

Conceptual Metaphors for COVID-19 in Tunisian Media Discourse: A Cognitive Semantic Analysis

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Abstract

With the spread of COVID-19, there has been a growing interest in the study of metaphor use during the pandemic (Sirait et al. 2020; Fernandez-Pedemonte et al. 2020; Isaacs/Priesz 2021; Kozlova 2021; Semino 2021; Alousque 2021; Marron et al. 2020; Prokhorova et al. 2021; Yu et al. 2021). However, to the best of our knowledge, no single study has provided a systematic analysis of the conceptual metaphors utilized by the Tunisian linguistic community to talk about the pandemic. On the basis of language data, this paper will pinpoint the conceptual metaphors used by the Tunisian media to depict the pandemic. The data is taken from three Tunisian online newspapers: *Assabah*, *Aljarida*, and *Alchourouk*. The study is conducted within the CMT framework. The following five conceptual metaphors have been identified: *COVID-19 IS WAR*, *PANDEMIC VICTIMS ARE WAR VICTIMS*, *PREVENTION IS AN ACTION*, *COVID-19 IS A NATURAL ATTACK*, and *COVID-19 IS A PERSON*. This study has shown that several COVID-19 metaphors are shared by different linguistic communities. These similarities might be attributed to the fact that the global pandemic has generated 'common' and 'universal' feelings of anxiety and panic among different cultures. It has been argued that this study provides evidence from a language other than English for the CMT claim that humans tend to use a familiar concept to understand a new or difficult concept.

Mit der Ausbreitung von COVID-19 hat das Interesse an der Untersuchung des Metapherngebrauchs während der Pandemie zugenommen (Sirait et al. 2020; Fernandez-Pedemonte et al. 2020; Isaacs/Priesz 2021; Kozlova 2021; Semino 2021; Alousque 2021; Marron et al. 2020; Prokhorova et al. 2021; Yu et al. 2021). Unseres Wissens hat jedoch keine einzige Studie eine systematische Analyse der konzeptionellen Metaphern geliefert, die von der tunesischen Sprachgemeinschaft verwendet werden, um über die Pandemie zu sprechen. Auf der Grundlage von Sprachdaten werden in diesem Beitrag die begrifflichen Metaphern ermittelt, die von den tunesischen Medien zur Darstellung der Pandemie verwendet werden. Die Daten stammen aus drei tunesischen Online-Zeitungen: *Assabah*, *Aljarida* und *Alchourouk*. Die Studie wird im Rahmen der Kognitiven Metaphertheorie durchgeführt. Die folgenden fünf konzeptionellen Metaphern wurden identifiziert: *COVID-19 IST KRIEG*, *DIE OPFER DER PANDEMIE SIND KRIEGSOPFER*, *PRÄVENTION IST AKTION*, *COVID-19 IST EIN NATÜRLICHER ANGRIFF* und *COVID-19 IST EINE PERSON*. Diese Studie hat gezeigt, dass mehrere COVID-19-Metaphern von verschiedenen Sprachgemeinschaften verwendet werden. Diese Ähnlichkeiten könnten auf die Tatsache zurückzuführen sein, dass die weltweite Pandemie in den verschiedenen Kulturen ‚gemeinsame‘ und ‚universelle‘ Gefühle der Angst und Panik hervorgerufen hat. Es wurde argumentiert, dass diese Studie Beweise aus einer anderen Sprache als dem Englischen für die Behauptung der Kognitiven Metaphertheorie liefert, dass Menschen dazu neigen, ein vertrautes Konzept zu verwenden, um ein neues oder schwieriges Konzept zu verstehen.

1. Introduction

The worldwide spread of COVID-19 has generated a feeling of panic due to the constraints it has imposed on human lives. WHO reported that by early June 2020, 6,140,934 COVID-19 cases had been confirmed. On March 11, 2020, COVID-19 was officially declared a “global pandemic” (Sirait et al. 2020). As a result, schools were shut and business activities cancelled (Sirait et al. 2020). Governments across the world tried to stop the virus through social distancing, circulation restrictions, and lockdowns (Fernandez-Pedemonte et al. 2020).

As the pandemic spread, it became “one of the hottest topics in the world” (Li 2021: 70). The public has been interactive on social media, and the mass media have constantly updated news about the virus. A close look at what is covered by the media and expressed by the public demonstrates that many metaphors have been utilized to talk about this novel virus. This has attracted the interest of a few scholars (Sirait et al. 2020; Fernandez-Pedemonte et al. 2020; Isaacs/Priesz 2021; Kozlova 2021; Semino 2021; Alousque 2021; Marron et al. 2020; Prokhorova et al. 2021; Yu et al. 2021). For instance, Elena Semino notices that “metaphors have been widely used in communication about the COVID-19” (2021: 50). Sirait et al. (2020) observe that the media has tried to “provide eye-catching headlines through the use of metaphor” (2020: 278).

A few studies have been conducted on the use of metaphors during the pandemic (Sirait et al. 2020; Fernandez-Pedemonte et al. 2020; Isaacs/Priesz 2021; Kozlova 2021; Semino 2021; Alousque 2021; Marron et al. 2020; Prokhorova et al. 2021; Yu et al. 2021). However, to the best of our knowledge, no single study has offered a systematic examination of the conceptual metaphors used by the Tunisian linguistic community to portray the pandemic. This paper addresses this gap. On the basis of language data, this study will identify the conceptual metaphors used by the Tunisian media to depict the pandemic. The data has been taken from three Tunisian online newspapers: *Assabah*, *Aljarida*, and *Alchourouk*, and analyzed by using CMT tools.

This study comprises four main sections. The first will present the study’s theoretical framework (CMT). The second will review selected studies conducted on the use of metaphors during the pandemic. The third will flesh out the study’s methodology for data collection and data analysis. The fourth is devoted to the study’s findings and discussion.

2. Theoretical framework: CMT

This study uses the CMT theoretical framework for many reasons. To start with, CMT is a psychologically tested theory whose hypotheses have been scientifically corroborated. Second, CMT goes beyond the linguistic perception of metaphor; it sees it as a matter of language, thought, and action. Finally, CMT tools, i.e. linguistic metaphor, conceptual metaphor, image schema, Source Domain (SD), Target Domain (TD), are good analytical devices for cross-linguistic metaphor analysis (Hamdi 2018, 2015, 2010; Bacz 2001; Chen 2010).

Key concepts inherent in this theoretical framework will be defined in this section. These concepts involve (1) the distinction between conceptual metaphor and linguistic metaphor, (2) the experiential basis of metaphor, and (3) the main cognitive functions of metaphor.

2.1 Linguistic metaphor versus conceptual metaphor

CMT distinguishes between conceptual metaphor and linguistic metaphor (Lakoff and Johnson 1980). What native speakers *say* is linguistic metaphor. Conceptual metaphor refers to a mental representation that depicts how two expressions from different domains may be linked at an underlying level. In the same vein, CMT asserts that the essence of a conceptual metaphor consists in understanding one concept in terms of another. It is comprehended in terms of the systematic set of cognitive correspondences between two conceptual domains.

For instance, in the conceptual metaphor *COVID-19 IS WAR*, the elements of the source domain, *WAR*, map onto elements in the target domain, *COVID-19*. Thus, victims of war correspond to victims of COVID-19, the socioeconomic and psychological damages of the war correspond to the socioeconomic and psychological damages of COVID-19, the warriors correspond to the patients who fight against COVID-19, the restrictive measures taken during the war correspond to the preventive measures imposed during the pandemic.

In *The Contemporary Theory of Metaphor*, Lakoff (1993) explains the conception of metaphor in CMT on the basis of the conceptual metaphor *LOVE IS A JOURNEY*, as follows:

What constitutes the *LOVE-AS-JOURNEY* metaphor is not any particular word or expression. It is the ontological mapping across

conceptual domains, from the source domain of journeys to the target domain of love. The metaphor is not just a matter of language, but of thought and reason. The language is secondary. The mapping is primary, in that it sanctions the use of source domain language and inference patterns for target domain concepts. The mapping is conventional, that is, it is a fixed part of our conceptual system, one of our conventional ways of conceptualizing love relationships. This view of metaphor is thoroughly at odds with the view that metaphors are just linguistic expressions. If metaphors were merely linguistic expressions, we would expect different linguistic expressions to be different metaphors. Thus, 'We've hit a dead-end street' would constitute one metaphor. 'We can't turn back now' would constitute another, entirely different metaphor. 'Their marriage is on the rocks' would involve still a different metaphor. Yet we don't seem to have dozens of different metaphors here. We have one metaphor, in which love is conceptualized as a journey. The mapping tells us precisely how love is being conceptualized as a journey. And this unified way of *conceptualizing* love metaphorically is realized in many different *linguistic* expressions (1993: 208-209).

Lakoff's above description of the conceptual metaphor LOVE IS A JOURNEY shows that metaphor is a matter of language, thought, and action. In this metaphor, the abstract concept of 'love' is construed and expressed in terms of a more concrete concept, 'journey'. Thus, terms peculiar to journeys are used to express the experience of love.

2.2 The experiential basis of metaphor

According to CMT, metaphor has an experiential basis. For example, the conceptual metaphor MORE IS UP is grounded in a human bodily experience of the world: when we pour more fluid into a container, we see the level go up. This correlation between verticality and quantity derives from our physical experience with the environment (Kövecses 2002). In the same vein, the conceptual metaphor KNOWING IS SEEING as reflected by the linguistic metaphors "I see what you're saying," "His answer was clear", and "This paragraph is murky", has an experiential basis. It lies in the correlation between what we know and what we see: what we know comes through vision (Lakoff 1993).

2.3 Functions of conceptual metaphor

In CMT literature, conceptual metaphor can be structural, ontological and orientational (Kövecses 2002). Through structural metaphors we understand the target domain in terms of the structure of the source domain. This comprehension occurs on the basis of conceptual correspondences between the source and the target domains (Kövecses 2002). For instance, in the conceptual metaphor *COVID-19 IS WAR*, the elements of the source domain, *WAR*, map onto elements in the target domain, *COVID-19*. Thus, the victims of war correspond to the victims of COVID-19, the damages of war correspond to the damages of COVID-19, and the warriors correspond to the people who fight against COVID-19.

In ontological metaphors, we construe our experiences in terms of objects, substances, and containers. Personification, for instance, is a type of ontological metaphor (Kövecses 2002). The conceptual metaphor *COVID-19 IS A PERSON* is an ontological metaphor underlying the linguistic metaphors “*COVID-19 is killing people*” and “*COVID-19 has destroyed our national economy.*” In this metaphor, COVID-19, a virus, is personified by being given animate attributes, such as the ability to kill people and to destroy or harm something.

Oriental metaphors refer to basic spatial orientations, such as up-down, center-periphery, etc. (Kövecses 2002). For instance, *HAPPINESS IS UP* and *SADNESS IS DOWN* are orientational conceptual metaphors underpinning the linguistic metaphors “*The recent news about the virus raised spirits*” and “*The alarming speed of COVID-19’s spread made me feel down today.*”

3. Review of the literature

This section will summarize selected studies conducted on COVID-19 metaphors. These studies involve the works of Fernandez-Pedemonte et al. (2020), Sirait et al. (2020), Li (2021), Semino (2021), Kozlova (2021), Marron et al. (2020), and Alousque (2021).

Fernandez-Pedemonte et al.’s study (2020) purports to identify the ‘framing’ of the pandemic during the compulsory quarantine in Argentina. This paper examines the link between the discourses offered by politicians and the media in the digital era. It is conducted within the framework of Discourse Analysis. The data consists of 283 digital newspaper headlines from Argentina. The

findings suggest that the headlines are composed of metaphors of war, metaphors of care, and metaphors of time. In the metaphor of care, the government is portrayed as “maternal”. In the metaphor of time, references to time and time management are used.

Sirait et al.’s study (2020) aims at examining how the Indonesian media describe the corona virus through the use of metaphor in the headlines. The study is qualitative. The data is compiled from two popular online newspapers: *The Jakarta Post* and *Kompas.id*. The study identifies nine conceptual metaphors in the headlines: CORONA VIRUS IS AN ANIMAL, CORONA VIRUS IS AN ENEMY, CORONA VIRUS IS WAR, CORONA VIRUS IS A CRIMINAL, CORONA VIRUS IS AN UNWANTED GUEST, CORONA VIRUS IS A HARSH NATURAL ATTACK, THE NUMBER OF PANDEMIC CASES IS A MOUNTAIN PEAK, and CORONA VIRUS IS AN AUTHORITY. The authors assert that the most prominent metaphor is the ENEMY metaphor in which the pandemic is depicted as a “massive destroyer”.

Z. Li’s study (2021) analyzes the COVID-19 speeches of two Presidents: US President Donald Trump and Chinese president Xi Jinping. The paper mainly focuses on the use of war metaphors in the speeches. The findings suggest that both Presidents use the concepts of ENEMY, SOLDIER, and VICTORY in depicting the combat against the virus. However, they have different understandings of these war metaphors. For instance, both presidents describe the fight against the pandemic in terms of winning a victory over an enemy. Yet, unlike Xi, Trump explicitly links this victory to economic recovery by seeing it as “a key factor in the victory” (78). The author attributes these differences to a divergence in ‘framing’.

E. Semino’s study (2021) discusses different metaphors for the pandemic and explains why they are used. Using cognitive reasoning, the author explains why the pandemic is talked about metaphorically. In her paper, Semino focuses on the pervasiveness of war metaphor. She argues that the most frequent metaphors tend to derive from “basic, embodied, sensorimotor experiences” (2021: 51). She provides alternative metaphors, suggesting that FIRE metaphors are “appropriate” in communication about different aspects of the virus, such as contagion.

T. Kozlova’s paper (2021) examines cognitive metaphors of the pandemic in business news. The study is conducted within the theoretical framework of Cognitive Linguistics, which perceives metaphor as a cognitive instrument

reflecting “the way we reason and imagine the world”. The data is taken from the *Financial Times*. The results suggest that metaphors are pervasive in the depiction of the pandemic.

Marron et al. (2020) state that war metaphors are frequently utilized in clinical practice. This goes back to President Richard Nixon’s declaration of “a war on cancer”, wherein he describes cancer as “a relentless and insidious enemy” (2020: 624). The authors assert that metaphors are pervasive in two-thirds of conversations between oncologists and patients. In clinical conversations, people talk about “a fight” against the illness. Doctors depict how cancer “invades” healthy cells. Treatment is portrayed as a “frontline” therapy. When patients complete their treatment, they are described as “survivors” and “heroes.” The authors highlight the positive and the negative implications of war metaphors in the description of COVID-19. On the positive implications of war metaphors with COVID-19, they state that the war on COVID-19 sheds light on the “urgency” of the pandemic and serves as a “rallying cry” for medical societies and the public. Health care workers are empowered and their efforts acknowledged for they are risking their lives to save others. As for the negative implications, the use of war metaphors wrongly assumes that there is adequate medical staff, that there is a strategy, and that the right weapons and protections are available. These war metaphors imply that all health workers choose to put their personal lives at risk. They also downplay the work and efforts of those who are not working in the health care sector.

In her article on COVID-19 metaphors, Isabel Negro Alousque (2021) uses the cognitive approach to metaphor to identify the conceptual metaphors for COVID-19 in the political speeches of French President Emmanuel Macron and Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez between March and June 2020. The author identifies the following conceptual metaphors: THE VIRUS IS A HUMAN BEING, THE ACTION TO CONTAIN THE VIRUS IS WAR, THE VIRUS IS A MOVING HUMAN BEING, THE VIRUS IS A TRAVELLER, THE VIRUS IS AN ANIMAL, and THE VIRUS IS A NATURAL DISASTER. The author argues that this metaphorical network has three main aims: (1) to shed light on the destructive impacts of COVID-19; (2) to spread hope and courage; and (3) to call for joint efforts to stop the pandemic.

The above studies give insights into the use of pandemic metaphors in different settings. They shed light on the importance of metaphor by showing that during the pandemic, we “survive by metaphors” (Fernandez-Pedemonte et al. 2020).

By using metaphor, the media, for instance, plays an important role in framing public discourse, involving representations of disasters (Wallis and Nerlich 2005; Fernandez-Pedemonte et al. 2020).

4. Methodology

The study's methodology comprised two main phases: data collection and data analysis.

4.1 Data collection

The study adopted CMT as a framework to examine conceptual metaphors for COVID-19 in Tunisian Arabic. The corpus was taken from three Tunisian popular online newspapers: *Aljarida*, *Alchourouk* and *Assabah*. The choice of these three online newspapers is motivated by two main factors: (1) The three independent newspapers offer an updated coverage of the pandemic in Tunisia; (2) they are the most widely read newspapers by the Tunisian population. The online sites were carefully surfed to pick up any lexical unit including 'corona', 'pandemic', 'COVID-19', 'Covid', 'virus'.

After data collection, the selection criteria for metaphors stipulated by Charteris-Black (2004) were used. According to these criteria, a linguistic metaphor for COVID-19 is any lexical unit referring to the pandemic and involving two different domains, thus causing a "semantic tension" resulting from reification or personification. For example, the expression "*Corona is killing people*" is an ontological metaphor that is based on personification. The pandemic is depicted as an agent capable of killing or murdering people. Also, the expression "*The virus should be controlled*" is a metaphor that is based on reification. Here, the virus is construed as an object that one can control or manipulate.

4.2 Data analysis

Analysis of the data proceeded in two stages: the interpretative stage and the conceptual metaphor identification stage. The interpretative stage highlighted the metaphorical sense of the expression by shedding light on the semantic tension (Charteris-Black 2004) that classified it as metaphor. The conceptual metaphor identification stage identified the two conceptual domains that constituted the conceptual metaphor, by following the CMT convention, A IS B.

This specific methodology was chosen for data analysis in order to control the move from linguistic metaphor to conceptual metaphor in a rigorous manner. The analytical implications of this methodology consist in conducting non-intuitive and objective analyses of the data at hand.

Table 1 below illustrates the different stages for data analysis:

Example	Identification of metaphor	Interpretative stage	Conceptual metaphor identification stage
<i>Corona is killing people</i>	There is a semantic tension between two different domains <i>CORONA</i> and <i>A PERSON</i> capable of killing.	'Corona', a virus, is given animate attributes. It is portrayed as an agent or a person able to commit murder.	CORONA IS A PERSON.

Table 1: Stages for data analysis

5. Results and discussion

The conceptual metaphors that were found to underlie the Tunisian media discourse in the three online newspapers: *Aljarida*, *Alchourouk* and *Assabah* are the following: *COVID-19 IS WAR*, *PANDEMIC VICTIMS ARE WAR VICTIMS*, *PREVENTION IS AN ACTION*, *COVID-19 IS A NATURAL ATTACK*, and *COVID-19 IS A PERSON*. The following section will describe these metaphors in further detail.

5.1 COVID-19 IS WAR

The country is portrayed as a war zone where people have to face or to stop the pandemic, as in examples (1)-(3) below:

- (1) 'aun ishhd *mu'arraḍ binisba kubrā lilisāba* (*Aljarida*, 2 July 2021).
The notable exposed rate big infection.
'The notable is very *exposed to infection by the virus*.'
- (2) Albaḥth fī ṭuruq 'amaliyya *lissaytara 'ala intishâr al'adwâ* (*Aljarida*, 2 July 2021).
Looking in ways practical to-control on spreading-of contagion.
'Looking for practical ways *to stop contagion*.'

- (3) Iqrār ijraāt *litaṣaddī lil'adwā* (Aljarida, 2 July 2021).
Taking measures to-face to contagion.
'Taking measures *to face contagion*.'

The pandemic conditions are depicted in terms of wartime conditions. This is reflected in the choice of lexis to describe the pandemic in examples (4)-(8) below:

- (4) *Sinārio mur'ib* fil ayyām al-qādima (Assabah, 29 June 2021)
Scenario scary in days coming.
'A *scary scenario* will happen in the coming days.'
- (5) *Arqām murtafi'a* min alisābāt (Assabah, 29 June 2021)
Number high from infected cases.
'A *big number* of infected people.'
- (6) Allajna al'ilmīyya *tajtami' bisifatin 'ājila* bida'wa min raīs addawla (Aljarida, 2 July 2021)
Committee scientific meet manner urgent invitation from head-of State.
'The Scientific committee had an *urgent meeting* initiated by the Head of State.'
- (7) Lāzim ḥad mā yokhruj middār *waljaysh* yuwaffar almākla lil manāzil (Aljarida, 2 July 2021).
Must no-one leave home and-the-army provide food to-homes.
'No one should leave the house, and *the army* should provide the food to the households.'
- (8) Hal *kharaja* alwad' assiḥi fil qayrawān '*ala assaytara?* (Aljarida, 2 July 2021).
Did get-out situation health in Kairouan from control?
'Did the health situation in Kairouan *get out of control?*'

In examples (4)-(8) above, the Tunisian media uses terms peculiar to the domain of war to depict the rapid spread of the pandemic. These terms involve "A scary scenario", "A big number of victims", "An urgent meeting", "The army", and "get out of control." During the pandemic, caregivers are depicted as "Aljaysh alabiyad" (the White Army), "Juyūsh aṣṣaf alawwal" (frontline soldiers), and "Abtāl" (heroes). COVID-19 patients are described as "fighting" against the virus. Patients and caregivers are portrayed as forming "a united front" against the virus. The pervasiveness of the conceptual metaphor COVID-19 IS WAR in the Tunisian media discourse corroborates the CMT claim that humans tend to use an experiential concept to understand and express a new or a more abstract concept. In this context, Tunisians use their prior knowledge related to war

(scary scenario, number of victims, pressure, emergency, loss of control, army) to construe and express a new experience (the spread of a novel virus).

In this context, Isaacs/Priesz argue that war metaphors are “context-dependent” (2021: 6). They have “positive” and “negative” implications. They elaborate on this point as follows:

A war metaphor for COVID-19 may resonate with the public, may help people recognize the threat to public health, may help them take their obligations such as social distancing seriously.... On the other hand, over-simplifying complex issues reduces ethical complexity, risking the transformation of complex moral choices into goodies-and-baddies trivialization (2021: 6).

In the same vein, on the use of war metaphors in cancer and COVID-19, Marron et al. (2020) observe that the COVID-19 pandemic has given a “new life” to war metaphors (2020: 624). According to their analysis, war metaphors pertaining to the pandemic are “more passive” than those used in cancer, as they depict patients as “victims” or “innocent bystanders” (2020: 625). In addition, patients are often portrayed as heroes in the battle against cancer; with COVID-19, however, heroism is attributed to the health care workers.

5.2 PANDEMIC VICTIMS ARE WAR VICTIMS

Deaths from COVID-19 are reported in a way that adds to the image of a bitter war with huge loss of life. The number of the pandemic “victims” is portrayed as escalating, as in examples (9)-(14) below:

- (9) *A'dâd murtafi'a* mil alişâbât bifayrûs *corona* (*Assabah*, 2 July 2021).
Escalating number from infected with-virus Corona.
'The number of *corona cases* is *escalating*.'
- (10) Akbar ḥaşıla lilwil âyât *sajjalathâ* Gafsa janūbiyya bi 123 *wafât* (*Achouruk*, 2 July 2021).
Big number for-governorates registered Gafsa Southern with 123 deaths.
'The highest number of *deaths* has been *registered* in the south of Gafsa.'
- (11) Tawâsil alnasaq almurtafa' *lilwifâyât* annâjima 'an alişâba bifayrûs *corona* fi wilâyat Sfax (*Achourouk*, 2 July 2021).
Continuous rate of-deaths due from infection with virus *corona* in governorate Sfax.

'There is a continuous rate of *deaths* from corona in the governorate of Sfax.'

- (12) Munadhamât aṣṣaḥa al- âlamiyya: '*Tūnes al ūlâ* 'arabiyyan wa ifriqiyyan binisbat **ḍaḥâyâ corona**' (Achourouk, 2 July 2021).

Organization Health World: "Tunisia first Arab and Africa in victims corona."

'WHO: "*Tunisia is ranked first in the Arab world and in Africa in terms of corona victims.*"'

- (13) **ḥaṣīla thaqīla** (Assabah, 2 July 2021).

death-rate heavy.

'A heavy death rate.'

In examples (9)-(13) above, the use of the term "ḍaḥâyâ" (victims) highlights the perception of corona victims as war victims. As in wars, there are winners and losers. In war, the winner is whoever is stronger and has more resources. With COVID-19, the winner is the "survivor," the one who won the "battle" against the virus. The loser is the victim whose immune system, for instance, is too fragile to resist the virus.

High risk cities are construed as "red zones", as in example (14) below:

- (14) Tamma tasnīf 9 wilâyât **kamanâṭiq ḥamrâ dhât mustawâ** '*ikhtitâr murtafa*' (Aljarida, 2 July 2021).

Were classified 9 governorates as-zones red with rate risk high.

'9 governorates have been classified as *high risk* 'red zones.'

As shown in examples (9)-(14) above, the number of deaths from the virus is important as if in a deadly war. In this war, the virus is construed as the winner, causing many victims. Negative expressions are associated with the pandemic situation, such as "heavy", "red zones", and "death."

5.3 PREVENTION IS AN ACTION

With the outbreak of COVID-19, several preventive measures are taken by the Tunisian government in order to reduce or to stop the spread of the virus. These measures consist of social distancing, circulation restrictions, and lockdowns. These preventive measures are portrayed by Tunisian media as mandatory actions, as reflected in examples (15)-(16) below:

- (15) *Tajīl wa ilghâ kâfat attadhâhurât al-jamâiriyya* (Assabah, 2 July 2021).
Postponing and cancellation all events public.
'All public events are postponed and cancelled.'
- (16) *Attatbīq aṣṣârim liman' attanaqqul bayna almanâtiq almawbūa* (Assabah, 2 July 2021).
Implementing strict prevention circulation between regions infected.
'Measures preventing circulation in the infected regions are strictly implemented.'

It can be noticed that the preventive measures are issued to the public as orders. No possibility is left for people to discuss or reject them.

The preventive measures range from wearing face masks to the total lockdown of highly infected areas. This is reflected in examples (17)-(18) below:

- (17) *ḍarūrat attaqaḡyud bil ijrât wal iltizâm bil protocol aṣṣaḡḡi wakhâṣa irtidâ alkammâma* (Assabah, 2 July 2021).
Necessity respecting measures and committing to health protocol mainly wearing masks
'It is necessary to respect the preventive measures and to be committed to the health protocol, especially when it comes to wearing masks.'
- (18) Qayrawân: *attamdîd fî alḡajr assiḡḡi aṣṣâmil* (Aljarida, 2 July 2021).
Kairouan: extension in confinement health total
'Kairouan: Total confinement extended.'

Examples (15)-(18) above corroborate Semino's description of these preventive measures as "actions demanded by law" (2021: 3).

5.4 COVID-19 IS A NATURAL ATTACK

With the rapid spread of the pandemic, and the increasing number of COVID-19 victims, it has become difficult to control the pandemic. Tunisian media expresses the difficulty to contain the pandemic by portraying it as a natural attack. Thus, adjectives and nouns referring to the pandemic as "a disaster," "a tsunami," and "a violent wave" that "hit the country" are used to express the conceptual metaphor COVID-19 IS A NATURAL ATTACK, as in examples (19)-(21) below:

- (19) Túnis: man almasúl 'an taḥawwil tafaṣi Corona fil bilād *kāriṭhiyyan* (*Assabah*, 2 July 2021).
Tunisia: who responsible in conversion spreading-of corona in the-country disastrous.
'Tunisia: Who is responsible for making the virus situation 'disastrous' in the country?'
- (20) Innaḥā *mawja rahība* (*Assabah*, 2 July 2021).
It-is wave scary.
'It is a scary wave.'
- (21) *Mawjat tsūnamī corona taḍrib Túnis* (*Assabah*, 2 July 2021).
Wave tsunami corona hit Tunisia.
'A tsunami wave hit Tunisia.'

What these natural attacks ("a wave," "a tsunami," "a disaster") have in common is that they are capable of destroying things and people so badly that they no longer exist. They are ferociously invasive. They represent the power of nature in front of which man is powerless. It can be argued that the conceptual metaphor COVID-19 IS A NATURAL ATTACK highlights human powerlessness to contain the pandemic. Example (19) above refers to the person responsible ("masūl") for the "disaster." As with natural disaster management, there should be a disaster manager who would be held accountable for the pandemic's move from a mere crisis to a ferocious "disaster". This person has specific responsibilities. He should prepare an action plan to face the disaster and respond to it rapidly and efficiently. This person should also be endowed with specific qualities, such as shrewdness, i.e., the ability to detect the coming of disasters well in advance.

The pandemic is construed as a global disaster that requires solidarity and collaboration among and between different countries, as in example (22) below:

- (22) Munadhamât mujtama' madaniṯ tuṭliq *nidâ istighâ tha duwalī* min Túnis (*Assabah*, 2 July 2021).
Organizations society civil sent a-call rescue international from Tunisia.
'Civil society organizations have sent a call for international help from Tunisia.'

In the same way that people alone cannot handle the effects of war or of natural disasters, communities would find it difficult to face a pandemic if left unattended or isolated. International collaboration is depicted as necessary for communities to survive the virus.

5.5 COVID-19 IS A PERSON

The Tunisian media uses the conceptual metaphor *COVID-19 IS A PERSON* to describe the pandemic. This metaphor is expressed by the linguistic metaphors in examples (23)-(24) below:

(23) *Dharūrat atta'âyush ma'a alvayrūs* (Assabah, 2 July 2021).

Need co-existence with the-virus.

'The need to *co-exist with the virus.*'

(24) *Al-vayrūs yaqtul* alatfâl '(Assabah, 2 July 2021).

The-virus kill the-children.

'*The virus is killing children.*'

In example (23), the Tunisian media argues for the need for "ta'âyush" (co-existence) with the virus by depicting the virus as a person with whom people might live. Thus, people are implicitly invited to make concessions for a peaceful "co-existence" with the virus. In example (24), the virus is personified by being assigned human attributes, such as the ability to perform the act of killing. The virus is portrayed as a criminal, an agent that is able to change things so badly that they no longer exist. The conceptual metaphor *COVID-19 IS A PERSON* highlights people's powerlessness in the face of the pandemic. Despite the strict preventive measures and the "heroic" efforts of the "White Army", the virus is growing so ferocious that it is "killing children" mercilessly. Thus, people have no choice but to surrender to this virus for a peaceful "co-existence".

The study has shown that metaphors are pervasive in Tunisian media discourse during the pandemic. The study's results corroborate the results of previous research done on metaphor use during the pandemic (Alousque 2021; Fernandez-Pedemonte et al. 2020; Sirait et al. 2020; Semino 2021). Similarly to this study, Alousque's study suggests that the following conceptual metaphors underlie the political speeches of French President Emmanuel Macron and Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez: *THE VIRUS IS A HUMAN BEING*, *THE ACTION TO CONTAIN THE VIRUS IS WAR*, and *THE VIRUS IS A NATURAL DISASTER*. These similarities in the conceptualizations of COVID-19 among different linguistic communities might be attributed to the fact that the global experience of the pandemic has generated "common" and "universal" feelings of anxiety and panic among different cultures. Interestingly, a few metaphors identified in previous research (Sirait et al. 2020; Alousque 2021, for instance), are not found

in my data, such as CORONA VIRUS IS AN ANIMAL, CORONA VIRUS IS AN UNWANTED GUEST, THE VIRUS IS A TRAVELLER, and CORONA VIRUS IA AN AUTHORITY.

6. Conclusion

The objective of this paper was to identify the metaphors underlying Tunisian media discourse during the pandemic in three popular online newspapers. Five conceptual metaphors were identified in this study: *COVID-19 IS WAR*, *PANDEMIC VICTIMS ARE WAR VICTIMS*, *PREVENTION IS AN ACTION*, *COVID-19 IS A NATURAL ATTACK*, and *COVID-19 IS A PERSON*. The study shows that the country is depicted in Tunisian media discourse as a war zone where people have to cooperate to face or stop the pandemic. Pandemic conditions are conceived of as wartime conditions. Deaths from COVID-19 are reported in a way that intensifies the image of a bitter war with huge loss of life. To stop the pandemic, governments impose preventive measures that are depicted as, in Semino's words, "actions demanded by law" (2021: 3). Adjectives and nouns referring to the pandemic as "a disaster", "a tsunami", and "a violent wave" that "hit the country" with no mercy are used to express the destructive effects of this pandemic on people. Negative attributes are utilized to describe the pandemic, such as "heavy", "scary", "disastrous", "strict", "high risk", "dangerous", and "deadly." The virus is construed as a person with whom people can co-exist. It is assigned human attributes, such as the ability to carry out the act of killing. Analysis of Tunisian media discourse shows that the pandemic has been a negative experience for the Tunisian community.

The study is contributive to CMT for several reasons. To start with, it provides evidence from a language other than English for the CMT claim that humans tend to use a familiar concept to understand a new or difficult concept. On the basis of language data, the study has shown, for instance, that Tunisians use their prior knowledge of war and natural attacks to understand a new experience related to the outbreak of a novel virus. Second, the study fills the gap in the literature, at least partially, by identifying the conceptual metaphors for COVID-19 in Tunisian media discourse as, to the best of our knowledge, no research has been done on this topic so far. Third, this study touches upon the universality of some conceptual metaphors for COVID-19. Indeed, the metaphors identified in the Tunisian discourse are found to exist in other

languages, as is reflected in the works of Fernandez-Pedemonte et al. (2020), Sirait et al. (2020), Li (2021), Semino (2020), Alousque (2021), and Kozlova (2021). It can be argued that the shared global pandemic has engendered “common” and “universal” feelings of panic and anxiety among different cultures. This might provide one of the reasons why these conceptual metaphors are shared by unrelated languages/cultures.

7. References

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