

A Cross-cultural Corpus Analysis of COVID-19 War Metaphors in China and the UK

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Since the “cognitive turn”, metaphor is viewed as a cognitive tool pervasive in human thought (Lakoff & Johnson 2008). As expected, it was extensively used, with War metaphors being employed most frequently despite considerable criticism, in different countries during the COVID-19 pandemic to frame the disease in culturally specific ways (Pfirmer & Barbosa 2020). While there has been significant research on the types of metaphors employed during the pandemic (Semino 2021), few studies delve into the variations in metaphor usage across diverse cultural contexts (cf. Berrocal, M. et al. 2021).

This paper provides a cross-cultural examination of metaphorical framing efforts within COVID-19 discourses, specifically investigating War metaphors employed in government and media communication in China compared to the UK. Particularly, through the comparison of the British Prime Minister’s and Chinese President’s use of War metaphors in their COVID-19 public speeches, the underlying metaphor systems are revealed extending from DISEASE IS WAR. Applying Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT) supplemented with Conceptual Blending Theory (CBT), the research focuses on the following two questions:

RQ1: Are War metaphors used more diversely and creatively in the Chinese Presidential Speech corpus compared to the British Prime Minister Speech corpus?

RQ2: Can any difference in variety and novelty be explained by broader cultural contexts and natural and physical environments?

The investigation is divided into three parts: (i) corpus compiling; (ii) metaphor identification and quantification; and (iii) critical interpretation. Firstly, I will search for public speeches related to COVID-19 from two websites, both covering the same time frame. Next, I will proceed with manual metaphor identification. Finally, qualitative analysis will focus on the categorizations and the valence of War metaphors.

A pilot study has already revealed a number of specific mappings that make up the DISEASE IS WAR system, including CURING A DISEASE IS FIGHTING A WAR, PEOPLE ARE SOLDIERS, and TREATMENT APPROACHES ARE WAR STRATEGIES. Additionally, both the Chinese and the British corpus contain culturally specific metaphors:

(1) 用血肉之躯筑起阻击病毒的钢铁长城。

building the Great Wall of Steel to defend against the virus by the flesh and blood

(2)to put that invisible shield around the elderly and the vulnerable in the form of vaccination.

Further findings will be given at the conference.

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