

Conceptualizations of the doctoral education: “Detours, delays and sidetracks can enrich your life”

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This paper investigates conceptualizations of the doctoral education process, based on analysis of all dissertation acknowledgements written between 2014-2019 by candidates from four PhD programs offered by a Norwegian university: 49 acknowledgements totaling roughly 28,000 words, approximately half in English and half in Norwegian, and covering academic disciplines ranging from the humanities to applied ecology. This study thus expands upon earlier studies related to metaphor and Higher Education through availing itself of a hitherto unexplored data source for identification of metaphorical conceptualizations, and in the Norwegian Higher Education context.

Dissertation acknowledgements “act as a means of demonstrating academic credibility, recognizing debts, and achieving a sense of closure at the end of a long and demanding research process” (Hyland, 2003, p. 243). While their main purpose is ostensibly to express gratitude to individuals and institutions, acknowledgements also provide insight into the persona of the writers, allowing them space for reflection and expression of personal and professional identity (see Hyland, 2004, p. 304).

Analysis adheres to a metaphor-led discourse dynamics approach because metaphor facilitates talk about abstract concepts (such as education), making them more comprehensible. In doing so, metaphor also provides a window into conscious and unconscious attitudes, opinions and beliefs (see e.g. Bager-Elsborg & Greve, 2017; Cameron, 2010). More specifically, the acknowledgements are analyzed as follows:

1. Identify linguistic metaphors using MIPVU (Steen et al., 2010) and its Scandinavian adaptation (Nacey et al., 2019);
2. Group the identified metaphors by their vehicle category (e.g. LOCATION, JOURNEY, TRANSFER), determined through a flexible and iterative process following Cameron, Maslen, and Low (2010);
3. Link vehicle categories with to identify metaphors about the *a priori* topics of a) the doctoral process (generally), b) academic assistance (particularly supervision) and c) supervisors.

The primary research question addressed here asks which metaphors doctoral students in Norway use to describe their educational experience, investigating metaphors that may appear either systematically or rarely, as well as those that may be used either by many or by few informants. Such an overview provides empirical evidence as to how such students conceive of their various aspects of the doctoral process. In making explicit how these students *actually* think about these issues, this investigation also provides insight into alternative ways in which they *could* think about them - that is, the metaphors uncovered could be used as the starting point for discussing hitherto implicit attitudes, addressing and possibly reframing potentially problematic conceptualizations.

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