

The Metaphorical Representation of the Covid-19 Pandemic in the Albanian Public Discourse



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Abstract From a cognitive linguistics perspective it is widely known that well known conceptual domains are used to explain complex or emerging concepts. As of recent, in the context of the Coronavirus pandemic, a wider usage of metaphors has been noticed in various public discourses. This paper aims to explore the most common metaphorical expressions used in the Albanian public discourse from the period of March 2020 until June 2020, in official political statements and media reports. It draws on the concepts of discourse metaphors and metaphor scenarios. The findings suggest that the pandemic in Albania is mostly framed in terms of WAR, NATURAL DISASTER and JOURNEY. However, even though these metaphors are used within the pandemic context they are not specific to Covid-19.

Keywords Covid-19 · Conceptual domain · Metaphor · Scenarios · Discourse

1 Introduction

The first case of the coronavirus infection in Albania, was reported on March 8, 2020 in Tirana. On March 10, 2020, Prime Minister Edi Rama announced the country's lockdown policy by stating that this policy was regrettable but necessary by inviting the citizens to wash their hands and avoid fake news (tiranatimes.com, n.d.). The measures were initially imposed on the largest urban areas only, to be then expanded on the whole country in a matter of days. They were continually modified without prior warnings and without providing justifications. Furthermore, the government required the citizens to apply for an online "going out permit" through E-Albania, an online government portal. The permission was awarded for one hour per day, later updated to an hour and a half, and only one adult member per family could be eligible for application. The elderly were not allowed to leave their homes, unless emergency situations. One concerning issue regarding these measures is the fact the authorities adopted them without declaring a State of Emergency, as provided by law,

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thus restricting and forbidding fundamental human rights. The lockdown was legally enforced on 24 March, 2020, when the government declared a State of Emergency through a Decision of the Council of Ministers. The provisions, however, remained the same and the act was considered just a technical formality, as the government had already ordered the military forces into urban centers calling on people to stay indoors before declaring the State of Emergency.

These measures were generally accepted by citizens, even though in some cases, various fines have been administered by the police forces for breach of measures. To date, Albania records 118,017 infected people, 2,060 fatalities and 81,061 recovered patients in a population of 2,877,797 inhabitants.

Facing a new, unknown and unprecedented situation, new and appealing narratives were required to justify the extreme measures that were taken and to persuade the citizens to collaborate and embrace the applied policies. This paper aims to shed light on the conceptualization of the Covid-19 pandemic in the Albanian public discourse from the period of March 2020 until June 2020. It explores the most used metaphorical expressions and metaphor scenarios found in political speeches and media reports during the first stage of the pandemic.

2 Conceptual Metaphor Theory

Metaphors are considered to be important in communication and cognition because they express, reflect and reinforce different ways of making sense of particular aspects of our lives (Semino, 2008). They involve the conceptualization of more abstract notions in terms of more concrete ones (Flusberg et al., 2018; Gibbs, 1994; Lakoff & Johnson, 1980; Pinker, 2007). More specifically, conceptual metaphors are defined as the understanding of one more abstract domain of experience in terms of a more concrete domain of experience. Thus, the metaphor is considered a process and a product simultaneously. The process aspect is related to the cognitive process of understanding a domain and the conceptual pattern that results from such an understanding is recognized as the product aspect (Kövecses, 2017). This process allows for the image of a familiar topic to replace the image of an unfamiliar topic in the auditor's mind (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980).

Another distinction embodied in the metaphor is the one between the “source domain” and “target domain”. The source domain is a concrete domain, whereas the target domain is an abstract one. In the case of the LIFE IS A JOURNEY conceptual metaphor, the domain of journey is concrete as opposed to the domain of life. Thus, JOURNEY constitutes the source domain of the metaphor and LIFE the target domain. In general, concrete physical domains typically serve as source domains for more abstract targets, as in the case of LIFE IS A JOURNEY metaphor (Kövecses, 2017). This reasoning suggests that conceptual metaphors reside not only in language but also in cognition. We frequently use metaphors to speak but also to think about certain aspects of the world (Kövecses, 2017). They help us think and speak about

a problem by simplifying the issue, highlighting certain aspects and deemphasizing others (Flusberg et al., 2018).

3 Metaphors and Covid-19

As aforementioned, metaphorical language tends to be used whenever an abstract concept is being discussed. The revolution in the lifestyle that this pandemic brought called on for relevant linguistic expressions to address the issues related to it. The abstraction of the topic is related to the fact that the virus in question was new, unknown and invisible. Also the consequences were very sudden and serious such as the spreading of a large scale illness and a considerable number of deaths. As a result urgent responses were needed from governments which also involved major changes in the lifestyle of people all over the world. These changes sometimes violated human rights and democratic behavior and resulted in a growing debate about the pandemic and the measures taken.

Metaphorical language use is not a novelty in healthcare discourse (Demmen et al., 2015; Semino et al., 2015; Sontag, 1991). Target domains concerning illnesses appear to be relatively complex, abstract, subjective and very sensitive experiences (such as life and death), whereas source domains tend to be simpler, richer in imagery and quite accessible experiences (such as fighting, people and animals). For this reason illness, both physical and mental, is a subjective and sensitive experience and tends to be talked about and conceptualized through metaphor (see Semino & Demjen, 2017).

4 Metaphor Scenarios

There are three main perspectives on metaphor analysis: cognitive, discourse based and practice based. All of the three methods are concerned with the implications and usage of metaphors, however they have different priorities. The cognitive based method is mostly concerned with metaphors in thought and considers metaphorical expressions as part of conceptual structures and processes. The discourse based method investigates the form and application of metaphors in authentic language use by taking into consideration the interlocutors and the context. The practice based method focuses on how metaphors affect communication in a particular setting (such as healthcare). What all these three methods have in common is the notion of framing, even though it is defined at different levels of generality in each of them (Semino, 2008).

The present study draws on the concepts of discourse metaphors and metaphor scenarios. It analyses metaphorical expressions in authentic data such as political statements and media reports on Covid-19, from March 2020 to June 2020 and considers their implication for rhetorical effects, social relations, ideologies etc. The

study is concerned with metaphor as an object of study and with issues within a specific domain of communication such as the narrative on the Covid-19 pandemic from which textual data are drawn. The chosen methodology involves a manual analysis of the selected data, based on the Metaphor Identification Procedure proposed in Pragglejaz Group (2007) which considers an expression as metaphorically used when its contextual meaning contrasts with a more concrete basic meaning and when the former meaning can be understood through a comparison with the latter. For instance, the expression “invisible enemy” was identified as a metaphorical expression and then allocated to the semantic field of war. Other semantic fields explored were those related to journey and natural disaster.

This approach to metaphor study proves to be effective since it offers the possibility to explore what is included within the framing effects, what level of conceptual structure is considered in relation to metaphors and framing, and the role of linguistic choices and patterns in claims about metaphor and framing (Semino, 2008).

More concretely, this study relies on the identification and exploration of metaphor scenarios. A scenario is defined as: *a set of assumptions made by competent members of a discourse community about “typical” aspects of a source-situation, for example, its participants and their roles, the “dramatic” storylines and outcomes, and conventional evaluations of whether they count as successful or unsuccessful, normal or abnormal, permissible or illegitimate, etc.* (Musolff, 2006; Semino, 2008).

The notion of scenario seems to be compatible with the notion of frame. However, scenarios are extracted from discourse data and function as a bridge between the conceptual properties of metaphor to its active usage in a socially situated discourse (Musolff, 2006).

5 Most Common Scenarios in Albanian Public Discourses on Covid-19

5.1 The Warfare Scenario

It is noticed that especially during the initial phase of the pandemic there is a tendency to conceptualize the virus as an enemy, or invisible enemy (the adjective invisible contributes to enhance the danger and risk involved) and the pandemic in general as a war. The war metaphor is proved to be effective because of some significant properties embodied by it, such as: the source domain recalls a salient knowledge (or feeling) and this knowledge is well-known to speakers of the linguistic community (Flusberg et al., 2018).

Within this context, there is a well-defined schematic knowledge for a prototypical war which involves a fight between opposing forces, an in- group (the people/ countries/ governments/ the world) and an out- group (the enemy/ the virus). Also there are strategic decision to be taken in order to win the war (lockdown/ travel restrictions), there is a hierarchy of decision making and a leader who takes the most

strategic decisions (the specialists' committee/ the Prime Minister), there are soldiers who fight in the frontline (medical staff) and there are also the people who have a stake in the outcome of the war but are not directly involved on the frontline (people who have to respect the government's measures). This knowledge of a prototypical war is quite widespread and relatable to the audience. The chances are that a lot of people have a first-hand experience with fighting in a war, or a second-hand experience of learning about a war, reading information about wars or seeing it and hearing from it through various media. Thus, war metaphors are meaningful because war exposure is frequent in everyday life. (Flusberg et al., 2018) They are also prevalent in daily communication. As stated by Lakoff and Johnson (1980) we cannot help but talk about, and enact, arguments in terms of concepts of war, since a lot of topics of discussion (politics, sport etc.) have something in common with war. Due to this conventionality, war metaphors are easy to process and understand in context.

The war metaphor is not new in healthcare discourse. It has been extensively used to refer to the Ebola epidemic, AIDS and cancer (Semino, 2016), a fact that suggests that the discourse on Covid-19 has been conceptualized on pre-existing frames and scenarios.

5.1.1 The Invisible Enemy

The warfare scenario has been applied in dominating discourses in English and borrowed and translated in other languages too. Albanian Prime Minister, Edi Rama has also relied on this conceptualization when constructing his political narrative on the pandemic. For example he explicitly refers to the virus as an enemy when addressing the pandemic issue in the Albanian parliament and government meetings during the months of March and April.

On the other hand, this is not a conventional war, where human values such as courage is highlighted. This is a war with an invisible enemy, completely invisible, who is able to enter our body and our beloved bodies by seriously menacing their health and their life.

(PM Edi Rama addressing the government meeting on March 10, 2020)

Friends, I hope you are keeping calm and mobilised to win this war, which unlike conventional wars, does not require us to go to an actual front, since we are the front; we don't have to protect the country from an enemy, but our own cells from an enemy; we don't need to use any weapons, but we should equip ourselves with the weapon of patience and sacrifice our own freedom. (Statement of PM Rama, March 2020)

We are in war with an enemy that is looking for hostages among the elderly in our family and its main ally is our carelessness and the other allies are fear, insecurity, confusion which are nourished by our sources of information. No war is fought without information and every battle or argument, let alone a war, can be lost if you are not informed or misinformed. And with regard to this enemy, every other information apart from official information, is dangerous and it should be received by wearing the protecting mask of total doubt. (Statement of PM Rama, March 2020)

The above discursive passages suggest that PM Rama emphasizes the danger embodied by the virus by highlighting the abstract and unknown properties of it and also stating that being courageous is not enough. This statement implies that

further “sacrifices”, such as respecting the measures of the government, are required to face this war. The need to express and articulate the new circumstances and justify the measures taken, which as the Prime Minister also states, limit the citizens’ basic rights, has activated in components of lexical field of war in discourse. The conceptualization of such circumstances as war, reaches the audience’s conscience and causes fear and insecurity and as a result, obedience towards the call for collaboration. PM Rama attributes features of the invisible enemy to the non-official information. Thus, the war frame is used here to indicate the media too. It is worth reminding here that Rama’s relationship with the media is not the best. Also, during the pandemic the PM centralized the information resources by being the only one who reported on the measures of the pandemic, mainly through his social media accounts. A number of people were also arrested for spreading fake news on social media.

One month after the application of government’s measures, PM Rama states:

Albania has successfully won the first battle with this invisible enemy. (PM Edi Rama addressing the Albanian parliament on April 16, 2020)

This war is positioned in two fronts; the front of facing the enemy on the battlefield, our beloveds bodies and the front of the battle for the survival of the economy today and its recovery tomorrow. Of course, with stress and patience, we are going to win both wars. (Statement of PM Rama on 16 April 2020)

This statement implies a success of the lockdown measures, however it does not announce a victory on the enemy. The war still goes on and other battles are on the way, as a result, further cooperation by the citizens is needed. The Prime Minister, also, juxtaposes here two very different concepts. On the one hand an abstract concept, the war with the invisible enemy and on the other hand a concrete concept, something that affected the daily lives of every Albanian family, the difficult economic situation. There is an implication that, so far, the war has been won only at an abstract level.

5.1.2 The Hero

As with every war, there are enemies and there are heroes. In the war against Covid-19, the traits of the heroes are attributed to the medical staff who is considered to be on “the frontline” with the virus by risking infections and also their life. Different political leaders and media channels have called on for solidarity for the medical staff in these challenging and difficult times, as is the case of this extract from a news report on March, 2020.

Since the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic, we are all experiencing a stressful and tiring period, but even in the most tiring days, there are the silent heroes who spend their days “imprisoned” in the hospital saving patients’ lives. (Shqiptarja.com)

We are continuing to furnish doctors, nurses and the structures of the National Emergency section with personal protective materials. The protection of doctors and nurses, who fight in the frontline in the war against COVID-19. (Statement by the Minister of Health, Ogerta Manastirliu, April 2020)

Dear doctors, nurses and health staffs everywhere in Albania and staff of the hospital of Tirana! You are our heroes! The heart and mind of every Albanian is close to you! May God

give you the strength and courage to face this challenge that lies ahead! In these times you are not just parents, partners, sons and daughters, sisters and brothers of your families, but of all the Albanian citizens. (Statement of Leader of the Albanian opposition, Lulzim Basha, March 2020)

Doctors and nurses in Albania are continuing their fight on the frontline to save infected coronavirus patients in extraordinary circumstances – that keep them isolated from their families and children. (reporter.al, news report, March 2020)

This is also the only occasion when the leader of the Albanian opposition, Lulzim Basha, has used the warfare scenario in his public discourse. He has avoided the usage of the war frame entirely during the pandemic.

Elements of the hero are also found in narratives about police officers, who even though are not on “the frontline” with the virus are still sacrificing their lives by being on duty.

The white collars are not the only heroes! Police officers are everywhere in times of peace and times of war. Even in this modern day war with the coronavirus. (Ora news, news report, March 13, 2020)

5.1.3 The Antihero

Political discourses on Covid-19 were framed with the aim to persuade and convince the citizens to collaborate in “the war” and this involved respecting the imposed rules, respecting social distancing, wearing a mask and during the lockdown phase staying at home. By doing what was required they could share the glory of making their part in winning the war. Those who would not be willing to contribute would be considered responsible for the loss of the war and would thus be attributed elements of the antihero. In one of his social media communications in March 2020, PM Rama states:

From 1 to 5 the country will be considered a closed house. Going for a walk with other people, during the exit hours, will not be peacefully tolerated. We will not stop at administering fines. The police and the army will supervise neighborhoods in Tirana and Durrës, which are categorized as red zones. We will photograph them and place them in the black list of traitors. These individuals will have to pay a price. They will be denied every financial aid possible for at least a year, starting from scholarships up to medicine reimbursement. The elderly too, will be considered war traitors and will be treated with zero tolerance. (Social media communication of PM Rama, March 2020)

If this is the level of understanding civic duty in the frontline with this war on life and death and referring to the positive result achieved so far, a lot of people are giving up thinking that nothing is going to happen to them, then the response from the government will be reciprocal for whoever that will not stand in a line. The new punitive measures will be converted into law on Monday and for the stubborn ones, deprivation of freedom will be the answer. (Social media communication of PM Rama, April 2020)

The new confining measures, which we are going to present to the parliament in order to conduct changes in the criminal code of the Republic of Albania, in the conditions of the natural disaster situation and more specifically the epidemic, will on the one hand, protect the people from the disobedients of this war, and on the other hand will guarantee the needed facilitations by securing the health of every citizen. (Statement of PM Rama, April 2020)

We are making a fantastic effort that history will remember, unless those who do not respect the laws of this war ruin all of this. They are a few, very few, compared to the population, but enough to turn this war into a national tragedy with unimaginable consequences, God forbid! (PM Edi Rama calling on Albanian youth to stay home, March 20, 2020)

PM Rama, who is in self-isolation with his family, since March 12, recalled on Monday, the priceless value of life through respecting the restriction of what he called “the laws of war”. “We have entered a very difficult week. Do not play with fire. We are going to lose people, but let us not lose a mountain full of people. Never”. PM Rama addressed the citizens on Monday. (DW, March 24, 2020)

Threatening discourse dominates the narrative of the above passages, where administrative measures are stressed. There is an implication that those who will deny to obey the rules, even though just a few, shall be the cause of a national tragedy. Moreover, the Prime Minister implies a moral public punishment of the disobedient ones, what contributes to the emotional manipulation of the audience.

5.2 Problems Arising from War Metaphor Usage

Whereas the war frame proved to be useful, especially at the beginning of the pandemic, since it conveys a feeling of risk and urgency (Flusberg et al., 2018) and tends to lead people modify their behavior accordingly, its extended use over-time may be problematic, especially if we think of the associated emotions evoked by war metaphors. They tend to create anxiety because loss of lives and loss of resources are involved and also imply that those who died did not fight enough or were not strong enough. Moreover, war metaphors evoke fear which is suggested to be their primary function in political rhetoric (Flusberg et al., 2018). On the one hand, fear can motivate people to pay attention, be more careful and modify their behavior on behalf of important social issues. As a result, war rhetoric helps individuals recognize the threat of diseases and dedicate more efforts to the research on the actual disease (Hodgkin, 1985; Petsko, 2001). On the other hand, fear is a strong and dangerous motivator in political choices and it tends to lead to the rise of conspiracy theories which can undermine trust in democratic institutions. Due to a circumstance of anxiety, fear and extraordinary measures which limit the basic rights of people (such as those implied by the lockdown restrictions) there is the possibility for the rise of authoritarianism and autocratic leaders.

Within this particular context another metaphor is noticed to be continuously used:

5.2.1 The Leader as the Father of the Nation

This is a concept deriving from the metaphorical frame A NATION IS A FAMILY, which allows us to “reason about the nation on the basis of what we know about a family (Lakoff, 1996). In the Covid-19 pandemic context the usage of this frame allows for the conceptualization of the country’s main leader as a devoted father of a

family. In a traditional nuclear family the father has the primary responsibility for the well-being of the household. In this context, life is seen as fundamentally difficult and the world as fundamentally dangerous. Evil is conceptualized as a force in the world, and it is the father's job to support his family and protect it from evils—both external and internal. The father embodies the values needed to make one's way in the world and to support a family: he is morally strong, self-disciplined, frugal, temperate, and restrained. He sets an example by holding himself to high standards. He insists on his moral authority, commands obedience, and when he doesn't get it, metes out retribution as fairly and justly as he knows how. It is his job to protect and support his family, and he believes that safety comes out of strength (Lakoff, 1996).

PM Rama has framed his narrative around this concept several times during the pandemic. For instance, on April 30, 2020, during his communication on social media he announced that:

On Saturday, May 2 and Sunday May 3, the elderly will be allowed to freely go out at 10:00. All the others will remain home during this timeframe. On Saturday, May 2 and Sunday May 3, parents accompanied by children up to 14 years old will be allowed to go out freely from 11:00 to 17:30. (PM Edi Rama on his Facebook profile, April 30 2020)

- TOMORROW IN ALL URBAN CENTERS, ONLY MOTHERS AND CHILDREN UNDER THE AGE OF 10 WILL BE ALLOWED TO GO FOR A WALK, UNTIL 11:00.
- ATTENTION! MOTHERS MUST NOT BE ACCOMPANIED BY FRIENDS AND CHILDREN MUST BE KEPT IN DISTANCE.
- ALL US, FATHERS AND OTHER CHILDREN OVER THE AGE OF 10 AND THE ELDERLY WILL STAY HOME UNTIL MONDAY, 05:00. (Social media communication of PM Rama, April 2020)

When explaining his Strict Father model, Lakoff states that the father's primary duty is tell his children what is right and wrong, punish them when they do wrong, and to bring them up to be self-disciplined and self-reliant. He teaches his children to be self-disciplined, industrious, polite, trustworthy, and respectful of authority.

Here the PM, takes the attributes of the family father who decides upon the actions and timetables of his children since he is responsible for them and thinks and decides on their behalf. This metaphor results to be highly effective, especially, in patriarchal societies.

On a broader note, the usage of war metaphors when addressing health related issues has been considered not appropriate. Research on the topic suggests that the usage of military language places the illness in the role of an opponent that the patient has to struggle with individually and not actually recovering may be interpreted as a personal defeat (Miller, 2010; Sontag, 1991). Constructing the patient as a victim may also prevent his/her recovery as he/she may be considered responsible for the development of the illness and culpable in case of a "failure" of recovery. Sontag proposes to entirely eliminate the usage of these metaphors when communicating health related issues and use only literal language instead (Sontag, 1991). The topic has created controversies since a study by Hauser and Schwartz (2015) has confirmed that the metaphorical framing of cancer as an enemy was shown to reduce people's

intention to engage in self-limiting prevention behavior (such as quitting smoking). In this case war metaphors are effectively used to explain and encourage behaviors that may have positive effects on people's health. This might also be the reason why the narrative of war was immediately incorporated in the discourses about Covid-19. Also, military language proved to be effective for the Albanian culture as the history of Albania is marked by multiple wars, starting from the Illyrian wars up to the Second World War. The activation of these pre-established familiar schemata fostered an immediate response from the citizens who embraced the restrictive measures and accepted the changes in the lifestyle.

5.3 *Other Common Scenarios*

5.3.1 **The Journey Scenario**

Another way of framing the pandemic in public narratives in Albania, is noticed to be the journey metaphor, which suggests that the return back to normality involves a long and difficult process with an uncertain conclusion. The process of dealing with the virus and the overcoming of this challenging situation is conceptualized based on elements of travelling and journeys such as maps, final destinations, length of the journey, expansion into different locations etc. The "journey" metaphor is considered as a better alternative to the war metaphor in healthcare discourse (Semino et al., 2015; Sontag, 1991). This metaphor constructs illness as a path that can be travelled collectively and can aid the relationship and involvement of other people rather than the patient in the course of the illness. In public discourses in Albania the journey scenario has been mostly employed by the healthcare authorities. The element of the map has been widely used in the press releases of the Ministry of Health, especially when explaining the spread of the infection.

In her daily public communication, the Minister of Health and Social Care, Ogerta Manastirliu, confirmed that the map of coronavirus infections has expanded and called on the citizens to respect the social distancing measures. (Press release of the Ministry of Health, March 23 2020)

The map of the people infected by COVID-19 is spread in Vlora, Shkodra, Durres and in cities such as Lushnja, Kavaja, Fier and Rrogozhina, the epidemic tracing is ongoing. (Statement of the Ministry of Health, March 2020)

These statements calls on the activation of already familiar visual and conceptual frames of maps and movement from one location to the other to illustrate the spread of virus. The process to recovery is also conceptualized as divided in phases as stated by a study of the Albanian Academy of Sciences and also by a manual on the opening strategy published by the Albanian Ministry of Health.

The Minister of Health has announced the inclusion within the "green areas" of 18 new municipalities. They are considered as involving a low risk for the spread of the infection. (Statement of the Prime Minister's office, April 2020)

Starting from the May 4, every person that will return in the country and is a resident in one of the red zones must be quarantined at home under strict monitoring conditions. While people who are residents in the green areas will continue the quarantine in the appointed accomodating structures. (Statement of the Minister of Health, April 2020)

We are now expecting the Peak and moving on to the next phase. (ata.gov.al quoting the Albanian Academy of Science, March 4 2020)

Based on the WHO recommendations as well as the evaluation of risk in the country, return to normality will be achieved gradually and will include some phases in time. (Manual on the reopening strategy, published by the Albanian Ministry of Health)

We are in a very important instance regarding the continuation of the epidemic situation in the country. Based on ongoing monitoring, there are still some active hearths of infection in some areas. We are working hard to test and trace the cases. The reopening strategy which is composed by the Technical Committee, predicts some phases of slow and careful relief of the actual measures. (Minister of Health, Ogerta Manastirliu, April 2020)

5.3.2 The Natural Disaster Scenario

Metaphors involving weather events are used to refer to the consequences of Covid-19 in the health system but not only. Thus, the pandemic is often conceptualized in terms of storms, tsunamis, and other natural catastrophes. PM Rama talks about a potential “second wave” by relying on pre-existing frames involving elements of the sea.

A second wave is expected, in autumn and winter. It could be true or not. (kryeministria.al/newsroom quoting PM Edi Rama during a press conference)

DW talks about a catastrophe that could occur in the Albanian health system if a situation similar to that of Italy could happen. This statement evokes the devastation brought about by natural disaster and implies that no one is immune to that.

A hypothetical Italian scenario, would be a catastrophe for Albania. (DW, March 24, 2020)

The natural disaster metaphor scenario tends to be effective because it evokes vivid and familiar images who may have been experienced directly or not. Another metaphor evoked within this scenario is the fire metaphor since fires tend to cause harm by progressively increasing in size and intensity and work as very suitable source domains for any phenomenon that causes damage by “spreading” (Charteris-Black, 2017). This clearly applies to a high contagious virus as Covid-19. The fire metaphor is very effective in describing how contagion happens and explains measures that need to be taken in this regard. It also helps to conceptualize the post-pandemic future and can be considered as more plausible alternative to the war metaphor. The usage of this kind of metaphor does not dominate Covid-19 narratives in Albania, however there are some cases when it is used, mostly by the media. For instance in this brief quote, DW talks about intensive explosions of contagions which evokes images of progressive fires.

The foretold storm on the explosion of COVID-19 just started. The pandemic entered on Monday its third week. A week of intensive explosions. (DW, March 24, 2020)

The global explosion of COVID-19 is expected to slow down economical growth during 2020. The rate is quite unclear at the moment”, states the IMF mission. They suggest that the governments secures enough financial resources for the health sector in order to support the infected by COVID-19. (DW, March 2020)

6 Conclusions

As a very pervasive and effective means of communication, metaphors have extensively been used in Covid-19 pandemic narratives in Albania. Based on an analysis of metaphor scenarios, the dominating metaphor resulted to be the war metaphor, especially during the initial phase of the pandemic. During this particular phase, their usage is considered appropriate to convey the dangers posed by the virus, justify the need to change certain aspects of the citizens’ lifestyle and generate a sense of responsibility and sacrifice for a common purpose. The warfare scenario has dominated the discourse of Albanian Prime Minister Edi Rama, especially in the initial phase of the pandemic. The leader of the Albanian opposition has avoided military language, as have done healthcare specialists.

The effectiveness of this metaphor is attributed to the fact that it is very relatable for the Albanian audience as it is constructed on pre-existing familiar frames and recalls on the country’s past experience in wars. However, its extended use overtime may be problematic, especially considering the negative emotions evoked by war components. Thus, it creates anxiety which contributes to health deterioration and evokes fear, which might have a strong impact in political choices by leading to the creation of conspiracy theories, undermining democratic institutions and causing a rise of authoritarianism. Also, from a discourse perspective, they can convey only a partial representation of a certain issue. The more complex and long term the issue, the more we need a variety of metaphors to capture the different facets of meaning generated on the way. For this reason and also for the need to normalize the presence of the virus two other scenarios appear to have been incorporated, the journey scenario and the natural disaster scenario. They both rely on familiar conceptualization and tend to be more acceptable and relatable than the warfare scenario. With the beginning of summer 2020, a tendency to return to normality, despite of the fact that the monitoring of the virus continued, called for a new representation of the virus. Thus the war metaphor was effective only at a short term level.

All of the three identified scenarios rely on already pre-existing conceptual frames which are not specific to Covid-19. Also, these scenarios and the metaphors generated by them are not culture specific but “borrowed” and translated from international discourse.

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