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A WAR ON WAR METAPHOR: METAPHORICAL FRAMINGS IN CROATIAN DISCOURSE ON COVID-19

Previous studies show that public discourse and social media discourse around the Covid-19 pandemic heavily use war framing, despite the fact that its misuse and inaptness to elaborate all aspects of the pandemic were already noted. This paper analyses conceptual metaphors in the Croatian (social) media discourse on the pandemic, focusing on the WAR metaphor. Using a specialized corpus of manually chosen relevant texts in Croatian, compiled for this purpose, we investigate how frequent war framing is in the Croatian media compared to alternative figurative framings. In a qualitative analysis, we outline the conceptual and inferential structure of the Covid-19 pandemic concept and discuss the structure, function, and (in)aptness of the WAR metaphor in pandemic circumstances. Additionally, by detecting other source frames used in this discourse, we offer other, possibly more apt (or less resisted) framing options – or a so-called metaphor menu – designed specifically for the Croatian language based on corpus data. We show that the Covid-19 pandemic is predominantly framed as combat or war in Croatian media and social media. Even though a ‘war’ on the WAR metaphor has been declared both by the media and research community, we show that the use of certain other source frames (e.g. the RELIGION frame) may be even more dangerous than the war framing. The paper also discusses the aptness and omnipresence of the WAR metaphor, as well as its inaptness to refer to all aspects of this pandemic, concluding that it is rarely the type of metaphor that is harmful or inappropriate – it is rather the effect of the context and how it is used.

1. Introduction

Since it has become a dominant topic in all forms of media and personal communication, the Covid-19 pandemic has changed not only *what* we are talking about daily but also *how* we talk about it. We have witnessed the emergence of many neologisms that have spread extremely fast thanks to social networks, but also the appearance of new collocations and phrases, changes in the meaning of existing words, the borrowing of medical jargon into general language,¹ and more or less expected metaphorical framings of the coronavirus discourse. Certain terms had been used in general language before; however, their frequency has increased recently due to the new context in which they appear. This has led to a more embodied meaning than the one originally attributed to them in the sense that they will continue to activate the entire semantic frame of the epidemic situation and our personal experience with it for a long time to come (e.g. words like *disinfection*, *epidemic*, *face mask*, *isolation*, *lockdown*, *quarantine* or *self-isolation*; see Despot 2020 for more details on this).

From the glossary compiled by the Institute of Croatian Language and Linguistics (*Pojmovnik koronavirusa*)² it is evident that a series of words and expressions have been borrowed literally from English and expanded considerably in Croatian (even when their normative status was publically questioned).³ Certain words are simply taken over from English, e.g. *korona free*, *korona party*, *lockdown*, *shutdown*, etc. The lexical inventory of Croatian has been significantly enlarged with a great number of compounds with the prefix *korona-*: *koronoakriza* ‘corona-crisis,’ *koronapravila* ‘corona-rules,’ *koronafobija* ‘corona-phobia,’ *koronamanija* ‘corona-mania,’ *koronaprofiter* ‘corona-profiteer,’ *koronazločin* ‘corona-crime.’ Word games and humorous neologisms flooded the media and social networks, so we drank *quarantinis* (Cro. *karantini*), ran away from *covidi-*

¹ E.g. *asymptomatic patient*, *comorbidity*, *local transmission*, *respiratory infection*, *sentinel study*, *serological testing*, *patient zero*, etc.

² Many research institutions have published glossaries and short dictionaries on the vocabulary related to the coronavirus and the COVID-19 disease, ranging from the Institute of Croatian Language and Linguistics, which was among the first to do so, to the Institute of Dutch Language, the Institute of Slovenian Language, the Oxford Dictionary, etc. *Pojmovnik koronavirusa* can be accessed at <http://jezik.hr/koronavirus/>.

³ Examples include *socijalna distanca* ‘social distance’ and *imunitet krda* ‘herd immunity’, for which terms *tjelesni razmak* ‘physical distance’ and *skupni/kolektivni imunitet* ‘collective immunity’ were often recommended as being more precise or appropriate from the normative point of view.

ots (Cro. *kovidiot*), avoided *corona-insanity* (Cro. *koronaludilo*), appreciated the comfort of *corona-fashion* (Cro. *koronamoda*), got *corona-fat* (Cro. *koronašpek*) and suffered from *snuffle-shame* (Cro. *šrmcosram*) (Despot 2020).

This paper looks beyond lexical changes, focusing instead on the conceptual properties of corona-induced language changes. Based on what we know about how we use metaphor in everyday life and how framing works (for more details on this, see section 2), it was expected that the new extra-linguistic reality would create new metaphorical framings and re-use or re-shape the already familiar source frames.

Even a superficial glance at public discourse on the pandemic reveals that it is saturated with metaphors (we talk about *epidemic epicentre*, *epidemic focal point*, *the wave of the epidemic*, *modern plague* and *flaming epidemic*), and especially with war metaphors (words like *headquarters*, *first line of defence*, *invisible enemy* and *the war against the virus*).

Previous studies (Semino 2021, Nerlich 2020, Podolšak 2020, Wicke and Bolognesi 2020) have shown that the discourse around the epidemic uses the war framing heavily, both in public discourse and in social media, despite the fact that the WAR metaphor was shown to be potentially harmful and inapt to elaborate all aspects of the pandemic.

This paper analyses conceptual metaphors in the Croatian (social) media discourse on the coronavirus and Covid-19, focusing on the WAR metaphor. We look into the corpus data to investigate how frequent the war framing is in Croatian (social) media compared to alternative figurative frames. Using qualitative analysis, we first outline the conceptual and inferential structure of the Covid-19 pandemic concept and then define the structure, function, and aptness of the WAR metaphor in the pandemic circumstances. Additionally, by detecting other source frames used in discourse, we offer other, possibly more apt (or less resisted) framing options – or a so-called metaphor menu – designed specifically for the Croatian language and based on corpus data.

2. Background: The role of metaphor in reasoning about socially relevant concepts

There is now extensive empirical evidence that metaphors are related to how we conceptualize the world (especially abstract concepts) and how we reason and make decisions on important social issues.⁴ Empirical studies suggest that due to different metaphorical framings, people reason differently about time, emotion, electricity, crime, etc. (Gentner and Gentner 1983, Gibbs 1994, Boroditsky 2000, 2001, Boroditsky and Ramscar 2002, Thibodeau and Boroditsky 2011). Moreover, understanding and reasoning about people's views, opinions and beliefs are influenced by the choice of metaphors we use (Citron and Goldberg 2014, Hendricks and Boroditsky 2016, Lee and Schwarz 2014, Thibodeau and Boroditsky 2011, Thibodeau, Hendricks and Boroditsky 2017). The choice of language affects people's reasoning, judgement or evaluation of socially relevant concepts like crime (Thibodeau and Boroditsky 2011) or climate change (Flusberg, Matlock and Thibodeau 2017), and leads to influencing social and political attitudes, but can also have serious implications for political actions and policy-making (Landau, Sullivan and Greenberg 2009; see Grady 2017 for a good overview).

2.1. War metaphors in discourse (on the Covid-19 pandemic)

Based on the research mentioned above that metaphors create and shape our understanding, opinions, decisions and beliefs on important social issues, it was not surprising that metaphor researchers would have readily explored 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 behaviour in this situation. The blog post by Nerlich (2020) is one of the first such explorations, in which she presents a collection of caught-on-the-fly metaphors used in media. Discussing the *WAR* metaphor and *DISASTER* metaphor as the usual framings, she gives an extensive list of metaphors used to talk about certain aspects of

⁴ Critics (e.g. Pinker 2007) argue that not enough work has empirically demonstrated that metaphors in language strongly influence how people think about and solve real-world problems. Such criticism is enforced by the fact that vastly popular embodied cognition experiments failed to be replicated in a number of experiments. This is discussed in detail in Despot, Tonković and Ostroški Anić, in press.

the pandemic, including some very interesting and creative examples. In another blog post, Podolšak (2020) discusses the role of the WAR metaphor in talking about the pandemic and explains why the WAR metaphor is readily used to express unity and urgency to make whole societies act as an individual and divert all its resources towards a common goal.

Semino (2021: 50) discusses the usage of war metaphors (as they are “particularly frequent and controversial”), and provides an overview of alternative metaphors, drawing from the #ReframeCovid crowd-sourced multilingual collection of metaphors for Covid-19 (see section 5.2. for details on this initiative). Based on this collection and a corpus of news articles in English, she suggests that fire metaphors are particularly appropriate and versatile in communication about different aspects of the pandemic, including contagion and different public health measures aimed at reducing it.

Wicke and Bolognesi (2020) analyzed the discourse on Covid-19 in a large corpus of tweets posted on Twitter during March and April 2020. They have shown that among the most common figurative frames detected, namely WAR, MONSTER, STORM and TSUNAMI, WAR is the frame used most frequently when talking about Covid-19 on Twitter, even though it does not seem appropriate to discuss all aspects of the situation.

In relation to previous studies investigating hypothetical situations and showing a powerful influence of metaphor over people’s attempts at solving social problems, Despot, Tonković and Ostroški Anić (in press) experimentally investigated the implications of different metaphorical framings (primarily the war framing) on reasoning about possible solutions to the Covid-19 pandemic. They found that different framings do not elicit different responses from the participants as a function of metaphorical framing, showing that the relevance, power, and effects of metaphorical framing may be less significant in a real-world situation. In a popular science article, Despot (2020) discusses corona induced lexical changes and metaphorical framings of the Covid-19 pandemic in public discourse in the Croatian language.

The dominance of the WAR metaphor in the discourse on the pandemic, exhibited in all mentioned studies, was not surprising. A large body of research provides evidence that war metaphors are vastly used to frame (important) social and

political issues and that they are “ubiquitous in discussions of everything from political *campaigns* to *battles* with cancer to *wars* against crime, drugs, poverty, and even salad” (Flusberg, Matlock and Thibodeau 2018: 1).

There are many reasons why war metaphors are so widespread and cross-cultural, according to Flusberg, Matlock and Thibodeau (2018). Primarily, structurally, they draw on basic schematic knowledge that may easily be mapped on many different situations, namely a fight between opposing forces and a sequence of fighting events that unfold over time and space.⁵ Emotionally, war metaphors instantly capture attention because they express strong negative emotional valence of fear and anxiety, highlighting the urgency and motivating action. Experientially, wars are an important and widespread human experience: either a first-hand experience of participating in real wars or a second-hand experience (learning about wars in school, second-hand witnessing current wars through media, experiencing warlike activities in children plays and video games, etc.). The experiential basis of this metaphor lies in the primary metaphor DIFFICULTIES ARE OPPONENTS (Grady 1997). All this provides us with rich knowledge of the war domain and results in the WAR metaphor’s effectiveness and prevalence in communication.⁶ Frequent usage only further enforces its salience and cognitive accessibility.

The WAR metaphor is especially frequently used to talk about diseases. Our general knowledge and understanding of any disease (folk theory) involves conceptualizing it as a war between an attacking enemy army (viruses, bacteria) and a defending army (our antibodies). Therefore, almost all diseases are primarily conceptualized precisely with the help of the WAR metaphor. This is especially true of extremely severe and life-threatening diseases such as cancer, where the possible loss of life in the ‘fight against the disease’ further reinforces the

⁵ “First, there is well-defined schematic knowledge for a prototypical *war*. It involves a fight between opposing forces with a clear distinction between an in-group (us, “good”) and out-group (the enemy, “evil”), who are engaged in a struggle to achieve different goals; there are strategic decisions to be made about how to use resources for attack and defense; there is a hierarchy to military force with roles for a leader like a general, lower-level fighters like ground troops, and a support staff like medics, as well as a role for people who have a stake in the outcome even though they are not actively involved in combat (civilians); and there is a hierarchy of events that unfold over time and space, since a war typically involves more than a single battle, with the ultimate goal of harming or even obliterating the opposing side.” (Flusberg, Matlock and Thibodeau 2018: 4).

⁶ See Flusberg, Matlock and Thibodeau (2018) for a detailed account of the structure and function of war metaphors in public discourse.

analogy with war, so languages abound with expressions such as *lost the battle, but won the war* and vice versa, *lost the battle for life and emerged victorious from the battle with the disease*. Historically, illness and war have often been simultaneous experiences because real wars have caused a decrease in population and easier succumbing to the disease. Military camps have often been sources of dangerous infections, and biological weapons have been used to weaken the opposing army with diseases.

There has been a large body of research on war metaphors in cancer discourse over the past decade, ranging from experimental studies (e.g. Hendricks and Boroditsky 2016, Hendricks et al. 2018) to corpus-based and discourse-based analyses of the language used by patients with cancer or healthcare professionals working with them (Gibbs and Franks 2002, Semino et al. 2015, Semino, Demjén and Demmen 2016, Potts and Semino 2019, to name a few).⁷

However, ever since Susan Sontag's influential essay *Illness as Metaphor* (1979), linguists and metaphor researchers, in particular, have tried to point to the inadequacy, inefficiency, and potential harm of framing diseases, especially cancer, as a battle. Battle metaphors may increase fatalism and decrease people's willingness to engage in self-limiting behaviours to lower cancer risk (Hauser and Schwarz 2020). On the other hand, it was shown that they could also be empowering in specific situations (Semino et al. 2015).

Similarly, we are witnessing a "love-hate" relationship with the WAR metaphor used to frame the current pandemic. On the one hand, it has been shown that talking about diseases and disease management in general without using words like *fight*, *battle* and *victory* is almost impossible.⁸ On the other hand, it is definitely the most hated and publicly opposed metaphor to a point that we can observe a 'war' on war metaphors (we discuss the inaptness of the war metaphor and attempts to reframe the discourse on the global coronavirus crisis in section 5.2.).

⁷ Gibbs and Franks (2002) give a short overview of literature on metaphors appearing in discourse on different illnesses. For a more detailed description of using metaphors in healthcare communication regarding physical health, see Demjén and Semino (2016).

⁸ This is vividly depicted in this article in The Times magazine: <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/staying-in-with-the-corens-giles-esthers-splendid-isolation-bbdnv9jjk>.

In our qualitative analysis (sections 5.1. and 5.2.), we further discuss, using particular examples from the Croatian media, the aptness and inaptness of the *WAR* metaphor in dealing with the Covid-19 pandemic.

3. Methods

Our main research questions are the following: what is the conceptual and inferential structure of the concept of the Covid-19 pandemic as reflected in Croatian (social) media, and how frequent and apt the *WAR* metaphor is compared to alternative figurative frames?

In order to answer these questions, we have performed a corpus-based analysis, as well as a qualitative one.

First, we compiled a specialized corpus of Croatian media texts (referred to here as the *Korona* corpus) using Sketch Engine corpus compilation tools.⁹ The corpus consists of manually selected texts dated from 29 January to 23 December 2020, all closely related to the coronavirus Covid-19 pandemic topics. Although most texts are newspaper articles and interviews with experts (epidemiologists, microbiologists and virologists), as well as politicians involved in managing the epidemic situation in Croatia, the corpus also includes a collection of publicly available Facebook posts by eminent epidemiologist Igor Rudan, which he regularly published from January until May 2020. His posts about the coronavirus and its implications on society make a large part of the corpus because they reached a wide audience. About a dozen short testimonials of Covid-19 patients, published in journals or on news portals, were also added to the corpus. In addition to this small corpus consisting of a little over 280,700 words, we have also used other Croatian corpora available in Sketch Engine (*HrWac* and *Riznica*) as reference corpora.

The corpus was first queried for the words *virus* ‘virus,’ *korona* ‘corona,’ *Covid* ‘Covid,’ *koronavirus* ‘coronavirus,’ *pandemija* ‘pandemic(s)’ and *epidemija* ‘epidemic(s),’ and for certain salient source frames connected words such as

⁹ For free access to the corpus, please write to the authors.

borba ‘fight,’ *bitka* ‘battle,’ *rat* ‘war,’ *utakmica* ‘football match,’ *putovanje* ‘journey,’ *put* ‘path, way,’ *pobijediti* ‘to win,’ *izgubiti* ‘to lose,’ *ples* ‘dance.’

We then manually analyzed the concordance samples and word sketches of these target words (having read full sentences in which target words are mentioned) and annotated them for linguistic metaphors using the metaphor identification procedure proposed by the Pragglejazz Group (2007). Linguistic metaphors were then annotated for the type of conceptual metaphor using the MetaNet (Sweetser et al. 2019) and MetaNet.HR (Despot et al. 2019) annotating schemas. Linguistic metaphors were also annotated for conventionality/novelty. The corpora HrWac and Riznica served as reference corpora in all these tasks. Since we aimed to determine the frequency of certain source frames used in the corpus in relation to others (with the expectation that the WAR source frame is the most frequent one), we counted each linguistic instance of a certain source frame as a metaphorical unit regardless of grammatical constructions they appear in. E.g., in the sentence *Na plućima nije bilo nekih bitnih promjena, tek neke male sjene, vjerojatno agresija virusa koji se nije uspio proširiti dalje*. ‘There have been no significant changes on the lungs, just some minor shadows, probably the aggression of the virus that did not manage to spread further.’, we have counted *agresija virusa* ‘the aggression of the virus’ as one metaphorical unit (reflecting personification), and *proširiti* ‘spread’ as another metaphorical unit (reflecting reification). This way, we could count the exact number of linguistic metaphors connected to a certain metaphorical source frame.

In the qualitative analysis, we considered all source frames resulting from our corpus-based analysis and grouped them into hierarchies to obtain a conceptual and inferential structure of the concept of the Covid-19 epidemic. Additionally, to overcome the fact that the corpus analysis does not capture the examples in which the target word is not explicitly stated, we annotated several complete texts from the corpus for figurativeness, following the same procedure described above. We analyzed a certain number of particularly interesting corpus examples in more detail, focusing on their conventionality and novelty. This has enabled us to account for the structure and function of metaphors, especially war metaphors, in the discussions about the Covid-19 pandemic in the Croatian media.

4. The conceptualization of the coronavirus in Croatian – a corpus-based analysis

The compiled Croatian Korona corpus was used as the main source for analyzing Croatian conceptual and linguistic metaphors. For the lemma *korona* ‘corona,’ we were able to annotate all the concordance lines, for there were only 155 lines for this lemma and no need to use a random sample option. The annotation and analysis of the concordances for the lemma *korona* results are as follows:

Table 1. Lemma *korona*

Lemma: <i>korona</i>	
Total number of lines in the concordance	155 (complete list)
Number of figurative expressions	64
Number of novel figurative expressions	1
Source frame and number of instances	Source frame and number of instances
War/combat 27	Location event structure 2
Personification 6	Religion/cult 2
Crisis 6	Beast 2
Problem 4	Possession 2
Partnership 4	Race 1
Fire 3	Water/wave 1
Evil 3	Control 1

The conceptual annotation of the concordance lines (see Table 1) reveals a complete dominance of the war framing. Out of 64 instances of figurative units, 27 expressions reflect the war/combat framing based on the conceptual metaphor THE CORONAVIRUS IS AN ENEMY (IN WAR/COMBAT) – exactly 42% of all figurative expressions with the lexeme *korona* as a target frame are based on the war framing. This conceptual metaphor is always linguistically realized in a very conventional way, either as *borba protiv korone* ‘fight against corona’ or *pobijediti koronu* ‘to defeat corona.’ Different personifications of the lexeme *korona* are relatively frequent as well: there are such cases, including examples like: *korona ne bira* ‘corona does not choose,’ *korona je uzela živote* ‘corona took lives,’ *pla-*

titi danak koroni ‘to pay a heavy toll to corona’ or *podmukla korona* ‘insidious corona.’ The word sketch for the lemma *korona* confirms the war framing as being the most frequent: in the construction *verb + korona Acc*, the figurative collocation *pobijediti koronu* ‘to defeat corona’ is the most frequent one, and in the construction *preposition + korona*, the preposition *protiv* ‘against’ (as in the collocation *borba protiv korone* ‘fight against corona’) is the most frequent one. The word sketch analysis does not provide any new source frames that were not already detected in the concordance analysis.

The annotation and analysis of the concordances for the lemma *virus* shows the following results:

Table 2. Lemma *virus*

Lemma: <i>virus</i>	
Total number of lines in the concordance	200 (random sample)
Number of figurative expressions	121
Number of novel figurative expressions	9
Source frame and number of instances	Source frame and number of instances
Reification 39	Control 3
War/combat 34	Race 3
Personification 19	Partnership 2
Force 9	Dance 2
Danger 8	Plant 2

Table 2 shows that out of 121 instances of figurative units, 34 expressions (28%) reflect the war framing based on the conceptual metaphor CORONA-VIRUS IS AN ENEMY (IN WAR/COMBAT). Reification is the most frequent figurative mechanism for virus conceptualization, and it, in almost all instances, refers to the collocation *virus spread*. As was the case with the lemma *korona*, all other source frames revealed in conceptual annotation are sporadically used. Among these, conventional metaphors (often in the form of a very frequent idiom or collocation) prevail. We annotated only nine figurative expressions as being novel (we discuss these examples in section 5.). The word sketch for the lemma *virus* confirms reification and the war framing as being the most frequent: in the constructions

with *virus* as subject, the most frequent figurative collocations are *virus se širi* ‘virus is spreading’ and *virus napada* ‘virus attacks.’ In the construction *noun + virus Gen*, the collocation *širenje virusa* ‘the spread of the virus’ is the most frequent one, while in the construction *preposition + virus*, the preposition *protiv* ‘against’ in the collocation *borba protiv virusa* ‘fight against the virus’ is the most frequent preposition. The word sketch analysis does not provide any new source frames that were not already detected in the concordance analysis.

Table 3. Lemma *Covid*

Lemma Covid	
Total number of lines in the concordance	126 (complete list)
Number of figurative expressions	21
Number of novel figurative expressions	3
Source frame	Number of instances
Personification	7
War/combat	4
Danger	2
Reification	1
The end of the world	1
Fire	1
(Destructive) force	1
Caries (dental cavity)	1

Table 3 shows that out of 126 concordance lines, only 21 expressions containing the word *Covid* can be marked as figurative, proving a significantly smaller figurative potential, as opposed to concordances of the words *virus* and *korona*. The word *Covid* is, in Croatian media at least, used in a more formal discourse, which is characterized by less figurative uses. However, personification and war framing are again the most frequent metaphors.

Table 4. Lemmas *pandemic* and *epidemic*

Lemma	<i>Pandemic</i>	<i>Epidemic</i>
Total number of lines in the concordance	200 (random sample)	200 (random sample)
Number of figurative expressions	90	84
Number of novel figurative expressions	7	6
Source frame	Number of instances	
Reification	8	14
War/combat	23	9
Personification	11	2
Force	9	13
Control	6	8
Event Structure	5	5
Fire	0	13
Water	16	5
Race	0	4
Beast	0	1
Problem	0	3
Plant	0	1
Explosion	1	1
Cataclysm	0	1
Tragedy	0	1
Container	4	3
Movie series	1	0
Crisis	3	0
Story	1	0
Ruler	1	0

Table 4 shows that, interestingly and unexpectedly, the lemmas *pandemija* ‘pandemic’ and *epidemija* ‘epidemic’ exhibit different figurative potential. To talk about *pandemic* (figuratively), we predominantly use the source frames of WAR/COMBAT,

WATER, and personifications, while the *epidemic* was most frequently conceptualized through reification and the source frames of FIRE, FORCE and WAR/COMBAT.

The annotation of the concordance samples and the word sketch analysis for all of the above target words clearly show that, despite the multiplicity and diversity of the source frames obtained by the analysis, there are predominantly only a few framings that proved to be crucial in the conceptualization of the Covid-19 pandemic.¹⁰ Those framings differ between different concepts related to the Covid-19 pandemic, and they are most frequently realized in relatively fixed conventional collocations. Some of those, like war/combat-related frequent collocations, are typical of all the target words we explored, while others are used with certain target words only (see Table 5).

Table 5. The most frequent figurative collocations in the Korona corpus.

<i>borba protiv korone/virusa/COVID-a/epidemije/pandemije</i>
‘a fight against the corona/virus/Covid/epidemic/pandemic’
<i>pobijediti koronu/virus/COVID/epidemiju/pandemiju</i>
‘defeat corona/virus/Covid/epidemic/pandemic’
<i>val epidemije/pandemije</i>
‘the wave of the epidemic/pandemic’
<i>širenje korone/virusa/pandemije/epidemije</i>
‘the spread of corona/virus/Covid/epidemic/pandemic’
<i>bukteća epidemija</i>
‘blazing epidemic’
<i>tijek pandemije/epidemije</i>
‘the flow of the pandemic/epidemic’

Personification and reification are very frequent, but they are (usually) very general mechanisms for conceptualizing all concepts, and abstract concepts in particular. Personification is also a complex way of conceptualizing an abundance of meanings, which we discuss in the next section. Overall, the predominant and omnipresent way of framing this pandemic in Croatian media and social media is through the WAR/COMBAT framing, which is frequent in all the concepts we

¹⁰ The analysis of word sketches also shows that the type of grammatical construction is crucial for the figurative potential of its linguistic realizations, and it is again confirmed that this potential is the greatest in constructions with verbs (due to the schematic nature of verb meanings) (see Sullivan 2013, Deignan 2006, Stanojević 2014).

investigated. The analysis shows that different concepts related to the pandemic exhibit significant differences in their figurative potential and the most frequent source frames we use to talk about them figuratively.

The shortcomings of our corpus analysis certainly include the fact that the role of grammatical constructions was not explored further beyond the constructions presented in the word sketches and the fact that we were only able to calculate the ratio between source frames as presented in our corpus. It would certainly be interesting to undertake similar research for other languages, compare the results, or investigate e.g. how frequent the WAR metaphor is in the conceptualization of illness in general or in a certain genre,¹¹ but this goes beyond the scope of this study. Moreover, since it is the public discourse that is being analyzed here, the predominant stories and views are public rather than private ones. Although the Korona corpus includes a small number of private testimonials of Covid-19 patients, some of which do include a personal war framing, they make but a small portion of the corpus and mostly elaborate the national war framing at an individual level. Another shortcoming includes the fact that this method does not enable considering figurative expressions in which the target word is not explicitly stated. We tried to overarch this in our qualitative analysis by reading several entire texts and annotating Covid-19 related figurative expressions.

However, we believe our results to be clear and informative enough in that a corpus smaller in size enabled us to do a very exhaustive analysis. Moreover, it enabled us to measure how pervasive the WAR metaphor is and how it, in terms of frequency, relates to other possible framings in the Croatian discourse on Covid-19.

5. The conceptualization of the coronavirus in Croatian – a qualitative analysis

In this section, we summarize the data resulting from the corpus analysis by forming hierarchies or metaphor families to define a conceptual and inferential

¹¹ Although it is not comparable to this study, Karlberg and Buell (2005) found that 17% of all articles published in the *Time Magazine* and 15% of all articles published in *Newsweek* between 1981 and 2000 used at least one war metaphor.

structure (cf. Lakoff and Johnson 1999) of the concept of the Covid-19 pandemic. The results obtained from the manual annotation of several entire texts, as well as results from Google searches and other corpora, are added to the corpus data, all of which then serves to discuss the structure, function and aptness/inaptness of metaphor families used to conceptualize the pandemic, particularly the dominant war/combat framing.

As can be expected, the general mechanisms of figurative conceptualization of all abstract concepts, such as personification, reification, different image schemas (possession, control, container, force) and the event structure metaphor play a significant role in the inferential structure of the concept of the pandemic.

The personified conceptualization of the pandemic is very frequent. On a general level, it is conceptualized as a person that *harasses, threatens, destroys, comes, affects, demands*, but also *closes factories, restricts road and air traffic and closes up citizens in their homes*.¹² (Cro. *hara, prijetei, ruši, dolazi, zahvaća, zahtijeva, izbija, zatvara tvornice, ograničuje cestovni i zračni promet, zatvara građane u njihove domove*). On more specific levels, the pandemic is personified as a killer (examples 1 – 2), but also as a teacher (3 – 4) and as a ruler (5):

- (1) *U samo tri mjeseca korona je ubila više Amerikanaca od ratova u Koreji, Vijetnamu, Iraku.*

‘In just three months, corona has killed more Americans than the wars in Korea, Vietnam, Iraq.’

- (2) *Epidemija je ubila više od 30,300 ljudi u Francuskoj.*

‘The epidemic has killed more than 30,300 people in France.’

- (3) *Čemu me do sada naučio koronavirus*

‘What the coronavirus has taught me so far’

- (4) *Ako ništa drugo, korona nas je naučila, ili nas i dalje uči, da živimo za danas, za sada i za ovaj trenutak.*

‘If nothing else, corona has taught us, or continues to teach us, to live for today, for now, and for this moment.’

¹² The last few examples are metonymically grounded because the cause of the phenomenon stands for its effect. In the above examples, the epidemic did not stop traffic or lock citizens in their homes, this was done by governments and the crisis headquarters, but as the epidemic was the cause, we conceptualize it as an agent.

(5) *Svijetom vlada pandemija Covida-19.*

‘The world is ruled by the Covid-19 pandemic.’

Novel extensions of personification include ‘living entity that eats others’ (example 6), a very sneaky and cunning person (example 7), and a celebrity (examples 8 – 9).

(6) *Jednostavno smo se neobjašnjivo raspali, covid nas je pojeo.*

‘We just inexplicably fell apart, Covid ate us.’

(7) *Prehoda sam dvije upale pluća što nisam trebao. I to je ova viroza primijetila, to korona odmah prepoznala. Gdje si tanak, ona te nađe.*

‘I went through two pneumonias unnecessarily. And this is what the virus noticed, corona immediately recognized it. Where you are thin, she finds you.’

(8) *I zašto je covid postao takva zvijezda, celebrity, kad imamo manje smrtnih slučajeva nego u isto doba prošle godine?*

‘And why has Covid become such a star, a celebrity, when we have fewer deaths than this time last year?’

(9) *A što sad, Covid je medijska zvijezda.*

‘And what now, Covid is a media star.’

These extensions account for and highlight different dimensions of the epidemic: the fact that it is proven to be much stronger than we are, and that we have no defense against it; the fact that any prior illness, especially a respiratory one, makes us ‘weaker’ and much more susceptible to the coronavirus; and the fact that the pandemic is extremely well covered by all media by being their almost exclusive topic.

Personification is at the basis of this novel figurative expression as well: *No, što sada, kad je prvi čovjek zaražen, a prvi mu se koronavirus uselio u stanice pluća?* ‘But what now, when the first person is infected, and the first coronavirus has moved in his lung cells?’. The above example is based on the conventional conceptualization of a virus as a person, which can enter our body as one enters a house (in Croatian, this is usually linguistically realized with conventional expressions *virus ulazi* ‘virus enters’ and *ulazak virusa* ‘entrance of the virus’). A novel expression *virus se uselio* ‘virus moved in’ is a source specification of

these common expressions, which carries additional meanings and highlights additional aspects, primarily the fact that once you move into a new place, you have an intention to stay there much longer than if you only ‘enter.’

Reification is most frequently linguistically realized in expressions such as *the spread of the virus/epidemic/pandemic*. This metaphor’s novelty manifests itself on the linguistic level – the expression is based on a very frequent and conventional conceptual metaphor, but its linguistic expression is unique and novel. Such is the case with the expressions *isporuka virusa* ‘virus delivery,’¹³ and *rastezanje epidemije* ‘the stretching of the epidemic,’¹⁴ which are based on a very frequent conceptual metaphor, i.e. the reification VIRUS/EPIDEMIC IS AN OBJECT, but being novel and more specific, they provide additional inferences and grab attention.

When used to talk about the Covid-19 pandemic, the location event structure metaphor is linguistically expressed through general conceptual metaphors STATES ARE LOCATIONS, CAUSES ARE FORCES, and ACTION IS MOTION, and through its more specific instance, PURPOSEFUL ACTION IS A (GOAL-DIRECTED) MOTION ALONG A PATH. This general conceptualization is used as a source for both the action of different governments to prevent the spread of epidemics and the action of a virus infecting the population (examples 10 and 11).

- (10) *No, krene li se jednim putem, pa nakon nekoliko tjedana prijeđe na drugi, tada će sigurno stradati i ekonomija, a i žrtve će biti prilično velike. Dakle, vlade su se suočile s dva naizgled vrlo loša rješenja i trećim, srednjim putem, koji je bio još i bitno gori.*

‘But if you go one way, and then switch to another one after a few weeks, then the economy will surely suffer, and the casualties will be quite large. So governments faced two seemingly very bad solutions, and a third, middle way, which was even significantly worse.’

- (11) *No, vrlo je dalek put još pred njim u nastojanju zaražavanja cjelokupnog ljudskog stanovništva, a zatim možda i trajnijeg udomljavanja u ljudskoj vrsti.*

‘But, there is still a very long way ahead of him in the effort to infect the

¹³ The full example in Croatian: *Ono što je Gordan Lauc govorio od početka, da se relativna zaražljivost smanjuje po ljeti zbog boljeg funkcioniranja sluznice kao prve (možda i najznačajnije) razine obrane, manje isporuke virusa na otvorenim prostorima, UV zraka, čini se da je istina.*

¹⁴ The full example in Croatian: *Stoga ni ove moje objave nisu baš svakodnevne. Rastezat će se i slijediti jedna drugu u razmacima od nekoliko dana, baš kao što će se sada rastezati i ova pandemija.*

entire human population, and then perhaps more permanent adoption in the human species.’

Novel extensions of the general EVENT STRUCTURE metaphor are often the results of the source and the target specification of the ACTION IS MOTION metaphor (MANNER OF ACTION IS MANNER OF MOTION), as in the following examples: *Ministar Beroš uletio je u koronu na samom početku svog mandata*. ‘Minister Beroš flew into corona at the very beginning of his term,’ *galopirajuća epidemija* ‘galloping epidemic,’ *puzajuća epidemija* ‘crawling epidemic,’ which highlight different dynamics of the spread of the epidemic, as well as the government’s way of dealing with it.

Another important metaphor family in this pandemic’s conceptual structure is the source frame of a DISASTER on a general level. This dominant conceptualization is in Croatian linguistically specified (within the source frame) as *kuga* ‘plague,’ *manija* ‘mania,’ *pošast* ‘pestilence,’ *elementarna nepogoda* ‘natural disaster,’ *ugroza* ‘threat,’ *potres* ‘earthquake,’ *požar* ‘fire,’ *nuklearna katastrofa* ‘nuclear disaster,’ *cunami* ‘tsunami,’ etc. Croatian uses terms such as *epicentar epidemije* ‘epidemic epicenter,’ *žarište epidemije* ‘epidemic focal point,’ *val epidemije* ‘the wave of the epidemic,’ *kuga* ‘plague,’ *Černobil* ‘Chernobyl,’ *Kalvarija* ‘Calvary,’ *pošast* ‘pestilence,’ *nalet* ‘raid,’ *prvi val epidemije* ‘the first wave of the epidemic,’ *drugi val* ‘the second wave,’ *tijek epidemije* ‘the flow of the epidemic,’ *nalet* ‘rush,’ *bukteća epidemija* ‘blazing epidemic,’ *epidemija je buknila* ‘epidemic flared up.’ These metaphors highlight the strength, unpredictability, danger, and destructive force of the epidemic, and its consequences for health care systems, but they hide and minimize the government’s power to treat it adequately, and their responsibility for properly funding the health care system, among other things.

We conceptualize our actions in dealing with the epidemic on a general level as COMBAT. This general conceptualization is further realized in more specific instances of the WAR and SPORTS frames, with the linguistic realizations of war metaphors being the most common in all corpora, as was clearly shown in the previous section. It is worth noticing that war metaphors belong to both the combat family and the disaster family, as will be seen in the next section, where we show how war metaphors vastly use the knowledge from both domains.

Sports metaphors are similar to those of war because they highlight the existence of opponents and the desire to win but are devoid of disastrous implications, negative emotional valence, and explicit militancy, which makes them more appropriate to frame this situation. In the Croatian media space, the primary sub-frame of the source frame of SPORTS has been FOOTBALL.¹⁵ We found expressions like *ovo je tek prvo poluvrijeme, ušli smo u drugo poluvrijeme* ‘this is only the first half, we entered the second half,’ and even very elaborate expressions such as the following examples:

- (12) *Ne znamo u kojoj je fazi naša utakmica, je li pri kraju prvog ili drugog poluvremena, ali spremni smo i na produžetke ako treba. Zahvaljujemo na potporama našem Stožeru, ali mi nismo tim koji igra. Cijeli hrvatski narod je na terenu i igra utakmicu protiv koronavirusa za zdravlje cijele nacije.*

‘We don’t know the stage of our match; is it at the end of the first or second half, but we are also ready for overtime, if necessary. We thank our Staff for their support, but we are not the team that plays. The entire Croatian people are on the field and playing a match against the coronavirus for the health of the entire nation.’

- (13) *Dojam je kako se bliži kraj prvog poluvremena u ovoj utakmici neodređenog trajanja. Ako je tako, postavlja se pitanje kako najbolje iskoristiti poluvrijeme: da li ga iskoristiti za promjenu taktike?*

‘The impression is that the end of the first half is approaching in this match of indefinite duration. If so, the question arises as to how best to use the halftime: should we use it to change the tactics?’

In addition to FOOTBALL, metaphors using RACE as a specific source frame were also present in media. The expression *utrka s virusom/epidemijom* ‘the race with the virus/epidemic’ is common in all corpora, and, more interestingly, it is often elaborated in terms of its source specifications. The choice of a more specific source frame highlights different aspects of the race and provokes different mappings (a MARATHON is usually a source specification, which highlights the

¹⁵ This metaphor was also present in other languages. The Italian Prime Minister thus said: *The virus was leading 3-0, now we have tied at 3-3, but it is not yet time to relax*, while the World Health Organization stated: *We cannot win in a football match by only defending ourselves. We also have to attack.*

aspect of the path's longitude, the exhaustiveness of the race, and the need to be extremely well prepared and in good shape).

(14) *Ovo je maraton. Spremati se moramo cijelo vrijeme.*

'This is a marathon. We have to be getting ready all the time.'

(15) *U karanteni svi zajedno učimo, ovo je maraton, a ne sprint.*

'In quarantine, we all learn together, this is a marathon, not a sprint.'

(16) *Ovo nije utrka na kratke staze, ovo je maraton.*

'This is not a short distance race, this is a marathon.'

After the period of complete lockdown in Croatia in April and May, the measures became less restrictive, hence the need for new framings as an alternative to the repressive ones. The corpus data clearly shows that the combat framing is still completely dominant, but other framings, especially a DANCE frame, started to appear more frequently. This was mostly due to the popularity of "the Hammer and Dance theory" (Pueyo 2020). The theory was heavily criticized in the media, but the framing it provided became rather productive.

(17) *Autor Tomas Pueyo nedavno je izložio trenutačno najrazumniju strategiju borbe s koronavirusom i nazvao je "Čekić i ples". "Čekić" je intenzivna i ne preduga karantena kojom se preokreće tijekom epidemije i smanjuje broj zaraženih. "Ples" je zatim naš suživot s virusom, nalik na eskiviranje udaraca u stilu Muhammada Alija, gdje mu ne smijemo više nikada dopustiti da se brzo proširi na velik broj ljudi.*

'Author Thomas Pueyo recently outlined the currently most sensible coronavirus control strategy and called it the "Hammer and Dance". "Hammer" is an intensive and not too long quarantine, which reverses the course of the epidemic and reduces the number of infected. "Dancing" is then our coexistence with the virus, similar to dodging blows in the style of Muhammad Ali, where we must never again allow it to spread rapidly to large numbers of people.'

(18) *Ovaj postupak je uvijek ples po oštrici: s jedne strane morate i želite biti što sigurniji da je cjepivo sigurno i pouzdano, a s druge strane imate velik pritisak javnosti da se što prije dođe do nekog rješenja.*

'This procedure is always a walk on the edge <a_dance on the_blade>: on the one hand, you have to and want to be as sure as possible that the

vaccine is safe and reliable, and on the other hand, you have much public pressure to come up with a solution as soon as possible.’

(19) *Hrvatska se sada odlučila za “strategiju plesa”, koju neki nazivaju “suživot s virusom”.*

‘Croatia has now opted for a “dance strategy,” which some call the “co-existence with the virus.”’

The DANCE frame highlights balance, cooperation, creativity and unpredictable motion, while it hides the militant aspects (examples 17 – 19). In example (18), however, dance is used in co-reference with the blade of a knife to provoke an entirely different mapping and highlight danger and uncertainty. Interestingly enough, even in more elaborate examples of the usage of the DANCE frame, like in example (18), it is mixed with the COMBAT frame (it is at the beginning framed as a strategy of the fight against the virus, but later on it is directly compared to a boxing match).

As a source and target subcase of the metaphor EVENTS ARE LITERARY FORMS, the event of the Covid-19 pandemic is conceptualized using source frames of DRAMA and STORY (*aktualna drama s koronavirusom* ‘current coronavirus drama,’ *priča s pandemijom* ‘the story of the pandemic’).

Figurative novelty is sometimes manifested on the conceptual level when a source frame uncommon in the conceptualization of this phenomenon is used. The conceptual novelty then results in a linguistic novelty as well.¹⁶ The source frames of DENTAL CAVITY and RELIGION are attested only once or twice in the corpus, and they serve very specific discourse purposes. In the simile with CAVITY as a source frame (*koji su tvrdili da je Covid nešto poput karijesa, da je izmi-*

¹⁶ Such is the case in this linguistically well-elaborated conceptual metaphor VIRUS INFECTION IS A PLANT: *Dopustimo li mu, virus će s prvog zaraženog skočiti na još dvoje ili troje, pa sa svakog od njih opet na dvoje ili troje, pa opet. Na taj način, ako je prvi zaraženi nacrtan na dnu stranice papira, nad njim se, korak po korak, stalno rastvara sve šira i gušća ‘krošnja’ zaraženih. Aktivnim testiranjem nalazimo zaražene među nama. Tako toj krošnji stalno pilimo grane, kako bi ona bila što rjeđa. Ako se krošnja prestane širiti iz koraka u korak jer joj stalno krešemo grane gdje god stignemo, tada smo u suživotu s virusom.* ‘If we allow it, the virus will jump from the first infected person to two or three more, and from each of them again to two or three, and then again. This way, if the first infected person is drawn at the bottom of a page of paper, the ever wider and denser treetop of the infected ones is constantly spreading above it, step by step. By active testing, we find the infected among us. So we constantly saw off the branches of that treetop, so that it would be as sparse as possible. If the treetop stops spreading from one step to another because we are constantly cutting its branches wherever we can, then we are coexisting with the virus.’

šljotina... ‘Who claimed that Covid was something like cavities that it was a fabrication’), the comparison with *cavities* highlights the action of minoring the real danger and gravity of the disease.

Examples with the RELIGION source frame (20 – 21) exhibit the real danger of metaphor:

(20) *Svima su nam rekli da su ‘čekić i ples’ naša nova religija. Mi smo se poklonili i rekli da je to tako.* ‘We were all told that the ‘hammer and dance’ was our new religion. We bowed and said it was so.’

(21) *Korona religiju treba uzdignuti iznad svega.*

‘The corona religion should be elevated above all.’

If we conceptualize this epidemic as religion, it allows for inferences that one can choose to believe in it or not. Knowing how metaphors can shape our beliefs and attitudes (see section 2) and witnessing the current Covid-19 pandemic and polarization in the society regarding its existence, we can reliably say that the religion framing is potentially far more dangerous than the war framing. Luckily, it is far less frequent.

Based on the corpus-based analysis results and the qualitative analysis, we believe we have detected almost all source frames used in the discourse to discuss the Covid-19 pandemic in the Croatian language. Our list (schematically represented in Figure 1) may serve as a so-called metaphor menu (Semino et al. 2018, Demjén and Semino 2020) – a resource that offers a wealth of possible ways to talk about this situation (possibly more apt or less resisted ones than the frequent war framing) by providing alternative framings and encourage creativity. As Semino (2021: 52) states, “the more complex and long-term a phenomenon, the more we need different metaphors to capture different facets and phases, and to communicate with different audiences.”

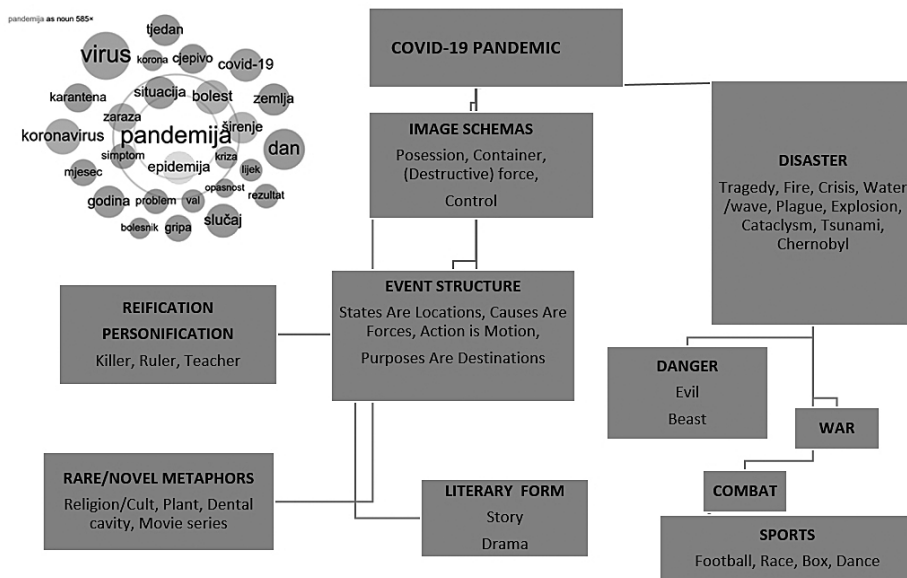


Figure 1. Conceptual and inferential structure of the Covid-19 pandemic in Croatian

5.1. The aptness of the WAR metaphor in talking about the Covid-19 pandemic

What is it that makes the WAR metaphor apt and omnipresent in the discourse on Covid-19?

Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT) emphasizes the embodied nature of metaphorical thinking and the experiential basis of metaphoric thought (particularly in Lakoff and Johnson 1999). As Flusberg, Matlock and Thibodeau (2018: 12) state, CMT is, therefore, “naturally suited to explain how the emotional impact of armed conflict becomes a key part of our conceptual representations of metaphorical wars.”

In section 2.1., we have shown how war metaphors are widely shared because of their structural, emotional, and experiential properties. They draw on basic schematic knowledge that may easily be mapped on many different situations (involving two opposing forces); they express strong negative emotional valence

of fear and anxiety, and they are an important and widespread human experience. In the previous section, we have shown how the WAR metaphor specifically draws from both combat and disaster scenarios, which are very frequent due to their structural, emotional and experiential salience.

The epidemic's target frame is easily mapped onto the source frame of WAR because it is a real and imminent threat. It shares key structural relations with the WAR frame, and there is a clear way of judging who the winner is in this metaphorical war (cf. Flusberg, Matlock and Thibodeau 2018). Structural correspondences between the WAR and PANDEMIC frames include mapping the virus to an enemy, health professionals to an army, sick or dead people to casualties, eliminating the virus to victory, etc. (Semino 2021).

Between the source frame of WAR and the (Covid-19) epidemic's target frame, several other mappings and analogies make this metaphor so cognitively accessible to us. Indeed, like a state of war, this situation is extraordinary and a huge challenge for the governments of all countries: strategies are adopted at the national level, everyday life includes pain, suffering and fear for one's own life and the lives of loved ones; we hear about the number of victims every day, and we evaluate our success and failure according to it.

Just like in an atmosphere of war, society is polarized into those who blindly trust the government and listen to the instructions, and to those who doubt that the truth is being concealed and have different theories of the real truth. As in real wars, leaders promise to do just about anything to preserve their citizens' security. Just like the real war, this metaphorical war, even when it is over, has its economic consequences: economic crisis, unemployment and poverty.

War metaphors, by triggering strong emotional valence of urgency and anxiety connected to them, aptly convey the seriousness and the real danger of the situation and make us more prone to, without questioning, radically changing our lifestyle. Its use strengthens national unity, collective responsibility, and readiness to see a common purpose and sacrifice our individual priorities for this common goal (Semino 2021). Additionally, the WAR metaphor is pervasive because it is a conventional metaphor, which eases its cognitive processing (Bowdle and Gentner 2005).

The most frequent linguistic manifestations of the WAR metaphor in the Korona corpus are conventional constructions *borba protiv x* ‘fight against x’ and *pobijediti x* ‘to beat x, as in examples 22 and 23:

(22) *Brojke govore da smo bitku s koronavirusom dobili. Jesmo li dobili i rat, odnosno što moramo učiniti da nas mogući drugi val ne iznenadi?*

‘The numbers say we have won the battle with the coronavirus. Have we won the war, or what must we do so that a possible second wave does not surprise us?’

(23) *Nažalost virus nismo pobijedili, već smo samo usporili njegovo napredovanje kako bismo se uspjeli bolje pripremiti za njegovo daljnje širenje.*

‘Unfortunately, we did not defeat the virus, but only slowed its progress in order to better prepare for its further spread.’

Other most frequent linguistic manifestations include common military terms and expressions, such as *pogođene države* ‘stricken states,’ *stožer* ‘headquarters,’ *prva linija obrane* ‘the first line of defense,’ *druga linija obrane* ‘the second line of defense,’ *front* ‘front,’ *napad* ‘attack,’ *bitka* ‘battle,’ *nevidljivi neprijatelj* ‘invisible enemy,’ *jak neprijatelj* ‘strong enemy,’ *koordinirana strategija* ‘coordinated strategy,’ *konačan poraz virusa* ‘the final defeat of the virus,’ *silan udarac* ‘powerful blow’ and *prijetnja* ‘threat’ (as in example 24):¹⁷

(24) *Ipak, virus je prodro iza prve linije obrane u Italiji i zatim ušao u mnoge druge države Europske unije.*

‘Nevertheless, the virus penetrated behind the first line of defense in Italy, and then entered many other European Union countries.’

The war framing is sometimes quite elaborate and highlights different, very specific and linguistically unconventional dimensions of this framing, such as uncertainty, mapping the corona-free zones to liberated areas in the war, mapping the virus testing to counterintelligence in war, etc. (examples 25 – 27). Since

¹⁷ Allusions to war are sometimes formed more directly through a simile or comparison instead of using a conceptual metaphor. For example, Queen Elizabeth II compares this situation with that of 1940, the German Prime Minister says this challenge is the greatest after 1945, and the Croatian government and the Crisis headquarters often drew parallels with the Homeland War. Chinese officials called for Mao Zedong’s words and a declaration of the “people’s war,” the French prime minister used the words of the World War I war minister, saying he was putting the country on “war feet,” and the US president called himself a war-time president, and declared war on the Chinese virus.

these mappings are novel and not as straightforward as the frequently used ones, they are usually further elaborated after being introduced:

(25) *Pandemije su, kao i svjetski ratovi, dinamički događaji s neizvjesnim ishodom. U njima se odnosi snaga mogu mijenjati iz etape u etapu. Pri susretu s novim, nepoznatim i nevidljivim protivnikom kakav je ovaj koronavirus, iznenađenja su uvijek moguća. Zato i treba biti oprezan, ali pritom ne i paničariti.*

‘Pandemics, like world wars, are dynamic events with an uncertain outcome. In them, power ratios can change from stage to stage. When encountering a new, unknown and invisible adversary like this coronavirus, surprises are always possible. That’s why you should be careful, but don’t panic.’

(26) *Za to bi bila potrebna nešto produljena karantena, ali cilj bi bio da postanemo jedna od prvih corona-free zona u svijetu. To bi bilo analogno stvaranju oslobođenih područja u ratovima, na kojima se život može normalizirati.*

‘This would require a somewhat extended quarantine, but the goal would be to become one of the first corona-free zones in the world. This would be analogous to the creation of liberated areas in wars, where life can be normalized.’

(27) *Testiranje na virus donekle je usporedivo s kontrašpijunažom u ratu. Suočeni smo s neprijateljem koji je nevidljiv, a uz to o učincima njegova djelovanja postajemo svjesni tek tjedan dana kasnije. U međuvremenu ne znamo gdje je virus i što nam radi iza leđa.*

‘The virus testing is somewhat comparable to counterintelligence in war. We are faced with an enemy who is invisible, and furthermore, we become aware of the effects of his actions only a week later. In the meantime, we don’t know where the virus is and what it is doing behind our backs.’

These examples illustrate how the WAR metaphor is apt to describe target frames of the epidemic in a variety of ways, and how they can, aside from evoking fear and anxiety and strengthening militant framework, establish a rich, dynamic and potentially creative source for talking and thinking about the Covid-19 pandemic.

5.2. The inaptness of the WAR metaphor: Attempts at reframing the discourse on the global coronavirus crisis

Despite the fact the analogies between war and epidemic are numerous, with some of them embodied or deeply ingrained in the collective consciousness, it should be borne in mind that it is a metaphor – an epidemic *is not* a war, and this state *is not* a state of war.¹⁸

If we use the WAR metaphor as frequently and almost exclusively as we do, we can indeed fall into the trap of narrowing the scope of thought and, consequently, of action. Namely, due to the partial nature of metaphorical mappings (Lakoff and Johnson 1980: 10), when a source frame is applied to a target, only certain aspects of the target are brought into focus. Therefore, conceptual metaphors highlight some aspects of the target frame, but hide certain other aspects that are not in line with the metaphor. Thus, the war conceptualization of the epidemic highlights the national and local political dimension, while hiding the personal level and the level of interethnic cooperation. It highlights political leaders' role, who are therefore conceptualized as generals of important battles, who have every right, even duty, to demand discipline and blind obedience. However, at the same time, the metaphor hides the dimension of individual freedom, skepticism, and civil rights. The dimensions of authoritarianism, unanimity and control are highlighted, and the dimensions of democracy and freedom of speech are hidden. Additionally, the emotions of fear and anxiety are strengthened, creating collective panic and despair.

In metaphorical framing, complete knowledge about the source frame does not map to the target frame's conceptualization, so not everything we know about war should apply to the epidemic. Nevertheless, when metaphor becomes so frequent and dominant that it is almost the only frame for conceptualizing a particular concept, as is the case with the war framing according to our data, there is a danger that these nearly complete or unwanted mappings will also occur. The national war framing of this situation imposes on people the image that they are expected to fight actively, but as the outcome of that struggle is completely

¹⁸ The Croatian president resisted to the war framing by saying: *Nismo u ratu, ali smo u izazovu, u krizi koja će proći, koja će trajati nekoliko mjeseci.* 'We are not at war, but we are in a challenge, in a crisis that will pass, that will last for several months.'

beyond their power, they usually feel like losers. The war framing also imposes the need for the unity of the whole nation under one political leader because any disunity certainly weakens the possibility of victory over the enemy, leading to the existence of only one political option and authoritarianism.

Therefore, it is not surprising that many people opposed the use of the WAR metaphor to talk about the current pandemic. Simon Jenkins wrote in *The Guardian*: “Never, ever, should a government use war as a metaphor in a time of peace. Britain is not at war with coronavirus. The phrase and its cognates should be banned. Those who exploit them to heighten panic and win obedience to authority should be dismissed from public office.” (Nerlich 2020). Semino (2021) admonishes that fatalism produced by the WAR metaphor is a major concern for a long-term pandemic, especially as the clear-cut victory inferred from the metaphor is less and less probable. Wicke and Bolognesi (2020) note that the WAR metaphor increases people’s willingness to act and ‘fight’ against the enemy (virus), which completely opposes public health messages about refraining from any activities, reducing contact with others and simply staying home.

Aware of the fact that the language and militant metaphorical framing of the epidemic influences the way we think, and the way we think affects our actions, metaphor researchers have collectively publicly spoken against such a pronounced dominance of the wartime framing of the coronavirus discourse. They, therefore, advocate a conscious change of the existing war framing. Such a reframing would change the way the public sees and understands this situation, but we need different metaphors and frames for that to happen. The Twitter #ReframeCovid initiative was first proposed by metaphor researchers Inés Olza and Paula Sobrino and soon joined by Veronika Koller and Elena Semino (<https://sites.google.com/view/reframecovid/home>). It invites metaphor researchers to propose alternative framings to the WAR metaphor in any language. Semino (2021) states that the rationale for collecting and sharing alternatives to war metaphors was exactly an awareness of the dominance of military imagery and its potential dangers.

Although such a reframing would certainly be welcome, it is hard to believe it could ever be completely realized given many analogies between wars and epidemics and the embodiment of the WAR metaphor when it comes to any disease.

The frequency and dominance of this metaphor has caused it to be cognitively and neurally strengthened in our brain.

Undoubtedly, more cross-linguistic research is needed regarding possible and probable alternatives and their aptness. We have seen in section 5 that the RELIGION frame may be potentially a very harmful substitute metaphor. It is also important to note that war metaphors are often unnoticed and disregarded by the audience because of their pervasiveness and extreme frequency (see Despot, Tonković and Ostroški Anić, in press). However, one should be aware that “in most cases, what makes a metaphor appropriate or inappropriate, helpful or unhelpful, empowering, or disempowering is not the type of metaphor itself but the way in which it is used in a specific context for a specific purpose for a specific audience” (Semino 2021: 52).

6. Conclusions

In this paper, we have performed a corpus-based and qualitative analysis of conceptual metaphors in the Croatian (social) media discourse on the Covid-19 pandemic in order to outline the conceptual and inferential structure of the pandemic and to discuss the structure, function, and (in)aptness of the WAR metaphor. We have shown how general mechanisms of figurative conceptualization of all abstract concepts are at the basis of the inferential structure of the concept of this pandemic. Those mechanisms include different image schemas (possession, control, container, force), personification (killer, ruler, teacher), reification, and the event structure metaphor. The conceptual richness of the domain of the pandemic is provided through figurative source frames of DISASTER (specified as TRAGEDY, FIRE, CRISIS, WATER/WAVE, PLAGUE, EXPLOSION, CATAclysm, TSUNAMI, CHERNOBYL), COMBAT (WAR, and SPORTS including FOOTBALL, RACE, BOX, DANCE), and LITERARY FORM (STORY, DRAMA). Rare and novel metaphors use RELIGION/CULT, PLANT, DENTAL CAVITY, and MOVIE SERIES as their source frames.

Our results demonstrate a full splendour of the creative potential of human language and freedom of thought, even in these unusual and worrying circumstances. However, despite this dazzling diversity of the source frames of conceptual metaphors obtained by the analysis, our corpus analysis has clearly shown that

the Covid-19 pandemic is predominantly framed as COMBAT/WAR in Croatian media and social media.

This is certainly additional proof to justify and support the attempts to deliberately use different metaphors, such as the #ReframeCovid initiative, that have emerged due to fear of overly militant metaphorical framing and Newspeak-like discourse in the context of unprecedented restrictions on basic freedoms. In addition to showing what makes the WAR metaphor inapt to discuss this pandemic, despite the fact that ‘war’ on war metaphors has been (justifiably) declared both by the media and research community, we have shown what makes it apt and why it is so frequent and omnipresent. Our qualitative analysis shows that the WAR metaphor is apt to describe the target frame of the epidemic in a variety of ways and that it can, aside from evoking fear and anxiety by strengthening the militant framework, establish a rich, dynamic and potentially creative source for talking and thinking about Covid-19. This is why we find it unlikely that a complete change of framework will ever be possible. Moreover, we have shown that some other source frames (e.g. the RELIGION frame) may even be more dangerous than war framing. However, it is important to note that it is rarely the type of metaphor that is harmful or inappropriate – it is rather the context and way in which it is used.

Our analyses left many questions unanswered and certainly raised several new ones. Keeping in mind that Croatia is a country in which people still have a vivid memory of the most recent war, it would be very interesting to, in comparative research, establish whether the structure and function of war metaphors in Croatian are affected by this recent personal experiences with war. Are people from countries with no such experience more or less likely to use the war frame? Do war metaphors provoke different emotional responses concerning these individual differences in first-hand combat experience?

In the light of our skeptical stance regarding the possibility of reframing Covid-19 discourse, it would certainly be interesting to test the real power of metaphorical framings in real-life situations and to, again, raise questions about when and to what extent metaphors indeed influence reasoning.

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Rat protiv ratne metafore: metaforički okviri u hrvatskome diskursu o pandemiji koronavirusa

Sažetak

U prethodnim studijama pokazalo se da se u javnome diskursu te na društvenim mrežama u velikoj mjeri rabi metaforički okvir rata kako bi se govorilo i mislilo o pandemiji koronavirusa, unatoč tomu što je pokazano kako je taj okvir potencijalno opasan i neprikladan za konceptualizaciju svih aspekata pandemije. Ovaj rad analizira konceptualne metafore u hrvatskome (društvenome) medijskome diskursu o ovoj pandemiji, s naglaskom na ratnoj metafori. Analizom zasnovanom na korpusu, koristeći se specijaliziranim korpusom ručno odabranih relevantnih tekstova na hrvatskome jeziku sastavljenim za potrebe ovoga istraživanja, pokazali smo koliko je ratna metafora doista česta u hrvatskim (društvenim) medijima u usporedbi s alternativnim figurativnim okvirima. Kvalitativnom analizom ocrnali smo konceptualnu i inferencijsku strukturu koncepta pandemije koronavirusa te analizirali strukturu, funkciju i (ne)prikladnost ratne metafore u pandemijskim okolnostima. Utvrđivanjem svih izvornih okvira potvrđenih u korpusu, nudimo i druge, možda prikladnije (ili manje kontroverzne) mogućnosti metaforičkoga uokvirivanja diskursa o koronavirusu – odno-

sno takozvani metaforički meni oblikovan posebno za hrvatski jezik na temelju podataka iz korpusa. Pokazali smo da se ova pandemija u hrvatskim medijima doista dominantno konceptualizira kao BORBA/RAT. Unatoč činjenici da su ‘rat’ protiv ratne metafore proglasili i mediji i istraživačka zajednica, pokazali smo što ratnu metaforu ipak čini prikladnom i sveprisutnom, a po čemu je neprikladna u diskursu o ovoj pandemiji. Pokazali smo i da su neki drugi izvorni okviri (npr. religijski) potencijalno čak i opasniji od ratne metafore. No gotovo nikada sam tip metafore nije štetan ili neprimjeren, nego je to kontekst u kojem se metafora upotrebljava i način na koji se to čini.

Keywords: conceptual metaphor, framing, semantic frames, coronavirus, pandemic, Covid-19

Ključne riječi: konceptualna metafora, uokvirivanje, semantički okviri, koronavirus, pandemija, COVID-19