
On the number of metaphors in a popular book

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Abstract

The novel *Special Topics in Calamity Physics* is estimated to contain 1363 ± 297 metaphors.

Introduction

The popular novel *Special Topics in Calamity Physics* (STCP) by Marisha Pessl¹ has been noted to contain many metaphors,² but the total number of metaphors has not yet been determined. This study was undertaken to estimate the number of metaphors in STCP, and to decide whether this number can be considered to be many or just a lot.

Methods

A modified Monte Carlo³ selection process was used, wherein the square root plus one of the number of pages (N=514) was sampled (n=23). The sampled pages were randomly selected throughout the book and the number of metaphors was counted on each sample page.

The mean number of metaphors per page was evaluated and a confidence interval generated via the Student's t-distribution. An estimate for the book overall was calculated as the product of the mean number of metaphors per page and the total number of pages.

Results

The selected pages and number of metaphors are given in Table 1.

The mean number of metaphors was 2.65 per page with a 95% confidence interval of 2.08-3.23. For the book as a whole the number of metaphors is estimated to be 1363 (95% CI: 1067-1660).

Discussion

STCP is filled with over 1000 metaphors, like a donut injected with so much jelly that it bursts at the seams.⁴

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Table 1. Pages and No. of Metaphors

No.	Page	No. of Metaphors
1	53	2
2	92	3
3	99	0
4	109	3
5	112	3
6	164	3
7	177	4
8	222	2
9	256	3
10	314	5
11	323	3
12	341	4
13	352	4
14	371	3
15	374	4
16	375	0
17	381	2
18	402	1
19	434	1
20	437	3
21	448	4
22	462	3
23	484	1

References

- ¹ Marisha Pessl, *Special Topics in Calamity Physics*, Viking Penguin, New York, 2006.
- ² Peter Dempsey, *Too Cool for School*, **The Guardian**, London, September 15, 2006.
- ³ Stephen Sheppard, *Monte Carlo*, Kensington Pub Corp, 1985
- ⁴ James H. Stapleton, *Models for probability and statistical inference: theory and applications*. p. 90, 1st edition, Wiley Interscience, New York, 2007.