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How the Headquarters stole Christmas - on the ways of conceptualizing measures and strategies...

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How the Headquarters stole Christmas - on the ways of conceptualizing measures and strategies to fight the coronavirus pandemic[1]

This paper explores the figurative language that was used in Croatian media discourse to describe measures and strategies for combating the coronavirus pandemic. Based on the Conceptual Metaphor Theory, Conceptual Integration Theory and Critical Discourse Analysis, the aim of the study is to examine how metaphorical language was employed to shape public understanding and responses to the pandemic. The corpus containing news articles from 2020 – 2021 was analyzed to address three key research questions: the types of figurative expressions associated with pandemic responses, the conceptual mechanisms they are based on and their role in the pandemic discourse. The analysis reveals that many expressions were based on familiar metaphors, such as the traffic light coding system to denote risk levels, but novel conceptualizations also emerged that reflected unique aspects of the pandemic circumstances. The results demonstrate how figurative language can function both as a cognitive tool for understanding the pandemic and public health policies and for establishing power dynamics during crises.

Key words: figurative language, conceptual mechanisms, pandemic, media discourse, Croatia

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1. Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic is one of the greatest health crises of our time. It has affected different aspects of our lives, including language and public communication. With the start of the coronavirus pandemic, public discourse became saturated with news about the virus, descriptions of epidemiological conditions around the world, requirements and instructions for citizens on how to behave in the new situation. The rapid spread of the pandemic and the vast number of unprecedented circumstances prompted the Croatian government and media to rely on various means to facilitate public understanding of the crisis and to influence citizens' behavior and activities. Figurative expressions have played a significant and multifaceted role since the beginning of the pandemic, from helping to explain how the virus functioned to justifying the necessity of measures and later encouraging citizens to get vaccinated.

Although previous studies have examined metaphorical representations of the virus and the disease experience, there remains a gap in our understanding of how containment measures and strategies are linguistically framed. This is particularly significant because the framing of such measures can directly impact public perception, response and compliance. The present study addresses this gap through a cognitive linguistic analysis of figurative expressions in the pandemic discourse. Additionally, taking into account Boin et al. (2016), who argue that the definition of crisis comprises three key components: threat, uncertainty, and urgency, and that crises can cause panic, insecurity, fear, and powerlessness (Wodak 2021: 330), it is evident that crises "… require effective communications to a variety of audiences with widely differing needs, views and frames of reference" (Boin et al. 2016: 12). Such an understanding of crisis and pandemic as not only a health phenomenon but also a communicative phenomenon (Bjørkdahl and Carlsen 2019: 1–10) provides additional motivation for this paper, as it seeks to contribute to a better understanding of crisis communication.

The following section provides a brief explanation of key concepts related to figurative language and cognitive processes that underlie it, which helps establish a theoretical foundation for the study. This is followed by a concise overview of the linguistic literature on the coronavirus, illustrating the use of WAR metaphors during the pandemic, the frames employed in coronavirus crisis communication (by both politicians and the public) and the methods of conceptualizing two significant measures: lockdown and vaccines. Subsequently, a section on the aim, research questions and methodology is presented. Finally, we discuss research results and summarize the main findings in the conclusion. This paper combines a cognitive-linguistic approach and critical discourse analysis to explore how the Croatian government and media used figurative expressions to describe measures and

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strategies for combating the coronavirus pandemic. There is a lack of systematic research about Croatian media discourse focusing solely on the conceptualization of measures and strategies during the pandemic, thus this paper aims to partially fill that gap.[2]

2. Figurative language, conceptual mechanisms and critical discourse perspective

Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT) is indispensable in the analysis of figurative language. Established by Lakoff and Johnson's (1980) monograph *Metaphors We Live By*, it shifted metaphor from language to mind and demonstrated that "our ordinary conceptual system, in terms of which we both think and act, is fundamentally metaphorical in nature" (Lakoff and Johnson 1980: 3). The central concepts of this theory are conceptual metaphor and conceptual metonymy. These two conceptual mechanisms underlie figurative expressions. The third mechanism is conceptual integration, which emerged as a response to and an extension of CMT (see Fauconnier and Turner 2002[3]). In the following subsection, we will clarify these mechanisms.

Kövecses (2010: 4) defines conceptual metaphor "… as understanding one conceptual domain in terms of another conceptual domain".[4] Conceptual domains, which can be defined as "rich mental representations … and portions of our background knowledge that relate to particular experiences or phenomena" (Semino 2008: 5), in conceptual metaphor are source domain and target domain. "The conceptual domain from which we draw metaphorical expressions to understand another conceptual domain is called source domain, while the conceptual domain that is understood this way is the target domain" (Kövecses 2010: 4). To linguistically express conceptual metaphors, we use metaphorical linguistic expressions. These are "… words or other linguistic expressions that come from the language or terminology of the more concrete conceptual domain" (Kövecses 2010: 4). In our

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[2]   Section 3.2. provides a detailed examination of how coronavirus metaphors were used in Croatian media discourse. Previous studies that addressed the conceptualization of strategies and measures for combating the coronavirus treated this topic only as a minor part of their work rather than a primary focus. Therefore, this lack of systematic research on the conceptualization of strategies and measures for combating the coronavirus was also the motivation for this paper.

[3]   The most renowned work is undoubtedly the aforementioned 2002 monograph. However, it should be emphasized that the theory of conceptual integration began its development in 1985 as the theory of mental spaces (Fauconnier 1985; 1994). It subsequently evolved into the theory of conceptual integration through the collaborative works of Fauconnier and Turner (cf. Fauconnier, Turner 1996; 1998; 1999; Turner, Fauconnier 1995; 2000).

[4]   Naturally, this is not the sole definition of conceptual metaphor, however, in most definitions, conceptual metaphor is defined using the notion of domain (cf. Barcelona 2003; Croft 2003; Lakoff 2006), an approach also embraced by the authors of this paper.

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corpus, these would be expressions such as *mjere su na stolu* ('the measures are on the table') and its various modifications (*sve staviti na stol* 'put everything on the table', *mjere su na tapeti* 'the measures are on the carpet') from which the conceptual metaphor MEASURES ARE OBJECTS is postulated. Conceptual metonymy is defined as "…a cognitive process in which one conceptual entity, the vehicle, provides mental access to another conceptual entity, the target, within the same idealized cognitive model" (Radden and Kövecses 1999: 21).[5] There are two general conceptual configurations under which types of metonymy-producing relationships may be subsumed: first, whole Idealized Cognitive Model (ICM) and its part(s) and second, parts of an ICM. The first category includes situations where a part stands for the whole or vice versa (WHOLE FOR PART and PART FOR WHOLE metonymies) and consists of physical entities, scales, constitutions, events, category membership and category features. The second category refers to situations where one part stands for another part (PART FOR PART metonymies), and some of these include activity, causality, control, etc. (Radden and Kövecses 1999: 29–43). The role of figurative expressions relates to their effects in specific contexts and these discourse roles can include promoting worldviews, manipulation, persuasion, etc. (cf. Charteris-Black 2004 and Deignan et al. 2013). Dancygier and Sweetser (2014: 212) have shown that "… very similar metaphors may have different interpretive effects when viewpoint changes".

The term frame was introduced by Fillmore (1975; 1976; 1982). Fillmore (1975) initially used it for any system of linguistic choices, but later associated it with the mind, discussing cognitive frames as well (Fillmore: 1976; 1982). The author (1982: 111; 117–118) defines frame as "… any system of concepts related in such a way that to understand any one of them you have to understand the whole structure in which it fits" and that "… frame or background against which the meaning of a word is defined and understood is a fairly large slice of the surrounding culture". Closely related to the concept of frames is the notion of semantic fields, which in this analysis refer to groups of interrelated lexical items linked by a shared area of meaning (Lyons 1977: 268). Semantic fields organize vocabulary based on the common conceptual content (such as warfare), whereas frames provide a structured, situational framework that influences our understanding of these concepts.

Although this cognitive-linguistic approach provides valuable insights into how figurative expressions structure meaning, it does not address ideological and sociopolitical aspects of the pandemic discourse. Therefore, the final step in this study employed Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to examine how figurative language

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[5]   Conceptual metonymy, like metaphor, has no single accepted definition. The aforementioned definition is one of the most widely recognized (cf. Lakoff 1987 and Littlemore 2015 who also refer to ICMs when defining metonymy). Brdar (2007: 13–14) uses the term domain in his definition but stresses that it can also be an ICM, script, scenario, frame, or single domain matrix involving several subdomains.

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functions in broader public communication. CDA, as developed by Fairclough (1989; 1995), offers an interdisciplinary framework with three interconnected dimensions: textual analysis, discursive practice and social practice. Fairclough (1995) views language not just as a communicative tool, but as a form of social practice. As a result, CDA requires not only a textual analysis, but also an examination of the conditions in which the text was produced and interpreted as well as the social effects it creates.

3. Conceptualization of crisis discourse and measures against the coronavirus pandemic

In this chapter, we briefly present the existing literature on the conceptualization of crisis discourse and the measures and strategies employed in combating the coronavirus. The first section reviews the literature addressing international media discourse during the pandemic, while the second section focuses on studies concerning Croatian media discourse.

3.1. The ways of conceptualizing crisis discourse and measures against the coronavirus pandemic in media discourse

The media has frequently employed the WAR metaphor during previous pandemics or major crises and people have perceived crisis management as a physical struggle (Larson et al. 2005). Many scholars examined these WAR metaphors, including Gillis (2020), who concluded that they can be useful in prompting people to act quickly but can also prevent people from questioning strict government measures. When we are at war, we must fight and hope for victory or surrender and be defeated. Such framing can lead to individuals perceiving those who question or resist measures as traitors, undermining the efforts of those fighting the war against the coronavirus. Charteris-Black (2021) conducted a more systematic investigation by analyzing British newspaper reports on the coronavirus over a year. War terminology is present in various discourses and describes different aspects of the pandemic: from fighting the virus and encouraging citizens to follow measures to explaining how our immune system behaves in contact with the virus and how vaccines affect it. To examine the impact of war framing on human behavior, the author conducted a brief empirical study in which participants read two short texts about the coronavirus: one containing eight war-related metaphors and another text with the same content but using literal expressions instead of those metaphors. Subsequently, the participants ranked five statements describing their decisions regarding pandemic behavior in accordance with government recommendations by importance. The only statistically significant difference in ranking the statements after reading both texts occurred with the fifth statement (*Put their household into*

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complete quarantine) and it involved the most drastic behavior change. This could indicate the potential of war framing to raise awareness about the dangers of the coronavirus and evoke fear that influences changes in beliefs and ultimately makes quarantine seem like an acceptable measure.

Wodak (2021) argues that politicians and those in power relied on crisis communication to persuade people to comply with strict measures and to mitigate fear. The author identifies four frames that leaders employed to decrease the fear of death during the first lockdown: religious, dialogic, trust-emphasizing and war frame. They used different methods of legitimation, including rationalization, appeals to authority, etc., with these strategies often relying on authority and quasi-rational arguments. By employing the religious frame, legitimation was achieved through moralization and authorization. In the dialogic frame, leaders who engaged in conversation with the public established a rational dialogue, while showing empathy and legitimation was achieved through authorization and rationalization. In the trust-emphasizing frame, leaders highlighted personal responsibility in the absence of hierarchical leadership. In the war frame, leaders took full responsibility and people had to follow orders. The author concludes that there is no single pattern that fits all types of crisis communication; rather, it depends on the leader's personality, the type of government regime in the country, collective memory, contextual factors, etc.

Let us return to the framework that emphasizes trust. It focuses on personal responsibility, which is evident in Chancellor Merkel's addresses when the lockdown was introduced in Germany. She framed COVID-19 as an urgent matter and a part of our personal responsibility, where the common interest is protected by our behavior. In other words, it is a collective health condition for which behavioral adaptation is the best remedy. She also frequently used lexemes like *father*, *mother*, *grandfather*, *save*, thus evoking collective protective feelings towards family and further emphasizing personal responsibility and the trust she has in German citizens. Furthermore, Degani (2022) examined former New Zealand Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern's crisis communication. The study investigated two aspects of the Prime Minister's communication: how she established connections with New Zealand citizens and the types of motivation she employed to explain her government's measures. The author concludes that Ardern, depending on the situation, appealed to logos, ethos, and pathos.[6] Ardern invokes logos when presenting the government's decisions and measures to combat the pandemic as being based on facts, evidence and science. A combination of ethos and pathos is evident when she calls

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[6]   Degani (2022: 478) connects logos to reason, ethos to the moral character of the speaker and pathos to emotional engagement. Charteris-Black (2011: 14) sees them as rhetorical means for persuasion in political communication. For him logos is connected to communicating political arguments ("thinking right"), ethos to establishing integrity ("having the right intentions") and pathos to heightening emotional impact ("sounding right").

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for unity and shared values to persuade people to follow the government's advice: to end the crisis, people must consider themselves part of a larger community in which individual actions are not motivated by personal needs. Although the author refrains from establishing a causal relationship between Ardern's words and New Zealand's ability to overcome the public health crisis, she suggests that the results may indicate the importance of the rhetorical features of Ardern's communicative style in positively influencing New Zealanders to support and respect the strict government measures imposed to curb the pandemic.

Two measures were particularly important during the pandemic: the lockdown and vaccination. Neagu (2022) demonstrated that leaders formed the idea of lockdown as a CONTAINER, especially in Boris Johnson's discourse. However, in New Zealand and parts of Canada, the BUBBLE metaphor emerged. Bubbles, like lockdown, are based on the CONTAINER metaphor, but there are important differences. A lockdown evokes images of prison, house arrest and punishment, while bubbles, as micro-communities, evoke images of fragile protection, responsibility and mutual support. Later, Johnson also began to speak of bubbles. Lu and Yu (2023) investigated how American and Chinese media framed vaccines. The research showed that four metaphors were common: VACCINE IS WEAPON, VACCINE IS MACHINE, VACCINE IS TRAVELER, and THE DEVELOPMENT OF A VACCINE IS A RACE / SELLING VACCINES IS A RACE. The use of certain metaphors in this case is motivated by ideological reasons. The Chinese government, starting from collectivism as an important determinant of communism, uses the WEAPON metaphor to encourage citizens to get vaccinated and thus participate in a common struggle. On the other hand, American journalists use the TRAVELER metaphor to portray vaccine development as a systemic issue of capitalism.

3.2. The ways of conceptualizing crisis discourse and measures against the coronavirus pandemic in Croatian media discourse

Due to the pandemic's impact on language, Croatian media discourse about coronavirus has also been extensively studied (cf. Štrkalj Despot 2020; Lacković et al. 2021; Ristanović 2021; Štrkalj Despot and Ostroški Anić 2021; Bezić and Petrović 2022; Šporčić et al. 2022; Štrkalj Despot et al. 2022). However, research specifically aimed at examining the conceptualization of strategies and measures against the coronavirus remains limited.

The frequent use of WAR metaphors when discussing anti-coronavirus measures is not uncommon, especially considering the widespread presence of WAR metaphors in Croatian media discourse regarding the coronavirus pandemic (cf. Štrkalj Despot and Ostroški Anić 2021; Šporčić et al. 2022). Lacković et al. (2021: 49) observed that the distribution of masks was framed as war profiteering and the do-

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main of WAR was employed for discourse surrounding vaccines (e.g., *globalni rat za cjepivo* 'global war for vaccines'). Bezić and Petrović (2022: 405–406) found in their dataset that adherence to measures was conceptualized using the WAR metaphor, particularly before vaccines or treatments became available. Šporčić et al. (2022: 291–293) observed a similar trend in vaccines and medicine discourse and identified the following conceptual metaphors in their dataset: VACCINATION IS AN INVASION, MEDICINE AND VACCINES ARE AN ARMED ARSENAL, MEDICINE IS A WEAPON, and NON-VACCINATION IS BEING ARMED. An instance of the SPORT metaphor was also found for quarantine as a measure for infected individuals or their close contacts (Štrkalj Despot and Ostroški Anić 2021: 21).

Interestingly, the DANCE frame was also utilized, drawing on the *hammer and dance strategy* (Pueyo 2020). This framework blended with the COMBAT and RELIGION frames, yet the DANCE frame emphasized balance, creativity, and unpredictable movement (Štrkalj Despot and Ostroški Anić 2021: 22–23). Štrkalj Despot et al. (2022) conducted an experiment in which three groups of participants read one of three texts: one framed the situation using a WAR metaphor, another with a FOOTBALL metaphor and the third with a DANCE metaphor. After reading the texts, participants were asked to assume the roles of Government officials and describe what they would do to reduce the number of infected individuals. They were then asked what was more important in fighting the virus: dominance and decisiveness, or cooperation with citizens and what the Government's approach to the pandemic should be: global or national. The re-emergence of the DANCE frame was evident in responses such as *treba izbalansirati gospodarstvo i restrikcije* ('we should find an equilibrium between restrictions and the economy') and *drugi dio plesa* ('the second part of the dance'). However, some participants expressed opposition to the use of the DANCE frame, deeming it unsuitable for the situation and misleading, as it depicted the situation as light and relaxed when it was not.

4. Aim and research questions

The aim of this paper is to investigate figurative language used in Croatian media discourse to present measures and strategies for combating the coronavirus pandemic. The paper attempts to answer the following research questions: first, what types of figurative expressions are associated with the representation of measures and strategies for combating the coronavirus pandemic; second, on which conceptual mechanisms are these expressions based and third, what is the role of these expressions?

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5. Methodology

The research was conducted on a corpus of newspaper articles from the news portals of Jutarnji list and Večernji list. According to the Reuters 2018[7] report, these newspapers and 24 sata are Croatia's most widely read publications. Therefore, the collected newspaper articles should provide a representative sample of media discourse concerning the coronavirus pandemic. The articles about the coronavirus pandemic were collected daily from March 1, 2020 to March 1, 2021. The corpus was compiled by hand and contains 1,378,976 words, available upon request. After compiling the corpus, the initial stage of the analysis involved manually extracting both single-word and multi-word expressions with figurative meaning, differing from their literal sense within the observed context meanings. The manual extraction process focused specifically on identifying metaphorical expressions related to the pandemic. In order to avoid subjective and intuitive classifications of figurative versus literal language, we applied the Metaphor Identification Procedure as outlined by the Pragglejaz Group (2007: 3). The procedure includes the following steps: reading the entire text or discourse, determining lexical units, establishing the meaning of each lexical unit in context and determining if a lexical unit has a basic meaning in other contexts that differs from its meaning in the observed context. If the meaning of the lexical unit differs in the observed context from its meaning in other contexts, determine if this meaning is contrary to the basic meaning and can be understood in comparison with the basic meaning. If the meaning in the observed context is contrary to or deviates from the literal meaning, the lexical unit is marked as metaphorical.

Following the identification of metaphorical expressions, the selected figurative expressions were categorized based on their semantic fields, frames and underlying conceptual mechanisms.[8] Each unit was analyzed to determine its underlying conceptual mapping structure. This process involved systematically identifying the source domain and the target domain. For example, the COLOR/TRAFFIC LIGHT metaphorical systems are examples of systematic conceptual mapping. The expression like *semafor epidemije* ('the epidemic traffic light') illustrates how the source domain of TRAFFIC CONTROL SYSTEMS maps onto the target domain of PANDEMIC MANAGEMENT. The systematic correspondences include traffic light colors (red, orange, yellow, green) that represent risk levels, while traffic flow regulation corresponds to movement restrictions. Some of the conceptual metaphors identified in the corpus correspond to conventional metaphorical systems already described in the literature (e.g., NATURAL DISASTER, PHYSICAL CONFLICT). However, for novel

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[7]   https://www.digitalnewsreport.org/survey/2018/croatia-2018/ (accessed on 2 June 2024).

[8]   Semantic fields were used in the descriptive sense to label thematically related lexical items, while the interpretation of meaning is based on cognitive-linguistic framework.

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or less established metaphorical patterns, the authors formulated original names that reflect specific conceptual mappings observed in the data. Furthermore, we examined how metaphorical expressions activate specific cognitive frames that can impact the understanding of the pandemic measures. For this paper, only figurative expressions that describe the measures and strategies employed for the containment of the coronavirus were considered. Quantitative analysis determined the total number of figurative expressions and their distribution across different semantic fields and conceptual mechanisms. The final step included Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) as developed by Fairclough (1989; 1995), which was employed to determine the role of figurative language in pandemic discourse. The analysis considers how pandemic discourse reflected and influenced social power relations through language. Following Chilton's (2005) call for greater incorporation of conceptual metaphor theory into critical discourse studies, the study aims to examine ideological mechanisms through which language influenced public perception and understanding of health measures during the COVID-19 crisis.

6. Results

The analysis included 170 figurative expressions (out of a total of 7,964), describing the measures and strategies for the containment of the coronavirus. These expressions were selected based on their explicit reference to the measures and strategies for virus containment, while the remaining expressions were related to other pandemic aspects, such as the virus itself, disease transmission, symptoms, etc. The categorization of the expressions identified both the source domain semantic fields from which metaphorical expressions draw their lexical content and the conceptual frames (following FrameNet) that these expressions activate. The majority of the analyzed expressions rely on COLOR metaphors (N = 76) to indicate different levels of danger in certain areas. Moreover, a general description of measures and strategies reveals that they were conceptualized as CONCRETE THINGS (N = 22). A small but significant group of expressions (N = 4) draws on the cultural reference of the Grinch character, specifically to conceptualize restrictions during the Christmas holidays. Figurative expressions describing lockdown (N = 43) refer to an array of source domains such as MEDICINE, SLEEP and NATURAL DISASTERS. The analysis also captured the emergence of a novel pandemic response strategy metaphorically termed *the hammer and the dance* (N = 25).

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Table 1. Categorization of figurative expressions by frames and semantic fields

Category	Frames/semantic fields	Number of figurative expressions
Color metaphors	Color frame	76
Lockdown conceptualization	Restraints frame + MEDICINE, SLEEP and NATURAL DISASTERS fields	43
Hammer and dance strategy	Forced motion frame + PHYSICAL ACTION field	25
Concrete things	Physical entity, Object, Artifact frames	22
Literary references	LITERARY/CULTURAL REFERENCES field	4
TOTAL		170

The COLOR metaphors serve as the conceptual basis for 76 figurative expressions that contain the lexemes associated with colors and traffic lights. The dominant colors include red, orange, yellow and green, while white was recorded only twice. These expressions are based on the conceptual metaphor PANDEMIC RISK IS TRAFFIC LIGHT SYSTEM, where red indicates the highest danger, followed by orange, yellow and green for safety. This mapping reveals that movement restrictions and permissions correspond to infection levels.

General descriptions of measures include expressions (N = 22) based on the dominant conceptual metaphor ABSTRACT POLICIES ARE CONCRETE THINGS. Measures are conceptualized as objects in 14 figurative expressions containing the idiom *biti na stolu* ('to be on the table') and its modifications. *Doći/staviti na stol* ('arrive/put on the table') and *na javni stol je servirano puno toga* ('a lot has been served on the public table') are lexical modifications of the base idiom, more specifically substitution and addition (Omazić 2015). This idiom is also based on the conceptual metonymy PART FOR WHOLE, that is, its subtype PART OF A SCENARIO FOR THE SCENARIO. *Hrvatski jezični portal*[9] ('Croatian language portal') defines this phrase as "to make a proposal, to offer something in negotiations." Since it is common for negotiations to take place at a table with documents containing proposals, putting the measures on the table is part of a scenario that replaces the entire scenario of making proposals. Using this metonymy, the focus is precisely on measures and negotiations regarding all measures as the most crucial part of the entire scenario.[10] Babić (2018: 134)[11] states that

> ...metonymies of this type are particularly suitable when we want to activate more complex concepts or rich ICMs in the interlocutor. Namely, linguistic expressions

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[9]   Hrvatski jezični portal https://hjp.znanje.hr/index.php?show=search (accessed on 26 June 2024).

[10]   This aligns with Radden and Kövecses (1999: 31), who, regarding the PART FOR WHOLE metonymy, state: "In such situations, the entity that is understood to be most crucially involved in the ICM is metonymically highlighted."

[11]   The importance and frequency of this metonymy are also evidenced by the fact that it accounts for 15.65% of metonymy examples in the corpus researched by Babić (2018).

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containing this metonymy simultaneously refer to a whole series of related events which together – still within a single domain or ICM – form a scenario.[12] (authors' translation)

The next group of expressions (N = 3) point to the temporality of restrictions illustrated by *mjere nisu zacementirane* or *zapisane u kamenu* ('the measures are not cemented' or 'written in stone'), based on the conceptual metaphor MEASURES ARE PERMANENT MATERIAL RECORDS. The figurative expression *mjere se neće izvlačiti iz rukava* ('the measures will not be pulled out of the sleeve') is a modified phraseological unit that has been expanded and in which lexical substitution has occurred. It is based on the phrase *as iz rukava* ('an ace up one's sleeve') that *Hrvatski frazeološki rječnik* ('The Croatian Phraseological Dictionary') defines as "a backup solution, an unexpected twist, a sudden argument by which one tries to achieve something in an unfair way" (Menac et al. 2014: 23).

The implementation of measures relied on *(jakim) plećima/leđima pojedinca* ('the (strong) shoulders/back of the individual'), figurative expressions (N = 3) that draw on the conceptual metaphor DIFFICULTIES ARE HEAVY OBJECTS. Besides instantiating OBJECT metaphor, the phrase *mjere ne drže vodu* ('measures don't hold water'), is based on the CONTAINER metaphor, in which the container's ability to hold liquid corresponds to the policy's ability to withstand questioning.[13]

The next three expressions refer to the measures introduced just before Christmas and are allusions to the book *How Grinch Stole Christmas* by Dr. Seuss. Implementing the measures during holidays was met with resistance and frustration, as illustrated by the figurative expression *stožer/vlada nam je ukrala Božić* ('the Headquarters/Government stole Christmas') (N = 3).

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[12] "... da su metonimije ovoga tipa posebno prikladne kada želimo kod sugovornika aktivirati složenije koncepte ili bogate ICM-ove. Naime, jezični izrazi koji sadrže tu metonimiju pozivaju se istodobno na cijeli niz povezanih događanja koji skupa – još uvijek unutar jedne domene ili ICM-a – čine scenarij."

[13] It is not uncommon for some metaphorical expressions to be based on multiple metaphors. Examples of such combinations of conceptual metaphors can be found in the literature (cf. Šarić 2005: 162–163; Dancygier and Sweetser 2014: 58–59).

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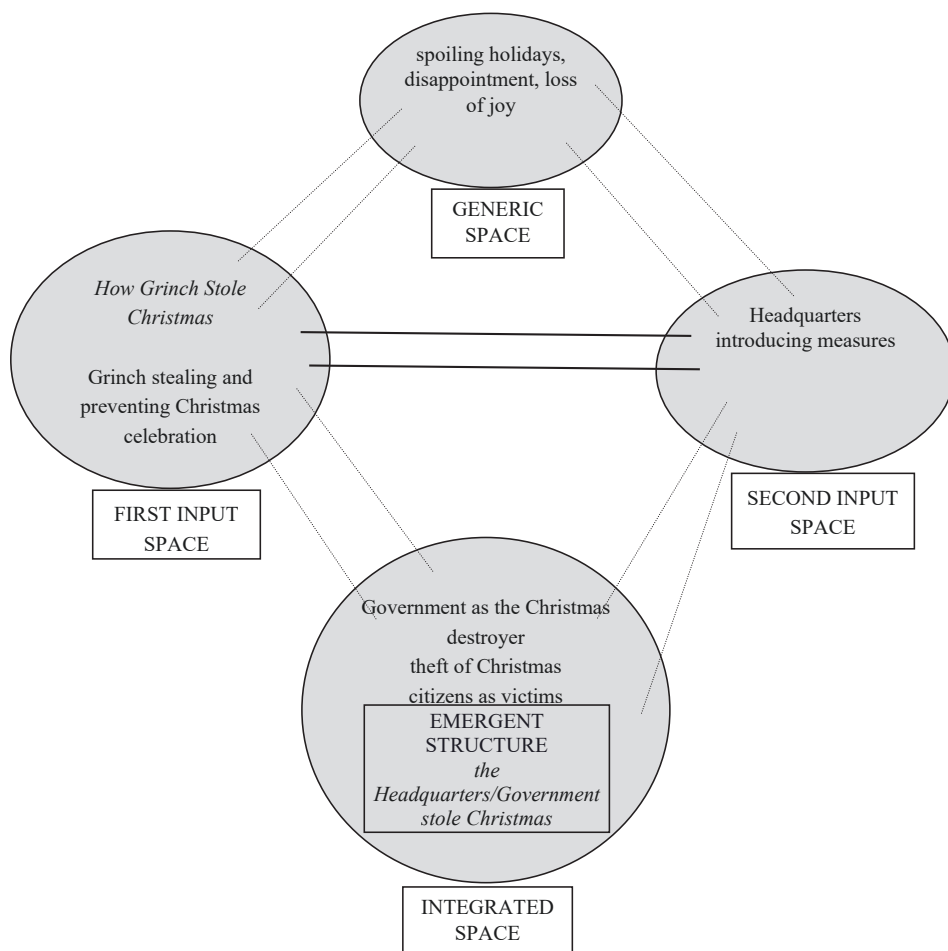JEZIKOSLOVLJE
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Figure 1. Conceptual integration network for
the Headquarters/Government stole Christmas

One of the most restrictive measures during the pandemic was a lockdown that limited people's freedom of movement. The following 43 figurative expressions demonstrate that it was primarily conceptualized as an object (N = 23) and described as *tvrdi, labaviji, klimavi, light, soft, mekani lockdown* ('hard, looser, shaky, light, soft and mild'). Drawing on the MEDICINE metaphors, the remaining expressions refer to the lockdown as *lijek* ('medicine') (N=3), *kemoterapija koju tijelo dugoročno ne može izdržati* ('chemotherapy that the body cannot endure in the long term'), *moždani udar* ('a stroke'), *smrtonosan udarac* ('a deadly blow') and *tupi instrument koji nanosi štetu svima* ('and a blunt instrument that harms everyone').

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Due to the inactivity during the pandemic, the lockdown was also described as *ugodna trauma* ('a pleasant trauma'), *godišnji odmor* ('a holiday'), *kolektivni smiraj* ('a collective calm'), *hibernacija* ('hibernation'), *neprirodan vakum* ('an unnatural vacuum') or a situation where everything was *zamrznuto* ('frozen'). It was also conceptualized through SLEEP metaphors as *noćna mora* ('nightmare') and once it ended, *zemlje su upalile svjetla* ('countries turned on the lights') (N = 2). The remaining expressions are based on the source domains of NATURAL DISASTERS and PHENOMENA (*uragan* 'hurricane', *propuh* 'draft'), RELIGION (*apokaliptični scenarij* 'apocalyptic scenario') and CONTROL metaphors (*držanje ljudi pod ključem* 'keeping people under lock').

During the pandemic, a novel strategy called *čekić* i *ples* ('the hammer and the dance') (N = 25) gained significant public attention.[14] *The hammer* refers to extreme measures imposed during short intervals followed by a more relaxed periods of *the dance*. But due to the continuous uncertainty and exhaustion, *the dance* phase was also described as *limbo-ples* ('the limbo dance' – a dance or game where the dancer must move under a bar without touching or knocking it down), *ples po žici, ples na rubu kolapsa, žestoki, sumorni* and *dugotrajni* ('tightrope walking, dancing on the edge of collapse, fierce, gloomy, and long-lasting dance').

7. Discussion

The results suggest that cognitive tools played a significant role in understanding and implementing pandemic measures, in which familiar color-coding systems functioned as the main organizational framework. The expression *na crvenoj listi* ('on the red list') conventionally denoted unsafe countries, while *narančasto, žuto* and *zeleno* ('orange, yellow and green') referred to different levels of risk. Red was also used in the TRAFFIC LIGHT metaphor so we recorded the expression *upalilo se crveno svjetlo* ('the red light was turned on') when the number of infected reached a certain level. *Semafor epidemije* ('the epidemic traffic light') signaled danger with three more colors: *narančasto* ('orange'), which denoted lesser danger than *crveno* ('red') followed by *žuto* ('yellow') and *zeleno* ('green'). Green marked safe areas without infection so such regions were called *zelene oaze* ('green oases'), while *zelene putovnice* and *propusnice* ('green passports and passes') allowed vaccinated citizens to move freely. Thus, the green traffic light was contrasted with red, indicating free

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[14]   Štrkalj Despot and Ostroški Anić (2021: 21–22) also identified expressions formed based on this strategy; therefore, the linguistic effect of this strategy on the creation of new metaphorical expressions cannot be overlooked. The authors found expressions such as *ples po oštrici* ('a dance on the blade') and *strategija plesa* ('dance strategy'), which were accompanied by explanations of their meaning. This is understandable given their novelty in usage, and considering that the use of too many unfamiliar metaphors can be counterproductive in the sense that the recipient of the message may not understand its meaning (cf. Cameron and Low 1999: 86).

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movement or prohibition. *Bijela zona* ('the white zone') was recorded only twice and was used similarly to green to denote infection-free areas. Salama's (2022) study on the multimodal representation of COVID-19 on the official World Health Organization (WHO) website examines the strategic use of colors. For instance, the top section of the WHO's homepage featured white text on a red background. The contrasting colors were used because red conventionally indicates danger, while white represents medicine, conveying the message of a medical emergency. Also, the interactive maps on WHO's website showing the number of the infected contrasted white and blue color or featured varying degrees of blue. The basic color schemes (red/white; blue/white) used by WHO were expanded in the Croatian context into a more comprehensive four-color hierarchy from red to green, indicating the changes in the number of infections and announcing restrictions. This color-coded system helped people quickly understand the safety status of different regions and make informed decisions about travel and social interactions. By framing risk assessment through familiar traffic light metaphors, this system made restrictions appear logical, while citizens were expected to obey without questioning the effectiveness and appropriateness of such measures.

The figurative expression *mjere su na stolu* ('the measures are on the table') and its various modifications, such as *sve staviti na stol*, *mjere su na tapeti* ('put everything on the table, the measures are on the carpet'), were mainly used by members of the Civil Protection Headquarters[15] when announcing plans to combat the virus. Using these phrases, which generally suggest a proposal or offer, created an illusion that the measures could be negotiated, even though citizens could not influence the Headquarters' decisions. Additionally, by stating that *svi scenariji/opcije su na stolu* ('all scenarios/options are on the table'), they avoided giving a direct and clear answer about the planned restrictions. One function of phraseological modifications in discourse, as stated by Omazić (2015), is to convey the author's attitude. This can be illustrated by the following example: *na javni stol servirano je puno toga* ('a lot has been served on the public table'). Lexical modification of this phraseological unit, specifically addition, emphasizes the criticism of certain epidemiological decisions due to the disorganization and inconsistency of the Headquarters and government.

The media used the next group of figurative expressions to convince the public that the measures could be changed, so we recorded phrases like *mjere nisu zacementirane* or *zapisane u kamenu* ('the measures are not cemented or written in stone'). These expressions are based on the conceptual metaphor MEASURES ARE PERMANENT MATERIAL RECORDS, which maps the concept of material stabilization onto policy imple-

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[15]   This refers to the ad hoc interdisciplinary body established by the Croatian Government in February 2020 (The Civil Protection Headquarters of the Republic of Croatia) to coordinate all services in the event of the occurrence of COVID-19 coronavirus in Croatia.

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mentation. By explicitly stating that the regulations are not permanent, as associated with cement and stone inscriptions, these expressions frame measures as negotiable and subject to change. The negative formulation ('not cemented') reveals that the authorities were aware of the problematic nature of such measures and the need to balance rigid rules with a flexible approach. This is also evident in the use of the modified phrase *mjere se neće izvlačiti iz rukava* ('the measures will not be pulled out of the sleeve'), which can be explained by the public's expectations that the implementation of measures will be transparent, thoughtful and without hidden intentions. A shift from flexibility to opposition is illustrated by *mjere ne drže vodu* ('measures don't hold water'), criticism positioning the media as qualified judges of measures effectiveness. However, the institutional responsibility is potentially decreased by emphasizing personal responsibility through figurative expressions indicating that the effectiveness of measures relies on *(jakim) plećima/leđima pojedinca* ('the (strong) shoulders/back of the individual'). These expressions are based on the conceptual metaphor DIFFICULTIES ARE HEAVY OBJECTS, which suggests that the implementation of measures is perceived as a demanding task requiring significant individual effort and resources, much like lifting or moving heavy objects.

Numerous announced restrictions before the Christmas holidays resulted in public criticism of the authorities who were managing the pandemic. The officials were aware of that so their intention to preempt public accusations is evident in the statement by the Headquarters that they will try not to be Grinches.

(1) *Bit će malo drugačije. Bit će povezano isključivo sa zdravljem. Bliži se vrijeme Adventa, Božića, **nastojat ćemo da ne budemo Grinchevi**, da ne upropastimo ljudima Božić, a da istovremeno im sačuvamo zdravlje, vidimo da će Advent biti u puno manjem opsegu nego što je ikad bio, rekao je Šostar.* (Večernji list, 12 November 2020)

'It will be a little different. It will be solely related to health. The time of Advent, Christmas is approaching, **we will try not to be Grinches**, not to ruin Christmas for people, and at the same time preserve their health. We see that Advent will be on a much smaller scale than it has ever been, said Šostar.'

Such explicit comparison to the Grinch can be seen as an attempt to reframe their role from a malicious holiday destroyer to an unwilling protector. The phrase *try not to be* emphasizes the difficulty of avoiding Grinch characterization while maintaining the restrictions. It is also an attempt to reassure citizens who might be upset about the inability to celebrate Christmas traditionally. Although the main aim of these strict measures was to protect citizens' health and safety, comparing policymakers to the Grinch suggests that they were viewed as selfish and malicious individuals whose actions are unjustifiable.

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The media quickly reacted to the Grinch reference and used it provocatively in the expression *stožer/vlada nam je ukrala Božić* ('the Headquarters/Government stole Christmas').[16] This example can be analyzed as the blend with the generic space containing the situation in which someone deliberately spoils the holidays and causes collective disappointment and loss of joy. As shown in Figure 1, the first input space contains phraseological unit[17] *How Grinch Stole Christmas* together with our knowledge about the story of a fictional character Grinch, a villain who despises Christmas and wants to prevent the celebration by stealing presents, food and decorations. The second input space refers to the Government's temporary measures, legal prohibitions of gatherings and movement restrictions. Those measures, backed by science, were imposed in order to protect citizens' health but they also resulted in preventing the traditional Christmas celebration. Through selective projection, the integrated space inherits the structure of the phraseological unit from the first input space, along with our background knowledge of the Grinch story. It is important to emphasize that the entire Grinch story is not mapped, as he ultimately returned Christmas, whereas the Civil Protection Headquarters/Government did not lift the measures that "stole" Christmas. Additionally, there is also lexical projection from the first and second input space into the projection space. From the second input space, background knowledge about the measures, especially the prohibition of large gatherings and restrictions on movement, is projected via selective projection, which impacts the Christmas atmosphere. The integrated space contains the blend *the Headquarters/Government stole Christmas* in which the Croatian authorities are perceived as the Grinch, whose physical theft of Christmas items maps onto the implementation of restrictions. The aforementioned background knowledge enables the activation of the integrated space in which the emergent structure *the Headquarters/Government stole Christmas* is formed, along with framing in which legitimate public health measures become illegitimate theft and the Government takes on the Grinch's role of Christmas destroyer. As a result, the government's authority is undermined by portraying health polices as criminal activity. Citizens are

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[16]   Such intertextual coherence is common when using figurative expressions, especially metaphorical ones. The discourse surrounding the coronavirus certainly became dominant in Croatian media, thus the repeated and creative use of a phraseological unit based on the Grinch story within a short period (in our example, a span of about three weeks) is expected (cf. Kövecses 2015: 182). Chilton and Schäffner (2002: 29) emphasize that intertextual coherence can arise from both conventional and novel metaphorical expressions. Semino (2008: 108) believes that newer expressions exploit conventional ways of thinking to achieve specific rhetorical effects, which is also applicable to our example given the public dissatisfaction with pandemic measures during the Christmas season of 2020.

[17]   We use the term phraseological unit as defined by Omazić (2003: 29): "Phraseological units are conventionalized two or more word combinations that are holistically stored and reproduced, and that may vary in frequency of occurrence, fixedness of form, and compositeness of meaning." Following this definition, phraseological units, or those in the process of becoming such, include idioms, proverbs, sayings, quotations, binomials, trinomials, slogans and titles of literary, scientific, and journalistic works, films and songs that have become part of the culture (cf. Omazić 2003; Menac 2007).

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positioned as victims of what seems to be an unjustified disruption to collective celebration and the scientific expertise aimed at protecting public health is challenged.

The questioning of the authorities' role and effective pandemic management was also evident in the lockdown discourse. The lockdown, as one of the most restrictive measures, was described with adjectives denoting varying levels of its hardness and stability, which indicate a large number of restrictions and a strict approach, while softness and lightness refer to a situation with a small number of prohibitions and measures. The remaining figurative expressions in this group are related to the impact of the lockdown on society, with four figurative expressions describing it as an ineffective *lijek* ('medicine') that fails to combat the coronavirus or even as *kemoterapija koju tijelo dugoročno ne može izdržati* ('chemotherapy that the body cannot endure in the long term'). The lockdown was criticized for its damaging effect on society, leading to expressions that depicted it as *moždani udar, smrtonosan udarac* and *tupi instrument koji nanosi štetu svima* ('a stroke, a deadly blow, and a blunt instrument that harms everyone'). However, one example combines the lockdown's positive and negative aspects, so the first lockdown was *ugodna trauma* ('a pleasant trauma') because many experienced it as an opportunity to rest and spend more time with family. The lockdown is also a state of stillness, so it is described as *godišnji odmor, kolektivni smiraj* and *hibernacija* ('a holiday, a collective calm, and hibernation'). Once the lockdown ended, the phrase *zemlje su upalile svjetla* ('countries have turned on the lights') was used and this, along with earlier metaphors, conveys the idea of the lockdown as a time of night and sleep. The SLEEP metaphor is also connected to the description of the lockdown as a social and economic *noćna mora* ('nightmare') due to its serious consequences on society. The emptiness and inactivity it caused in Croatians' lives led citizens to perceive it as *neprirodan vakum* ('an unnatural vacuum') or a situation where everything was *zamrznuto* ('frozen'). Its devastating impact, as well as the entire pandemic, is described with figurative expressions based on the source domains of NATURAL DISASTERS[18] and PHENOMENA (*uragan* 'hurricane', *propuh* 'draft'). The uncontrollable force of *hurricane* and its unpredictability refer to the devastating impact of the lockdown, while *draft* emphasizes the impossibility of complete protection. RELIGION (*apokaliptični scenarij* 'apocalyptic scenario') as a source domain maps biblical apocalypse onto pandemic experience and points to suffering and catastrophe. The British media discourse also contained apocalyptic framing of the pandemic influenced by popular culture. Empty streets during lockdown, the feeling of uncertainty and fear of virus attack gave rise to 'zombie apocalypse' scenarios (Charteris-Black 2021). CONTROL metaphors (*držanje ljudi pod ključem* 'keeping people under lock') due to many imposed restrictions describe the lockdown as imprisonment and loss of civil freedom, po-

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[18] The NATURAL DISASTER metaphor is common in the discourse surrounding the coronavirus (cf. Nerlich 2020; Štrkalj Despot and Ostroški Anić 2021).

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tentially undermining public acceptance of epidemic measures by highlighting punishment rather than protection. These metaphors have various rhetorical functions: natural disasters and religious metaphors emphasize uncontrollability and destruction, while imprisonment metaphors question government legitimacy.

As pandemic management was changing from strict measures to a more relaxed approach, a new *hammer and dance* strategy emerged, originating from Tomas Pueyo's 2020 article. *The hammer* refers to short periods of extreme measures (lockdowns, travel restrictions, tracking and isolating contacts and infected people), aimed at quickly suppressing the spread of the virus. This is followed by *the dance* phase, stabilization, in which most restrictions are lifted; but testing, isolating the infected, maintaining physical distance, and prohibiting large gatherings continue. During *the dance*, the government may reintroduce stricter measures if infections rise, aimed at buying time until a vaccine or cure is available. Conceptually, *čekić* 'hammer' reflects the metonymy PART FOR PART, specifically MEANS FOR ACTION within the broader Action ICM and evokes PHYSICAL CONFLICT metaphor. This frames the virus as an enemy which should be struck. On the other hand, *ples* 'dance' activates metaphors such as ACTION IS MOTION and MANNER OF ACTION IS MANNER OF MOVEMENT, which point to flexibility, rhythm and adaptation. It also serves as a rhetorical softening of control and promotes coexistence with the virus rather than confrontation. This dance through the pandemic did not always occur in a straight line as explained by the Minister of the Interior, Davor Božinović. He warned citizens that coexisting with the virus was like dancing in circles and the end could not be predicted.

> (2) *Svakodnevno pratimo situaciju, analiziramo sve što se događa i u Hrvatskoj i oko Hrvatske, gdje nam virus prolazi i u skladu s tim donosimo mjere. Ništa nije isključeno, međutim moramo se priviknuti da je ovo faza u kojoj zapravo* **'plešemo' s virusom**, *negdje on prevari nas, onda mi njega zaustavimo i tako u krug – dodao je.* (Jutarnji list, 24 June 2020)

'We are monitoring the situation every day, analyzing everything that is happening in and around Croatia, where the virus is passing us by, and adopting measures accordingly. Nothing is ruled out, but we have to get used to the fact that this is a phase in which we are actually **'dancing' with the virus**, somewhere it tricks us, then we stop it and so on in a circle, he added.'

It was obvious that uncertainty and the duration of the pandemic were becoming exhausting, so the media also started using dances with more negative connotations, such as *limbo-ples* ('the limbo dance'), *sumorni* and *dugotrajni ples* ('gloomy and long-lasting dance'). The expressions *ples po žici* and *ples na rubu kolapsa* ('tightrope walking', 'dancing on the edge of collapse') demonstrate that this dance is not fun, but requires certain skills and endurance. As the pandemic continued,

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the dance became increasingly exhausting, leading even its initial supporters to question this strategy.[19]

The research examined three research questions. First, the analysis identified five distinct groups of figurative expressions: color metaphors, lockdown conceptualization, hammer and dance strategy, conceptualization of measures as concrete objects and literary references. Second, the majority of these figurative expressions are based on conceptual metaphors (PANDEMIC RISK IS TRAFFIC LIGHT SYSTEM, ABSTRACT POLICIES ARE CONCRETE THINGS, MEASURES ARE PERMANENT MATERIAL RECORDS, DIFFICULTIES ARE HEAVY OBJECTS) and conceptual metonymy (PART OF A SCENARIO FOR THE SCENARIO, MEANS FOR ACTION). Also, literary references functioned as source inputs in a conceptual blend, which integrated cultural knowledge with pandemic management discourse. And third, this analysis reveals the significant role of figurative expressions in effectively communicating pandemic measures and strategies to the public. The prevalence of COLOR metaphors highlights our reliance on familiar visual coding systems to communicate risk levels and restrictions. The conceptualization of measures as OBJECTS and PERMANENT RECORDS served rhetorical purposes in debates about the flexibility of implemented measures as well as to emphasize individual responsibility. Controversial holiday restrictions were framed in familiar terms, employing Grinch metaphors, while figurative expressions describing lockdown were based on various source domains to capture its complex social and economic impact. *The hammer and dance strategy* introduced a novel metaphorical framework combining aggressive action with adaptive behavior. These results demonstrate how different figurative expressions were used to explain, justify or criticize measures reflecting public responses to restrictions and the need for clear communication.

8. Conclusion

During the pandemic, it was crucial to effectively communicate the necessary measures and regulations to the public, ensuring their understanding and compliance. The analysis of 170 figurative expressions reveals how different metaphorical frameworks served distinct communicative purposes. The government and the media relied on familiar conceptual domains, such as color coding and traffic lights to convey risk levels. When introducing potentially controversial measures and strategies, they employed well-known idioms and OBJECT metaphors to make restrictions more perceptible, while emphasizing individual responsibility through the conceptual metaphor MEASURES ARE HEAVY OBJECTS. The lockdown, perhaps the most questioned pandemic strategy, generated diverse metaphorical expressions

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[19]   The questioning of the dance strategy was also observed by Štrkalj Despot et al. (2022) in their research (see subsection 3.2. for more details on that study).

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based on the domains of MEDICINE, SLEEP and NATURAL DISASTERS, reflecting its complex social and economic impact. In addition, the use of literary references, the Grinch metaphors, had two different purposes: politicians employed them to soften harsh holiday restrictions and gain public trust, while the media used the same references to question the appropriateness of such seemingly arbitrary measures. Even the novel *hammer and dance* strategy reflected the tension between the need for strict control and adaptive behavior. These findings demonstrate how metaphorical framing played a crucial role in pandemic communication, revealing both the institutional need to ensure compliance and the public reactions to unprecedented restrictions.

It should be noted that the main limitation of the study is its focus solely on media discourse in the Croatian pandemic context. Also, the analysis considers a specific period of the pandemic, potentially missing the changes in figurative language as the pandemic progressed (for instance, we did not find CONTAINER and BUBBLE metaphors for lockdown, which were identified in the literature (see subsection 3.1.). It would also be interesting to research how vaccines were conceptualized as a measure, especially because of the intensive discourse that emerged in spring 2021 and continued throughout the following year). Future research should take into account other types of discourse and examine how figurative framing might have impacted public understanding of the pandemic. This study can contribute to our understanding of how metaphorical language influences crisis communication and public health discourse, but also discourses related to war crises, crisis communication about climate change, etc.

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KSENIJA BENČINA, DOMAGOJ KOSTANJEVAC
How the Headquarters stole Christmas - on the ways of conceptualizing measures and strategies...

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KAKO NAM JE STOŽER UKRAO BOŽIĆ – O NAČINIMA KONCEPTUALIZACIJE MJERA I STRATEGIJA SUZBIJANJA PANDEMIJE KORONAVIRUSA

Ovaj rad istražuje figurativni jezik koji se rabio u hrvatskom medijskom diskursu za opis mjera i strategija suzbijanja pandemije koronavirusa. Oslanjajući se na teoriju konceptualne metafore, teoriju konceptualne integracije i kritičku analizu diskursa, cilj je rada istraživati kako se rabi metaforički jezik za oblikovanje javnog mnijenja i odgovora na pandemiju. Korpus sačinjen od novinskih članaka od 2020. do 2021. analiziran je kako bi se odgovorilo na tri ključna istraživačka pitanja: vrste figurativnih izraza povezanih s odgovorima na pandemiju, konceptualni mehanizmi koji su u njihovoj podlozi te njihova uloga u pandemijskom diskursu. Analiza otkriva da se mnogo izraza temelji na poznatim metaforama kao što je sustavna upotreba boja pomoću semafora kako bi se označila razina rizika, a pronađene su i nove konceptualizacije koje odražavaju posebne vidove pandemijskih okolnosti. Rezultati pokazuju kako figurativni jezik može funkcionirati i kao kognitivni alat za razumijevanje pandemije i javnozdravstvenih politika i za uspostavljanje dinamike moći tijekom krize.

Ključne riječi: figurativni jezik, konceptualni mehanizmi, pandemija, medijski diskurs, Hrvatska

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