

Abs-125

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Sugar makes you sweet: Polysemy and cultural beliefs about causation

Lay terms in health discussions can show multiple senses not recognized as polysemes. Since polysemous terms have related senses—often in the same domain—contexts give fewer clues for disambiguation. Identifying conflated senses reveals misunderstandings reinforcing cultural beliefs about the causes of health and illness.

Methods: Track words expressing causation (causes, makes, becomes, turns into) collocated with 8 ambiguous terms (fat, stress, cholesterol, oil, hard, cold, hot, sugar) in the Corpus of American Discourses on Health.

1) "I am persuaded we are on a wrong scent in supposing moist, or cold air, the causes of that disorder we call a cold. (Ben Franklin, 1773, Green 2008)

2) "When you eat ice cream, the fat in the ice cream becomes fat in your body. So if you eat a lot of ice cream, you might become fat. If you don't, you're gonna stay skinny." (Little Miss Sunshine, 2006)