphasis on the negative symptoms associated with hormone imbalance pathologizes menopause, framing it as an abnormal or undesirable condition rather than a natural phase of aging.

**(IV) MENOPAUSE AS A SOCIETAL AND IDENTITY CHALLENGE** (seed emotions: mourn, stress, brutal, overwhelming):

(15) Women for whom motherhood was primary in importance may mourn the passing of stages of active caregiving.

(16) (...) she didn't know who she was and mourned the woman she used to be after brutal menopause symptoms.

In a literal sense, mourning is the act of grieving the loss of a loved one. In the metaphorical sense, it can also refer to the grief associated with the LOSS (SD) of a significant role or identity, as in examples (15) and (16), where the target domain is MENOPAUSE EXPERIENCE/TRANSITION. The focus here is on the emotional experience of women transitioning from an active caregiving role in motherhood to a post-caregiving stage, coinciding with menopause or later life stages. Framing the end of the active caregiving stage as something to be mourned implies that this transition is not a smooth and natural chronological change but a extremely sad process. The expressions «didn't know who she was» and «mourned the woman she used to be» in (16) offer a poignant reflection on the profound experience that some women might go through during this period. Such metaphors highlight a deep sense of LOSS, CONFUSION, and GRIEF, one that transcends mere physical symptoms to include the psychological and emotional realms. The idea of having a distinct and recognizable sense of self is mapped onto the experience of feeling lost and confused during menopause; at the same time, the state of being unsure of one's identity is mapped onto the state of feeling disconnected from one's past self and unsure of who one is in the present. In the second part of the sentence, the act of mourning the loss of a loved one is mapped onto the act of grieving the loss of a part of oneself, such as one's youth, health, or sense of identity. Thus, the feeling of sadness, grief, and regret associated with mourning is mapped onto the feeling of loss and sadness associated with the physical and emotional changes of menopause; the metaphor of «not knowing oneself» suggests a disruption or fragmentation of identity brought about by menopause. In western societies, where youth and physical vitality are highly valued, menopause is often viewed as a departure from these ideals. Furthermore, the act of mourning one's prior self conveys a particularly profound sense of grief and loss. As a metaphor it extends beyond the physical aspects of menopause to encompass a mourning process for the loss of certain aspects of one's life, such as fertility or a particular phase of existence; hence, menopause is presented as an emotional burden similar to the process of mourning.

(17) Coping with a changing body, a changing sexual relationship, and everything else which is going on during perimenopause can be quite overwhelming and can have a major impact on mood.

In the metaphorical analysis of menopause-related discourse, we often find the use of the source domains OVERWHELM and BURDEN to articulate the experiences involved in the menopause transition and the changes in a woman's body. These domains, rooted in the notion of being heavily laden or inundated, serve to convey a sense of the intensity and impact of menopause, the notion that this period can be especially taxing, both physically and emotionally. The metaphorical framing in (17) presents the menopause transition and bodily changes as significant challenges, emphasizing their considerable weight and difficulty, portraying this life stage as a time of substantial strain and readjustment, focusing on the struggle to adapt to and cope with the myriad changes occurring during this phase.

- (18) In addition to these biological changes, for women this phase of life is often burdened with numerous psychosocial stressors, role changes, losses, and the experience of aging.

The source domain in (18) involves the concept of a BURDEN and various challenges such as «psychosocial stressors», «role changes», «losses», and «aging». These terms are used metaphorically to describe the weight of the experiences faced by women during this phase. This framing implies that the transition is not just a natural process but also that it adds to the challenges a woman faces in life, akin to carrying a extra, heavier load. The inclusion of «losses» and «the experience of aging» in the framing points to these elements as inherent components of the menopausal transition, and metaphor here conveys the idea that such aspects are notably impactful parts of the process. «Losses», we might add, also implies a more definitive sense of the end of certain life stage or role.

The metaphorical framework used in the above analysis has sought to situate menopause as a multifaceted transition that affects women biologically, psychologically, socially, and existentially. The language explored has been seen to present menopause as extremely complex, going beyond the physical changes that occur and including a wide range of emotional and social readjustments.

## 5. CONCLUSIONS

The present study took as its starting point the representation of MENOPAUSE AS A DISEASE, focusing on a set of emotions detected and automatically tagged using Wmatrix5 in a corpus of texts on menopause. As highlighted, negative words predominated (78.14%), and such a disparity clearly indicated that the corpus studied is heavily framed by negative emotional language.

The prevalence of this discourse in the four metaphorical frames discussed has underlined the difficulty of overcoming negative representations at this stage of life. More specifically, the analysis of the framing of MENOPAUSE AS EMOTIONAL TURBULENCE has shown how profoundly it shapes our understanding of menopause as a period marked by intense and unpredictable emotional fluctuations. This framing is vividly illustrated in the metaphor of roller-coaster-like mood swings, highlighting as it does the supposedly erratic and extreme nature of women's emotional changes, and thus drawing on a social stereotype and suggesting a lack of control and stability that casts women in a light of helplessness and vulnerability.

The second category of framing was MENOPAUSE AS A DISRUPTIVE CHANGE, which influences the perception of menopause by highlighting its complexity and the series of challenges it presents, as if changes are not constant facts of life and that women suddenly find that they are someone else physically and mentally. Indeed, menopause is portrayed as detrimental to mental acuity, the brain compared to a MALFUNCTIONING MACHINE, suggesting cognitive impairment and reinforcing stereotypes of mental deficiency. Hot flashes, mood swings, plus hormonal and physical changes are framed as OBSTACLES, hence describing menopause as a DISRUPTIVE FORCE in daily life, emphasizing its unpredictability and the physical and emotional challenges that accompany it. Menopause is thus metaphorically described as an UNEXPECTED OBSTACLE, even for successful women, placing those who experience it at a dead end, somewhere from which they are unable to escape. In fact, this framing also employs metaphors of THREAT and ENEMY to describe the «menopause misery» –a highly negative connotation to collocate with «menopause»– as an ADVERSARIAL FORCE, negatively presenting this stage of life as a period of discomfort and sadness, one which also poses a health risk. Indeed, «risk» is also one of the most frequent words in the corpus (3,796.87 per million tokens).

The framing of MENOPAUSE AS HORMONE CONFLICT highlights the loss of estrogen production as central and emphasizes the negative changes of this biological change, one capable of provoking various pathologies. In this sense, it conveys the notion that hormones are our number one enemy. Indeed, this framing presents menopause as a period of hormonal imbalance, leading to emotional disorders such as irritability and depression, and draws on ideas of internal strife and discord. Hormonal changes are metaphorically described as a TRIGGERING MECHANISM, highlighting their immediate and significant impact on emotional and physical well-being. The use of the term «chaos» to describe hormonal changes during menopause conveys the disruptive and challenging nature of this stage in a woman's life. The framing of the disruption of hormonal balance using NON-LINEAR DYNAMICS and IMBALANCE suggests a lack of verticality and a vulnerability in menopausal women, pathologizing menopause as an abnormal condition; it is depicted as full of ups and downs, as if the course of life were otherwise a journey in a straight line and this stage were something radically different. There is no doubt that even in our 21<sup>st</sup>-century world, we can still find in this kind of discourse a reliance on the kind of approach to menopause that Tilt referred to as «the evil effects of this time of life» (Tilt, 1870).

The framing of MENOPAUSE AS A SOCIETAL AND IDENTITY CHALLENGE presents this stage as an important point of emotional and identity transition for women. This perspective serves to articulate a profound sense of loss and the upheaval associated with the end of maternal functions (as if you suddenly cease to be a mother), changes in bodily and sexual functions, and the broader experience of aging. It touches on the emotional experiences of women, highlighting grief, confusion, and a sense of disconnection from one's past self, suggesting a departure from societal ideals of youth and vitality, and intensifying the sense of loss and re-evaluation of self-identity. The emotional complexity and struggle of women is highlighted, in that they are seen as having to adjust to these changes, with menopause described as a period of considerable stress and involving the reassessment of one's identity. Such an approach, in that it focuses on how menopause can have a profound impact on women, also runs the risk of reinforcing stereotypes that view the stage in life predominantly in terms of loss and decline, potentially

overshadowing women's diverse and individual experiences. As such, we believe it has the power to contribute significantly to social narratives that frame menopause as a predominantly negative transition, thus influencing how women's experiences during this phase are understood, discussed, and managed in both personal and broader social contexts.

Taken together, these dominant metaphorical frames contribute to the reinforcing of several stereotypes about menopausal women, shaping societal perceptions in ways that often oversimplify and negatively color this life stage. From the many examples in our corpus, we can see that menopause is frequently characterized in terms of emotional turmoil and instability, loss of identity, and a wide range of symptoms and pathologies that are difficult to resolve, given that reversing women's aging is not (yet) possible. This focus on the challenges and difficulties of menopause ignores or relegates the importance of a more comprehensive and positive understanding of the issues, often neglecting the diverse experiences of menopausal women and unnecessarily increasing negative perceptions about this life transition. Such multimodal representations often portray women as lacking agency and control over their emotional and physical states, which can significantly influence social attitudes toward menopause and reinforce stereotypes such as mentally troubled, emotionally unstable, and worthless older women.

However, it is equally important to recognize the benefits of menopause: the end of menstrual cycles, no longer needing menstrual hygiene products, freedom from the fear of unwanted pregnancy—allowing sexual relations without contraceptives, the cessation of pre-menstrual syndrome, and the discovery of emotional stability and liberation. These benefits highlight the need for a narrative shift that better aligns with women's empowerment at this life stage and its multimodal representation in images and oral and written texts.

## REFERENCES

- Archer, Dawn, Andrew Wilson & Paul Rayson (2002). Introduction to the USAS Category System. In Benedict project report. <http://ucrel.lancs.ac.uk/usas/usasguide.pdf>
- Charteris-Black, Jonathan (2004). *Corpus Approaches to Critical Metaphor Analysis*. Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave. DOI: 10.1057/9780230000612.
- Charteris-Black, Jonathan (2004). Metaphor and Thought. In *Corpus Approaches to Critical Metaphor Analysis* (pp. 7–24). Palgrave Macmillan.
- Deignan, Alice (2005). *Metaphor and Corpus Linguistics*. Amsterdam, Netherlands: John Benjamins. DOI: 10.1075/celcr.6
- Deignan, Alice & Elena Semino (2010). Corpus techniques for metaphor analysis. In L. Cameron, & R. Maslen (Eds.), *Metaphor Analysis: Research Practice in Applied Linguistics, Social Sciences and the Humanities* (pp. 161–179). London, UK: Equinox
- Demmen, Jane, Elena Semino, Zsófia Demjén, Veronika Koller, Andrew Hardie, Paul Rayson & Sheila Payne (2015). A computer-assisted study of the use of Violence metaphors for cancer and end of life by patients, family carers and health professionals. *International Journal of Corpus Linguistics*, August, 205–231. <https://doi.org/10.1075/ijcl.20.2.03dem>

- Dodge, Ellen, Jisup Hong, Elise Stickles & Oana David (2013). The MetaNet Wiki: A collaborative online resource for metaphor and image schema analysis. In *12th International Cognitive Linguistics Conference (ICLC 12)*.
- Entman, Robert M. (1993). Framing: Toward Clarification of a Fractured Paradigm. *Journal of Communication*, 43(4), 51–58. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1460-2466.1993.tb01304.x>
- Jimenez, Tyler, Jamie Arndt & Mark J. Landau (2021). Walls Block Waves: Using an Inundation Metaphor of Immigration Predicts Support for a Border Wall. *Journal of Social and Political Psychology*, 9(1), 159–171. <https://doi.org/10.5964/jssp.6383>
- Kazemian, Reza, & Somayeh Hatamzadeh (2022). COVID-19 in English and Persian: A Cognitive Linguistic Study of Illness Metaphors across Languages. *Metaphor and Symbol*, 37(2), 152–170. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10926488.2021.1994839>
- Koller, Veronika, Andrew Hardie, Paul Rayson & Elena Semino (2008). Using a semantic annotation tool for the analysis of metaphor in discourse. *Metaphorik.De*, 15, 141–160.
- Kövecses, Zoltán, Laura Ambrus, Dániel Hegedűs, Ren Imai & Anna Sobczak (2019). The lexical vs. corpus-based method in the study of metaphors. In M. Bolognesi, M. Brdar, & K. Despot (Eds.), *Metaphor and metonymy in the digital age: theory and methods for building repositories of figurative language* (pp. 149–173). John Benjamins Publishing Company. <https://doi.org/10.1075/milcc.8.07kov>
- Kövecses, Zoltán (2000). *Metaphor and emotion: Language, culture, and body in human feeling*. Cambridge University Press.
- Lakoff, Robin T. (2000). *The language war*. Univ of California Press.
- Lakoff, George (2006). Simple framing: An introduction to framing and its uses in politics, Rockridge Institute. Available from [tinyurl.com/yl97j6wj](https://tinyurl.com/yl97j6wj)
- Lazar, Amanda, Norman M. Su, Jeffrey Bardzell & Shaowen Bardzell (2019). Parting the Red Sea: Sociotechnical Systems and Lived Experiences of Menopause. *Proceedings of the 2019 CHI Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems*, 1–16. <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctvk12r9h.13>
- Martin, Emily (1994). Medical Metaphors of Women's Bodies: Menstruation and Menopause. In *Women's Health, Politics, and Power* (pp. 213–232).
- Martin, Emily (1997). The woman in the menopausal body. In *Reinterpreting Menopause: Cultural and Philosophical Issues* (pp. 239–254). <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203379516-19>
- Niland, Patricia R. (2010). *Metaphors of Menopause in Medicine* [Massey University, Wellington, New Zealand]. <https://mro.massey.ac.nz/bitstream/handle/10179/1338/02whole.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>
- Porto Requejo, María D (2023). Polarización en periódicos españoles: significado y contextos de uso. *Cultura, Lenguaje y Representación*, 30, 223–242. <https://doi.org/10.6035/clr.6939>
- Pragglejaz Group (2007). MIP: A Method for Identifying Metaphorically Used Words in Discourse. *Metaphor and Symbol*, 22(1), 1–39. [https://doi.org/10.1207/s15327868ms2201\\_1](https://doi.org/10.1207/s15327868ms2201_1)
- Rayson, Paul (2008). From key words to key semantic domains. *International Journal of Corpus Linguistics*, 4, 519–549.

- Rojo López, Ana M., & María Á. Orts Llopis (2010). Metaphorical pattern analysis in financial texts: Framing the crisis in positive or negative metaphorical terms. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 42(12), 3300–3313. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pragma.2010.06.001>
- Semino, Elena, Zsófia Demjén, Andrew Hardie, Sheila Payne & Paul Rayson (Eds.) (2017). *Metaphor, Cancer and the End of Life. A Corpus-Based Study*. New York: Routledge. doi:10.4324/9781315629834.
- Semino, Elena, Zsófia Demjén & Jane Demmen (2018). An integrated approach to metaphor and framing in cognition, discourse, and practice, with an application to metaphors for cancer. *Applied Linguistics*, 39(5), 625–645. <https://doi.org/10.1093/applin/amw028>
- Sopory, Pradeep & James P. Dillard (2002). The persuasive effects of metaphor: A meta-analysis. *Human Communication Research*, 28(3), 382–419.
- Steen, Gerard J., Aletta G. Dorst, J. Berenike Herrmann, Anna Kaal, Tina Krennmayr & Trijntje Pasma (2010). *A Method for Linguistic Metaphor Identification. From MIP to MIPVU*. John Benjamins Publishing. <https://doi.org/10.1075/celcr.14>
- Stefanowitsch, Anatol (2008). Corpus-based approaches to metaphor and metonymy. In A. Stefanowitsch & S. T. Gries (Eds.), *Corpus-Based Approaches to Metaphor and Metonymy* (pp. 1–16). De Gruyter Mouton. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110199895>
- Tilt, Edward J. (1870) *The Change of Life in Health and Disease: A Practical Treatise on the Nervous and other Affections Incidental to Women at the Decline of Life*. London: J. Churchill & Sons [Available at: <https://iiif.wellcomecollection.org/pdf/b21081190>]
- Vargas-Sierra, Chelo (2006): Diseño de un corpus especializado con fines terminográficos: el Corpus de la Piedra Natural. *Debate Terminológico*, 2 (7/2006). París: RITERM (Red Iberoamericana de Terminología).
- Vargas-Sierra, Chelo & Antonio Moreno-Sandoval (2021): War and Health Metaphors in Financial Discourse: The case of ‘Letter to Shareholders’ in Annual Reports. Mateo-Martínez, José & Francisco Yus (Eds.): *Metaphors in Economics and Specialized Discourse* (pp. 41–71). Bern: Peter Lang Publishing.
- Vargas-Sierra, C. (2024): On defective machines and roller coasters. A critical cognitive analysis of metaphors in an ad hoc corpus on menopause. In Molina-Plaza, Silvia & Nava Maroto (Eds.), *Aspects of Cognitive Terminology Studies. Theoretical Considerations and the Role of Metaphor in Terminology* (pp. 191–208). <https://doi.org/10.1515/9783111073149-009>. De Gruyter Mouton.