

# The Study of Cartoons about COVID-19 in China Daily from the Perspective of Multimodal Metaphor

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## Abstract

With the outbreak of COVID-19, Chinese has taken useful measures to fight against the disease. The media plays a crucial role in transmitting information. Cartoons as one of types in media can vividly show messages. This study tries to apply Multimodal Metaphor to analyze COVID-19 cartoons in China Daily. These cartoons can be divided into three types, including HUMAN metaphor, IMPLEMENT metaphor and HUAMN BODY metaphor, which can not only present Chinese way to combat the epidemics, but also reflect the spirit of putting people's lives first, nationwide solidarity, sacrifice, respecting science and a sense of mission for humanity.

## Keywords

COVID-19 cartoons; Multimodal Metaphor; China Daily.

## 1. Introduction

In the end of 2019, the novel coronavirus pneumonia has broken out suddenly in China, which is called COVID-19 by the World Health Organization then. The epidemic of COVID-19 has still spread around the world until now. Hundreds of thousands people died from this unexpected infectious disease. This public health emergency is one of the central focus in China and the international community. It definitely does severe harm to the both physical and mental health of the public, as well the society stability. Every mainstream media in different countries have played the critical role in transmitting information promptly and accurately and leading a positive public opinion by the aid of languages, pictures or videos. China Daily as one of the most influential media both in China and foreign countries has published news about not only the current situation in China, but also sharing the practice of domestic handling of COVID-19. In news reporting of COVID-19, a number of cartoons use metaphors. At present, cognitive linguistics believe that metaphor is not just a kind of rhetorical device, but an important cognitive style to understand and express abstract concepts. The mapping between concrete or familiar concepts and abstract or strange concepts is not randomly combined, which is constrained by bodily experience and culture. The previous study can show that most of languages have the common conceptual metaphors even under different culture background, but there are still some differences. Although there have been some studies focusing on metaphors used in news reports, few have studied cartoons. The application of Multimodal Metaphor can take an indispensable effect on simplifying complicated semantic meanings and giving foreign readers an insight into Chinese minds. Recently, China has laid emphasis on telling Chinese stories. Therefore, it is essential to analyze cartoons under the background of Chinese culture. This study makes attempt to research pictorial metaphors of cartoons about COVID-19 based on the data in China Daily. Furthermore, the study tries to uncover the way people think of the infectious disease from the perspective of Multimodal Metaphor.

## 2. Literature Review

The early research of metaphor can be dated back to Aristotle who defined it as using one thing to refer to another. For a long time, metaphor has been viewed as a rhetoric. Until Lakoff and Johnson firstly put forward Conceptual Metaphor Theory in the book *Metaphors We Live by* in 1980, the cognitive perspective of metaphor developed a new field. They believe "metaphor is pervasive in everyday life, not just in language but in thought and action." (2003) It is necessarily pointed out that our conceptual system, as well as the way we think and what we do is a matter of metaphor. Metaphor is a significant method to convey semantic meanings, which expands the way of thinking and language expressions. And then Forceville(1996) proposed pictorial metaphor in his book *Pictorial Metaphor in Advertising*, which studied the metaphor about advertising pictures from the visual level. He brought non-verbal symbols into the category of metaphor research, and thought that multimodality includes image symbols, written symbols, spoken symbols, sign language, sound, music, smell, taste and touch.

Some scholars have studied metaphors related to the public health emergencies. One part of them pay close attention to foreign media, the other part concern about Chinese discourse. So this study will try to find out the classification and characteristics of pictorial metaphors used in Chinese media that may make differences with foreign ones.

## 3. Research Design

The study focuses on the one of mainstream media in China, China Daily, which also has an global edition for foreign readers. China Daily in 2020 launched a special theme page online entitled "Fighting COVID-19: The Chinese Way" to better introduce the Chinese practices how to deal with the epidemic of disease to the international community and show the image of a responsible country. All cartoons coming from this column will be analyzed. The Critical Metaphor Analysis put forward by Charteris-Black (2004) is applied to identify which metaphors are chosen. The source domain is classified by the most apparent features.

## 4. The Analysis of Cartoons about Covid-19

These cartoons will be classified into the following categories through investigating in detail. These metaphors can be mainly divided into HUMAN metaphor, IMPLEMENT metaphor and HUMAN BODY metaphor. And at last, the study will summarize cognitive function.

### 4.1. HUMAN Metaphor

Most of the anti-epidemic cartoons apply HUMAN metaphor, the main source of which is medical workers. The source domain of HUMAN metaphor is linked to the target domain of FIGHTING AGAINST EPIDEMIC. Medical workers have played an important role in this outbreak of disease. They must take the risk of suffering from the disease and face the challenges that the unprecedented disease has developed rapidly and there was no effective therapy at first. Therefore, medical workers can be called hero in the heart of all Chinese.

Generally speaking, the process of mapping between HUMAN metaphor and the target domain only focuses on human himself. It means that this kind of people are known for some typical characteristics, traits or achievements they have, which can be seen as one of the source domains. During the period of fighting against of coronavirus, medical workers are the most active figures to gain attention and praise because of their dedicated trait. They are the pioneers to fight the deadly disease, especially they are on behalf of the country that has the ability to defeat epidemics. It is obvious that the HUMAN metaphor of medical workers can reflect anti-epidemic spirits.

## 4.2. IMPLEMENT Metaphor

The source domain of IMPLEMENT metaphor involves medical supplies and daily tools. There are different implement occurring in cartoons, including syringe, mask, umbrella and so on. The process of fighting for the coronavirus is like a battle between the whole Chinese people and the virus. Medical workers are familiar image in people's vision. So medical supplies are always visible near them, like syringe and medical masks that appear in cartoons to show confrontation towards the disease. It is no doubt that medical supplies seem like powerful weapons coming to the mind. The appearance of implement can show the way how people fight against COVID-19. Syringe is used by doctors all the time to inject drugs into bodies to kill or avoid invasion of virus. After the occurrence of epidemic, scientists all over the world have tried their hard to develop vaccine. In China, vaccine for COVID-19 has rapidly come into use for everyone, which help people produce antibodies and keep healthy. Mask is another common sign. And its application scenarios expand from hospitals where medical workers must wear to public places where everyone is suggested to use to prevent the spread of the disease. So in these cartoons, common people wearing masks usually can be seen. Besides, daily used implements, like umbrella and broom, appear in these cartoons as well. Although common implements only hold a small portion in the field of IMPLEMENT metaphor, they have the capacity to reflect anti-epidemic policies and nationwide spirits called by Chinese leaders under the urgent situation. According to the application context, IMPLEMENT metaphor can be divided further into two categories. The tools occurring in COVID-19 cartoons can be related to different places. Syringe is frequently used by medical workers in hospital. Hence, it is easy for audience to link the syringe with the hospital and medical workers. As a result, though the figure of medical workers do not emerge, audience often connect syringe with the spirit of fighting with the coronavirus. And umbrella as one of the source domain in the area of IMPLEMENT metaphor is everyone needs in weather change, which is extremely different from the syringe. Because this implement is available for the public to protect from the rain. The application of common tools is a sign that every ordinary people is involved in this epidemic. No matter you are a medical worker or just one of the common, no one has the power to escape from this infectious disease. Therefore, everyone has the responsibility to protect from the virus by wearing mask in a right way, not gathering and other measures.

## 4.3. HUMAN BODY Metaphor

HUMAN BODY metaphor refers to the part of body, like heart and hand. And the hand can be further divided into an open hand with five fingers and a fist. The hand metaphor usually symbolizes power. Among the cartoons, the target domain of hand metaphor is mapped for Chinese spirit of defeating COVID-19, which stands for nationwide solidarity and a sense of mission in humanity. Especially in one of cartoons, the hand has five different fingers with five kinds of people in a different color. This unique image can be mapped for all countries in the world fighting against the same enemy, COVID-19. Five fingers mean that people all over the world relate with each other without separation, which can present Chinese attitude that facing the epidemics, countries are required to joint efforts. Therefore, the target domain of an open hand metaphor connects with a sense of mission for humanity. And fist also can show that everyone's power can get together to have more strength to combat coronavirus epidemics. Medical workers are like fist punching towards virus. As a result, fist can evoke multimodal metaphor that is fist is mapped for nationwide solidarity.

## 4.4. Cognitive Function of Metaphors

*China Daily* as one of mainstream media fulfills a communicative function between different cultures. Chinese government has taken a prompt measure to deal with the epidemic. The reason why Chinese can achieve the goal of defeating the virus is that everyone has the anti-

epidemic spirits. This special spirit is the spiritual product of fighting against COVID-19 that can inspire people to hang over the panic and frightening feeling. Once, President Xi has said the characters of anti-epidemic spirits are putting people's lives first, nationwide solidarity, sacrifice, respecting science and a sense of mission for humanity. These spiritual features in combating the virus can be defined as the target domain to interpret the source domain, including HUMAN, HUAMN BODY and IMPLEMENT metaphor. Through these cartoons, foreigners can have an opportunity to know more and clearly about the reason why Chinese people have taken these actions. The principal reason is not only that the measures are effective to solve the epidemic, but also Chinese are united by these spirits.

## 5. Conclusion

In the period of fighting against COVID-19, cartoons in China Daily can show Chinese way to the whole world. This study tries to research these images from the view of Multimodal Metaphor. The pictorial metaphors in these cartoons can be mainly analyzed from three dimensions, including HUMAN metaphor, IMPLEMENT metaphor and HUMAN BODY metaphor. Other countries can learn useful experience from cartoons and know more details about Chinese spirits, anti-epidemic spirits, that can be shown through these cartoons.

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