FIGURATIVE FRAMING AROUND PANDEMIC DISCOURSE:
FROM METAPHORICAL WARS ON CORONAVIRUS TO WARS ON ANTI-VAXXERS

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Abstract. The current paper deals with metaphorical framing of the COVID-19 pandemic and public response to it in the public and media discourse. Being one of the most dramatic global challenges of the third Millennium, the COVID-19 pandemic spurred transformation in social order, economic/business relationships and dramatic growth in social anxiety and tensions, mistrust and discriminatory measures. It has inevitably found its reflection in language and related discursive practices, which rely heavily on discourse metaphors. When being systematically employed, they affect people's views of events, situations and decisions they subsequently make. The present paper focuses primarily on the COVID-induced discourse changes that create new metaphorical framings and re-shape the familiar ones. The repertoire of elicited discourse metaphors framing the coronavirus discourse communicates the changing combating strategies referred to by the authors as globalist, nationalist and discriminatory. By drawing on specially compiled subcorpus of public and media texts, the paper reveals the conceptual and inferential structure of the concept of the COVID-19 pandemic and discusses the possible implications of activating various pandemic-related frames. The study stresses that the discursive construction of the coronavirus pandemic mirrors the dynamic nature of the pandemic itself as well as the measures to combat the insidious virus taken by national governments, the spread of misinformation and fake news as well as the split in the society and discrimination of certain groups (vaccine deniers/anti-vaxxers). Acknowledging the prevalence of military metaphors in the pandemic-related discourse, the authors claim that metaphorical framing serves as a crucial conceptual tool to communicate the gradual transition from war on COVID-19 to war of vaccines and ultimately to war on out-groups (vaccine deniers, anti-vaxxers).

Key words: metaphor, metaphorical framing, public discourse, media discourse, globalist strategy, nationalist strategy, discriminatory strategy.

ОБРАЗНЫЙ ФРЕЙМИНГ ДИСКУРСА ПАНДЕМИИ:
ОТ МЕТАФОРИЧЕСКИХ ВОЙН С КОРОНАВИРУСОМ
ДО ВОЙН С АНТИПРИВИВОЧНИКАМИ

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Аннотация. В статье исследуется конструирование дискурса пандемии COVID-19 посредством метафорического фрейминга и общественной реакции на нее, отраженной в публичном и медийном дискурсах. Являясь одним из самых серьезных глобальных вызовов третьего тысячелетия, пандемия коронавируса ускорила трансформацию общественного порядка, экономических / деловых отношений и рост социальной тревожности и напряженности, недоверия и дискриминации определенных слоев общества. Это неизбежно нашло отражение в языке и связанных с ним дискурсивных практиках, в значительной степени опирающихся на дискурсивные метафоры, которые при систематическом использовании трансформируют взгляды людей на события и принимаемые впоследствии решения. В статье делается акцент на изменениях в навязанном коронавирусом дискурсе, которые способствуют возникновению новых и преобразованию известных типов метафорического фрейминга. Предложена классификация варьирующихся стратегий борьбы с пандемией (глобалистских, националистических и дискриминационных), передаваемых репертуаром извлеченных дискурсивных метафор, конструирующих дискурс коронавируса. На материале специально составленного подкорпуса русскоязычных и англоязычных публичных и медийных текстов раскрывается концептуальная и инференциальная структуры концепта пандемии COVID-19 и демонстрируются возможные последствия активизации различных связанных с пандемией фреймов. Показано, что дискурсивное конструирование пандемии коронавируса отражает ее динамичный характер, а также меры борьбы с вирусом, принимаемые национальными правительствами, распространение дезинформации и фейковых новостей, а также раскол в обществе и дискриминацию отдельных групп (антипрививочников). Выявив преобладание военных метафор в дискурсе пандемии, авторы утверждают, что метафорический фрейминг служит важнейшим концептуальным инструментом для сообщения о постепенном переходе от войны с ковидом к войне вакцин и в итоге к войне с «чужаками» (антипрививочниками).

Ключевые слова: метафора, метафорический фрейминг, публичный дискурс, медийный дискурс, глобалистская стратегия, националистская стратегия, дискриминационная стратегия.

Introduction

The pandemic caused by the new COVID-19 virus is considered to be one of the most dramatic global challenges of the third millennium, which spread worldwide within several months and marked a new era in which the coronavirus rules. Though COVID-19 is primarily a biological phenomenon which is being actively studied within the framework of biology, medicine and contiguous natural sciences, its impact is by no means reduced solely to health care as it unprecedentedly "intoxicated" all spheres of life. COVID-19 pandemic spurred a crisis and transformation in social order, economic and business relationships and provoked severe restrictions on travelling globally. It was followed by the dramatic growth in social anxiety and tensions, closed borders, ongoing debates about vaccines and their effectiveness, the resulting mistrust and various sorts of discriminatory measures.

In all times any social turmoil has inevitably found its reflection in language, its lexicon and phraseology, giving rise to new words, word-combinations and metaphors. In the course of the current pandemic, human language and discursive practices were the first to react to the new global reality in all aspects of social life: politics, economics, education, international and social relations, forms of communication and mass media. These days, the linguistic consciousness and related discursive practices are being enriched with new words, word-combinations and neologisms (_коронавирус – coronavirus, пандемия – pandemic, самоизоляция – self-isolation, антипрививочники – anti-vaxxers, ковидиоты – covidiots, карантикулы – quarancation_, etc.), that reflect new cognitive models, concepts and metaphorical frames, which indicate significant changes in peoples' world views [Zaitseva, 2020].

Since its inception in the late 2019, the COVID-19 pandemic has long pervaded not only what we are talking about on a daily basis but also the ways we talk about it. The pandemic gave rise to numerous neologisms due to their fast spread and circulation in social networks and public media, which, in its turn, spurred new collocations and phrases, changing the meaning

of existing words [Shmeleva, 2021], borrowing medical jargon into general language and generating a myriad of metaphorical framings of the coronavirus discourse. Metaphors are frequently applied to refer to different aspects of diseases, their outbreak, symptoms and treatment. The high relevance of the metaphorical framing is particularly obvious in health-related discourse, as it can impact patients' general wellbeing [Sontag, 1979; Semino, 2017].

Metaphor as a fundamental way of thinking and reasoning has been pervasive in understanding a wide range of human experiences such as time, causation, events, emotions, self, morality, and disease. Its effects on the ways we see major societal issues have been long attested in cognitive science, psycholinguistics and related fields [Gibbs, 2012; Kovecses, 2020; Lakoff, Johnson, 2003].

Taking a closer look at the pandemic discourse, the authors found that metaphorical narratives, which have been unfolding around COVID-19, are dynamic and tend to evolve reflecting the changes in the nature of the pandemic itself and the ways nations deal with it. The repertoire of elicited discourse metaphors framing the discourse about coronavirus, with its successive waves, prompts the ways nations approach it, and is consistent with the changing combating strategies, referred to by the authors as globalist, anti-globalist/nationalist and discriminatory.

Scope and methods

The present paper focuses primarily on the COVID-induced discourse changes that create new metaphorical framings and re-shape the familiar ones. It addresses the following questions:

– how the concept of the COVID-19 pandemic is conceptually and inferentially structured in public and media discourse;

– what are the most frequent and apt metaphors figuratively framing the discourse about coronavirus and measures to combat it;

– how the COVID-19 discourse is evolving with new waves of the pandemic following one another.

Methodologically, the paper relies on a specialized corpus of public and media texts (mostly Russian and English), the authors compiled, using Sketch Engine corpus compilation tool. The manually selected texts in the corpus cover the period from January 2020 to December, 2021. The sources of the texts range from newspaper articles and interviews with representatives of medical experts community to speeches and statements of public figures and politicians involved in managing the pandemic.

Along with this subcorpus comprising about 275,600 words, we used Russian and British national corpora as reference corpora. Initially the query included the words *вирус – virus*, *коро-на – corona*, *ковид – COVID*, *коронавирус – coronavirus*, *пандемия – pandemic*(*s*) and *эпи-демия – epidemic*(*s*) to identify salient source frames such as *борьба – fight*, *битва – battle*, *война – war*, *игра – game*, *путешествие – journey*, *путь – path*, *победить – to win*, *побить – to beat*, etc. The next step was to manually analyze the concordances of these target words and annotate them for linguistic metaphors which were subsequently annotated for the type of conceptual metaphor using the MetaNet annotating schemas [Sweetser, David, Stickles, 2019]. In terms of qualitative analysis, we elicited all source frames and grouped them into hierarchies enabling us to reveal the conceptual and inferential structure of the COVID-19 pandemic concept.

The innovative nature of this paper lies in the extensive analysis of discourse metaphors drawn from our observations of figurative framings, found in the pandemic-related discourse in public and social media, and a compiled specialized subcorpus of COVID-related metaphors. Some examples are borrowed from The Coronavirus Corpus – an online collection of news articles in English from around the world from January 2020 onwards (XXVIII) and a cross-linguistic open database of metaphors #ReframeCovid (XXVI), an initiative aimed at collecting and promoting alternative metaphorical narratives about the pandemic. We claim that the discursive construction of the coronavirus pandemic evolves around certain aspects of the coronavirus discourse (measures to combat the insidious virus taken by national governments, controversial public response to them, the resulting split in society, the spread of misinformation and fake news as well as ethnic, racial, professional and group discrimination). Transformation of COVID-19 discourse is driven by numerous

factors, including the changing nature of the pandemic itself, with its alternating waves, along with the changes in the discursive strategies exercised by public actors or other stakeholders (pharmaceutical companies, multinationals, professional and pseudo-professional medical communities), each pursuing their own goals. However, the COVID-19 discourse is still relatively underexamined as an ongoing and evolving phenomenon, abundant with diverging and opposing metaphorical narratives consistent with the ideologies and strategies of various interest groups. Therefore, the coronavirus agenda is widely applied as a tool to shape public opinion.

With this in mind, the authors examine the range of metaphorical frames employed in public and media discourse and exemplify the ways of affecting the target audience by imposing competing ideologies and strategies (globalist, anti-globalist/nationalist and discriminatory) related to the COVID-19 pandemic, thus shaping social behavior. By answering the aforementioned research questions our study paves the way for further longitudinal studies and its results provide crucial information for subsequent opinion mining, enabling us to compass public sentiments and the current state of mind, beliefs and feelings of various communities.

Results and discussion

Military framing of the pandemic and its dynamics

The first wave of the pandemic, when its origins were still unknown, and doctors were hardly able to find proper treatment of the disease, is rife with frustration and anxiety as well as harsh criticism of the government and its inability to fight the virus. Language responded promptly by coining the corresponding words and expressions, most of which are metaphorical, since metaphor has been attested to be a powerful explanatory tool for unfamiliar and highly abstract concepts [Skrynnikova, 2020]. People worldwide experienced *corona apocalypses*, *the fear from the emerging of a new deadly mutated strain of the pandemic*, *were locked down*, *worked remotely* (i.e. at a considerable distance from others, Russian neologism – *удалёнка* (*udalyonka*) and eventually *went covidcrazy on*

quarantication (XXX). At that point, the global community, being aware the virus knows no boundaries and spreads fast, united its efforts to withstand the dismaying and formerly unknown disease by sharing their findings and developing vaccines across the globe. This is when metaphor researchers started exploring the inventory of metaphors used to discuss current unprecedented social issues of the COVID-19 pandemic, and the role of metaphors in our reasoning and behavior in this situation.

Previous research [Kalinin, Romanov, 2021; Nerlich, 2020; Semino, 2021; Wicke, Bolognesi, 2020] have shown that the pandemic discourse relies heavily on the war framing. The military metaphors are commonly pervasive in public and media discourse about diseases as they cover various topics providing an effective structural framework for communicating and thinking about abstract and complex topics. Moreover, this frame bears a strong negative emotional valence. When applied to diseases, the war metaphor is generally resorted to for framing the situation relatively to the treatment of the disease [Wicke, Bolognese, 2020]. As we can see from MetaNet, a structured repository of conceptual metaphors and frames [Dodge, Hong, Stickles, 2015] elaborated by UC Berkeley and International Computer Science Institute (ICSI), the formalization of this metaphor is as follows:

DISEASE TREATMENT IS WAR or
TREATING DISEASE IS WAGING WAR (XXV).

This metaphor implies a number of mappings:
DISEASED CELLS are ENEMY COMBATANTS
MEDICAL PROFESSIONALS are ARMY OF ALLIES
BODY is a BATTLEFIELD
MEDICAL TOOLS are WEAPONS
TREATING a DISEASE is FIGHTING [Flusberg, Matlock, Thibodeau, 2018].

Disease-related discourses are structured by the figurative frame of WAR, which is conventional and is used unconsciously. The prevalence of this frame can be explained by its drawing on our basic knowledge and embodied experience along with inferred urgency to take action to achieve an ultimate goal. Another reason for high frequency of the war frame is the simplicity of its inner structure, with opposing

forces clearly referred to as in-groups (allies) and out-groups (enemies). Having its own strategy to achieve a goal, each force exercises its strategy, not without risks, including lethal ones. This is why this frame seems rather suitable, although arguable, for the discourse around COVID-19. Therefore, metaphorical descriptions of the pandemic as a war can be traced in Vladimir Putin's calls *to join efforts to win the pandemic*, and his belief in the victory is reflected in his references to the ancient Russian history:

(1) ...И печенеги ее терзали, и половцы, – со всем справилась Россия. **Победим** и эту заразу коронавирусную (I).

Both the Pechenegs and the Polovtsians tormented Russia. Russia coped with everything. And we will definitely **win** this coronavirus contagion [1].

Similar ideas are communicated by other national leaders:
– in China's Xi Jinping speech to the World Economic Forum in Davos:

(2) ...The world had **fought a tenacious battle** against the once in a century pandemic. First, we need to embrace cooperation and jointly **defeat** the pandemic (II);

– in Boris Johnson's statements on Britain's ability *to beat the deadly enemy*, in French President Macron's national address:

(3) We are at war. The **enemy** is here, it's invisible and **attacking** (III);

– in American ex-President Trump's speech:

(4) We are **waging the war**, in the true sense of the word (IV).

It is critical to note that metaphors are far from being "neutral ways of perceiving and representing reality, as each source domain highlights some aspects of the target and backgrounds others, facilitating different inferences and evaluations" [Lakoff, Johnson, 2003]. Similarly, war metaphors for diseases foreground the need for swift action to do away with it, while backgrounding the option of adapting to and living with it [Semino, 2021].

However, the use of war metaphors has not been widely welcomed and found to be potentially harmful and inapt to elaborate all aspects of the pandemic. The argument against military metaphors is that they tend to inappropriately personify the virus as a malicious opponent, thus adding to further social anxiety. This may subsequently legitimize tough and occasionally authoritarian governmental measures across the globe, and even imply weakness, unwillingness or even inability to fight for those who die. The following are critiques of military framings found in media headlines: "Why '**War** on COVID-19' is not the best metaphor", "We are not at '**war**' with coronavirus", "Using **military** language to discuss coronavirus is dangerous and irresponsible – the US must stop" [Tamkin, 2020].

Shifting towards vaccine wars

As months passed, more data about the nature and effects of COVID-19 became available, with new mutations arising in different parts of the world. Formerly united by the common threat and the constantly rising number of victims, countries then decided to focus on their internal problems and were busy developing their vaccines introducing various restrictive measures on a national scale (self-isolation, social distancing, lockdowns, national borders closures, restrictions on international travel, etc.) consistent with the epidemiological situation. Developed nations became aware of the pressing need for vaccination enabling to achieve collective immunity, in medical circles referred to as "*herd protection*", while vaccines for developing and underdeveloped ones were still unaffordable. Such uneven distribution of vaccines gave rise to what public and social media term *"vaccine nationalism"*, the mindset and act of gaining preferential access to newly developed COVID-19 vaccines by individual, mostly higher income countries [Bhutto, 2021]. This could not but raise questions about anti-globalist/nationalist approaches to the global public health crisis. Combining nationalist and globalist approaches to COVID-19 vaccines implies simultaneous and controversial globalization and deglobalization processes. It results in the mounting political and economic split globally, the lack/lag in public awareness of global coherence, especially in fields other than economic ones and various structural impediments

to global collaboration in the face of the common threat [Zhou, 2021].

Such state of affairs translated into trading accusations among the nations concerning origins of the virus and its spread. Instead of cooperating to defeat such a deadly disease, governments in power are busy exchanging accusations. China accused the US of spreading the COVID-19 pandemic in Wuhan [Huang, 2020; Myers, 2020]. The USA labeled the virus as "*Chinese virus*" and asked an opened investigation against Wuhan labs. Another "apple of discord" is (in)efficiency of various vaccines, their mutual recognition and methods to eradicate COVID-19. As a result, the war on COVID-19 has transformed into the war of vaccines, with each vaccine producing country promoting their own vaccine and finding faults with the one developed in another country.

Evidence of that is found both in official public sources and social media on deaths caused by different vaccines. For instance, the blog writer, Steve Kirsch argues:

(5) Pfizer's COVID-19 vaccine **kills** more people than it saves (V).

Similar military narratives containing mutual accusations concerning competing vaccines also prevail in official reports and social media:

(6) Are Chinese and Russian Covid-19 vaccines **victims** of prejudice? (VI);
(7) ...Publications, serving as **fronts** for Russian intelligence, have **targeted** Western-produced COVID-19 vaccines with misleading coverage (VII);
(8) Pfizer's vaccine has been the prime **target** of Russian disinformation... (VIII);
(9) Sputnik V's backers were already **under fire** for releasing little data on the vaccine's safety record (IX).

The examples above seem to validate the critical role of metaphorical framing in the implementation of such nationalist strategies in public and media discourse. It serves as a powerful tool of ideologization to promote certain interests of language users. By imposing particular metaphorical COVID-related narratives, metaphorical framing is critical in the positive or negative representation of the pandemic and issues related to it.

This ideological polarization is widely used in media to highlight the positive and good quality

and effectiveness of '*our*' vaccines, on the one hand, and emphasize the negative qualities and effectiveness of '*others*' vaccines. The media of the vaccine producing countries use the ideology of positive *us* representation and negative *others* representation. The latter is reported clearly through blaming the Chinese government of shortcomings and restrictions:

(10) ...The efficacy of the vaccines push WHO to stress the necessary need for **fighting** infodemics on one hand and trusting and respecting science on the other. Infodemics is deliberate attempts to disseminate wrong information to undermine the public health response and advance alternative agendas of groups or individuals (X);
(11) We're not just **fighting** an epidemic; we are **fighting** an infodemic (XI).

Blaming the victim and resorting to division and contrast strategies are used clearly through the media as applied to framing of vaccination.

Discriminating deniers through metaphors

As COVID-19 keeps spreading, sickening and killing people across the globe, widespread mandatory vaccination adoption becomes critical for battling the pandemic. However, widespread vaccine hesitancy deriving from specific concerns about long-term safety, fears due to past experiences and other uncertainties about COVID-19 vaccines, are rising [Larson, Broniatowski, 2021]. In a social environment, formed in the era of COVID-19, a mismatch between attitudes towards vaccination, compliance with social distancing rules and individual protective measures (wearing masks and gloves, quarantine, etc.) can serve as a pretext for social aggression and inequality. G.W. Allport argued that even simple inequality, prejudice if left unchecked, can develop into an extreme form, (starting from anti-locution and ending up at genocidal extermination) [Allport, 1954; Caless, Tong, 2015].

Bias (stigmatization) as prototypical concepts of racial, ethnic, class, age, gender and professional inequality are verbalized in the discriminatory COVID-19 discourse with its agonal concepts. Structural-cognitive elements of intolerance are proneness to conflict, all-or-nothing mentality, imposing opinions, which are enforced

in discriminatory topics of communication, violation of the norms of living together, deviant behavior of members of the out-group and open opposition to its representatives. They manifest themselves in a high degree of aggressiveness by means of a pungent social response to an event, excessive emotionality and rejection, imposing a certain view and lifestyle on representatives of the minority group, its psychological humiliation under the social and communicative dominance of the majority group.

Politicizing pandemics encourages ethnic and racial discrimination among different people, societies, and countries. It pushes people to indulge in hate speech and aggression resulting in disinformation, distortion, racial rhetoric, slur expressions, ideology, manipulation, and propaganda. A recent example is an anti-vaxxer's threatening in New York:

(12) ...If the authorities start vaccinating children, I can guarantee you one thing: Town halls and schools will be **burned to the ground** (XII).

In Russia, one of the infected confesses:

(13) ...Их соседи посылали бы им проклятия одним только взглядом и перестали бы здороваться с родней (XIII).
...Their neighbors would curse them with glances and stop saying hello to their relatives. Give them **a gun** and they wouldn't hesitate to **shoot** us all.

Concurrently, research shows that public conversations about COVID-19 contribute to an increasingly polarized citizenry in the society as well as the politicization of science and health issues [Finkel et al., 2021; Woolhandler et al., 2021]. This division reflects general vaccine attitudes, concerns about side effects, distrust of medical professions. One important factor related to vaccine hesitancy is political ideology. For example, US Democrats are more receptive to advice of scientists than Republicans [Blank, Shaw, 2015]. Amid COVID-19, conservatives perceive the virus as less severe and more likely to think the pandemic is a conspiracy [Calvillo et al., 2020].

From this perspective, vaccinated folks are considered to be morally accountable and deserve to be praised as opposed to anti-vaxxers who are immoral and, therefore, should be regulated for not taking the COVID-19 vaccine. The ethical focus is to promote universal vaccination entailing positive individual and public freedom for pro-vaxxers against restrictions or even discrimination of anti-vaxxers. This raises the question about the freedom of movement of unvaccinated people in public implying that someone who refuses the COVID-19 vaccine could bring harm to their broader community. But in a progressive society limitations on people's freedom are acceptable without infringing on the freedoms of others.

The recent trend of politicizing the COVID-19 vaccination manifested itself in the changing pandemic-related discourse. Despite the abundance of military metaphors in the public and media COVID-related discourse, the framing tends to shift towards discriminating those opposing and hesitant about inoculation against COVID-19. This marks the gradual transition from war on COVID-19 to war of vaccines and ultimately to war on out-groups (*anti-vaxxers*) as opposed to in-groups (*pro-vaxxers* – people with enough common sense to vaccinate themselves and their kids, protecting them from preventable diseases) (XXIX).

Media coverage of COVID-19 vaccine denial issues as well as public authorities responses to them are rife with military metaphors emphasizing the idea of a looming danger from vaccine deniers who should be opposed to by the in-group majority of pro-vaxxers:

(14) Gene Simmons rips anti-vaxxers: "If you're willing to walk among us unvaccinated, you are **an enemy**" (XIV);
(15) When a prominent Israeli opponent of vaccination died from COVID-19 in September 2021, his supporters "claimed that he was **murdered** by government authorities..." (XV);
(16) Even for **a militant** pro-vaxxer – I'm proud to be such – the idea of a general population-wide "mandatory" vaccination makes one uneasy (XVI);
(17) And in the UK, **the militant** anti-vaccine group Alpha Men Assemble (AMA) is reportedly plotting **to target** the police and vaccination centres (XVII).

According to the press secretary of the Russian President Dmitry Peskov, one can also find opponents of COVID-19 vaccination in the presidential administration, who will not be tolerated:

(18) Наша позиция по отношению к ним [ан-тиваксерам] **непримирима** (XVIII).

Our position about them (vaccination opponents) is **irreconcilable**.

Discrimination metaphors instantly capture attention as they express strong negative emotional valence of anxiety and fear, highlighting relevance and urgency, motivating action. Experientially, discrimination is an important and widespread human experience. It can be either a first-hand experience of participating in real discrimination situations: family discrimination at home; gender, age and occupational inequalities at work; racial, ethnic, class, in-group and other inequalities in society; or a second-hand experience through witnessing current inequalities in media, covering humiliating or abusive activities, etc.

To avoid such a backlash, it seems more reasonable to involve social democracy in the discussions of the COVID-19 crisis instead of discrimination of anti-vaxxers. Such an approach implies the form of governance and societal formation assuming that, if one is sick, everybody is potentially sick, therefore, a risk to one means a risk to all. This solidaristic provision of welfare to support the infected and potentially infected is both efficient and just. It clearly contrasts with discrimination governance that permits the minority to bear the brunt of the COVID-19 crisis representing egalitarian and just society in public institutions and practices, unlike contested "herd immunity". The latter is considered a good way of protection from infectious diseases when the entire population is immune either from vaccination or acquiring immunity through previous infection.

Repertoire of alternative framings

The metaphors elicited from our subcorpus suggest that metaphors are diverse in terms of the experiential domains from which they draw, various aspects of the pandemic they reflect, and "the ways in which they frame that aspect of the pandemic" [Semino, 2021, p. 53].

Although the frequency of military metaphors in public and media discourse is undebatable, their pervasiveness is severely opposed to. Different arguments against excessive militarization of the pandemic discourse range from concerns that war metaphors do not contribute to searching for alternative ways to solve problems, to exacerbating xenophobia along with fear and anxiety in the populations across the globe that these metaphors generate. For instance, K. Henderson [2020] stresses that employing a war narrative to talk about COVID-19 can be used to an advantage of white supremacist groups. Using a war frame divides communities, thus legitimizing the use of actual military actions. The press also opposes deliberate use of the war frame and calls for alternative figurative frames. An attempt to do so is a recent #ReframeCovid initiative, a collection of short texts (articles, advertisements, notes, etc.) providing alternative framings of the pandemic. They range from framing COVID as a GAME (FOOTBALL) to CALAMITIES/STORMS, to FAMILY, with the latter been applied to refer to the measures taken in response to the pandemic (e.g., lockdown, the WHO We are Family Campaign).

(19) The fact that we are keeping our masks on shouldn't lead anyone to believe that the vaccines are anything less than **game** changing (XIX);

(20) Surviving the **waves** of a pandemic **storm**: how to fix the supply chain flaws exposed by COVID-19 (XX).

However, some game metaphors, for instance, are similar to military metaphors in treating the virus as an opponent and implying either winning or losing:

(21) But just like **a football player** wouldn't discard one piece of protective equipment just because he got another one, we are going to keep all of our preventive measures in place until after the opponent is **defeated** (XXI).

The Russian public discourse around the pandemic frequently employs PRISON and CAMP frames which derive from Soviet times where those opposing the Soviet ideology were more often isolated than sick patients. This explains the use of *self-isolation* (unlike *quarantine*), *regime*, associated with a prison or *high-security colony*, rather than a hospital. Moscow and a number of other cities introduced *a permit regime*, and the expression *digital/electronic concentration camp* flashed across the Internet and social media:

(22) Под прикрытием коронавируса, Собянин хочет в Москве установить **электронный концлагерь** (XXII).

Under cover of the coronavirus, Sobyanin wants to establish an electronic **concentration camp** in Moscow.

Less radical metaphorical conceptualizations of the isolation zones are promoted by the GARDENING frame (*covidary* = fr. covid + rosary; *covidarium* = fr. covid + dendrarium – rus. *ковидарий*). In many ways a coronavirus is what we would consider an invasive species/ weed, managing of which has a traditional three-tiered response: prevention, early detection and rapid response followed by mitigation. From this perspective, COVID-19 as an alien species infects vulnerable targets which have little or no natural immunity. The term "weed" is any plant growing where it is not wanted while a noxious weed is commonly defined as a plant that grows out of place and is pernicious and persistent. Such line of reasoning evokes the inferences that COVID is a weed which has been introduced into an environment where it did not evolve. As a result, it has no natural enemies to limit its reproduction and spread. In this way, this weed produces significant changes to vegetation, composition, structure, or ecosystem function.

Previous research has repeatedly demonstrated the aptness of FIRE metaphors for characterizing emotions and other phenomena, from sexual desire to social movements [Charteris-Black, 2017; Kovecses, 2000], and, therefore, they appear to be suitable for exploitation in the coronavirus era [Semino, 2021]. Their creative and flexible use to frame the pandemic serves several functions. They vividly stress danger and urgency to take action, signal different phases of the pandemic, and explain the process of contagion and measures to reduce it. They can also foreground the role of medical personnel, relate the pandemic to health inequalities and other related problems or even predict scenarios of post-pandemic life.

Another alternative framing relies on the ANIMAL frame suggesting corresponding abusive nominations both for the virus and anti-vaxxers (e.g. *beast*, *invasive/alien species*, *herd immunity*, etc.). A beast is usually not a gentle or attractive animal. People are referred to as beasts when they behave "...in a violent and uncontrolled, crude, or horrible way, pertaining to the physical, sensual, or carnal nature of humans, rather than their spiritual or intellectual nature. Beasts often aggressively attack people" (XXIX). This line of reasoning is traced in the rhetoric of the vaccination campaign in Russia which changed within several months. From the balanced stories of doctors about an insidious sore and exhortations of unreasonable fellow citizens to get vaccinated, TV propagandists moved on to showing "horror stories" and threats against anti-vaxxers, without understanding what they were protesting against: against vaccinations in principle or against forced vaccination:

(23) Просто предлагают поверить им на слово: страшнее антиваксера **зверя** нет (XXIII).
They just offer to take their word for it: there is no **beast** worse than an anti-vaxxer.

Our analyses seem to provide sufficient evidence that the conceptual prolificacy of the pandemic domain is encouraged by figurative source frames providing both conventional and novel conceptualizations of the global health crisis. Our findings suggest striking creative potential the human language demonstrates even in the face of protracted uncertainty and alarming news coming from every corner of the world.

Conclusion

The presented study explored the evolving discourse around COVID-19 as manifested in public and social media permeated by metaphors. By drawing on specialized corpus data, it revealed the conceptual and inferential structure of the concept of the COVID-19 pandemic. The results obtained in the course of the research speak in favour of pervasiveness of the military metaphors to figuratively frame the discourse about coronavirus and measures to combat it. Another issue the study addressed was whether military framing of the pandemic is comparable to other potentially relevant metaphorical framings related to the pandemic-induced discourses. We found that COVID-19 discourse is strikingly dynamic evolving along with new phases of the pandemic itself and reflecting the changing strategies employed to withstand the pandemic.

Taken together our results suggest the prevalence of the WAR frame in shaping public discourse around the coronavirus. However, this frame is more frequent when talking about such aspects of the current pandemic as pressing urgency to respond to it through diagnostics and treatment as well as unwillingness to reconcile with it. This brings us to conclude that selecting a

single apt way of framing the pandemic is hardly acceptable, and employing alternative framings (FIRE, GARDEN, ANIMAL, PRISON) for various aspects of the pandemic would be more appropriate. In this regard, future studies could shed more light on the effects of alternative figurative framings.

Metaphor is a pervasive, powerful but yet uncensored tool for reasoning and communication about critical issues. Therefore, it can be potentially useful or harmful when framing societal challenges, such as global pandemic. To provide for reasonable public health messaging, the metaphor selection should be well-informed and context-sensitive. False or distorted information, manipulation, excessive ideologization, baseless accusations, and inaccurate conclusions, if facilitated by metaphorical framing, can spread quicker than the virus itself. A possible line of further research could be testing the power of metaphorical framings in real-life situations and their possible effects on reasoning.

NOTE

[1] Hereinafter the translation of Russian examples is provided by the authors.

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