

The Pandemic and Multimodal Metaphors: A Mixed Methods Study on COVID-19 Metaphors in China

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Preface

Metaphorical descriptions of the COVID-19 pandemic are pervasive in media coverage in China. This study carries out a corpus-based critical analysis of COVID-19 metaphors used by the Chinese government in online news pictures in the first year of the pandemic in China, and conducts experimental studies to examine the impact of COVID-19 metaphors in Chinese society.

Chapter 1 of this study functions as an introduction to this study. It introduces the background and demonstrates the outline of this study.

Chapter 2 synthesizes the theoretical foundations for this study. In detail, this study reviews the literature on conceptual metaphor, multimodal metaphor, and studies of metaphors in disease discourse and political discourse. Possible research gaps are identified, and research questions are proposed after reviewing existing studies.

Chapter 3 is a critical metaphor analysis of online authentic pandemic-related data in this study. This chapter mainly investigates major COVID-19 metaphors in the Chinese political context and their social entailment. This chapter introduces the analytical framework, exhibits the research method, including data collection and corpus construction, the data sampling method, the coding scheme, and the check of inter-coder reliability, and reports results. The results from this qualitative investigation on corpus data suggest that COVID-19 metaphors (45%) are less widely used in news pictures than presumed. Most metaphors (95%) in news pictures are rendered verbally. The most salient COVID-19 metaphors used by the Chinese government in news pictures are the UP/DOWN (spatial), WAR, FAMILY, and COMPETITION metaphors. Log-linear analyses of the association between source/target domains and pandemic stages reveal that target domains and source domains are highly associated with specific pandemic stages. The Chinese government employs particular source/target domains when faced with different issues in different pandemic stages. Drawing on Critical Metaphor Analysis, this study interprets major COVID-19 metaphors in the Chinese political context and highlights that the Chinese government employs

COVID-19 metaphors with persuasive and ideological functions.

Chapter 4 presents experimental studies that examine how major COVID-19 metaphors that are used in the Chinese political context influence Chinese people's risk perception and attitudes toward protective health behaviors. Questionnaire surveys are designed to examine how major COVID-19 metaphors help Chinese people to perceive the pandemic better by checking their perceived severity, perceived susceptibility, and affective reaction/negative affect of the pandemic and how major COVID-19 metaphors influence Chinese people's attitudes and decision-making on protective behavioral intention and vaccination intention when participants are given news pictures with metaphorical/literal frames. The study constructs a mediation model and examines the mediating role of risk perception in the relationship between metaphorical frames and protective health behaviors. The study first conducts a pilot study among college students in the southeast of mainland China, then adjusts the questionnaire and delivers the questionnaire online to a larger sample of Chinese people from more diversified locations. The results reveal that perceived severity, perceived susceptibility, and negative affect are parallel mediators that mediate the effect of COVID-19 metaphors on protective health behaviors. This study also finds that metaphorical frames in news pictures allow Chinese people to perceive higher levels of severity and susceptibility of the pandemic, make people perceive more negative emotions and more willing to take protective behaviors and receive vaccines. Moreover, news pictures with high-depicted severity and susceptibility and generate more negative affect from people also make them more willing to take protective behaviors and receive vaccines.

Chapter 5 lists some conclusions, implications and limitations of the whole study. Suggestions for future studies are also addressed. In short, this study combines qualitative and quantitative research designs to examine COVID-19 metaphors used in the Chinese political context. This study highlights the importance of metaphor as a powerful tool for communicating the pandemic in Chinese culture. The investigation of COVID-19 metaphors elucidates the underlying reasons and motivations behind the government's

utilization of metaphors across different stages of the pandemic, thereby facilitating readers' comprehension of China's current situation, social values, and ideological perspectives. Through investigation, this study has generated adverse spatial metaphor patterns from Lakoff and Johnson (1980), and addressed the WAR metaphor as an effective tool in Chinese political discourse to raise people's vigilance and persuade them to take preventive actions against the SARS-CoV-2 virus. The findings allow readers to rethink the appropriateness of COVID-19 metaphors in their cultural contexts