

ТЕОРЕТИЧЕСКАЯ, ПРИКЛАДНАЯ И СРАВНИТЕЛЬНО-СОПОСТАВИТЕЛЬНАЯ ЛИНГВИСТИКА /
THEORETICAL, APPLIED AND COMPARATIVE LINGUISTICS

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.18454/RULB.2022.30.6>

CONCEPTUAL METAPHOR OF COVID-19 PANDEMIC IN ECONOMIC NEWS

Research article

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Abstract

The article examines conceptual metaphors by analyzing the most productive metaphoric concepts used to describe the events and consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic. The article provides a brief theoretical basis of the study, discusses the notion and types of conceptual metaphor from the point of view of the cognitive approach. The research material – English economic news articles that cover the topics of the coronavirus pandemic. The analysis of the selected material made it possible to evaluate the areas of knowledge that served as source domains for metaphorizing the pandemic. The data obtained prove the prevalence of metaphor in the media, its importance for understanding complex situations, effectively conveying ideas and influencing the audience.

Keywords: metaphorical model, conceptual metaphor, representation, COVID-19, economic news.

КОНЦЕПТУАЛЬНАЯ МЕТАФОРА ПАНДЕМИИ COVID-19 В ЭКОНОМИЧЕСКИХ НОВОСТЯХ

Научная статья

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Аннотация

В статье исследуются концептуальные метафоры посредством анализа наиболее продуктивных метафорических моделей, используемых для описания событий и последствий пандемии COVID-19. В статье приводится краткая теоретическая основа исследования, рассматриваются понятие и виды концептуальной метафоры с точки зрения когнитивного подхода. Материалом для исследования послужили англоязычные экономические новостные статьи, охватывающие тематику пандемии коронавируса. Проведенный анализ выбранного материала позволил оценить области знаний, послуживших источниками метафоризации пандемии. Полученные данные доказывают распространенность метафоры в средствах массовой информации, ее значение для понимания сложных ситуаций, эффективной передачи идей и воздействия на аудиторию.

Ключевые слова: метафорическая модель, концептуальная метафора, репрезентация, COVID-19, экономические новости.

Introduction

Modern society is still going through a series of radical changes due to the current situation caused by the spread of coronavirus infection in 2019, also referred to as coronavirus or COVID-19. Due to its unpredictability, rapid rate of spread and global scale, the pandemic has made significant changes in people's lives. The enormity of the pandemic is discussed, explained and interpreted in numerous publications related to medicine [11] and other fields of science, culture, economics, education and politics [9], [10].

Since the beginning of the pandemic, mass media is awash with information about the health status of people in different countries. The articles abounded with medical terminology. However, in order to broadcast messages in a more understandable and attractive form, the mass media began to use a greater number of neologisms in the news texts, as well as non-standard interpretations of vital issues in different languages [12]. The expressive mean that most vividly and concisely describe various phenomena is metaphor. With the appearance of new neologisms and metaphorical collocations, the linguistic side of coronavirus became a new subject for linguistics research.

Methodology of the research

The objective of the research is to analyze the most productive metaphorical models of COVID-19 pandemic in the texts of economic articles.

The relevance is explained by the fact that the classification of conceptual metaphors characterizing the pandemic phenomenon was not presented, despite the appearance of linguistic analysis on the transformations occurred after the spread of coronavirus.

The material selected for this study includes thirty articles from the newspapers The Times and Financial Times (FT) published digitally between March 2020 and February 2022.

We should mention that the cognitive approach has no precise methods for identification of conceptual metaphors [6, P. 215]. Therefore, we relied on the following criteria for the data selection: the presence of terms COVID-19, coronavirus, corona, pandemic in collocations that could be understood metaphorically. Continuous sampling method and classification method were also used during the analysis of the selected material.

Theoretical background

Metaphors express the attitude to the described object or phenomenon and contribute to the dialectical interaction of individual texts and discourses. In the traditional sense, a metaphor is a linguistic phenomenon, a rhetorical figure, the “decoration” of speech used for artistic purposes [5, P. 93]. However, cognitive approach of American linguists George Lakoff and Mark Johnson radically changed the definition of metaphor. In cognitive linguistics, the theory of conceptual metaphor received a huge resonance. The theory was fully formulated in the G. Lakoff and M. Johnson’s book “Metaphors that We Live by”, which was written in 1980 [8].

Their key argument is that conceptual system of a person is ordered and defined metaphorically. Metaphors become possible because they exist in the conceptual system of a person. Since language communication is based on a person’s conceptual system, language acts as the most important source of information about what this system is. Conceptual metaphors are fundamental, they deeply permeate a process of thinking. That is why their “metaphoricity” is not felt and realized by speakers [4], [6], [7], [8].

Conceptual approach distinguishes the following types of conceptual metaphors: structural, orientational, ontological. Structural metaphors represent a metaphorical system in which one abstract (target) concept is presented in terms of more concretely described (source) concept. The important feature of these metaphors is their ability to “highlight” or “mask” some aspects of a particular concept. The orientational metaphor involves special relationships and helps us to present a system of ideas comparing it with interactions in space. The most significant notions are organized by one or more orientational metaphors that are integrated with each other. Ontological metaphors help to comprehend events, actions, emotions and ideas as discrete, sensually perceived objects and entities [8].

Discussion

The COVID-19 pandemic has evoked various linguistic studies. Some of them consider the use of conceptual metaphors for describing events connected with the spread and consequences of coronavirus.

Fei Junhui has analyzed the White paper “China’s Measures to Counter the Coronavirus Epidemic”, an official document devoted to the experience of fighting the COVID-19 epidemic in China [5, P. 217-222]. The research showed that the text is flooded with military and anthropomorphic metaphors, metaphors of movement and exam. The complex application of conceptual metaphors in discourse and measures of prevention and control over the epidemic creates a common system of social practices, which is fundamentally aimed at defeating the epidemic. In addition, the White Paper explains China’s ideas regarding global containment of the epidemic, shows the role of China as a responsible major power in this matter.

Rycheva E.A. and Soroka S.S. have analyzed the image of the coronavirus in the political discourse of Russia and the Czech Republic [2, P. 71-81]. The authors conclude that conceptual metaphors are based on stereotypical ideas existing in culture, which have the greatest impact on the recipient. The choice of a particular metaphor is influenced by the combination of specific conditions and the context. With the help of conceptual metaphors, the speaker identifies the most significant characteristics of the object, interprets them, forming an image of the coronavirus in the recipient’s mind.

A. Doquin de Saint Preux and O. Masid Blanco study the coronavirus pandemic influence on the people’s mental state by comparing two domains: COVID-19 IS A WAR and COVID-19 IS SPORT. Metaphors based on the concept of war greatly increase people’s anxiety about the events during the spread of pandemic and cause negative emotions. At the same time, sport metaphors soften tension and people’s negative state. They have a significant influence on public opinion regarding measures to combat the pandemic [3, P. 37-47].

A profound cross-sectional study on the linguistic side of the COVID-19 pandemic was made by Kupina N.A. [1]. The author basing on the texts of the Russian press looks into the word-centrism development of the national culture: the formation of a special layer of the thematic vocabulary of the current moment, the appearance of metaphors included in the event context. The article stresses on an emotionally expressive coloring of thematic words. For example: The words “virus” and “quarantine” cause a panic reaction. Metaphors diagnose stressful condition of society. Kupina N.A. concluded that metaphors act as a means of operational axiological diagnostics of the moral and mental state of society, current economic situation.

Results

1. COVID-19 IS A WAR

The analysis of the texts showed that the events of the pandemic period are often described as events of war and metaphorically compared with military operations, attacks, which is explained by the sudden appearance of the coronavirus, its spread around the world and the consequences for humanity and economy. We have considered examples of military metaphors in the economic news context: *While the pandemic has not been beaten, the healthcare response is making progress* (FT, 31/07/20) [13]. *Scotland’s battle against coronavirus is on a knife edge* (The Times, 16/07/21). *Researchers have created an app designed to fight COVID-19 by analysing data* (The Times, 13/12/20). *“We have one shared enemy and that enemy is the virus”* (The Times, 29/07/21) [14].

Verbs belonging to the source domain “war” are always used to describe the struggle (*battle, beat, combat, defeat, fight, struggle*) with various diseases and the effects for society caused by them. When describing events during the era of coronavirus infection spread, the following metaphors were regularly encountered in the texts of economic news: *invisible enemy, global weapon, hit to growth, attack, coronavirus battle, fight against coronavirus/COVID-19, defend, strike*, etc. The

measures of states and enterprises are viewed as a war with economic and financial consequences left by the coronavirus: *The confidence of business leaders has been destroyed by the coronavirus outbreak* (The Times, 10/03/20) [14].

2. COVID-19 IS A NATURAL DISASTER

Almost equally productive metaphor is the comparison of the coronavirus and its consequences with natural phenomena: The metaphor of the *first/second/new/autumn wave of COVID-19* has firmly entered the language: *US and UK workers were more concerned by a second wave* (FT, 24/08/20). *US seeks to bring its most recent wave of the coronavirus pandemic under control* (FT, 1/11/21) [13].

Especially frequent sources for describing the economic and social consequences of a destructive pandemic are natural disasters, against which people and the economy are weak (*corona storm, Covid tornado, corona earthquake, Covid disaster, Covid chaos*): *How South Africa's lenders rode out first Covid storm* (FT, 21/12/21). *If Brexit is a permanent speed bump for the Eurostar, coronavirus is an earthquake* (FT, 4/03/21) [13]. *Reparation payments for the chaos unleashed by COVID-19* (The Times, 14/12/21) [14].

3. COVID-19 IS A LIVING ORGANISM/HUMAN BEING

Due to the universal nature of the metaphor, it often uses images from the sphere of human activity, which allows it to convey the vitality of the pandemic: *The market was already growing, but Covid has accustomed many more people to self-testing* (FT, 12/01/22) [13]. *Is this now our main method of understanding how coronavirus is moving among us?* (The Times, 16/03/20). *Covid does have a lot to answer for* (The Times, 6/12/22) [14].

In this metaphoric model, the human condition is often exploited as a source sphere for creating metaphoric descriptions. In the representation of the coronavirus pandemic phenomena, the most used are the state of *hunger, anxiety, fear, stress*: *Sardinian households have started to use online and at-home musical rituals to cope with the stress of coronavirus* (FT, 15/04/20). *New coronavirus fears dented confidence in the travel sector* (FT, 13/12/21) [13]. *I cannot be the only one for whom coronanxiety is playing tricks with my brain* (The Times, 22/05/21) [14].

4. COVID-19 IS A SPORT COMPETITION

Sports metaphors are used mainly to describe the competitive struggle of the largest international pharmaceutical companies developing vaccines against coronavirus infection, their struggle for the sales market: *The "great vaccination divide" between rich and poor nations is not closed* (FT, 8/02/22). *The two large vaccine makers have lagged behind in the race to develop a Covid* (FT, 23/02/22). *The world's largest healthcare company, said it sold \$2.38bn of its vaccine in 2021 as it battled manufacturing problems and tough competition* (FT, 25/01/22) [13].

5. COVID-19 IS TRAVEL

The study showed that the coronavirus pandemic is often metaphorically represented through the frame "travel" to show the gradual spread of the COVID-19: *When Covid arrived, investors feared luxury conglomerate LVMH would be hard hit* (FT, 3/01/22). *The Delta variant of the virus arrived in the country* (FT, 6/01/22) [13]. *It's probably the most worrying development we've had in the Covid journey for some months* (The Times, 27/11/21) [14].

The analysis of metaphors selected from the texts of English-language articles allows us to demonstrate the percentage ratio of areas that served as sources for the metaphorization of the coronavirus pandemic (see figure 1). The diagram shown below allows us to make the following conclusion: the conceptual areas "War" and "Natural disaster" are the most productive for the metaphorical description of the COVID-19 effects. Frequent appearance of military metaphors in the texts of economic news articles can be explained by the widespread use of the lexeme "war" and verbs describing military actions when fighting against the virus. The COVID-19 pandemic is considered as a common enemy with which humanity is combating. Source domains "Living organism/human being", "Sport competition" and "Travel" are inferior to the above-mentioned concepts in terms of the number of metaphors belonging to them.

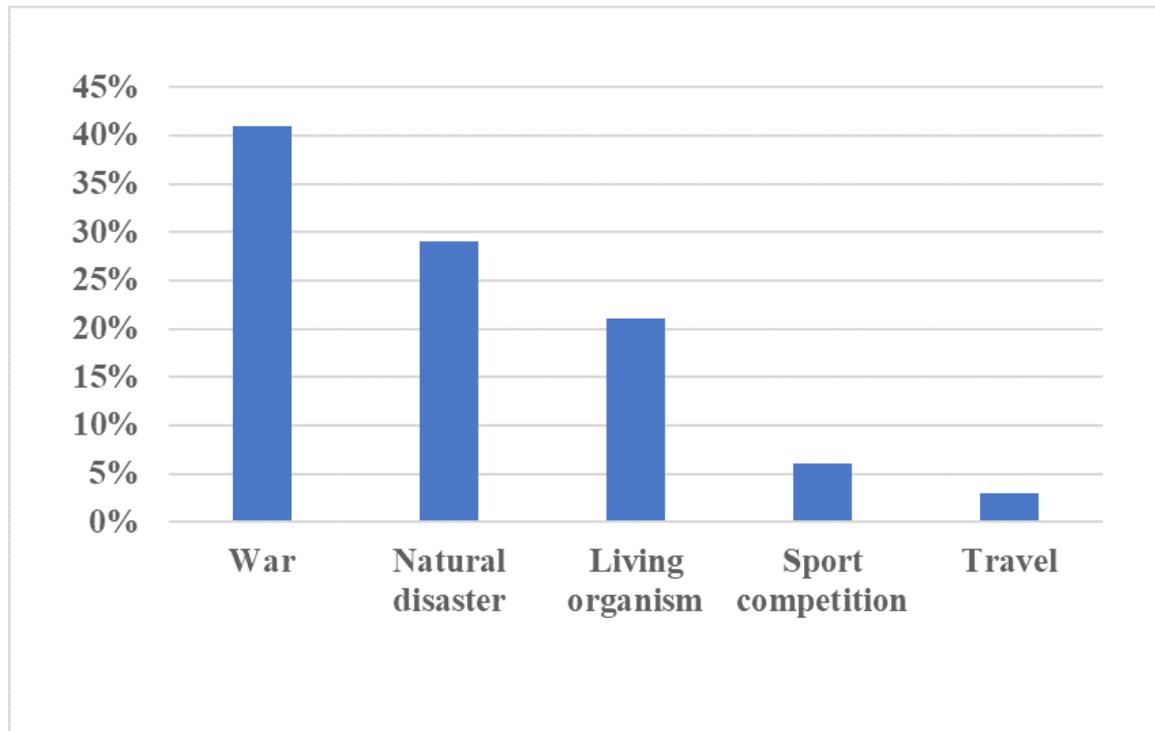


Figure 1 - Source domains of COVID-19 metaphorization

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.18454/RULB.2022.30.6.1>

Conclusion

The research of the metaphorical description of the COVID-19 pandemic events was conducted on the basis of English economic articles from the digitally published newspapers Financial Times and The Times. The analysis has shown that the use of metaphors is relevant for covering news directly related to the coronavirus and its consequences for all spheres of life. The source areas of the analyzed metaphors represent various spheres, such as “War”, “Natural disaster” and “Living organism/human being”, “Sport competition” and “Travel”. The study results demonstrated that the purpose of using metaphors for the representation of various aspects related to the coronavirus pandemic is aimed at forming public consciousness and a linguistic picture of the world.

Конфликт интересов

Не указан.

Рецензия

Все статьи проходят рецензирование. Но рецензент или автор статьи предпочли не публиковать рецензию к этой статье в открытом доступе. Рецензия может быть предоставлена компетентным органам по запросу.

Conflict of Interest

None declared.

Review

All articles are peer-reviewed. But the reviewer or the author of the article chose not to publish a review of this article in the public domain. The review can be provided to the competent authorities upon request.

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