

Critical Metaphor Analysis of War Metaphors in Official News Reports of COVID-19 in China

Qin Yang

School of Foreign Languages West Anhui University, Lu'an, China

12830965@qq.com

Abstract. This paper initially situates research on the conceptual metaphors based on Critical Metaphor Analysis with regard to their manifestation in public discourses. Specifically, it centers on the cognitive features and social effects of war metaphors used in the official coverage of COVID-19 pandemic in China. The war metaphors was first identified and analyzed by both manual metaphor identification and the aid of vocabulary analytic software AntConc. 3. 5. 9. Then the cognitive mechanism and social functions of the selected metaphors were analyzed in the perspective of cognitive linguistics. The findings show that: (1) despite of the possible negative emotions they might bring, war metaphors can arouse cognitively the public's awareness of self-protection and stimulate properly the positive emotions of the public with the embedded Chinese narrative characteristics "a party in trouble, assistance comes from all sides"; (2) the application of war metaphors can function as positive guidance in conveying government policy and play an important role in soothing the public tension and help to stabilize. The adoption of war metaphors in the COVID-19 news reports in China official media can help to stimulate the positive emotions of the public, arouse the collectivism values, construct a unified epidemic prevention cognition system of the public, and play a crucial role in providing information, policy interpretation and humanistic guidance.

Keywords: Critical Metaphor Analysis; war metaphors; official news reports; COVID-19.

1. Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic, also known as the coronavirus pandemic, is an ongoing pandemic of coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) caused by severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus [1]. On 27 December, 2019, Hubei Province firstly reported cases of pneumonia of unknown cause in China; "as of 24:00 of May 31, 2020, a cumulative total of 83,017 confirmed cases had been reported on the Chinese mainland" [2]. When confronting such urgent public health emergencies, the public is eager for information and emotional catharsis. News reports of COVID-19 plays a critical role in achieving the pandemic control and prevention by communicating with the public. On 10 March, 2020, at Huoshenshan Hospital in Wuhan, Chinese President Xi Jinping -- wearing a mask -- spoke to a patient lying in bed by video link. "We all should be confident that we will win this war," Xi said, "Victory for Wuhan, victory for Hubei, and victory for China!" [3]. It is neither the first nor last time that the Chinese news media have instilled war metaphors in providing information, policy interpretation and humanistic guidance since COVID-19 pandemic sweeps over China. The hope and power to conquer the disease is conveyed through the metaphorical expression "war" and "victory".

Traditionally, metaphor is limited to the figurative figure of language rhetoric, while the conceptual metaphors are essentially "expressions from one domain to talk about corresponding concepts in the metaphorically defined domain" [4]. Metaphor, in the perspective of cognitive linguistics, exists widely in daily discourse and are commonly used to cope with complex and obscure social and political activities [5][6]. One of frequently used metaphor is war metaphor. Many scholars observe that war metaphors are ubiquitous in the public discourses connected with social and political domains [4][7];. Some scholars have researched into the reasons for its pervasiveness. Ferrari [8] points out that metaphors function as a privileged cognitive tool for framing discourse strategies. Chiang and Duann [9], in analyzing naming strategies and conceptual

metaphors for SARS taken from three leading newspapers, reveal that political guidelines and implied ideologies of newspapers can be spread through the adoption of metaphor. Wallis and Nerlich [10] also point out the cognitive features of conceptual metaphors used in the reporting of SARS in the UK press. Similarly, metaphor, an important tool for the popularization of science transmitted by mass media, are used to attract the reader and interpret scientific concept on cancer and improve the readability of the text [11].

However, some scholars argue that the overuse of conceptual metaphors (such as military metaphor) seemingly mitigate the effectiveness of public communication [12]. And Wiggins [13] calls for the ceasefire of war metaphors for disease. These critics suggests that war metaphors may not necessarily bring positive effect of publicity. Despite of this, war metaphors are still the media's favorite device in such domain as public health emergencies. One recent research shows that the word frequency of warfare metaphors selected from one-month news reports on COVID-19 of three Chinese major news media amounts to 1481, and the ideology of collectivism, sense of responsibility and faith to conquer the disease that conceptual metaphors carries can inspire certain discourse power and realize the communication intention of public discourse [14]. Thus, the following questions emerge:

1. What is the cognitive mechanism and social functions of war metaphors in public news reports concerning COVID-19 in China?
2. What provoke the frequent use of war metaphors in public news reports concerning COVID-19 in China in spite of the possible negative influence?

In the present article, we address these questions by reviewing the literature on this topic and explore the cognitive features and guiding effects of war metaphors in COVID-19 reporting by Chinese major media based on Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT)[4] and Framing Theory which is applied in metaphorical analysis by Lakoff [15]. The study hopes to show that the analysis of cognitive mechanism and social functions of war metaphor can account for the metaphorical application in official news reports under particular social and cultural situations. We argue that the use of framing of war metaphor in China at that peculiar period can enhance the public's social awareness and correspond with the social psychological needs and values, so as to improve the credibility and effectiveness of the media and government in response to public health emergencies.

2. Theoretical base

2.1 Conceptual Metaphor Theory

This study is anchored on Lakoff and Johnson's theory of conceptual metaphor, who holds that metaphor is a cognitive means for people to know the world [4]. Lakoff and Johnson[4] believed that the essence of metaphor is a way of thinking, which is to understand and experience relatively abstract or unfamiliar things (target domain) through a relatively familiar thing (source domain). Conceptual metaphors are regarded as a kind of cross-domain mapping based on context and conceptual system: all kinds of relations, attributes and knowledge in the source domain will be correspondingly mapped to all kinds of relations, attributes and knowledge in the target domain; the similarity and analogy between source domain and target domain can help people understand and understand abstract things more vividly[4]. Meanwhile, metaphors are endowed with both linguistic and communicative function [16] The best way for politicians to carry out political persuasion is to use metaphor reasonably and appropriately, which can effectively help to understand, accept and spread abstract and obscure political views[17]. Thus, metaphors in political discourse can carry the ideology implied by the government or the politician and play the communicative persuasion function effectively.

And as for the cognitive reasons for conceptual metaphors, Lakoff [18] adopted the psychological term "framing" to explain it: language, by its very nature, depends on the cognitive framing that exists in the brain and reflects people's value orientation. People would automatically activate the cognitive framing when they think and communicate. For example, when people are

talking about a medical accident, the corresponding framing will be activated, which covers the following elements: hospital, doctors, patients, medicines etc. Framing is a kind of metaphorical thinking, which can reveal the deep political and social values of conceptual metaphors. For example, Barack Obama, a Democrat of the United States, pursues the political morality of the “benevolent model”, which emphasizes empathy and increasing rights and interests [18]. Therefore, there are many words related to security and stability in his speeches about medical insurance, such as security and stability [18]. The security structure and stability structure are more obvious, and people will feel that buying insurance can bring them security and stability.

2.2 Critical Metaphor Analysis Theory

Since the paper plans to make a corpus-based analysis, Charteris-Black’s [19] Critical Metaphor Analysis Theory is adopted as the framework. He (2004) divides the process of researching metaphors into three procedures: metaphor identification, metaphor interpretation and metaphor explanation. For metaphor identification, Charteris-Black [19] proposed two stages: firstly, the researchers make a perusal of the target texts to identify candidate metaphors based on Charteris-Black’s [19] definition of metaphors, which would conveying a new meaning semantically, developing people’s understanding in providing proper analogy cognitively and offering evaluations pragmatically; secondly, the researchers make a close examination of the selected metaphors under the corpus context to make sure whether the selected metaphors are metaphorical or literal. As for metaphor interpretation, Charteris-Black [19] deemed it as a procedure to seek the relationship between metaphors and explore their cognitive and pragmatic functions. In this stage, the conceptual metaphors are identified and their cognitive mechanism of the conceptual metaphors are probed [19]. And for metaphor explanation, Charteris-Black [19] stressed the social function of conceptual metaphors, which probably lies in the persuasive function and their production.

3. Source and Method

3.1 Source

The paper focuses on the COVID-19-related news reports in People’s Daily(PD) from Jan. 21, 2020, when the novel coronavirus was first mentioned in PD, to Sept. 8, when National Commendation Conference for Fighting COVID-19 was held in China to mark the stage victory in fighting the epidemic. People’s Daily (PD), the largest newspaper group in China, is an official newspaper of the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) with a worldwide circulation [20]. PD, commonly known as the “mouthpiece” of China [20], has provided direct information on the policies and viewpoints of CCP during the epidemic. Along with the ups and downs of the epidemic in China, PD is the authoritative window of Chinese epidemic situations around the world.

After identification and collation, the present research has altogether downloaded 18 COVID-19 related editorials over the stated period from the online People’s Daily Graphic data base (<http://paper.people.com.cn/rmrb/paperindex.htm>). The size of self-built corpus, covering only headlines and the main body of the relevant editorials, is 24,469 Chinese characters. With the aid of software ROST CM6, the research has got 4,627 tokens and 299 types from the 18 editorials.

3.2 Method

The paper adopts both qualitative and quantitative methodology. In the first place, the panel of three researchers identified the candidate war metaphorical expressions through close reading of the corpus under the guidance of Charteris-Black’s [19] Critical Metaphor Analysis Theory. The three researchers consists of one professors and two associate professors from one Chinese university whose research fields are cognitive linguistics. In this phase, as suggested by Charteris-Black [19], the panel selected the candidate metaphors through perusal and finally determined the war

metaphors under the corpus context. Then vocabulary analytic software AntConc.3.5.9 was used to analyze the frequency and collocation of the selected war metaphorical expressions to aid the following metaphor interpretation. In the last stage, on the basis of the quantitative analysis of the war metaphors, the qualitative analysis of conceptual metaphor COVID-19 IS WAR was applied to probe into the cognitive mechanism and social functions in the light of CMT and Framing Theory[4][16].

4. Results

4.1 Identification of War Metaphors

Under the guidance of Charteris-Black's [19] critical approach to researching metaphors. The author perused the 18 COVID-19-related editorials and selected 25 frequently used war metaphorical expressions. After integrating key words with similar meanings, 14 of them are analyzed with the aid of AntConc.3.5.9. Table I shows the frequency of war metaphorical expressions in the corpus and the ration of each type is also presented.

Table 1. Frequency of war metaphorical expressions

War Metaphorical Expressions	Frequency	% of TOTAL
douzheng/kangji/fenzhan/zhandou (fight)	88	23%
zujizhan/zhanyi (battle)	61	16%
bushu/zhihui (deploy)	44	12%
zhansheng/juesheng (defeat)	31	8%
fangyi/lianfang (defence)	28	7%
yixian/huoxian (frontline)	23	6%
fangxian/baolei (fort)	24	6%
dongyuan (mobilize)	19	5%
fengxian/xisheng (sacrifice)	17	4%
shengli (victory)	16	4%
shoutu (defend the territory)	8	2%
chongfeng (assault)	8	2%
yingxiong (hero)	6	2%
xianfeng (pioneer)	6	2%
TOTAL	379	100%

Besides, in order to understand the semantic and pragmatic meaning of the identified war metaphorical expressions, Table II shows parts of the clusters and collocate of the metaphorical expressions based on the data analysis with the aid of AntConc.3.5.9.

Table 2. clusters and collocate of the metaphorical expressions

War Metaphorical Expressions	Clusters		Collocate	
	Types	Fre	Types	Fre
douzheng/kangji/fenzhan/zhandou (fight)	diyixian(frontier)/yi	9	yiqing	38
	qing(epidemic)/bao	20	(epidemic)/	
	lei(fort)	5	baolei(fort)	5
zujizhan/zhanyi (battle)	bisheng (victory)	3	daying(win)	6
bushu/zhihui (deploy)	dangzheng (the Party)	3	juece(policy)	19
			tongyi (consolidated)	8
zhansheng/juesheng	yiqing (epidemic)	12	yibing	9

War Metaphorical Expressions	Clusters		Collocate	
	Types	Fre	Types	Fre
(defeat)			(COVID-19)	
fangyi/lianfang (defence)	wuzi (supplies)	11	wuzi (supplies)	11
yixian/huoxian (frontline)	fenzhan (fight)	2	zhandou (fight)	2
fangxian/baolei (fort)	kangji (fight)	2	qunfangqunzhi (mass prevention)/ zhandou(fight)	10 5
dongyuan (mobilize)	qunzhong (mass)	2	yiqing (epidemic)	6
fengxian/xisheng (sacrifice)	liliang (strength)	2	yongyu (bravely) zhanchang (battlefield)	4 2
shengli (victory)	Hubei	7	zujizhan (battle)	3
shoutu (defend the territory)	danze (responsibility)	7	jinze (reponsibility)	22
chongfeng (assault)	zaiqian (forward)	6	dangyuan(the Party member)	3
yingxiong (hero)	guilai (return)	2	renmin (people's)	4
xianfeng(pioneer)	zuoyong (function)	6	zuoyong (function)	9

4.2 Cognitive Interpretation of War Metaphors

Table II shows that war metaphors are highly correlative with the major event yiqing (epidemic), which is frequently collocated with douzheng/ kangji/ fenzhan/ zhandou (fight) and zhansheng/ juesheng (defeat) that are frequently used among the war metaphorical expression as shown in Table I. It is clear that the war metaphors used in PD’s COVID-19 reporting have centered around the key elements in the event of the COVID-19 epidemic: Chinese government, the CPC, the infected people, medical supplies, hospital building etc. In the event of a war, the following elements are included and connected with each other: participants of the war, the battle field, the war process, the casualties and the results etc. Thus, there exists the conceptual metaphor COVID-19 IS WAR whose source domain is WAR and target domain is COVID-19. To understand the corresponding relationships in their inner conceptual structure, Fig. 1 displays the mapping process of COVID-19 IS WAR in detail.

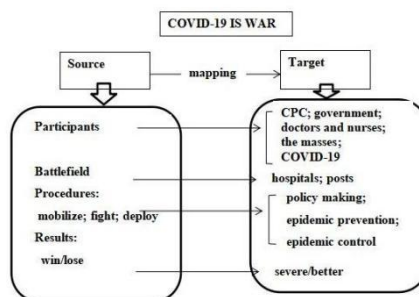


Fig. 1 Mapping correspondence between source domain WAR and target domain COVID-19

More examples are taken from the corpus to make detailed semantic analysis of the war metaphors.

Example 1:

Unify to the decisions and deploy of the CPC Central Committee, mobilize comprehensively,..., to resolutely win the battle against the epidemic.....We should stick to our posts and take command from the front. We should not just give command and not go to the front lines. We should only blow trumpets and not charge. [21]

Example 2:

Doctors and nurses in Wuhan charged to the front line, medical workers around the country have become the most respectable “soldiers in white” in this Spring Festival.....The medical team of Southern Hospital volunteered to fight and vowed that “if there is a battle, we will return and win the battle.” [22]

Example 3:

As long as we work together, fight bravely and overcome difficulties together, we will surely win the battle against the epidemic in Wuhan, Hubei and the whole country. [23]

In the above examples, PD made a moving and uplifting narrative of COVID-19 epidemic which threatened the people’s life around the country. Under the life-threatening situation, dealing with COVID-19 is metaphorically taken as a war between Chinese people and the fierce pandemic. The participants of this war includes the governments in all levels, CPC members, doctors and nurses and the masses. And working posts in every walks of life, especially the hospitals, during the lockdown period are compared to battlefields, fortress and fort lines. Since COVID-19 pandemic is fierce and fatal, PD has chosen a series of uplifting and enlightening war metaphors to encourage all the participants involved. In Example 1, the role of “CPC Central Committee” is the leader and decision maker, whose duty is to lead everyone to fight against the “enemy” “COVID-19” and win the war in the end. In Example 2, “doctors and nurses” are the “soldiers” and “fighters”, who are the major force to defeat the virus. In Example 3, the ultimate goal is to win, which is repeatedly mentioned and reinforced. These examples are taken from different editorials, but they are strikingly consistent in the choice of war metaphors. PD’s rhetorical choice of war metaphors in these examples are not random but intentional. It aims to achieve the cognitive function in encouraging the masses and conveying the determination of controlling the epidemic situation. Such words as “soldiers”, “fight bravely” and “victory” in these examples can activate people’s fighting will and responsibility in face of the unprecedented difficulties, which is the positive aspects of WAR concept. Moreover, in Table I, it is clearly sated that incentive words such as “fight”, “defeat”, “deploy”, “battle” and “victory” are frequently used, which can not only pacify the negative mood towards the epidemic bu also play an important role in encouraging the masses. The interpretation reflects that both rhetorical and cognitive motivation urge PD to choose WAR framing.

4.3 Explanation on Social Functions of War Metaphors

For explaining war metaphors, the paper would focus mainly on their social functions in the process of spreading. The importance of official press is self-evidence. Under the severe epidemic situation in 2020, trusting the official press seems to be the reliable choice for the masses. People’s Daily, in this case, is a natural choice. PD will also definitely consider the social function when reporting the news. In face of such public health crisis as COVID-19 epidemic, PD tends to play a guiding role through the application of war metaphors. In the previous part, the author have analyzed the rhetorical and cognitive motivation underlying the choice of war metaphors in PD’s editorials. Then the paper discusses these war metaphors from the perspective of the influence on readers to reveal the social function.

Firstly, the WAR framing constructed by the war metaphors would guide readers’ reasoning, which would further influence readers’ minds and actions. In PD’s editorials, the military terms “fight” “battle” “front lines” “fortress” are frequently used (see Table I). It would highlight the

urgency, difficulty and complexity of epidemic prevention and control, thus arousing the vigilance of the public and the wider attention of the whole society. Meanwhile, the specific war metaphorical expressions are used to describe obscure medical terms concerning COVID-19 virus, treatment and prevention procedures, which can mitigate the readers' possible panicked emotion.

Moreover, the WAR framing constructed by war metaphors with Chinese characteristics can stimulate unique sense of mission not only among doctors and nurses, volunteers and other posts but also common people. It is unique in the PD's editorials to regard dealing with the epidemic as renminzhanzheng (people's war). The term renminzhanzheng, proposed by Mao Zedong in his article "On Protracted War" in May, 1938, means that unity and progress between the army and the people is the most essential factor in defeating the enemy [24]. This deep-rooted term relates implicitly to the anti-Japanese War (1937-1945) and can arouse the national determination to deal with the epidemic despite of the difficulties. Under the framing system of renminzhanzheng, the government officials are shuai --the commander in chief (see Example 1), doctors and nurses are zhanshi --warriors or soldiers(see Example 2) and common people are all involved into the anti-epidemic war.

The war framing interwoven in PD's editorials form a successful narrative to realize its social guidance. The narrative refers to the use of framing to tell a story, including semantic roles, character attributes, character relationships, and scenarios [25]. In PD's editorials, the Chinese unique war framing activates the scenarios of unity and solidarity in the fight against the epidemic. Through the narrative with Chinese characteristics, it conveys the government's policy tendency and affect people's public opinion.

5. Discussion and Conclusion

5.1 Major Findings

Based on the Critical Metaphor Analysis of war metaphors in official news reports concerning COVID-19 outbreak in China, the major findings can be concluded as follows:

(1) Despite the fact that the war metaphors implicitly bring negative emotions such as horror and death to some extent, it can arouse cognitively the public's awareness of self-protection and stimulate properly the positive emotions of the public with the embedded Chinese narrative characteristics "a party in trouble, assistance comes from all sides".

(2) The application of war metaphors can function as positive guidance in conveying government policy and play an important role in soothing the public tension and help to stabilize.

In sum, the adoption of war metaphors in the COVID-19 news reports in China official media can help to stimulate the positive emotions of the public, arouse the collectivism values, construct a unified epidemic prevention cognition system of the public, and play a crucial role in providing information, policy interpretation and humanistic guidance.

Apart from the major findings, the possible reasons for adopting war metaphors in China official news reports are listed in the following part.

5.2 Reasons for Adopting War Metaphors

Despite the fact that war metaphors may cause some negative consequences, such as aggressiveness and excessive worries, Chinese PD has still chosen war metaphors in their COVID-19 accounting, especially during the early stage of the outbreak. At the beginning of the outbreak, the lockdown of Wuhan and the unknown severe infectious disease have caused nationwide panic and such panic situation expanded rapidly around the country. Under such severe domestic situation, it is the official media's responsibility to restore public trust and soothe public sentiment. In PD's editorials, a lot of war metaphors are used to activate the war framing in people's mind. In the attempt to seek an emotional trigger to encourage people at that gloomy situation and elevate people's fighting will, war metaphors are the inevitable choice. Based on the critical metaphor analysis on the war metaphors used in PD's editorials concerning COVID-19, the

paper digs out the possible reasons for adopting war metaphors: historical and cultural background and policy tendency.

In the first place, Chinese people are familiar with war. Especially in China's modern history, the Chinese nation suffered from the bullying of wars. The whole nation went through military struggles such as the Northern Expedition, the anti-Japanese Aggression and the War of Liberation. Under the leadership of the Communist Party of China, the Chinese nation finally won its independence and the birth of new China. At present, Chinese people remain relatively fresh memories of war. It is a good method to use war metaphors to arouse the public's positive emotion. Besides the historical background, WAR framing under Chinese context coincides with Chinese ideology of collectivism to some extent. In Chinese ideology of collectivism, the individual family is closely connected with the whole nation and people tend to act for the good of the group, not necessarily for their own good [26]. Thus, war metaphors in the news reports can function as a trigger to arouse people's sense of responsibility and elevate the confidence in overcoming the difficulties.

Moreover, the choice of war metaphors also reflects Chinese government's policy tendency towards the epidemic. War metaphor in the official media is not simply a semantic way of reporting COVID-19 prevention and control work, but rather an effective discourse strategy to convey government policy tendency and construct public opinion. On the one hand, the war framing in the official media reflects Chinese governments' determination to eradicate COVID and aims to get rolling victory. And Chinese government has pursuing the policy of "people first" during the epidemic, which is conveyed through the metaphor *renminzhanzheng* (people's war). On the other hand, such unique war framing can affect and construct people's public opinion. WAR framing under Chinese context are particularly under the influence of Mao Zedong, who holds that people is the most essential factor in defeating the enemy and Chinese people can finally win the war after a long and tough process with joint efforts[25] The public can feel the determination and people-first policy through the war framing and their national identity and sense of responsibility can also be aroused.

5.3 Implicature and Limitations

The findings in the present study shed light on the cognitive mechanism and social functions of war metaphors in official news reports in China. Although many scholars opposed the abuse of war metaphors in public discourse [12] [13], the proper and timely use of war metaphors under particular social situations and cultural background is recommended and plays positive functions. In this case, the choice of war metaphors is motivated by both cognitive and social factors. Under such unprecedented social situations (nationwide lockdown, possible breakdown of medical system and rapidly spreading epidemic), good use of war metaphors and WAR framing they constructed at that time is crucial in providing information, policy interpretation and humanistic guidance. The strengthen of war metaphors is fully manifested and metaphors that conform to the values of the receivers can elicit positive responses psychologically. And the present study strongly suggests the correlation between the metaphors chosen in official news reports and the political policies adopted by the government. Both the cognitive and political factors affect the application of metaphors and metaphors reflects the political policies in turn. It is quite necessary to make critical analysis on metaphors used in official news reports.

It is worth noting that the political policy change along with with the dynamic change of the epidemic situations. Thus, the present study is limited in its time-span of the corpus, which only focus on one stage of Chinese epidemic. The future study can expand the time-span of the corpus and focus on the change in the application of war metaphors and find out the possible reasons for the possible change.

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