

## **Metaphors in Public Health Communication: A Critical Analysis of Chinese-Language Media in Taiwan during COVID-19**

*Yi-chen Chen*

Department of Foreign Languages and Applied Linguistics, Yuan Ze University, Taiwan

E-mail: yicc@saturn.yzu.edu.tw

### **Abstract**

The unfamiliarity of new realities during the COVID-19 pandemic made metaphors especially influential, as some enhanced understanding and aided emotional expression while others obscured meaning or reinforced stereotypes. However, while often studied in political and cultural contexts, COVID-19 metaphors have received little attention in mental health communication. This study addresses this gap by examining the use of metaphors in Chinese mental health publications in Taiwan between January 2020 and June 2022. Using Critical Metaphor Analysis, the research identifies and analyzes 485 metaphorical expressions across 99 news articles purposively collected from a range of health-related media and institutional platforms in Taiwan. The study reveals a shift in metaphor usage over time, from dominant war imagery to broader narratives of journey and resilience. War-related metaphors, which depicted the pandemic as an immediate threat, decreased over three years, reflecting a shift in public perception from an acute crisis to a long-term challenge. Meanwhile, journey-related metaphors emphasizing personal growth remained consistent, and metaphors portraying emotions as objects or energy sources grew, reflecting an increased focus on emotional management. This evolution in metaphor use demonstrates how public understanding and responses to the pandemic dynamically adapted. The study underscores the role of metaphors in health communication and highlights the importance of careful metaphor selection by media professionals and policymakers to manage public perception and support mental well-being during ongoing health crises.

*Keywords:* metaphor, mental health, COVID-19 pandemic, conceptual metaphor, critical metaphor analysis

### **Introduction**

Metaphors serve a dual role in communication: they both shape discourse and reveal underlying perceptions. Lakoff and Johnson (1980) assert that “[...] truth is always relative to a conceptual system that is defined in large part by metaphor” (p. 159), suggesting that metaphors are fundamental in shaping our understanding of reality, which in turn affects our construction of new insights into our lives. A well-known example is the TIME IS MONEY metaphor<sup>1</sup>, which frames time as a scarce and valuable commodity, allowing us to “spend,” “save,” or “waste” it. This illustrates how conceptual metaphors influence everyday decisions by mapping concrete experiences (money) onto abstract concepts (time). This interpretive power has made metaphors powerful rhetorical tools in constructing and shaping ideologies in various fields, such as politics (Charteris-Black, 2006; Efeoğlu Özcan, 2022) and science (Semino, 2011; Taylor & Dewsbury, 2018). By utilizing familiar concepts and experiences rooted in the shared

---

<sup>1</sup> This study follows the convention in cognitive metaphor research whereby conceptual metaphors are written in small capitals (e.g., TIME IS MONEY, TIME metaphor) to indicate the underlying conceptual mapping. This notation distinguishes the conceptual metaphor itself from the linguistic expressions that realize it (e.g., “spend time,” “save time,” “waste time”).

history and culture of a community, metaphors can be instrumental in constructing social realities and facilitating cultural transmission. In the same vein, the use of metaphors may empower individuals to actively shape others' perceptions, especially during times when unfamiliar events necessitate new understandings of reality.

An unprecedented event, the COVID-19 pandemic, was declared a global health crisis by the World Health Organization in 2020, and introduced a new reality. With over 45 million cases worldwide, the crisis led to extensive lockdowns and social distancing measures, drastically altering daily life and causing widespread emotional distress due to remote work, unemployment, and isolation. In this time of disconnection, mass media was believed to play a critical role in maintaining communication channels, providing vital information, and offering emotional support (Willingham, 2020). Thus, the use of metaphors by the media became essential, as societies were navigating this new reality.

However, the unfamiliarity of new realities makes the choice of metaphors particularly influential. Some metaphors can improve understanding and aid emotional expression, while others may obscure meaning or reinforce stereotypes. For example, in early 2020, when COVID-19 was first declared a pandemic, it was frequently described through the conceptual metaphor of WAR in media and politics. The WAR metaphor faced criticism for creating confusion and tension rather than clarity (Bates, 2020). Statements such as “we will win this war, and we’ll win it much sooner than people think” (White House Coronavirus Task Force Press Briefing, 2020) oversimplified the complex issues that extended beyond politics (Niland, 2020). In response, alternative metaphors that emphasized coordination, hope, and reflection were also adopted. For instance, social distancing was likened to an ORCHESTRA: “Social distancing is like asking a string section to play pianissimo: it only works if everyone does it” (Classic FM, 2020). Similarly, metaphors of LIGHT evoked optimism and perseverance, such as “seeing the light at the end of the tunnel,” while CANARY metaphors warned of societal risks, as in the sentence “COVID-19 is the yellow canary for the societal methane we’ve allowed to fester around us” (Xiao, 2020). Over time, metaphor usage evolved in response to the shifting stages of the pandemic: while the early and middle phases were dominated by metaphors that conveyed crisis and threat, later discourses increasingly incorporated metaphors of resilience and recovery, such as Dutch recovery plan’s calls for increased “resilience [veerkracht] of the healthcare system” (Pankakoski, 2024). These emerging metaphors suggest a recognition that the pandemic would lead to fundamental changes in life, a re-evaluation of personal health, and potentially broader societal shifts towards sustainability and responsibility (Colak, 2022). In this sense, the metaphors chosen during the pandemic may not only influence public understanding and collective response but also carry implications for how individuals processed the crisis emotionally and psychologically.

Given that metaphors may influence both public perceptions of health-related issues and individual well-being (Brugman et al., 2022), the way COVID-19 was framed in mass media is significant for mental health communication. This study addresses three critical gaps in research on COVID-19 metaphor use in public media. This study addresses three critical gaps in research on COVID-19 metaphor use in public media. Firstly, although research has extensively covered the ideological use of metaphors in political discourses across specific linguistic and cultural contexts—such as Spanish (Magaña et al., 2023), Turkish (Efeoğlu Özcan, 2022), Indian (Rahman, 2020), Chinese (Zhang & Lin, 2023; Xu, 2023), and Japanese (Komatsubara, 2023)—little attention has been paid to their role in mental health communication. Following the WHO's 2020 directive, it is crucial that metaphors in public media not only reflect emotional intentions but also positively impact public well-being during the global crisis. Secondly, despite the substantial analysis of COVID-19 metaphors, there is a lack of studies exploring how these metaphors have evolved or considering alternative

framings. This study aims to fill the gaps by examining COVID-19 metaphors and those used in media aimed at promoting mental health over a three-year span. Lastly, recognizing the nuances in metaphor preferences due to cultural and linguistic differences, this research specifically targets the Taiwanese context, aiming to enrich the understanding of metaphor use during the pandemic.

To address these research gaps, this study adopts Critical Metaphor Analysis (CMA) as the primary analytical framework. The research questions are as follows:

How were the Chinese conceptual metaphors for COVID-19 and mental health in Taiwan expressed linguistically across different domains?

How did these Chinese metaphors evolve over time, and what do these patterns reveal about mental health interpretations during the pandemic?

How did Taiwanese mental health publications employ metaphors in specific communicative contexts, and what do these uses reveal about the rhetorical and ideological purposes of health communication during the pandemic?

### **Literature Review**

Metaphors have long been used not only as rhetorical devices in literature but also as tools for uncovering intangible cognitive processes and analyzing social events. Critical Metaphor Analysis (CMA), introduced by Charteris-Black (2004), extends traditional metaphor analysis to explore the social implications of metaphorical expressions, integrating insights from corpus linguistics, pragmatics, cognitive linguistics, and discourse analysis. CMA has been applied across various fields, including business (Koller, 2006; Lai, 2018), environmental discourse (Mohamed, 2014; Wang & Habil, 2024), political rhetoric (Charteris-Black, 2011; Kyeremeh et al, 2023; Guo, 2025), and educational technology (Lee, 2015; Manson, 2018), highlighting its versatility in uncovering underlying intentions and ideologies.

CMA approaches metaphors from two perspectives. Firstly, the structure-focused perspective, inspired by discourse analysis, is concerned with how metaphors actively shape and structure reality. It highlights metaphor's role in emphasizing or concealing certain features, going beyond mere reflection of an objective reality. The second perspective focuses on metaphors generated by individuals, seeking to understand their intentions and the ideological implications of their language use. In this study, the structure-focused perspective is applied to trace how metaphor use in Taiwanese mental health magazines highlighted different aspects of the pandemic across three years, while the intention-focused perspective is used to interpret how these choices reflect the communicative goals of agencies promoting mental health. Both perspectives together provide insight into how discursive practices reflect socio-political power structures through metaphors (Charteris-Black, 2004).

Extending this analysis to a time context, Gibbs and Cameron (2008) explore how metaphor performance in discourse is shaped by dynamic interactions between social and cognitive processes across different time scales. At the microgenetic level, metaphor performance is influenced by moment-to-moment interactions and the immediate cognitive and social context. On a broader scale, socio-cultural dynamics play a significant role, with metaphors reflecting and shaping shared values and beliefs within specific groups. This dynamical systems approach highlights how metaphors are fluid and not static, adapting to different contexts and interactions.

Cameron et al. (2009) further propose that metaphors serve as powerful tools for revealing people's ideas, attitudes, and values through discourse analysis. The multi-layered approach

examines metaphors at four levels: the microlevel, focusing on individual metaphors in their immediate context; the mesolevel, looking at episodes of talk to show how metaphors evolve and interact; the macrolevel, considering entire discourse events to identify overarching patterns and themes; and the sociocultural level, situating metaphors within broader cultural and societal contexts. This comprehensive approach underscores the dynamic interplay between language, thought, and social context.

A more recent implementation of CMA emphasizes the importance of temporal factors in analyzing social change. Liu, Li, and Feng (2024) advanced Critical Metaphor Analysis by incorporating both cross-linguistic and time-based dimensions into a schematic four-stage framework: contextual analysis, metaphor identification, interpretation, and explanation. Their study of Chinese–English bilingual COVID-19 reports in a Chinese newspaper demonstrated how WAR metaphors were strategically retained, paraphrased, omitted, or even created anew in translation to mediate messages for different readerships. In some cases, newly created WAR metaphors in English intensified negativity toward the pandemic, revealing a time-structuring pattern aligned with China’s restrictions in 2020 and political tensions with the United States. This case illustrates how CMA can capture the temporal and ideological manipulation of metaphors across languages, emphasizing the value of considering metaphor use in relation to time in sensitive discourses.

This temporal perspective shows that metaphors can have short-term effects, evident in a single sentence or conversation, and long-term implications, where their influence extends across a larger scope of discourse. Such analysis allows researchers to trace how metaphors can subtly or significantly shift perceptions within various contexts, from a brief news interview to prolonged media campaigns. This time-based perspective emphasizes the importance of considering both the immediate and extended impacts of metaphor use in understanding their role in communication and societal changes. Within the framework of CMA, which focuses on the agents who generate specific metaphors and questions the intentions or ideologies that these metaphors carry in a particular discourse, a comprehensive view of a social event can be provided.

CMA is particularly suitable for this study, as it has proven effective in analyzing COVID-19 discourse in Chinese contexts across different types of data. Xu (2023) employed CMA to compare metaphors on social media, illustrating how online discourse circulated and reshaped public perceptions of the pandemic. Zhang and Lin (2023) analyzed national newspaper articles, showing how mainstream media constructed dominant framings of COVID-19 at the societal level. Liu, Li, and Feng (2024) incorporated cross-linguistic and time-based perspectives in their analysis of Chinese–English bilingual reports, revealing how translation strategies and temporal patterns of WAR metaphors mediated political tensions and pandemic restrictions. These studies demonstrate that CMA is well suited to analyzing COVID-19, a global issue often accompanied by politicized and emotionally charged narratives. This suitability is especially relevant in Asian contexts, where the pandemic’s alleged origin heightened ideological framing and stigma in public discourse. At the same time, CMA is particularly effective for examining the intentions of institutional actors, making it valuable for this research on how Taiwan’s mental health agencies communicated during the crisis. Building on this foundation, the present study applies CMA to explore how metaphors shaped public understanding and emotional responses in Taiwanese mental health communication across three years of the pandemic.

## **Methodology**

### **Data Collection**

The data collection process involved four steps: selecting materials across a broad timeframe, curating them with the expertise of native speakers holding linguistic qualifications, conducting a thorough review, and finally compiling an electronic corpus of 99 unrepeated news articles totaling 147,762 Chinese characters. These steps ensured a comprehensive representation of text data relevant to the psychological aspects of the pandemic and provided a solid foundation for subsequent linguistic and semantic analyses in this study.

### Corpus sources

A systematic and comprehensive approach was employed from January 2020 to June 2022, encompassing various online sources. This extensive timeframe ensured the inclusion of diverse news articles and reports that captured the evolving discourse surrounding the COVID-19 pandemic. The initial phase involved keyword searches on reputable online sources, including Common Health Magazine, the Ministry of Health and Welfare (MOHW), the Health News, the Chinese Mental Health Association, the Taiwan Depression Prevention Association, and Health & Hope (HEHO). The selection of these sources was guided by their explicit focus on mental health issues and their consistent coverage of the psychological dimensions of the COVID-19 pandemic. Specifically, each source provides content directly addressing public concerns about stress, anxiety, depression, and coping strategies during the crisis, thereby ensuring the corpus reflects the mental health discourse most relevant to this study. Additionally, their accessibility to the public promotes transparency and adherence to academic research standards. Government-affiliated sources like MOHW offer authoritative information on public health, while nonprofit organizations such as the Chinese Mental Health Association and the Taiwan Depression Prevention Association bolster the credibility of the data. Inclusion of popular sources like Common Health Magazine and HEHO aligns with the research focus on metaphor's impact on mental imagery during the pandemic, given their broad readership and potential influence on public perceptions. The diverse perspectives from various media platforms enrich the corpus, while continuous news updates provide valuable insights into the evolving discourse on pandemic psychology.

### Data Collection Procedure

The data collection process began with keyword searches in the online news agencies. Two individuals, both native Chinese speakers with master's degrees in applied linguistics, meticulously sifted through articles to ensure relevance and linguistic nuances necessary for analysis. The third person, the primary researcher, double-checked article suitability and relevance to eliminate potential bias, ensuring a comprehensive representation of textual material addressing the psychological dimensions of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The data collection process followed three distinct steps:

Step 1: the researchers performed key-word searches using the word 疫('epidemic') on the designated websites, locating key phrases such as 疫情('epidemic'), 防疫 ('epidemic prevention'), 疫病 ('epidemic disease'), and the like, were included. The choice of the general term 疫 ('epidemic') over 新冠肺炎 ('coronavirus disease') was based on the observation that the magazine seldom used the full name of the pandemic directly.

Step 2: a full-text screening of selected articles was conducted. Articles discussing emotional states and mental health during the COVID-19 pandemic were collected. Those categorized under various topics and divisions underwent an initial screening process based on news titles and content to determine their relevance.

Step 3: the selected articles were collected and saved as text files to facilitate later identification and interpretation.

The data collection process began on February 3rd, 2020, with the earliest pertinent news article, marking the pandemic's initial stages. It concluded on June 7, 2022, covering the most recent developments. In total, 99 unrepeated news articles, constituting 147,762 Chinese characters, were meticulously collected, each presented and stored in electronic format for further analysis. This rigorous and continuously updated methodology aimed to construct a corpus encompassing a diverse range of texts addressing the psychological facets of the pandemic.

### **Data Analysis**

This study draws on three complementary approaches to establish the analytical framework. (1) Critical Metaphor Analysis (CMA) provides the overarching discourse-analytic lens that links speakers' metaphor choices to communicative purpose, ideology, and audience through a cycle of identification, interpretation, and explanation (Charteris-Black, 2004). (2) Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT) treats metaphor as systematic mappings from concrete source domains to abstract target domains (e.g., LIFE IS A JOURNEY), which we use to label and compare patterns across texts (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980; Lakoff, 1993). (3) The Metaphor Identification Procedure (MIP) operationalizes the identification stage by comparing a lexical unit's contextual meaning with its more basic, conventional meaning; a salient contrast indicates metaphorical use (Pragglejaz Group, 2007).

In this study, CMA frames the main inquiry, CMT informs categorization and interpretation, and MIP ensures reliable identification of metaphorical expressions. To implement the analytical framework and ensure reliability, a seven-step coding procedure was developed and followed.

### **Theoretical Framework and Analytical Stages**

Critical Metaphor Analysis (CMA) was adopted as the main framework for analysis. CMA follows a tripartite model: identification, interpretation, and explanation of metaphor in a specific context. Each stage has a distinct purpose: identification detects metaphorical expressions by contrasting contextual with basic, conventional meanings; interpretation formulates conceptual mappings and categorizes them; and explanation links metaphor choice to social agency, audience, and persuasive function in context.

In the identification stage, linguistic data were examined to detect metaphorical expressions using the procedures of MIP. The process includes three steps: (1) each text was comprehensively read to gain a general understanding of its intended meaning; (2) lexical units were identified and their contextual meanings compared with their more fundamental, conventional meanings; and (3) units were marked as metaphorical if they displayed a noticeable contrast between their contextual meaning and their basic, fundamental meaning.

Noted that lexical units were treated at the word level, with conventionalized multiword expressions like idioms also considered as single units. Judgments of "basic, fundamental meaning" prioritized conventionality and were verified against dictionary definitions in established lexicographic sources (Pragglejaz Group, 2007). Additionally, for the purposes of this study, only those relevant to mental calmness, peacefulness, and the promotion of mental health were annotated, while figurative language unrelated to these themes was not coded for analysis.

The interpretation stage focuses on establishing conceptual metaphors. CMT provided the theoretical basis for linking concrete, experiential source domains to abstract target domains. The analysis classified patterns into ontological (e.g., EMOTION IS OBJECT), structural (e.g., LIFE IS A JOURNEY), and orientational types (e.g., MORE IS UP). Because the corpus targets a general readership in contemporary Chinese magazine and news discourse, units of analysis extended beyond isolated words to include entire communicative units within sentences (including conventionalized multiword expressions). This approach captures colloquial metaphor use and reflects how readers encounter authentic metaphors in context.

In the explanation stage, the social context underlying metaphor choice was examined. CMA explores how social agents select specific metaphors based on their rhetorical and ideological motivations, aiming to understand their persuasive societal functions (Charteris-Black, 2004). Imani (2022) expanded CMA to include three critical dimensions influencing metaphor use: audience, context, and topic. These factors, along with the speaker or author's ideological stance and power dynamics, shape how metaphors are tailored to resonate with particular audiences and contexts, effectively evoking targeted mental imagery. However, in the present study, the agent had been defined as news media engaged in public health communication, and metaphor choices were interpreted within this communicative frame rather than as evidence of hidden agendas. Accordingly, attention was directed to the ways in which metaphorical framing encouraged calmness, peacefulness, and the promotion of mental well-being.

### **Data Coding Procedure**

To implement the analytical framework, a coding team was established and guided by a seven-step protocol. The team consisted of two trained reviewers, while the researcher served as an independent third party to ensure objectivity and balance in decision-making. Both reviewers were female graduate students in applied linguistics, around twenty-five years old, and native speakers of Mandarin Chinese born and residing in Taiwan. With familiarity in Taiwanese varieties of Chinese, they had also completed coursework in cognitive linguistics and were knowledgeable about metaphor theories. Noted that these reviewers were not involved in the data collection procedure, ensuring independence between data gathering and analysis.

The coding protocol emphasized independent double coding, consensus adjudication, and external validation. This protocol complemented the three stages of CMA by enhancing procedural transparency while strengthening reliability. The procedure is as follows:

Step 1: The researcher established a review group consisting of two native Chinese-speaking reviewers with backgrounds in linguistics.

Step 2: The researcher trained the two reviewers in metaphor identification using MIP until they reached a consensus on identifying metaphorical expressions in Chinese.

Step 3: The two reviewers individually and independently examined and identified metaphorical expressions within the collected data.

Step 4: The reviewers organized the results, concentrating on metaphor use clusters, and generated conceptual metaphors.

Step 5: The reviewers collectively confirmed their metaphor identification and interpretation. Any disagreements were resolved through discussions between the two reviewers; when consensus proved elusive, the researcher made the final decision.

Step 6: The researcher and the reviewers collaboratively conducted the explanation stage of CMA by situating metaphors in their communicative contexts, confirming the agents involved, and discussing the rhetorical and ideological purposes of metaphor use.

Step 7: The researcher and reviewers jointly applied purposive sampling to select four passages for qualitative illustration. The selection ensured (1) coverage of major metaphor families, (2) variation across different media agents, and (3) representation of different stages of the pandemic (2020–2022). Chinese originals were retained, and English translations were drafted by the researcher and cross-checked by the reviewers.

Throughout the process, the reviewers worked independently during the identification stage (Step 3) and collaboratively during the interpretation stages (Steps 4 and 5). The researcher was involved only at the initial stage, when forming and training the team (Steps 1 and 2), and later when adjudicating unresolved disagreements (Step 5). For the explanation stage (Step 6 and 7), the researcher and reviewers worked together to interpret the broader communicative functions and critical implications of metaphor use.

## Results

In total, 485 occurrences of metaphorical expressions were identified across the 99 articles, encompassing words, phrases, and sentences. Among these, 319 entries directly relate to COVID-19 or the pandemic, characterized by the formula "COVID-19 IS...". The remaining 166 entries pertain to conceptual metaphors concerning emotions and mental health. Certain common conceptual metaphors occurred only once in the corpus, yet they are retained in the list to faithfully represent the results.

This section presents the findings in relation to the research questions. Sections 4.1 and 4.2 report on the linguistic expressions of conceptual metaphors and their evolving patterns over time. Section 4.3 then extends the analysis by interpreting how these metaphors were strategically employed in context, linking the results to broader communicative and mental health implications.

### Linguistic Expression of Metaphors

In line with Research Question 1, this section examines how conceptual metaphors were expressed linguistically in the collected texts. The results are divided into two parts: metaphors directly framing COVID-19 and metaphors promoting mental health. These findings reveal the range of metaphorical framings used by Taiwanese media during the pandemic.

### Conceptual Metaphor of COVID-19

Table 1 reports the results of the "COVID-19 IS..." conceptual metaphor. The analysis identified 319 instances of conceptual metaphors. It is important to note that these occurrences refer to metaphorical expressions found within communicative units, such as sentence clusters, rather than individual words or characters. Therefore, the number of occurrences here does not represent the number of Chinese characters but the number of metaphorical expressions.

The conceptual metaphors found can be categorized into three types of metaphors: structural, orientational, and ontological metaphors. Within the structural metaphor category, the most prevalent theme is BATTLING/MILITARY/WAR/ATTACK (96 occurrences), followed by JOURNEY (39), STRUGGLE (19), and LIGHT/DARKNESS (13) and BALANCED (13). In the orientational metaphor category, QUANTITY emerges as the predominant theme with 30 occurrences, while WEIGHT and TEMPERATURE have 8 and 6 occurrences, respectively. In the ontological metaphor category, "NATURE" stands out with 33 occurrences, followed by "CONTAINER" with 32, "IMAGES" with 12, and "VIRUS" with 8 occurrences.

Taken together, the data suggest that war imagery dominated discourse but coexisted with alternative framings. The presence of JOURNEY and BALANCE metaphors indicates attempts to normalize or humanize the pandemic experience beyond warfare. Orientational and ontological metaphors further diversified the discourse by offering measurable or embodied ways of conceptualizing COVID-19. This mixture of metaphors demonstrates how the Taiwanese mental health media simultaneously emphasized urgency, endurance, and contextualization, supporting the argument that metaphor choice adapted to both the immediate crisis and the longer-term psychological impact of the pandemic.

**Table 1.** *Number of Occurrences of Conceptual Metaphor “COVID-19 IS ...”*

<b>Structural metaphor (190)</b>	<b>Orientational metaphor (44)</b>	<b>Ontological metaphor (85)</b>
1. BATTLING/MILITARY/WAR/ATTACK (96)	8. QUANTITY (30)	11. NATURE (33)
2. JOURNEY (39)	9. WEIGHT (8)	12. CONTAINER (32)
3. STRUGGLE (19)	10. TEMPERATURE (6)	13. IMAGES (12)
4. LIGHT/DARKNESS (13)		14. VIRUS (8)
5. BALANCED (13)		
6. VIOLENCE (9)		
7. FIRE (1)		

### **Conceptual Metaphors of Mental Health Promotion**

Various conceptual metaphors have been identified in the articles aimed at promoting mental health during the COVID-19 pandemic. While these metaphors are not directly related to COVID-19 itself, they offer valuable insights into how individuals perceive and articulate mental health challenges in this context. Table 2 presents the distribution of these metaphors across domains such as emotion, life, time, and other thematic categories.

The most dominant metaphors appear in the EMOTION domain (66 occurrences), with EMOTION IS OBJECT (49) as the most frequent, reflecting a tendency to treat emotions as tangible burdens that can be carried or managed. Less frequent metaphors such as EMOTION IS ENERGY (10) and EMOTION IS LIVING CREATURE (7) highlight emotions as dynamic forces or animate agents, stressing their vitality and unpredictability.

The LIFE domain (14) frames life as both an investment and a substance, underscoring concerns about resource management and the material value of well-being. The TIME domain (20), especially TIME AS A MOVING OBJECT (18), conveys the sense of time passing under uncertainty, while the rare TIME IS MONEY (2) indicates limited economic framing in this context. Additional metaphors include metonymic expressions (43), which link mental health to embodied behaviors, and other categories such as INFORMATION IS SUBSTANCE (14) and CONSEQUENCE IS PRICE (8), emphasizing information overload and the psychological costs of the pandemic.

Overall, the predominance of emotion-based metaphors highlights the centrality of coping and stress management, supported by life, time, and embodied framings. These results indicate a tendency for Taiwanese media to emphasize emotional resilience alongside broader perspectives on mental health during the pandemic.

**Table 2.** *Number of Occurrences of Other Conceptual Metaphors*

---

**EMOTION (66)**

1. EMOTION IS OBJECT (49)
  2. EMOTION IS ENERGY (10)
  3. EMOTION IS LIVING CREATURE (7)
- 

**LIFE (14)**

4. LIFE IS INVESTMENT (7)
  5. LIFE IS SUBSTANCE (7)
- 

**TIME (20)**

6. TIME IS A MOVING OBJECT (18)
  7. TIME IS MONEY (2)
- 

**Metonymic expressions (43)**

8. Metonymy (27)
  9. Symbolic behaviors (16)
- 

**Others (23)**

10. INFORMATION IS SUBSTANCE (14)
  11. CONSEQUENCE IS PRICE (8)
  12. INCIDENT IS A PLAY (1)
- 

**Evolving Patterns and Interpretation**

In line with Research Question 2, this section examines how metaphor use changed over the course of the pandemic. Drawing on Table 3, the analysis tracks both COVID-19–related metaphors and mental health metaphors from 2020 to 2022. Subsections 4.2.1 and 4.2.2 highlight, respectively, the shifting patterns in crisis framing and the evolving conceptualizations of emotions, life, and time, showing how these trends collectively reflect changing interpretations of mental health during the pandemic.

**Table 3.** *Number of Occurrences of Conceptual Metaphors by Years*

Conceptual Metaphor (Occurrences)	Year 2020		Year 2021		Year 2022	
<b>Conceptual Metaphor about COVID-19</b>						
1. BATTLING/MILITARY/WAR/ATTACK (96)	38	(38%)	37	(24%)	21	(36%)
2. JOURNEY (39)	13	(12%)	19	(12%)	7	(12%)
3. STRUGGLE (19)	7	(7%)	11	(7%)	1	(2%)
4. LIGHT/DARKNESS (13)	2	(2%)	10	(6%)	1	(2%)
5. BALANCED (13)	2	(2%)	4	(3%)	7	(12%)
6. VIOLENCE (9)	1	(1%)	5	(3%)	3	(5%)
7. FIRE (1)	1	(1%)	0	(0%)	0	(0%)
8. QUANTITY (30)	9	(8%)	17	(11%)	4	(7%)
9. WEIGHT (8)	4	(4%)	4	(3%)	0	(0%)
10. TEMPERATURE (6)	4	(4%)	2	(1%)	0	(0%)
11. NATURE (33)	16	(15%)	14	(9%)	3	(5%)
12. CONTAINER (32)	6	(6%)	19	(12%)	7	(12%)

13. IMAGES (12)	3	(3%)	5	(3%)	4	(7%)
14. VIRUS (8)	0	(0%)	7	(5%)	1	(2%)
<b>Total number of occurrences</b>	<b>106</b>	<b>(100%)</b>	<b>154</b>	<b>(100%)</b>	<b>59</b>	<b>(100%)</b>
<b>Conceptual Metaphors about Other Subjects</b>						
1. EMOTION IS OBJECT (49)	18	(24%)	28	(41%)	3	(13%)
2. EMOTION IS ENERGY (10)	5	(7%)	3	(4%)	2	(9%)
3. EMOTION IS LIVING CREATURE (7)	1	(1%)	3	(4%)	3	(13%)
4. LIFE IS INVESTMENT (7)	4	(5%)	1	(1%)	2	(9%)
5. LIFE IS SUBSTANCE (7)	2	(3%)	2	(3%)	3	(13%)
6. TIME IS A MOVING OBJECT (18)	12	(16%)	6	(9%)	0	(0%)
7. TIME IS MONEY (2)	1	(1%)	0	(0%)	1	(4%)
8. Metonymy (27)	13	(17%)	11	(16%)	3	(13%)
9. Symbolic behaviors (16)	7	(9%)	9	(13%)	0	(0%)
10. INFORMATION IS SUBSTANCE (14)	10	(13%)	0	(0%)	4	(17%)
11. CONSEQUENCE IS PRICE (8)	2	(3%)	4	(6%)	2	(9%)
12. INCIDENT IS A PLAY (1)	0	(0%)	1	(1%)	0	(0%)
<b>Total number of occurrences</b>	<b>75</b>	<b>(100%)</b>	<b>68</b>	<b>(100%)</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>(100%)</b>
<b>Total number of occurrences by years</b>	<b>181</b>		<b>222</b>		<b>82</b>	

### Shifts in COVID-19 Metaphor Usage

Over the course of three years (2020-2023), the evolving usage of metaphorical language to describe the COVID-19 pandemic reflects changing public perceptions and understanding of the pandemic's nature and impact. In 2020, the dominant BATTLING/MILITARY/WAR/ATTACK metaphor accounted for 38% of occurrences, indicating the initial pandemic impact as a war-like situation. However, the significantly decline to 24% in 2021 signifies a shift from viewing it as an immediate threat to a nuanced understanding. In 2022, though the percentage raised back to 36% but the occurrences was only 21, showing the reducing needs for metaphor uses. In contrast, the JOURNEY metaphor demonstrated consistency, accounting for 12% of metaphors in 2020, maintained in 2021 and in 2022, reflecting the enduring public perception.

The STRUGGLE metaphor exhibited fluctuations, from 7% in 2020 to 7% (11) in 2021, then decreasing to 2% in 2022. The VIOLENCE metaphor transitioned from 1% in 2020 to 3% in 2021, with a slight decline to 5% in 2022. The BALANCED metaphor started at 2% in 2020, rising to 3% in 2021 and 12% in 2022. These shifts in frequency of metaphorical language usage mirror the evolving societal perceptions of the pandemic, suggesting a growing emphasis on equilibrium in the context of COVID-19.

In the same vein, the evolving use of metaphors for COVID-19 also corresponds with the changing perception of the pandemic from an immediate threat to a more complex challenge. The FIRE metaphor, emerging in 2020, faded in subsequent years, signifying limited applicability. Similarly, the WEIGHT metaphor began at 3% in 2020, dropped to 2% in 2021, and vanished in 2022, indicating diminishing relevance. The NATURE metaphor declined from 16% in 2020 to 9% in 2021, reaching 5% in 2022, reflecting changing attitudes. Conversely, the VIRUS metaphor, starting at 0% in 2020, rose to 5% in 2021 but decreased to 2% in 2022. These shifts align with evolving societal perceptions of COVID-19, highlighting the transition from an immediate threat to a multifaceted, nuanced challenge.

Together, these shifts highlight a transition from urgent crisis imagery at the pandemic's onset to more diverse and nuanced framings in later years. The persistence of WAR metaphors alongside the growth of BALANCE metaphors illustrates how Taiwanese media adapted its discourse from confrontation to resilience.

### **Shifts in Mental Health–Related Metaphors**

Conceptual metaphors about other subjects reflect the evolving focus on mental health. In 2020, EMOTION AS OBJECT was predominant, constituting 24% of occurrences. EMOTION AS ENERGY and EMOTION AS LIVING CREATURE followed at 7% and 1%, respectively. By 2021, the emphasis on EMOTION AS OBJECT rose sharply to 41%, while the percentages for EMOTION AS ENERGY and EMOTION AS LIVING CREATURE remained stable at 4%, indicating a sustained perception of emotions as both tangible and dynamic. However, by 2022, there was a notable shift: EMOTION AS OBJECT dropped to 13%, while EMOTION AS ENERGY and EMOTION AS LIVING CREATURE increased to 9% and 13%, respectively, highlighting a broader recognition of emotions as integral to the human experience, rather than a solid object.

In addition, the shifts in metaphorical use over the years reflect changing attitudes toward life and time, offering insights into the evolving mental landscape of individuals navigating the challenges of COVID-19. In terms of metaphors related to LIFE, the LIFE IS INVESTMENT metaphor decreased from 5% in 2020 to 1% in 2021, then surged to 9% in 2022, suggesting a growing emphasis on the strategic value of life. Meanwhile, LIFE IS SUBSTANCE saw less fluctuation, maintaining at 3% in 2020 and 2021, before jumping to 13% in 2022, indicating a stronger perception of life as a tangible and significant entity. In contrast, the TIME IS A MOVING OBJECT metaphor began at 16% in 2020, dropped to 9% in 2021, and was absent by 2022, reflecting a shift away from viewing time as continuously passing. These trends highlight a deepening materialization and appreciation of both life and time, albeit more significantly for life, as the pandemic progressed.

While other conceptual metaphors did not show significant shifts, they generally indicated a recovery from pandemic stress. INFORMATION AS SUBSTANCE was prominent at 13% in 2020, disappeared in 2021, and surged to 17% in 2022. This fluctuation reflects initial ignorance followed by a growing thirst for information as the situation progressed. The CONSEQUENCE IS PRICE metaphor, which evaluates consequences in terms of cost, rose from 3% in 2020 to 9% in 2022, suggesting a shift in focus from managing the crisis to addressing its aftermath. These trends highlight the dynamic use of metaphorical language and the evolving perceptions throughout the COVID-19 pandemic.

### **Metaphor Explanation in Context**

This section addresses Research Question 3, which investigates how Taiwanese mental health publications employed metaphors in specific communicative contexts and what these uses

reveal about the rhetorical and ideological purposes of health communication during the pandemic. To illustrate these dynamics, four representative excerpts were selected from different years and media agents. These examples highlight how metaphors functioned not only as linguistic expressions but also as strategic tools for guiding perception, framing resilience, and shaping public response.

### **COVID-19 Metaphors in Media Narratives**

Excerpt (1) features the repeated use of the conceptual metaphor "COVID-19 IS BATTLING/MILITARY/WAR/ATTACK" within the context of promoting mental health and reporting on common health during the early stages of the COVID-19 pandemic in March 2020. This metaphor initially establishes the pandemic as an invisible adversary, invoking associations of fear and vulnerability.

事實上，面對「看不見的敵人」，這甚至不是賴碧蓮第一次主動選擇長驅直入，站上疫情的最前線。...賴碧蓮的回答既不是武漢包機，也不是抗煞之役，而是從護專畢業後，自己第一時間選擇了投入加護病房。...「作為將士，就是要戰死沙場，直到今天，我還是這麼想。」(Article 11, Common Health, 2020/6/24)

Translation: In fact, facing the "invisible enemy", this is not even the first time that Lai Bilian has taken the initiative to march forward and stand on the front line of the epidemic.... Lai Bilian's answer was neither a chartered flight from Wuhan nor a fight against evil, but that after graduating from nursing school, she immediately chose to invest in the intensive care unit. As a soldier, you must die on the battlefield. To this day, I still think so.

Considering the agent, Common Health Magazine, whose mission is dedicated to promoting healthy and joyful living, their approach to COVID-19 takes a unique perspective. The article depicts the virus as a challenge that requires confrontation, celebrating the bravery and proactive stance of medical professionals. Unlike typical representations that suggest vulnerability, this article portrays them as determined "soldiers" on the frontline, committed to their duty. This approach not only honors their dedication but also encourages readers to recognize their potential for making a positive impact during tough times.

This example demonstrates the adaptability of metaphors, showing how the "COVID-19 IS WAR" metaphor can vary in meaning depending on the context. While it's often critiqued for promoting obedience, here it highlights the resolve and agency of healthcare workers, effectively reshaping their role from passive participants to active, empowered contributors in public health.

In excerpt (2), from an article by the Taiwan Depression Prevention Association dated April 1, 2021, the journey metaphor is harnessed to convey a message about mental health. This metaphor underscores that mental health is an ongoing process like a lifelong expedition. It also aligns with the concept of personal growth and development, emphasizing that individuals can learn and evolve during challenging times, underlining the agency of individuals in actively shaping their mental well-being amidst a crisis.

幾天後便被醫院要求居家隔離，開始了我在隔離期間忐忑的心路歷程。...避免自己掉入負面想法不斷輪迴的死胡同中。...你我都可能處在危機之下：一起攜手走過危機。

(Article 40, Taiwan Depression Prevention Association, 2021/4/1)  
Translation: A few days later, I was asked by the hospital to isolate myself at home, which started my anxious journey during the isolation period. ...prevent yourself from falling into a dead-end cycle of negative thoughts. ...You and I may be in crisis. Let's go through it together.

The agent, Taiwan Depression Prevention Association, uses the journey metaphor to frame the pandemic as a navigable part of life. Mandatory home isolation introduces this metaphor, portraying it as a passage through uncertainty and anxiety. This approach conveys that the pandemic, while challenging, is not insurmountable. It suggests that with determination and support, individuals can move through this difficult period just like any other phase of life.

### **Mental Health Metaphors in Media Narratives**

In excerpt (3) from an article published by Common Health Magazine on May 1, 2020, the early stages of the COVID-19 pandemic were marked by public anxiety and uncertainty. The agent recognized the heightened stress levels during this time and chose to address the issue by framing stress as a measurable weight. This metaphor implies that mental well-being can be quantified and objectively measured. The article encourages individuals to seek professional help, specifically from doctors or psychologists, when their stress becomes overwhelming. This approach highlights the importance of objective measurement in assessing mental health and aligns with Common Health's mission to provide support during times of uncertainty.

最後，如果你的身心壓力已經負荷不了，別猶豫，請記得找醫師（心理師）諮詢，他們將能給你最專業、可靠的建議。(Article 3, Common Health, 2020/5/1)  
Translation: Finally, if your physical and mental pressure can no longer bear it, don't hesitate to consult a doctor (psychologist). They will be able to give you the most professional and reliable advice.

In excerpt (4), published by Health News on April 26, 2022, the use of the conceptual metaphor QUANTITY within the context of "Medicine for the Pandemic" presents a remarkable sense of relief. The agent, Health News, effectively conveys a message of optimism and progress in addressing the pandemic's challenges. Highlighting medical advancements, the article instills confidence in the effectiveness of new treatments. Published in 2022, after more than two years of global struggle with the pandemic, the timing emphasizes a turning point. The mention of an effective treatment provides hope, suggesting significant progress in the ongoing fight against the virus.

清冠一號對於中重症有明顯減輕感染症狀的效果，搭配西藥有一加一大於二的功效。(Article 82, Health News, 2022/4/26)  
Translation: Qingguan No. 1 has the effect of significantly reducing the symptoms of moderate to severe infections. When combined with western medicine, the effect of one plus one is greater than two.

The analysis underscores the strategic use of metaphors by various agents to address the pandemic at different stages. Common Health Magazine initially framed COVID-19 as a battle, invoking courage and empowerment. As the pandemic progressed, it shifted to a weight metaphor, helping quantify and manage public anxiety by promoting measurable mental well-being. The Taiwan Depression Prevention Association, through the journey metaphor, emphasized resilience and personal growth in mental health. Meanwhile, Health News

highlighted a turning point in the pandemic by focusing on the efficacy of medical advancements, instilling hope and optimism. These examples show how agents effectively adapt metaphors to convey messages that resonate with the changing dynamics of a global crisis.

## Discussion

### Metaphor Adaptation

The findings indicate a variety of Chinese metaphors used to describe the pandemic. These metaphors represent the experience of managing COVID-19 through images of a battle (WAR), a journey (JOURNEY), or a manageable entity (STRUGGLE and BALANCED). All chosen source domains share characteristics, treating the disease as a target to be combated over time while striving to maintain a balance in life.

This finding is unsurprising, as many studies on disease have highlighted the features. Sontag (1989) analyzed AIDS discourse, noting that illness is often described in military terms, portraying suffering as warfare and framing death as a medical failure rather than an inevitable tragedy. Similarly, Nerlich (2004) examined the political discourse around foot-and-mouth disease (FMD) in the UK and found that WAR metaphors were used by the media and policymakers to promote a proactive stance against FMD. More recently, Deng et al. (2021) and Efeoğlu Özcan (2022) focused on COVID-19 and confirmed the frequent use of WAR metaphors during the pandemic. Across different languages, as mentioned previously, studies have observed the same prevalence of WAR metaphors. All these studies highlight similar entailments of WAR metaphors: enemy, battle, struggle, winning, and losing. Disease is perceived as a difficulty that needs to be combated, managed, and ultimately overcome.

Extant literature also demonstrates the prevalence of war-related metaphors in expressing ideologies of management and control. For example, Demjén et al. (2016) investigated perceptions of death and found that VIOLENCE metaphors, such as battle and fighting, are frequently used to express defiance against an uncontrollable death, such as dying from a disease. Similarly, Gao and Wu (2024) analyzed blogs written by parents of children with cancer and identified the dominant use of WAR metaphors. These metaphors often serve as a means for parents to express their emotions and motivate their children to actively fight against the cancer. In both cases, the chosen metaphors highlight attempts to resist natural forces and exert control over life circumstances.

However, this study implies subtle differences from previous research. In excerpts (1) to (3), the metaphors display a more positive intention, rather than evoking aggressive instability. Instead of emphasizing losses, excerpt (1) celebrates the dedication and courage of those combating the disease. Excerpt (2) focuses on progress rather than isolation in the journey, and excerpt (3) suggests control over what are perceived as uncontrollable emotions. Instead of foregrounding the entailments such as battle, loss, and being out of control, more positive features are highlighted in the metaphors: courage, progress, and seeking help. Such adaptation of traditional metaphors not only reflects the speakers' specific intentions but also underscores a shift in metaphorical framing that is sensitive to the context and audience needs.

The adaptive nature of metaphor is further evidenced from audience perspectives by Brugman et al.'s (2022) study, which examined how COVID-19 metaphor perceptions vary by source domain and national context among 216 participants from various countries. Their findings reveal that familiarity and aptness with the target domain differ by country and experience, shaping metaphor perceptions and appreciation. This underscores the necessity for careful metaphor selection by governments and media to effectively communicate during the

pandemic, to avoid resistance that could impede communicative goals. Semino's (2011) study similarly advocates the adaptive use of metaphor across disciplines, illustrating how metaphors are customized for different audiences and highlighting their dynamic and evolutionary nature across discourses. Likewise, Imani (2022) identifies three key factors—audience, context, and topic—that, along with the ideological stance and power dynamics of the speaker, influence the construction of metaphors to resonate with specific audiences and contexts. These insights are pertinent to the present study, which is set in the context of promoting mental health. It demonstrates that positive framing in COVID-19 metaphors can effectively engage audiences seeking information on mental stability and calls for more adaptive use among socially influential groups.

### **Metaphor Dynamics**

This study examines the evolving patterns of metaphor usage over a three-year span, revealing insights into contemporary interpretations of both the pandemic and mental health. Initially in 2020, the prevalent WAR metaphor portrayed the crisis as an urgent, war-like situation, instilling fear. As time progressed, the decline in this metaphor's usage suggests a shift in societal perceptions—from viewing the pandemic as an immediate threat to recognizing it as a more complex, enduring challenge. This transition indicates a deeper understanding of the multifaceted issues posed by COVID-19 and a move toward a more nuanced approach. Simultaneously, the consistent use of the JOURNEY metaphor throughout the pandemic illustrates mental health as a continuous expedition. It underscores how individuals navigate challenges and actively shape their well-being, emphasizing resilience and personal growth while acknowledging the dynamic nature of mental health amid changing pandemic circumstances.

The evolving trend can be seen at different stages of COVID-19. Magaña et al. (2023) analyzed TV news from March to June 2020, identifying a dominant use of WAR metaphors, followed by JOURNEY and NATURAL DISASTER metaphors, reflecting an initial defensive stance against the pandemic. The WAR metaphors highlighted the urgent need for medical resources like protective gear and ventilators. Similarly, Zhang and Lin (2023) investigated news articles from January to February 2020—when the pandemic had already escalated significantly in China—and found the TREATING DISEASE IS WAR metaphor prevailed in China. This framing not only involved key social agents like political party members, but also featured them as part of a heroic struggle in these “Heroic Fight” scenarios.

The change of metaphor uses can be observed in Komatsubara's (2023) study, which examines COVID-19 metaphors in Japanese newspapers over time, noting that shifts in usage corresponded with new waves of infections. He suggests that temporal analysis of metaphorical framing enhances understanding of evolving event. In a related study, Xu (2022) reviewed Twitter and Weibo data over a week in February 2022 and found that while war metaphors remained prominent, the zombie metaphor was prevalent in English texts and the classroom metaphor dominated in Chinese texts. This underscores the active participation of individuals in selecting metaphors that resonate with their personal experiences, rather than merely adopting those shaped by social, historical, and cultural factors. Such dynamics stem from the perspective of time and the evolving experiences of people over time.

Excerpt (5) gives an example. During the Omicron resurgence in May 2022, marked by increased anxiety, Common Health used a tsunami metaphor to depict the swift comeback and eventual receding tide, rather than a prolonged war. This example shows the dynamic nature of metaphors in adapting to evolving situations, demonstrating how time, context, and the agent's strategy influence metaphor interpretation.

Omicron 海嘯般襲來，北市篩檢站陽性率已達 65%，影響所及，以篩代隔呼聲大起。  
 (Article 87, Common Health, 2022/5/2)  
 Translation: Omicron has hit like a tsunami, and the positivity rate at the screening station in Taipei has reached 65%. The impact has led to louder calls for screening to replace isolation.

In summary, evolving metaphor usage in Taiwan during the COVID-19 crisis provides deep insights into interpretations of mental health. These shifts from initial crisis responses to more adaptable strategies reflect society's dynamic adaptation. As Semino (2021) claims, metaphors offer only a partial view of phenomena, necessitating varied metaphors for different stages and audiences. The metaphors in this discourse influence public understanding and response to the pandemic's mental health challenges, shaping contemporary mental health interpretations during this unprecedented crisis.

## Conclusion

The study examines the use of metaphors in Chinese during the COVID-19 pandemic, focusing on their role in promoting mental health in Taiwan. The study explores how metaphors conceptualize conditions and create new realities, revealing the cognitive associations, social representations, and symbolic meanings in human perception. It examines the influence of society, culture, and environment on metaphor selection in specific discourse contexts. Spanning from January 2020 to June 2022, the study collects data from varied online sources for their relevance and credibility in mental health. The analysis utilizes Conceptual Metaphor Theory, Metaphor Identification Procedure, and Critical Metaphor Analysis to identify, interpret, explain, and analyze the metaphors, focusing on how metaphors are integrated to align with the news agency's communicative goals.

The findings show that metaphors such as BATTLE and JOURNEY conceptualized mental health as either a conflict or a path to personal growth, while structural metaphors (e.g., QUANTITY, WEIGHT) and orientational metaphors (e.g., NATURE, CONTAINER) emphasized management and perception of well-being. Metaphors portraying emotions as objects, energy, or living creatures highlighted themes of control, dynamism, and empathy. Additionally, metaphors such as LIFE IS INVESTMENT and TIME IS MONEY reflected the perceived value of life and time during the pandemic. The evolving usage of these metaphors, from dominant battle imagery to broader narratives of journey and resilience, illustrates a shift in public sentiment from viewing the crisis as an immediate threat to recognizing it as a longer-term challenge.

This adaptability of metaphorical language plays a crucial role in shaping public understanding and responses to the mental health challenges posed by the pandemic. In general, the study shows the multifaceted role of metaphors in health communication, emphasizing their significant impact on public perception and behavior during health crises. Such communicative power of metaphors may extend into various domain beyond health, like political, medical, psychological, therapeutic, scientific, and educational domains. Thus, purposeful metaphor selection by health communicators, policymakers, and media professionals can strengthen mental health messaging, while inappropriate framings risk reinforcing fear or stigma.

By situating metaphor analysis within the domain of mental health communication, this study also contributes to applied linguistics in several ways. First, it extends critical metaphor analysis to the intersection of public health and media discourse, demonstrating how linguistic choices can influence resilience, coping strategies, and collective attitudes in times of crisis. Second, it highlights the role of metaphors in multilingual and multicultural contexts, showing how culturally grounded expressions in Chinese resonate with Taiwanese audiences while

offering insights for future comparative studies. Third, the study advances applied linguistic research on discourse strategies by illustrating how metaphors adapt dynamically over time, thus providing a methodological model for tracing linguistic change in response to global events. This study highlights the importance of metaphor research in applied linguistics as a tool for understanding how language mediates meaning, supports public well-being, and informs communication strategies in crisis contexts.

While the study provides insights into the adaptive and dynamic nature of metaphors, it also has limitations. The analysis is confined to January 2020–June 2022, excluding later developments of the pandemic. Future research could extend the timeframe to capture subsequent phases. The study also relies on news articles, representing a relatively narrow genre of communication. Broader sources such as social media, public speeches, and personal narratives would enrich our understanding of metaphor use. In addition, while this study focused on qualitative methods of identification and interpretation, future studies might incorporate quantitative approaches to assess metaphor prevalence and distribution more comprehensively. Finally, although the study examined how metaphors shape perceptions of mental health, it did not investigate their actual psychological outcomes. Future research could empirically evaluate how metaphorical framings affect readers' emotional and cognitive responses.

## References

- Bates, B. R. (2020). The (in)appropriateness of the war metaphor in response to SARS-CoV-2: A rapid analysis of Donald J. Trump's rhetoric. *Frontiers in Communication*, 5, Article 50. <http://doi.org/fcomm.2020.00050>
- Brugman, B. C., Droog, E., Reijnierse, W. G., Leymann, S., Frezza, G., & Renardel de Lavalette, K. Y. (2022). Audience perceptions of covid-19 metaphors: The Role of source domain and country context. *Metaphor and Symbol*, 37(2), 101–113. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10926488.2021.1948332>
- Cameron, L., Maslen, R., Todd, Z., Maule, J., Stratton, P., & Stanley, N. (2009). The Discourse Dynamics Approach to Metaphor and Metaphor-Led Discourse Analysis. *Metaphor and Symbol*, 24(2), 63–89. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10926480902830821>
- Casarett, D., Pickard, A., Fishman, J. M., Alexander, S. C., Arnold, R. M., Pollak, K. I., & Tulskey, J. A. (2010). Can metaphors and analogies improve communication with seriously ill patients? *Journal of palliative medicine*, 13(3), 255–260. <https://doi.org/10.1089/jpm.2009.0221>
- Charteris-Black, J. (2004). *Corpus approaches to critical metaphor analysis*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Charteris-Black, J. (2006). Britain as a container: Immigration metaphors in the 2005 election campaign. *Discourse & Society*, 17(5), 563–581. <http://doi.org/10.1177/09579265060666345>
- Classic FM [@ClassicFM]. (2020, March 27). Social distancing is like asking a string section to play pianissimo: it only works if everyone does it [Tweet]. Twitter. <https://twitter.com/ClassicFM/status/1243472908581777408>
- Colak F. U. (2022). COVID-19 as a Metaphor: Understanding COVID-19 Through Social Media Users. *Disaster medicine and public health preparedness*, 17, e159. <https://doi.org/10.1017/dmp.2022.83>
- Demjén, Z., Semino, E., & Koller, V. (2016). Metaphors for 'good' and 'bad' deaths: A health professional view. *Metaphor and the Social World*, 6(1), 1–19. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1075/msw>.

- Deng Y, Yang J, & Wan W (2021). Embodied metaphor in communication about lived experiences of the COVID-19 pandemic in Wuhan, China. *PLoS ONE*, 16(12): e0261968. <http://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0261968>
- Dong, J., Dong, S., & Buckingham, L. (2023). A discourse dynamics exploration of terminology for Covid-19 in professional and public discourse A frame-based approach. *Terminology*, 29(2), 224-251. <https://doi.org/10.1075/term.00070.don>
- Efeoğlu Özcan, E. (2022). Pull the weeds out or perish: Using pandemic metaphors to strengthen in-group solidarity in Turkish political discourse. *Metaphor and Symbol*, 37(2), 171–184. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10926488.2021.1994840>
- Fetterman, A. K., & Robinson, M. D. (2014). What can metaphors tell us about personality? *In Mind*, 2014(20). <http://www.in-mind.org/article/what-can-metaphors-tell-us-about-personality>
- Gao, R., Wu, Y. (2024). Understanding the use of metaphors by parents of children with cancer in blogs: a qualitative analysis. *Humanit Soc Sci Commun*, 11, Article 794. <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41599-024-03284-y>
- Gibbs, R.W., & Cameron, L. (2008). The social-cognitive dynamics of metaphor performance. *Cognitive System Research*, 9(1-2), 64-75. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cogsys.2007.06.008>
- Guo, S. (2025). Unveiling the conceptual metaphors in political discourse: A fresh perspective. *Journal of Linguistics and Communication Studies*, 4(1), 53–67. Retrieved from <https://www.pioneerpublisher.com/JLCS/article/view/1217>
- Halliday, M. A. K. (1985). *An Introduction to Functional Grammar*. London: Edward Arnold
- Imani, A. (2022). Critical metaphor analysis: A systematic step-by-step guideline. *LSP International Journal*, 9(1), 1-15. <https://doi.org/10.11113/lspi.v9.17975>
- Komatsubara, T. (2023). Framing risk metaphorically: Changes in metaphors of COVID-19 over time in Japanese. In A. Ädel & J. Östman (Eds), *Risk Discourse and Responsibility*, 65-87. John Benjamin Publication Co.
- Kövecses, Z. (2005). *Metaphor in culture: Universality and variation*. Cambridge, U.K.; New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Kyeremeh, Y.S., Taylor, B.H., Abudulai, R., Forson, I., & Akoto, E.A. (2023). Analysis of communicative functions of metaphors in selected political speeches. *Universal Journal of Literature and Linguistics*, 3(1), 16–28. <http://doi.org/10.31586/ujll.2023.702>
- Lakoff, G., & Johnson, M. (1980). *Metaphors we live by*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Liu, Y., Li, D., & Feng, J. (2024). Incorporating cross-linguistic and time-based dimensions to Critical Metaphor Analysis: A specialised hands-on analytical approach. *Critical Discourse Studies*, 1–21. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17405904.2024.2400874>
- Magaña, D., Durazo, A., Ramos, L., & Matlock, T. (2023). An analysis of metaphor in COVID-19 TV news in English and Spanish. *Journal of Communication in Healthcare*, <http://doi.org/10.1080/17538068.2023.2255417>
- Nerlich, B. (2004). War on foot and mouth disease in the UK, 2001: Towards a cultural understanding of agriculture. *Agriculture and Human Values*, 21(1), 15–25.
- Niland, N. (2020). An unhealthy combination: War, Covid-19 and the politics of metaphor. *Alternatives Humanitaires*, 14, 126-136.
- Nikitina, L., & Furuoka, F. (2008). “A language teacher is like...”: Examining Malaysian students’ perceptions of language teachers through metaphor analysis. *Electronic Journal of Foreign Language Teaching*, 5(2), 192-205.
- Pankakoski, T. (2024). Concepts We Transform by: Metaphorical Concepts in Post-COVID-19 Transition to Normalcy. *Redescriptions: Political Thought, Conceptual History and Feminist Theory*, 27(1): 6–25. <https://doi.org/10.33134/rds.425>

- Pragglejaz, G. (2007). MIP: a method for identifying metaphorically used words in discourse. *Metaphor and Symbol*, 22(1), 1-39.
- Rahman, S. Y. (2020) ‘Social distancing’ during COVID-19: The metaphors and politics of pandemic response in India. *Health Sociology Review*, 29(2), 131-139. <http://doi.org/10.1080/14461242.2020.1790404>
- Semino, E. (2011). The adaptation of metaphors across genres. *Review of Cognitive Linguistics*, 9, 130-152.
- Semino, E. (2021). “Not soldiers but fire-fighters” – Metaphors and Covid-19. *Health Communication*, 36(1), 50–58. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10410236.2020.1844989>
- Sontag, S. (1978). *Illness as Metaphor*. New York, NY: Farrar, Straus and Giroux.
- Taylor C, & Dewsbury BM. (2018). On the problem and promise of metaphor use in science and science communication. *Journal of Microbiology and Biology Education*, 19(1). PMC5969428. <http://doi.org/10.1128/jmbe.v19i1.1538>
- The White House (2020 March 3). Remarks by President Trump, Vice President Pence, and members of the Coronavirus Task Force in press briefing. Retrieved from <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/remarks-president-trump-vice-president-pence-members-coronavirus-task-force-press-briefing-9/>
- Thibodeau, P, Matlock, T., & Flusberg, S. (2019). The role of metaphor in communication and thought. *Language and Linguistics Compass*, 13(5), e12327. <https://doi.org/10.1111/lnc3.12327>
- United Nation (2020). Policy brief: COVID-19 and the need for action on mental health. <https://unsdg.un.org/sites/default/files/2020-05/UN-Policy-Brief-COVID-19-and-mental-health.pdf>
- Wang, Y., & Habil, H. (2024). Critical metaphor analysis of climate change in COP28 speeches: An ecolinguistic perspective. *World Journal of English Language*, 14(5), 49–61. <https://doi.org/10.5430/wjel.v14n5p49>
- Willingham, A. (2020, July 3). 2020 has changed everything. And it’s only half over. *Edition.cnn.com*. Retrieved from <https://edition.cnn.com/interactive/2020/07/world/2020-year-in-review-july/>
- Xiao, A. (2020, August 11). This pandemic isn’t a swan—It’s a canary. [online] *Meedan*. Retrieve 4 November 2020 from <https://meedan.com/blog/this-pandemic-isnt-a-swan-its-a-canary/>
- Xu, Q. (2023). Comparing COVID-19 metaphors in Chinese and English social media with critical metaphor analysis. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 14, Article 1198265. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2023.1198265>
- Zhang, C., & Lin, Z. (2023). Metaphor analysis of the COVID-19 public health emergency on Chinese national news media. *Pragmatics and Society*, 14(1), 90-116. <https://doi.org/10.1075/ps.20023.zha>