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The Metaphors of China's COVID-19 News Commentary and its Social Mobilization Function

Wu Huijuan¹, Syamimi Turiman², Ameiruel Azwan Ab Aziz³

¹Akademi Pengajian Bahasa, Universiti Teknologi MARA, Malaysia/ School of Foreign Language, Zhejiang A & F University, China,

^{2,3}Akademi Pengajian Bahasa, Universiti Teknologi MARA, Malaysia.

Abstract

This study attempts to analyze the types of metaphors and their social functions in Chinese news media's anti-epidemic discourses to show how Chinese official media mobilizes society through discourse strategies. A total of 58 commentary articles on China's anti-epidemic response between January 26, 2020, and April 5, 2020, are selected from *People's Daily* to analyze the types of metaphors and their social mobilization functions. The research adopts the qualitative analysis method to identify, classify metaphors, and expounds on metaphors' social mobilization function and realization mechanism. Linguistic statistics software AntConc is used to count the total number, frequency and resonance value of all kinds of metaphorical keywords to show the application of all types of metaphors in discourse. The social mobilization function of the metaphors is mainly to enhance people's understanding of the epidemic and the characteristics of the anti-epidemic work, thus promoting the government's anti-epidemic policies and propositions to be widely accepted. The realization of the social functions of metaphor is inseparable from people's complex psychological mechanisms. This mechanism is mainly composed of cognitive, rational, and emotional systems, which jointly promote people's cognition and identification of metaphorical discourse.

Keywords: Chinese Anti-Epidemic, Media, Metaphors, Social Mobilization Function, Realization Mechanism.

Introduction

On January 7, 2020, *People's Daily Online*, the website of *People's Daily*, reported 59 cases of pneumonia of unknown cause in Wuhan, Hubei Province, China (Mao, 2020). Such cases were identified as COVID-19 later. In the following two months, although the outbreak in Wuhan continued to expand, it was gradually brought under effective control. In March and April 2020, China began to make significant progress in its fight against COVID-19. On March 8, the number of newly confirmed, newly suspected, and existing suspected cases in Wuhan reached zero. On April 1, the number of newly confirmed cases in Hubei was 0. At midnight of April 8, Wuhan officially lifted the 76 days lockdown.

The large-scale COVID-19 outbreak in China has been brought under fundamental control. One of the main reasons for the success of the epidemic in just over two months is that the Chinese government has carried out strong mobilization work, especially through

People's Daily, China's most authoritative newspaper and other mainstream media. *The People's Daily* has published a large number of commentators' articles. Based on this, to better understand the specific ways and mechanisms of China's official media mobilization functions against COVID-19, this study takes the commentators' articles from *People's Daily* for analysis and employs quantitative statistics and pragmatic function analysis to explore the metaphors and their functions in the COVID-19 commentary discourse.

Literature Review

Halliday's systemic-functional linguistics deeply influences the theories and viewpoints on metaphor function. Halliday (1970) proposed that language has three meta-functions: conceptual meta-function, interpersonal function and discourse function (Halliday, 1967). Lakoff (2002) analyzed the functions of personification in political discourse to enhance persuasion and influence (Lakoff, 2002). Perez-Sobrinó (2013) studied the metaphors in American media reports on Iran, revealing the strong ideologically oriented function of the metaphors in American media (Pérez-Sobrinó, 2013).

In the political context, metaphors also play a role in shaping a positive national image (Xu et al., 2013), constructing multiple identities of political figures (Zhang, 2017), expressing political opinions and realizing persuasion intentions (Zeng, 2019). Political metaphor on the Internet has the regulation-oriented function, public opinion balance function and value-oriented function (Zhang & Qin, 2018). Some theorists also comprehensively expand the views of systemic functional linguistics on the three meta-functions of language and believe that metaphor also has conceptual meta-functions, interpersonal functions and textual functions (Wen, 2017).

In terms of the realization mechanism of metaphor function, there is not enough discussion in the academic circle. Only a few studies are concerning the analysis of the persuasion mechanism. Wu (2016)'s research finds that the persuasion mechanism of metaphor lies in the role of "emotion", "rationality" and "justification" and the realization of metaphor persuasion depends on the function of "name rectification". This study demonstrates that "reason" and "emotion" in metaphor jointly produce the characteristics of persuasion function but does not analyze the rational elements in metaphor and the multiple forms of metaphorical emotion. The above discussion on the mechanism of metaphor is instructive, but due to its departure from the concrete and rich corpus foundation, relevant research needs to be expanded in breadth and depth.

The social mobilization function of metaphor has not been fully discussed in the context of news discourse. As an essential stylistic form of media, the research concerning commentators' articles in social mobilization and the complex psychological mechanism of its realization needs to be explored in depth. Therefore, media commentators' articles are selected to form this study's corpus to address the aforementioned issues.

Data and Analytical Methods

The data for this study consists of 58 commentators' articles on China's COVID-19 from January 26, 2020, to April 5, 2020, from *People's Daily*. The total number of Chinese characters is 77930. This study chooses this period of anti-epidemic discourse because there was a large-scale outbreak of COVID-19 in Wuhan, Hubei province, and the epidemic spread widely to other provinces and cities in China during this period. The seriousness of the epidemic and the enormity of fighting the epidemic require the Chinese government to open the national propaganda machine and mobilize *People's Daily* to fight the outbreak. As one of the most

important official media, the significance and effectiveness of social mobilization are huge and influential. Therefore, *People's Daily* carried out a sustained and powerful mobilization against the epidemic through its commentators' articles. During the epidemic, *People's Daily* published many commentators' articles on the anti-epidemic battle, with the purpose of timely transmission and interpretation of the central government's strategies, policies, and propositions to mobilize the largest force against the epidemic. For this reason, we can directly understand how the Chinese government carries out social mobilization through authoritative media and then reveal the mechanism of the realization of the social mobilization function by studying metaphors in the commentators' articles. The data analysis was conducted in three stages.

Phase 1: Metaphor Identification

This study employs Pragglejaz Group's metaphor identification process for metaphor identification (Pragglejza, 2007). The first step is to understand the meaning of the context of metaphorical keywords. The second step is to determine the metaphorical lexical units. Thirdly, recognizer A understands the contextual meaning of the metaphorical words, and recognizer B understands the basic meaning of the metaphorical words in other contexts. The fourth step is to determine whether the context meaning can be understood through the basic meaning. Step 5, if yes, the metaphorical meaning of the metaphorical word is determined.

Phase 2: Metaphor Classification

The metaphors were then classified following Lakoff and Johnson's (1980) categories: ontological, orientational, and structural metaphors. The ontological metaphor is divided into entity metaphor, container metaphor and personification (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). Therefore, this paper divides metaphors into five categories: entity metaphor, container metaphor, personification, orientational metaphor and structural metaphor.

Phase 3: Quantitative and Qualitative Analysis

The linguistic statistical software AntConc 3.5.7 is used to calculate the number, frequency and resonance value of metaphorical keywords. AntConc is a free corpus retrieval tool for concordance and text analysis. Firstly, this paper analyzes the frequency and resonance of relevant metaphorical keywords in each type of metaphor. Resonance of metaphor keywords is used to measure the metaphor productivity in the corpus, which is generated by multiplying types of metaphor by the number of metaphors (Charteris-black, 2004). For example, there are six keywords in structural metaphor, and the total frequency of their occurrence in the discourse is 485. The total resonance value is 2940 when the total number of keywords is multiplied by the total frequency. The quantitative analysis of other types of metaphors also adopts such statistical methods. Finally, a qualitative analysis of the metaphor's textual meaning and social mobilization function is conducted. The types of metaphors and their social mobilization function are analyzed. The psychological mechanism of the realization of the metaphorical social mobilization function is studied to expand the new understanding of the metaphorical function of media.

Findings

The Metaphors in China's COVID-19 News Commentary and its Social Mobilization Function

Metaphors often serve linguistic, psychological and sociological functions in the specific context, such as language rhetoric, information transmission, opinion guidance and power exercise. It was found that various metaphorical expressions are used in news commentary to pursue the effective realization of metaphorical functions, as shown in Table 1 below:

Table 1. Metaphor types in news commentaries

	number of metaphors	The frequency of metaphor keywords	The resonance value	The proportion of the resonance value
Entity metaphor	426	2438	1038588	99.05%
Container metaphor	27	129	3483	0.33%
Oriental metaphor	25	127	3175	0.3%
Structural metaphor	6	485	2940	0.27%
Personification	10	33	330	0.03%

Due to the small number of keywords in structural metaphor and personification and their low proportion of the resonance value, this study does not analyze them in detail but focuses on the top three metaphorical resonance values of entity metaphor, container metaphor, and orientational metaphor.

Entity Metaphor and its Social Mobilization Function

Metaphor is not only a linguistic phenomenon but also a cognitive phenomenon. It is a cognitive activity in which human beings use their experience in one domain to illustrate or understand experience in another domain (Shu, 2000). Entity metaphor is a type of metaphor that projects the characteristics of concrete things or phenomena onto abstract concepts or experiences. Through entity metaphor, abstract concepts or experiences enter the familiar cognitive schema of the audience, so it is easier for the audience to understand and accept the abstract concepts. The cognitive function of metaphor is significantly reflected in entity metaphor.

In the corpus, entity metaphor occupies the highest proportion among all kinds of metaphors. There are 426 metaphorical keywords with a total frequency of 2,438. Among them, 打赢 (win), 阻击战 (battle), 斗争 (fight), etc. rank the top 10 in terms of frequency, as shown in the table below.

Table 2. Top 10 keywords of anti-epidemic entity metaphor

Keywords	打赢 win	阻击战 battle	斗争 fight	奋战 struggle	担当 responsibility	蔓延 spread	胜利 victory	落实 implement	守土 guard	抓实 grasp
Keyword frequency	110	109	106	65	61	55	51	48	44	42

打赢 (win), 阻击战 (battle), 斗争 (fight), 奋战 (struggle), 胜利(victory) and 守土 (guard) belong to the category of war metaphor, and their frequency accounts for 70.18% of the total frequency of the ten keywords. The three keywords 担当 (responsibility), 落实 (implement), 抓实 (grasp) are object metaphors, accounting for 21.85% of the total frequency of the top ten keywords. 蔓延 (spread) in the discourse belongs to plant metaphors, and its frequency accounts for 7.95% of the total frequency of ten keywords.

Overall, the war metaphor, object metaphor and plant metaphor all directly reflect the multiple characteristics of the anti-epidemic work in the discourse, so they effectively convey the intention and proposition of the speaker. First, the war entity metaphor establishes a mapping relationship between war and anti-epidemic work. War metaphors project the concrete social phenomenon of the war onto abstract concepts such as the difficulty and urgency of the anti-epidemic work so that people can understand the complexity of the anti-epidemic work through the familiar characteristics of war. Therefore, war metaphors can achieve good communicative effect and purpose and play an important role in enhancing people's anti-epidemic initiative. The following excerpt taken from the corpus illustrates this further.

Excerpt 1: Example of war metaphor in the corpus

只要坚定信心、同舟共济、科学防治、精准施策，我们就一定能打赢疫情防控阻击战。

(As long as we have strong confidence, stick together in times of difficulty, take scientific measures and take targeted measures, we will surely **win the battle against the epidemic.**)

As seen in Excerpt 1, This phrase compared the fight against the epidemic to a battle, which helped arouse people's attention to the fight against the epidemic to carry out the fight with a serious and responsible attitude. When comparing the fight against the epidemic to a battle, the commentator stressed that the requirements for winning the battle are firm confidence, close ties of solidarity and cooperation, scientific prevention and control of the disease, and the implementation of precise work strategies.

Secondly, the entity metaphor expresses the specific requirements of the anti-epidemic work by visualizing the anti-epidemic work as an intuitive action, which plays a positive role in enhancing people's awareness of responsibility and effectiveness in the anti-epidemic work, as shown in Excerpt 2 below:

Excerpt 2: Example of entity metaphor

面对急难险重任务，必须豁得出来、顶得上去，担当起该担当的**责任**。

(In the face of urgent, difficult, dangerous and heavy tasks, we must be clear and brave enough to take on the **responsibility**.)

This statement embodies the abstract "responsibility" of fighting the epidemic into something with shape and weight, just like something you can carry on your shoulders, requiring people to fight the epidemic bravely. Therefore, this metaphor expresses the specific requirements of fighting the epidemic, which is conducive to inspiring people's courage and sense of responsibility.

Thirdly, the plant-based entity metaphor establishes a mapping relationship between plants and COVID-19. In the following excerpt, the COVID-19 epidemic is compared to grass plants, and the crazy growth of plants is mapped to the expansion of the epidemic situation.

Excerpt 3: Plant-based entity metaphor

目前正值春节期间，人员大范围密集流动，面对新型冠状病毒感染的肺炎疫情加快蔓**延**的严重形势，必须充分认识做好疫情防控的重要性和紧迫性。

(At present, during the Spring Festival, there is a large-scale and intensive movement of people. Facing the difficult situation of the accelerated **spread** of COVID-19, we must fully recognize the importance and urgency of epidemic prevention and control.)

The relatively abstract development of the epidemic situation is visualized as the crazy growth of plants, and the audience can feel the seriousness of the epidemic. Therefore, it is easy to arouse people's attitude of paying close attention to it. As the discourse says, using the word "spread", this discourse concretely presents the serious situation of COVID-19, which is conducive to attracting people's attention to the epidemic and its prevention and control work.

Container Metaphor and its Social Mobilization Function

The container metaphor includes the size, depth, and other characteristics of containers, to be mapped to abstract things so that the abstract things can be intuitively perceived and understood. There are 27 container metaphor keywords in the corpus, and the total frequency of their occurrence is 129. The top four container metaphors are 推进 (push inside (promote)), 输入(input), 深入(in-depth) and 投入(put in). The frequencies are 43, 26, 10, and 6, respectively. Examples of the metaphorical mapping relationship constructed by these four metaphorical keywords are shown in the following table.

Table 3. Top 4 Container Metaphors in the Corpus

metaphor keywords	Source domain	Target domain	Examples
推进 (push (promote)	Contain er	Scientific research	科研工作者积极投入到防控疫情阻击战中， 按照“战时状态”推进科研攻关 Researchers have actively participated in the epidemic prevention and control war, and pushed (promoted) scientific research according to the "wartime state".
输入 input(input)	Contain er	The epidemic spread	实现“防输入、防蔓延、防输出”的疫情防控目 标 We will achieve the epidemic prevention and control goals of "preventing input, spread, and export"
深入 (in- depth/ deep into)	Contain er	The front line of the fight against the epidemic	各级领导机关和领导干部要深入一线了解情 况 Leading organs and cadres at all levels should go deep into the front line to understand the situation
投入put in(devote)	Contain er	Epidemic preventi on and control	让基层干部把更多精力投入到疫情防控第一 线 We will encourage community officials to put in (devote) more energy to the front line of epidemic prevention and control.

The word 推进(push) vividly expresses the situation of the Chinese government leading the people to carry out the anti-epidemic work in an orderly and effective manner. The COVID-19 outbreak in China is widespread and devastating, posing a huge test to the Chinese government's anti-epidemic measures and the will of the Chinese people. This requires the Chinese government to take active and orderly measures to make its determination and scientific strategy known to the public. Only in this way can society fully mobilize its forces to fight the epidemic, as seen in the following excerpt:

Excerpt 4: 'Push' as container metaphor

在各方面共同努力下，防控工作有力开展，防控措施有力**推进**，凝聚起万众一心、众志成城抗击疫情的强大力量。

(With the joint efforts of all sectors, the prevention and control work has been vigorously carried out, and the prevention and control measures have been vigorously **promoted**, gathering the powerful force of one heart and one mind to fight the epidemic.)

As seen here, 推进 (push (promote) clearly conveys the Chinese government's firm attitude and practical actions in fighting the epidemic. It will help the public see hope in the fight against the epidemic and generate enthusiasm for the battle.

The word 输入(input) mainly expresses the Chinese government's policy of strictly preventing the spread of COVID-19 from other regions and abroad. The global spread of

COVID-19 has made the Chinese government realize the complexity and strategic nature of epidemic prevention and control, so China has gradually established the policy of "preventing the spread of COVID-19 at home and preventing the input COVID-19 abroad" to prevent input cases from spreading from one region to other regions within China and from outside China to China. To implement the policy, China has adopted strict epidemic detection and quarantine measures for trans-regional and trans-border migrants. Excerpt 5 below illustrates this further.

Excerpt 5: 'Input' as container metaphor

从强化社区网格化管理，实施地毯式排查，严格落实早发现、早报告、早隔离、早治疗，到叮嘱督促社区居民多通风、戴口罩、勤洗手、不聚集；从做好社区封闭管理，加强疫情监测，……，到测体温、做消杀、清垃圾、搞卫生……广大社区工作者尽职尽责、尽心尽力，……织就了抵御疫情的严密防线。

(We have strengthened community grid management, implemented rigid check, and strictly implemented early detection, early reporting, early isolation, and early treatment. We have urged community residents to ventilate, wear masks, wash their hands frequently, and refrain from gathering. From doing a good job in community containment management, strengthening epidemic surveillance..., to taking the temperature, doing elimination, cleaning garbage, making sanitation... the majority of community workers are conscientious and dedicated... We have formed a tight defense against the epidemic.)

The metaphorical use of 内防扩散、外防输入 (External anti-input, internal non-proliferation) reinforces the importance of the Chinese government's anti-epidemic policy, helps to enhance the public's understanding of the rationality of the government's anti-epidemic policy, and has a positive significance for the public to earnestly implement the policy.

The word 深入 (in-depth/ deep into) mainly expresses the following requirements of the Chinese government: actively studying the spirit of the central government in fighting the epidemic, leading the members to carry out work in the anti-epidemic front line, vigorously carrying out publicity and education of prevention knowledge, mastering the diagnosis and treatment knowledge, and timely summarizing successful experience, as seen in Excerpt 6:

Excerpt 6: 'In-depth' as container metaphors

深入学习贯彻习近平总书记重要指示精神 (In-depth study and implementation of the spirit of General Secretary Xi Jinping's important instructions), 要深入防控疫情第一线，回应群众关切 (to go deep into to the front line of epidemic prevention and control, respond to the concerns of the people), 广泛深入的传染病预防知识宣传教育至关重要 (extensive and in-depth knowledge of infectious disease prevention and education is crucial).

The metaphorical use of the word "in-depth/ deep into" vividly expresses the Chinese government's call for speedy and solid progress in the fight against the epidemic, demonstrates the Chinese government's firm determination and conception, and points out the direction for the anti-epidemic work. Therefore, it is conducive to stimulating and gathering the public's anti-epidemic forces.

The use of the metaphorical word 投入(put in (devote)) vividly expresses the proposition that the anti-epidemic work requires the active participation and hard work of people from all walks of life. As mentioned in the discourse, the anti-epidemic battle requires "staff to put in (devote) themselves to the production work", "grassroots cadres to put in (devote) more energy to the front line of epidemic prevention and control", and medical staff to "keep healthy and put in (devote) themselves to the anti-epidemic work".

To conclude, the use of container metaphors such as 推进 (push (promote)), 输入(input), 深入(in-depth/ deep into) and 投入(put in) effectively express the Chinese government's various anti-epidemic propositions and methods, and serve the discourse function of stimulating the enthusiasm of the majority of people to fight the epidemic.

Oriental Metaphor and its Social Mobilization Function

Our ancestors began to understand the world from understanding space and themselves. The concept of space and body are the two main bases for us to form some abstract concepts. They have become the starting point of human primitive thinking and the essential source of metaphor (Lin, 2012). Because of the close relationship between spatial concept and metaphor, orientational metaphor is widely used in various discourses. Oriental metaphor is also widely used as an effective form to mobilize people's anti-epidemic forces in the commentary articles. There are 25 metaphorical orientational keywords with a total frequency of 127. Among them, the top three keywords in frequency are 提高 (raise (improve)), 下沉 (lower down), 落到 (fall down/go down) with frequencies of 20, 15 and 14 respectively.

The metaphor of 提高(raise (improve)) in the discourse compares the effectiveness of the anti-epidemic work to something with directional characteristics. 提高 (raise) is mainly used to emphasize that fighting the epidemic is to achieve better results, as seen in the following excerpt:

Excerpt 7:

要回应群众关切、及时解疑释惑，深入城乡社区基层一线，加强有关政策措施的宣传解释工作，**提高**公众自我防护意识和能力。
(We should respond to the concerns of the masses, solve doubts and dispel doubts in time, go deep into the grassroots front line of urban and rural communities, strengthen the publicity and interpretation of relevant policies and measures, and raise the public's awareness and ability of self-protection.)

The excerpt shows that the basic goal of fighting the epidemic is to "raise the public's awareness and capacity for self-protection". As the goal of the fight against the epidemic, 提高 (raise) has pointed out the direction and specific requirements for people's anti-epidemic work, thus playing a positive role in stimulating people to fight against the epidemic.

In addition, the word 提高(raise (improve)) in the discourse also refers to the good results that have been achieved, that is, 提高(raise (improve)) is no longer a goal but a result that has already occurred.

Excerpt 8:

从医院救治一线到科研攻关前沿，从完善诊疗方案、精心救治患者，到治愈率不断提高、死亡率持续下降，各地不断传来患者治愈出院的好消息。

(From the front line of hospital treatment to the forefront of scientific research, from the improvement of diagnosis and treatment plans and the meticulous treatment of patients, to the continuous improvement of the cure rate and the decline of the mortality rate, the good news that patients being cured and discharged from hospitals is coming from all over the country.)

As seen here, the word 提高(raise (improve)) in a specific context shows the progress of the anti-epidemic work, which can stimulate the public's morale of the fight against the epidemic.

Additionally, 降低(lower down) also has metaphorical meaning in the discourse. The word "lower down" establishes a mapping relationship between infection rate, mortality rate and location, and mainly expresses the anti-epidemic goal of controlling infection rate and mortality rate caused by the epidemic at a low level. As mentioned in the following excerpt, the expression "lower down" proposes specific directions and tasks for anti-epidemic work, which helps to enhance the pertinence of the measures and quantify the effectiveness of the work.

Excerpt 9:

组建由医护、管理、疾控专业人员组成的支援队伍，实地支持与远程医疗服务相结合，多措并举开展对口支援工作，努力提高收治率、治愈率，降低感染率、死亡率。

(A support team composed of medical, management and disease control professionals has been set up to combine on-site support with telemedicine services, and take multiple measures to carry out pairing support, striving to raise the admission and cure rates and lower down the infection and fatality rates.)

Next, the metaphorical meaning of 下沉 (go down) in the discourse helps express that the resources and forces should be rationally allocated to grassroots units and communities, so that grassroots units can play the main role of fighting the epidemic. 下(down) in the discourse represents grassroots institutions and community units. "Go down" expresses a method of the Chinese government to deal with the epidemic in the discourse, which is of great significance for promoting the rational allocation of resources and thus mobilizing the main role of the grassroots in the fight against the epidemic, as described in Excerpt 10 below:

Excerpt 10:

上级党政机关、企事业单位等要抽调更多干部下沉基层、支援基层。

(Higher party and government organs, enterprises and public institutions, etc., should transfer more cadres to go down to the grassroots level and support the grassroots.)

In sum, the orientational metaphor puts forward specific requirements for fighting the epidemic and clarifies the goals and methods of fighting the epidemic, which plays an important role in promoting people's awareness and initiative in fighting the epidemic.

Discussion

Scholar Norman Fairclough pointed out that in the social sense, discourse is constructive, constructing social subjects, social relations, knowledge and belief system (Fairclough, 1992). As a type of media discourse, commentator's articles bear an obvious discourse construction function, especially the official media such as the *People's Daily*. The metaphors employed in

the commentary discourses aim to enhance people's understanding of the epidemic and the characteristics of the anti-epidemic work so that the government's anti-epidemic policies and measures can be widely accepted. Discourse is a network of meanings, symbols and rhetoric. Like ideology, discourse is committed to legalizing the status quo. Therefore, the metaphors in the commentary discourses aim to promote the public to implement its propositions earnestly based on recognition by constructing the rationale and importance of the government's anti-epidemic propositions.

The realization of the metaphorical discourse functions is inseparable from the operation of people's complex psychological mechanisms. This psychological mechanism mainly includes the cognitive system, rational system, and affective system, as illustrated in Figure 1 below:

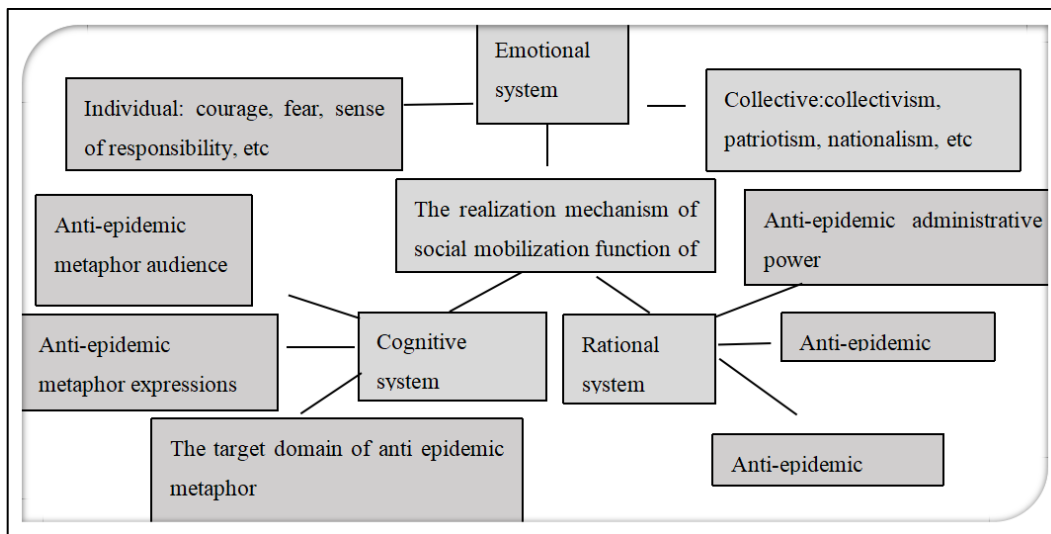


Figure 1. The Realization Mechanism of Social Mobilization Function of Anti-epidemic Metaphor

The function process of the cognitive system is that the anti-epidemic metaphors map the characteristics of the objects in the source domain into the objects in the target domain, so that the metaphorical audience, as the cognitive subject, can integrate the objects in the target domain into the familiar cognitive schema, and then realize the understanding of the objects in the target domain. In this process, metaphors become a cognitive tool for the audience to understand the object. In the cognitive process of metaphor understanding, the audience of metaphors (cognitive subject), the target domain of metaphor (cognitive object), and the metaphors itself (cognitive tool) interact with each other to jointly promote the metaphorical audience to understand the connotation of metaphor. Hence, the cognitive system is mainly a thinking process that operates at the semantic level, and it provides information and knowledge basis for people's rational decision-making in fighting the epidemic.

The operation of a rational system is a thinking process of rational choice based on the cognitive system. The cognitive system enables the audience to understand the basic meaning of metaphors. However, a rational system could influence the choice of the following actions. The basic elements of the rational system are power, norms and interests. In order to realize the metaphorical mobilization function of fighting COVID-19, metaphorical audiences need to comprehensively consider the influence of power, norms and interests on themselves or society. What people need to consider is whether they should implement the government's anti-epidemic propositions, how to implement and to what extent, whether they should first

evaluate their interests or those of society, or how to consider both, and whether they will be punished by state power and national norms if they disregard the interests of society and the country. Therefore, the operation of the rational system is essentially a process in which the metaphorical audience comprehensively considers the influence of power and norms, and balances the advantages and disadvantages. It requires the metaphorical audience to make a choice or balance between self-interest and social interests. From the audience of the commentators' articles in *People's Daily*, administrative power and norms have an important impact on the realization of metaphorical mobilization function. *People's Daily* is popular among public officials. Many major national policies and propositions will be publicized in *People's Daily*. Therefore, many public officials are used to understanding and grasping the national policies and work orientation from *People's Daily*. Through the metaphorical message conveyed in the *People's Daily* commentator's article, China's public officials have weighed the influence of state power and relevant regulations to determine their attitude and actions against the epidemic.

The emotional system is an important mechanism to realize the social mobilization function of metaphor. Metaphor stimulates the emotional elements of the audience through vivid words so that the audience can identify with the proposition of metaphorical discourse under the influence of emotions and values. The emotion system includes individual emotion and collective emotion. Individual emotion is the psychological reaction to meet their own needs, such as courage, fear, sympathy, and a sense of responsibility. Collective emotions are values that tend to social and group interests, such as collectivism, patriotism, nationalism, internationalism, etc. In the corpus, the various emotional elements promote the realization of metaphorical social mobilization function. In the context of fighting the epidemic, metaphors construct the collective identity and sense of belonging for common anti-epidemic work with the help of the emotional system, thus helping to enhance people's enthusiasm for fighting the epidemic.

The social mobilization mechanism of the anti-epidemic metaphor consists of various elements of the cognitive system, rational system and emotional system related to anti-epidemic. Anti-epidemic metaphor mobilizes specific cognitive concepts, rational thinking and emotional concepts related to anti-epidemic work, producing remarkable social mobilization function.

The social function of metaphor is an essential theoretical field of metaphor research, which has been discussed in the academic circle. However, there are few studies on the specific context function of metaphor by combining metaphor with specific social events. Based on the specific social event of China's fight against COVID-19, this study illustrates the social mobilization function of metaphorical discourse in the news media, which is instructive for the academic circles further to enrich the research on the social function metaphorical discourse.

Conclusion

The main function of its "commentator" column is to respond to major national policies and events, guide public opinion with words and views representing official positions, and promote the publicity and implementation of national policies. Therefore, in the commentary discourses described in this study, the commentators use a large number of metaphorical words to explain and publicize the government's anti-epidemic propositions. The social function of metaphor is an important theoretical field of metaphor research, which has been discussed a lot in the academic circle. However, there are few studies on the specific context

function of metaphor by combining metaphor with specific social events. In view of this, based on the specific social event of China's fight against COVID-19, this paper illustrates the social mobilization function of metaphor in the news media, which is instructive to further enrich the research on the social function of metaphor. Future researchers can explore the contextual function of metaphors in various specific social events, especially the social function of metaphors in news reports about emergent major social events, such as group conflicts and demonstrations. The realization of metaphorical social mobilization function is the result of the joint action of various social mechanisms. Therefore, future studies can start from other social mechanisms, such as the media power mechanism, discourse production mechanism and other perspectives, to carry out more diversified studies on metaphorical social mobilization mechanism.

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Corresponding Author

Syamimi Turima

Akademi Pengajian Bahasa, Universiti Teknologi MARA, Shah Alam, Malaysia

Email: syamimituriman@uitm.edu.my

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