



Metaphors of Coronavirus: Invisible Enemy or Zombie Apocalypse?

Jonathan Charteris-Black

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The book *Metaphors of Coronavirus: Invisible Enemy or Zombie Apocalypse?* makes a valuable contribution to the field of cognitive linguistics and the discourse surrounding the Covid-19 pandemic. Drawing upon Haidt's Moral Foundations Theory (2012), it examines the metaphors regarding Covid-19 in the British press and offers insights into the moral bases for people's decision-making during the pandemic.

Chapter 1 serves as an introduction, clarifying the background and the aim of the work. The aim of the research is to investigate the metaphors and allegories related to coronavirus pandemic so as to find the moral frames of people's actions. It also intends to explore how journalists and politicians draw on these moral frames in the pandemic era to motivate public actions and attitudes. Charteris-Black adopts the Moral Foundations Theory as the theoretical framework, which consists of six pairs of opposites, including Care and Harm, Fairness and Cheating, Loyalty and Betrayal, Authority and Subversion, Sanctity and Degradation, and Liberty and Oppression. Charteris-Black argues that the opposite of Honesty and Dishonesty, which is overlooked in Haidt's theory, is in effect a crucial frame that deserves attention in the pandemic discourses, as it pertains closely to species survival.

Chapters 2 and 3 focus on prevalent metaphors including the "war" frame, the "fire" frame and the "force of nature" frame. In Chapter 2, Charteris-Black explains that the reason why the "war" frame becomes dominant during the pandemic is that "war" is the most prototypical crisis requiring concerted social efforts with life-and-death outcomes. By arousing the moral intuition of Care and Harm, the "war" metaphor is significant in acknowledging the urgency of the disease and calling for a joint public response. However, some contend that the pandemic is socially and psychologically unlike a war, and an overuse of "war" metaphor has rendered it cliched and less effective (see papers in Musolff et al. 2022). By

searching “coronaviruses” in the “UK National Newspaper” section of the Nexis database from 1st February 2020 to 28th February 2021, the study finds that the frequency of the lexical field of “war” in British Press changed with the gravity of the pandemic. An empirical online survey was designed to study how people’s behaviour was influenced by metaphor, revealing that public beliefs and responses to the pandemic were not directly or consciously influenced by metaphor.

Chapter 3 deals with the “fire” and the “force of nature” frames. The fire frame is regarded as an effective metaphor for public health communication purposes, because fire and illness have been long associated with each other for their shared embodied experience of heat and the historical use of fire for sterilization. By activating moral frames of Care and Harm, Fairness and Cheating, and Loyalty and Betrayal, the fire frame serves to call for public action, arouse people’s emotional response, warn the public against improper behaviours, and solicit support for or objection to specific policies. Another type of metaphor, the “force of nature” metaphor, construes the coronavirus to be caused by non-human rather than human agency and conveys fatalism about the pandemic. The study also finds that the “force of nature” frame is associated with a preference for the passive voice, because this frame usually topicalizes the affected entity rather than the disease.

Chapter 4 examines the frames derived from science fiction, including the “zombie apocalypse” frame and the “we are the virus” meme, in which the pandemic is framed as a viral invasion. These science fiction metaphors facilitate the articulation of uncertainty and the exploration of moral issues during the pandemic crisis. Charteris-Black first explores the zombie metaphor in British press and Twitter, identifying a large number of newspaper reports containing the zombie frame. As people have developed a predominant interest in epidemiology due to the zombie movies, this frame can be exploited to motivate people’s preparedness for the pandemic.

In Chapter 5, the author investigates a range of metaphor-based expressions that are related to science, including “following the science”, “herd immunity”, “flattening the curve”, “spikes” and “circuit breaker”. These metaphors are adopted to render the science of epidemiology intelligible and accessible to the public, and encourage their compliance with the government’s counter-pandemic policies. By tracing the origin of these metaphor-based scientific terms, Charteris-Black examines the rhetorical effectiveness according to the moral frame of Honesty and Dishonesty.

Chapter 6 explores the cultural history of disease-related confinement and how the experience influences language and public cognition. “Cordon sanitaire” and “quarantine” are traditional reactions to prevent infectious disease from spreading. However, they often caused conflicts between the moral foundations of Care and Harm, and Liberty and Oppression in historical praxis. The author also demonstrates how metaphor and metonym relating to “iron lung”, a treatment for polio patients since the 1930s, can be used to highlight the risks of non-preventive actions against Covid-19.

Chapter 7 continues with containment metaphors, for instance, “bubble”, “cocoon”, “protective ring”, “bunker” and “petri dish”. This chapter elaborates on these container frames by considering the nature of the containers, the contents in them, the perspectives on them and the agency of the subjects who fill the containers. The moral intuitions on which these issues are based are further discussed. The rhetorical purposes of these containment metaphors include creating social cohesion, protecting people from Harm, demanding compliance with the policies by the majority through expressing shared values and conveying moral intuitions such as Care and Harm, and Loyalty and Fairness.

Chapter 8 centers on metonymy, which according to the author can provide mental access to moral attitudes. The metonym “mask” activates the sense of protection. It appeals to the moral intuitions of Care and Harm, Authority and Subversion, Loyalty and Betrayal, and Sanctity and Degradation in different cultures. The hazmat suit is seen as a situation-specific metonym for complete protection and is associated with the peaking of Covid-19 infections. Based on the moral foundation of Care, the rainbow metaphor communicates a sense of hope and social cohesion and displays people’s support for the efforts made by National Health Service workers.

Chapter 9 discusses how metaphor is used as a discursive strategy for misinformation concerning Covid-19. The author introduces magic-related metaphors and illustrates how they are utilized to evaluate Covid-19 remedies, sometimes by dismissing them as childish and unfeasible. “Miracle cure” is another metaphor adopted to describe seeking for a remedy for Covid-19. It is often employed by journalists in an ironical way to expose and condemn misinformation and its perpetrators; this is done by appealing to the moral intuition of Honesty and Dishonesty. The author then focuses on metaphors in pro- versus anti-vaccine discourses. The analysis demonstrates how advocates of vaccination activate various frames including Fairness,

Honesty and Care and Harm to promote optimism about the vaccine. By contrast, the anti-vaccine discourse adopts “human-as-animal” metaphor and arouses the moral frames of Sanctity, Degradation, Liberty and Care and Harm. Chapter 10 concludes the whole research. In this part, Charteris-Black further highlights the importance of Honesty in aiding human survival; he advises that only by searching for a common moral framework and maintaining trust in public medicine can humans survive better. In the end, the author reemphasizes that metaphorical language plays a vital role for leaders in regaining trust.

With a detailed analysis of the prevailing metaphors in a wide array of epidemic discourses in British press and political speeches by adopting Haidt’s Moral Foundations Theory, this work contributes to a better understanding of people’s moral decision-making in a time of pandemic crisis. It explores how journalists and politicians draw on moral frames induced by metaphor to influence people’s decision making.

One interesting departure in this volume is that the author also conducted a survey to gauge how far people’s behaviour is indeed influenced by different metaphors. However, it is unclear how the 100 respondents in the survey were selected and sampled: more specific selecting and sampling criteria would make the results more persuasive.

A further issue concerns the argument that Honesty/Dishonesty should be added as one of the moral foundations because Honesty is believed to play a vital role in increasing the possibility of human survival, especially at a time of pandemic crisis. Nevertheless, Charteris-Black does not illustrate what honest language exactly is through examples. In view of the important role played by language in displaying honesty and recouping trust, offering instances of honest metaphors would facilitate deeper understanding of this notion.

In general, this book is a very timely, innovative and comprehensive work on metaphors of coronavirus. In particular, the crisis of pandemic provides an opportunity to delve into the moral foundations underlying metaphors that have the potential to influence public behaviour and to demonstrate how important language is for human survival. By investigating the moral intuitions reflected in a large corpus of coronavirus metaphors in British press and political speeches, this volume adds to our understanding of metaphor and cognitive linguistics, media and political communication, and critical discourse studies.

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