



A Cross-Cultural Analysis on Conceptual Metaphors Used in the Written Reports of Disease Outbreak by Mainstream Media*

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Received: March 13, 2024

Revised: August 3, 2024

Accepted: December 10, 2024

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* This paper was supported by the research semester program of Jeonju University for the fall semester of 2024, granted to the corresponding author.

ABSTRACT

Sun, Jing, Yohan Hwang, and Dong-Jin Shin. 2025. A cross-cultural analysis on conceptual metaphors used in the written reports of disease outbreak by mainstream media. *Korean Journal of English Language and Linguistics* 25, 1-22.

This article compares conceptual metaphors related to COVID-19 as manifested in the written reports of mainstream media in China and the United States. According to the three steps of critical metaphor analysis proposed by Charteris-Black (2004), 12 conceptual metaphors in *People's Daily* and 13 conceptual metaphors in *The New York Times* were identified separately by making use of two self-built corpora. The reasons for employing similar and different conceptual metaphors in the coverage of two media have been discussed with the help of the corpus analysis tool. Finally, this study finds that conceptual metaphors concerning COVID-19 have the function of transmitting information about COVID-19, producing a persuasive function, and conveying certain attitudes and ideologies. The findings facilitate cross-cultural communication on COVID-19 and confirm the universality and variations of conceptual metaphors influencing language use.

KEYWORDS

conceptual metaphor, COVID-19, contrastive analysis, critical metaphor analysis

1. Introduction

Since late 2019, COVID-19 has swept the whole world and has become the biggest concern for human beings. Scientists from all over the world have decided to spare no efforts to research its origin, symptoms, as well as its therapy. Alongside this scientific inquiry, the pandemic has also spurred discussions in other disciplines, including linguistics, as how we describe and communicate about the virus shapes public understanding and response. This linguistic perspective aligns with Whorf's (1956) argument that our perception of the world and the way we think about it are profoundly affected by the structure of the languages we speak. Therefore, this paper aims to shed light on the different thinking patterns in China and the United States by conducting a comparative study on the reports of COVID-19 in the mainstream media of both countries. This paper attempts to distinguish similarities and differences in conceptual metaphors (CMs) used in the two countries.

Research in various disciplines has been conducted to help people to understand the situation, covering pandemic outbreaks, prevention, and vaccination (Baloch et al. 2020), as well as its impact on society and people's mental health (Bashir et al. 2020, Rajkumar 2020). Besides, numerous linguistic analyses contribute to revealing how the disease is conceptualized metaphorically, what the public's reactions and concerns are, and how the government responds to the pandemic.

Recent years have witnessed a growing interest in comparative studies of Chinese and English political discourse, but corpus-based empirical studies framing COVID-19 in written reports are still rare. Both China and America were significantly affected by the outbreak of COVID-19, and their media coverage provides valuable insights into the framing of this global challenge. While China and America have distinct cultural and historical influences, they also operate within increasingly interconnected and complex global systems. This study seeks to explore how media in these two countries, which are often viewed as representative of certain cultural tendencies, address the pandemic. This article, based on two comparable self-built corpora in which the metaphorical expressions are exhaustively identified and annotated, aims to investigate the proportion and distribution of conceptual metaphors related to COVID-19 in Chinese and English from the perspective of critical metaphor analysis (CMA). Hence, based on the cognitive approach to conceptual metaphors, this paper attempts to address three specific research questions.

- 1) What conceptual metaphors are employed by mainstream media in China and the United States?
- 2) What are the reasons for the use of different conceptual metaphors in the reports of China and the United States?
- 3) What are the functions of these conceptual metaphors?

2. Literature Review

2.1 Conceptual Metaphor (CM)

The conceptual metaphor proposed by Lakoff and Johnson (1980) holds that the essence of metaphor is to understand and experience one kind of thing in terms of another. Therefore, every metaphor involves two domains, including the source domain and the target domain. Systematic cross-domain mapping has been adopted in understanding metaphors since people tend to use the familiar, known, or concrete words belonging to the source domain to describe an unknown, unfamiliar, or abstract target domain. That is, certain concepts in the target domain

can be understood in light of the source domain because particular features of the source domain can be projected onto the target domain. Thus, metaphor can be viewed as a way of conceptualizing the world.

In this vein, Lakoff and Johnson (1980) claim that “metaphor is pervasive in everyday life, not only in language but also in thought and action” (p. 1). Therefore, our thought pattern is metaphorical. The understanding of metaphor should not be limited to its superficial linguistic forms or expressions. What matters are the conceptual metaphors in a person’s conceptual system. On the one hand, all human behaviors, whether practical, mental, or cultural, are influenced by metaphorical thinking. On the other hand, the conceptual metaphors that underlie linguistic expression, in turn, constrain human thought.

Conceptual metaphors can also influence people to feel, think, and act differently. Numerous studies have shown that manipulating how people think about a source domain can affect how they reason or feel about a target domain by backgrounding or foregrounding certain aspects of the target domain (Casasanto et al. 2010). Up to now, scholars have made enormous contributions to the development of conceptual metaphors (Gibbs and Colston 1995, Kövecses 2003, McCloskey 1995, Ortony 1993). Studies on conceptual metaphors cover diverse areas, especially economic discourse, disease discourse, and political discourse. For instance, Maestre (2000) examines how economics is conceptualized and presented to the public through repeatedly selected source domains by analyzing conceptual metaphors in the headlines of the business sections of *The Times*. Sontag (1979, 2006) describes the associations of conceptual metaphors with diseases—tuberculosis, cancer, and AIDS. She uncovers the potential damage of the WAR metaphor on patients, which particularly brings shame and blame, eventually leading to fatal consequences for the patients, such as being cursed or avoiding seeking treatment. Further, researchers explore how politicians manipulate language to influence people’s decision-making and perceptions of reality through their choice of conceptual metaphors (Charteris-Black 2011, Miller 1979). For instance, Ji (2021) compares conceptual metaphors in the Hong Kong riot reports of the British and American mainstream media and shows that the Western media induce and trigger public opinion by highlighting the features of events to implant their own ideology.

2.2 Research on the Conceptual Metaphors of COVID-19

Conceptual metaphors are often employed in important social issues, such as crisis communication, health emergencies, and political issues (Abdel-Raheem 2022, Nerghes et al. 2015, Semino et al. 2018). For example, there is continuous usage of conceptual metaphors in pandemics, such as Swine flu (Angeli 2012, Hallett and Hallett 2012) and SARS (Chiang and Duann 2007, Wallis and Nerlich 2005), etc. Since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, scholars have explored different linguistic aspects of political discourse in terms of COVID-19 (Kim and Kreps 2020). In particular, a growing number of studies focusing on the conceptual metaphors of COVID-19 have been carried out at an increasing rate (Cipolletta and Ortu 2021, Craig 2020, Semino 2021).

Regarding the COVID-19 crisis, it is not surprising that the WAR metaphor dominates the political discourse in social and news media (Sabucedo et al. 2020). Drawing on critical discourse analysis, Castro Seixas (2021) examines the usage of WAR metaphors in the speeches of key political representatives during the COVID-19 pandemic and discovers seven purposes for deploying the WAR metaphor in the management of the current pandemic. In addition, the WAR metaphor raises a sense of alarm related to the threat and severity of COVID-19. According to Chen et al. (2021), the curbing of the virus has been described as a ‘WAR’ since the emergence of COVID-19 in 2019. Figure 1 illustrates the mapping process of framing pandemic prevention and control as being similar to launching a war (the source domain) with the anti-pandemic effort (the target domain). Through this mapping, the public’s sense of crisis and urgency to mobilize the whole country to respond to this changeable pandemic increased immediately.

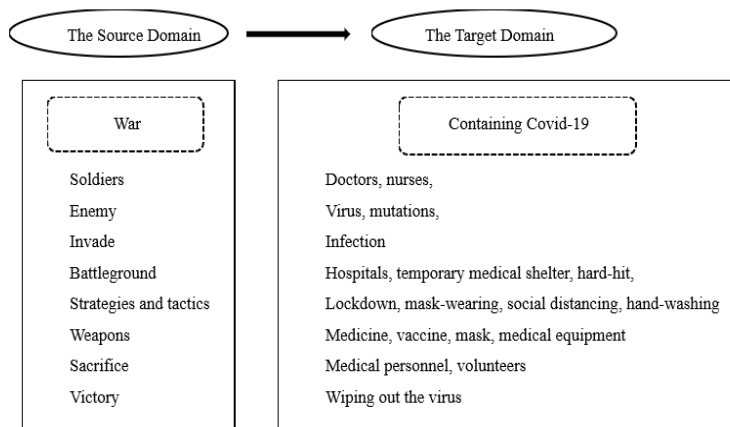


Figure 1. The Mapping Relationship Between War and COVID-19 (Adopted from Chen et al. 2021)

At the same time, there are voices against the prevalence of the WAR metaphor. Panzeri et al. (2021) state that some journalists and academics worry that the employment of the WAR metaphor in clarifying the pandemic might have negative outcomes for people, leading citizens to “prefer conflictual practical solutions to solve the problems” (p. 17). Some scholars question the appropriateness of the WAR metaphor (Bates 2020) and call for advice for alternative conceptual metaphors (Semino 2021). In a study of how former US President Donald Trump utilized the WAR metaphor to shape public understanding of COVID-19, Bates (2020) reveals that the entailments of the WAR metaphor chosen by Trump undermine policy response to the virus, and Bates therefore calls for adopting alternative metaphors to construct the public perception of the pandemic. In terms of the alternative conceptual metaphors, de Saint Preux and Blanco (2021) empirically investigate whether using the WAR metaphor and SPORT metaphor separately will lead people to feel and reason about COVID-19 differently. The experiment shows that the use of the WAR metaphor framing COVID-19 intensifies the negative emotions compared with the use of the SPORT metaphor.

Given that the pandemic has impacted people’s lives across countries in various ways, especially concerning its spread patterns and government-imposed measures, Brugman et al. (2022) confirm that metaphor appreciation of individuals “differs between source domains and country contexts, mostly in terms of aptness” (p. 101). across three European countries.

Kazemian and Hatamzadeh (2022) also examine the similarities and differences of source domains regarding the way COVID-19 is conceptualized in American English and Persian. They identify several conceptual metaphors that differ between cultures, often reflecting unique historical, political, or religious contexts. Results show that some metaphors are shared between cultures, especially metaphors involving bodily and life experiences, while other metaphors can be regarded as culture-specific due to their unique history, politics, and religion. For instance, both American English and Persian adopt the WAR metaphor in illustrating COVID-19. Compared to the common interpretation of the WAR metaphor as an “enemy,” emphasizing defense and attack, drawn from a military framework in American English, the WAR metaphor uniquely emphasizes “unfair battles” in Persian, resonating with Iran’s historical experiences, especially the Iran-Iraq war. Additionally, in the context of Islamic culture, the virus is uniquely considered a God’s gift, as it encourages acts of kindness and mutual assistance during challenging times. In other words, the unmanageable nature of the crisis inspires prayers for protection and survival, fostering spiritual connection. At the same time, the pandemic is regarded as a God’s gift

in the sense that it prompts impious people to repent of their sins and join pious people to survive the disastrous pandemic. Therefore, the unique depiction of the virus as a God's gift highlights how faith imbues the pandemic with meaning and hope rather than purely hardship.

From the analysis above, it is evident that the comparative studies on conceptual metaphors associated with China and the United States about COVID-19 are comparatively rare. Chen (2020) tries to undertake a comparative study by exploring the metaphors in the coverage of COVID-19 in both China and the United States and concludes that although China and the United States belong to different cultural categories, they still share some similarities in thought patterns. However, he does not explore the underlying motivation of the similarities and differences in conceptual metaphors employed by the two countries. Therefore, this paper attempts to study the conceptual metaphors used in the news reports from China and the United States. With the help of corpus tools, the different thinking patterns or modes of the two countries will be revealed in detail.

3. Method

3.1 Research Objects and Data Collection

People's Daily, an official and authoritative newspaper in China, aims to promote the policies of the Communist Party of China and record social changes in China. Along with the largest circulation, the authority and influence of *People's Daily* are beyond the reach of many other media in China. *The New York Times* is an American daily newspaper that has earned a national and international reputation for thoroughness over time. Based on their official websites, this research collected news reports from January 1, 2020 to August 31, 2021 separately to form two different corpora, using 'COVID-19,' 'corona virus,' 'coronavirus,' or 'pandemic' as keywords. The collected reports were all related to COVID-19. One hundred and twenty news reports from different sources were randomly selected as the database for the research, including sixty news reports from *People's Daily* as *Chinese COVID-19 Corpus (CCC)*, and sixty from *the New York Times* designated as *American COVID-19 Corpus (ACC)*. A total of 241,847 characters or words are collected and analyzed. The two databases were nearly equal in terms of the number of counting units used in the two languages: 145,769 characters for CCC and 96,078 words for ACC. Table 1 summarizes the composition of the two self-built corpora.

Table 1. Composition of the Two Self-built Corpora

Source of Corpus	<i>People's Daily (CCC)</i>	<i>The New York Times (ACC)</i>
Time duration	2020-01-01–2021-08-31	2020-01-01–2021-08-31
Articles for each month	3	3
Total articles	60	60
Total	145,769 Characters	96,078 Words

Note. There is a basic ratio between the Chinese character count and the English word count. Every 1,000 Chinese characters will be translated into about 600–700 English words, or every 1,000 English words will be translated into about 1500–1700 Chinese characters (depending on the nature of the text).

3.2 Instruments

Two instruments were employed to carry out the research. One was the segmentation system of JiebaR, which was used to segment the Chinese news in advance and then export the CCC corpus into TXT format. Then, the

Corpora of *CCC* and *ACC* in the TXT format was analyzed using the other instrument of AntConc 3.5.5. AntConc 3.5.5 is a free corpus toolkit for data analysis, which allows users to locate keywords and their concordance and to determine the frequency and collocates of keywords.

3.3 Research Method and Procedures

The method used to analyze conceptual metaphors in this research was CMA, proposed by Charteris-Black (2004). As a new method of critical discourse analysis, CMA intends to unveil the ideology and motivation behind words, which involves three steps: metaphor identification, metaphor interpretation, and metaphor explanation.

Metaphor identification was used to distinguish metaphorical expressions from non-metaphorical expressions. In this research, both quantitative and qualitative methods were adopted to determine the conceptual metaphor in each corpus. The present study employed a three-step metaphor identification procedure (MIP) adapted from the Pragglejaz Group (2007) to separate conceptual metaphors in the corpora of *CCC* and *ACC*. The MIP in this study consisted of the following steps:

First, through a comprehensive manual reading of the entire database, potential metaphorical expressions concerning COVID-19 were identified following the MIP standard. During this complete manual reading, expressions identified as metaphorical were marked, and their metaphor keywords were documented.

Second, to validate and ensure the completeness of the manual identification, these documented metaphor keywords were used to conduct KWIC (keyword in context) searches using AntConc 3.5.5. This verification step helped ensure no metaphorical expressions were overlooked in the manual analysis. For each retrieved expression, the literal and contextual meanings were compared at the semantic, pragmatic, and cognitive levels to confirm the presence of semantic contradiction resulting from concept mapping. Expressions meeting this criterion were confirmed as conceptual metaphors, while non-metaphorical uses (noise) were excluded. To enhance reliability, this entire identification procedure was repeated after a two-week interval. Any discrepancies were resolved through discussion with another researcher. This combination of thorough manual identification and systematic computer-aided verification maximized the identification of conceptual metaphors.

Third, the confirmed conceptual metaphors were categorized according to Lakoff and Johnson's (1980) principles. The frequency of metaphorical expressions within each source domain was then calculated using AntConc 3.5.5's Concordance function.

In addition, this research used the method of the source domain resonance proposed by Charteris-Black (2004) to see the distribution of certain conceptual metaphors in each corpus qualitatively. The resonance of the source domain equals the sum of the types of keywords and the sum of the frequency of the metaphorical expressions in that category. The following is the formula: $\text{Resonance} = \Sigma \text{type} \times \Sigma \text{token}$

The Type here refers to the metaphorical keywords and Σtype is the sum of the metaphorical keywords. The token is the times of occurrence of each metaphorical keyword, and Σtoken means the sum of the frequency of the metaphorical keywords. Take the WAR metaphor as an example. Suppose the WAR metaphor has four keywords: 'battle,' 'enemy,' 'frontline,' and 'kill,' of which 'battle' occurs once, 'enemy' twice, 'frontline' three times, and 'kill' four times. Then the resonance value of the WAR metaphor in the corpus is $(1+1+1+1) * (1+2+3+4)$.

Then a qualitative approach was used to reveal the reasons and thoughts behind the conceptual metaphors of COVID-19 in detail, while comparative analysis was used to elaborate on the deep reasons for the similarities and differences in the two corpora in reporting on COVID-19.

4. Results

4.1 General Description of CMs in CCC and ACC

In the corpus of *People's Daily*, there were 12 dominant conceptual metaphors about COVID-19, and details of every type of conceptual metaphor are shown in Table 2. Table 2 provides categories of conceptual metaphors, numbers of types and tokens, the value of resonance, and its proportion.

Table 2. Conceptual Metaphors Related to COVID-19 in the CCC and ACC Corpora

Source Domain	CCC		ACC	
	Resonance	% of total resonance	Resonance	% of total resonance
WAR	78,736	80.79	55,859	65.81
PERSONIFICATION	12,450	12.77	16,366	19.28
DISASTER	828	0.85	7,191	8.47
CONTAINER	264	0.27	1,862	2.19
LIGHT	360	0.37	288	0.34
EXAM	1,246	1.28	0	0
CHESS	1,110	1.14	0	0
WEATHER	900	0.92	0	0
RELIGION	0	0	1,092	1.29
GREEK MYTHOLOGY	0	0	260	0.31
DRAMA	0	0	216	0.25
SPORTS	0	0	285	0.34
CONSTRUCT	792	0.81	0	0
RACE	430	0.44	0	0
BODY	240	0.23	0	0
COMPUTER	120	0.12	0	0
ORIENTATION	0	0	765	0.90
FOOD	0	0	312	0.37
JOURNEY	0	0	234	0.28
PLANT	0	0	144	0.17
TOTAL		99.99		100

Seven types of conceptual metaphor, the resonance value of which exceeded 500 out of 12 types, were as follows in CCC. The WAR metaphor held the leading position, accounting for 80.79%. The second majority conceptual metaphor was PERSONIFICATION, taking up 12.77%. The EXAM metaphor and the CHINESE CHESS metaphor took up a similar percentage separately, followed by the WEATHER metaphor for 0.92%, the DISASTER metaphor for 0.85%, and the CONSTRUCT metaphor for 0.81%. These seven types of metaphor shaped the majority of source domains in *People's Daily*, which accounted for 98.56% of the total resonance. While the resonance of the other five types of metaphors ranged from 430 to 120, which is relatively low. The diversity of conceptual metaphors used to frame COVID-19 in *People's Daily* reflects the multi-faceted nature and profound societal impact of the crisis. By employing various metaphorical frameworks—from war and personification to examinations and chess moves—the media discourse sought to capture different aspects of the crisis: its threat to public health (WAR metaphor, 80.79%), its dynamic and unpredictable nature (PERSONIFICATION at 12.77% and WEATHER metaphors), the challenges of control and strategy (CHINESE CHESS metaphor), and the need for systematic response (CONSTRUCT metaphor). This rich metaphorical

landscape suggests that a single conceptual framework was insufficient to convey the complexity and severity of the pandemic. The high concentration (98.56%) of resonance in these seven primary metaphors, combined with their diverse conceptual domains, indicates both the media's deliberate effort to frame the pandemic comprehensively and the inherent complexity of the crisis itself. This systematic metaphorical framing not only highlights the unprecedented nature and urgency of the pandemic but also provides multiple cognitive frameworks through which the public could understand and respond to this novel health crisis.

In terms of conceptual metaphors in *The New York Times*, the resonance value of 13 source domains was found in ACC. The former six types of metaphors constituted the majority of source domains, the resonance value of which was more than 500. The WAR metaphor occupied 65.81% of conceptual metaphors, followed by PERSONIFICATION at 19.28%, the DISASTER metaphor at 8.47%, and the CONTAINER metaphor at 2.19%. Decreasingly, the RELIGION metaphor shared 1.29 % of total resonance, and the ORIENTATION metaphor shared only 0.90%. The other seven source domains together were the minority of source domains, with a resonance value under 400. To sum up, the metaphorical expressions covered a wide range of aspects of COVID-19, including its outbreak, the scale of its spread, preventive measures, its impact on economic and social life, and various policies on coping with it at the level of all human beings.

4.2 Similarities in CMs Employed in CCC and ACC

4.2.1 WAR Metaphor

As illustrated in Table 2, the WAR metaphor, which accounted for 80.79% of the CCC and 65.81% of the ACC corpus, ranked as the highest metaphor resonance in both corpora. It is no surprise that the WAR metaphor dominated the two corpora in portraying COVID-19 because war framing is prevalent in the universal conceptualization of human experiences which involve danger and difficulties (Flusberg et al. 2018, Semino 2008). Thus, in the WAR metaphor, COVID-19 is regarded as '*an enemy*' which threatens people's life. *People's Daily* has declared the pandemic to be a '*People's war*.' In line with the '*wartime condition*,' the government has appealed for unity and has called for citizens to make their contribution to winning the war by staying inside their homes to avoid spreading the virus.

As described in *New York Times*, while the pandemic accelerated and spread, dozens of countries deployed strict measures to try to '*disarm*' this perplexing '*foe*' of human beings. During the presidential campaign, Mr. Biden reminded people that '*America is not going to lose this war*' and encouraged people not to '*surrender to the fatigue*' by '*picking up the wartime mantle*' to '*fight the year-long battle*.'

Although the WAR metaphor conveys a negative association, evoking an atmosphere of confrontation and tension, the officials aimed to remind people of the bad memories of war to mobilize all the possible means to defeat the virus together. Hence, presenting a pandemic as a war effectively prepares the people for unprecedented dark times, accepting the severity of the pandemic psychologically, understanding the exceptional restrictions in the COVID-19 crisis, and finally inspiring people to act collaboratively for the common good.

4.2.2 PERSONIFICATION

PERSONIFICATION is another major conceptual metaphor shared by the two corpora in the description of COVID-19. Lakoff and Johnson (1980) define PERSONIFICATION as a process that "allows us to comprehend a wide variety of experiences with nonhuman entities in terms of human motivations, characteristics, and activities"

(p. 33). In other words, its source domain is human beings, including human thought, language, and behavior. It can be seen from Table 2 that PERSONIFICATION was the second most used conceptual metaphor in both corpora, occupying 12.77 % of the total resonance in CCC and 19.28 % in ACC.

The following examples of metaphorical keywords of PERSONIFICATION have been extracted from both corpora.

Example 1: 我们可能对新冠肺炎感到厌烦，但病毒不会厌烦我们，它会对身体较弱的人们下手，还会对其他弱点下手，如不平等、分裂、否认、一厢情愿和顽固无知…… (We may be sick of COVID-19, but the virus will not be fed up with us, it will use its hand to hit weaker people, and also hit at other weaknesses, such as inequality, division, denial, wishful thinking, and stubborn ignorance...)
(CCC, 2021-06-03)

Example 2: You can start peace talks with your enemy. You can change your policies to lessen the threat of terrorism. But you cannot negotiate with a virus, and we know that new threats are coming along every year.
(ACC, 2020-06-01)

At its basic level, a virus is a packet of data benefiting from being shared with the host. However, in the two Examples above, the virus is vividly personified through metaphorical expressions that attribute human characteristics to it. In Example 1, the Chinese expression ‘下手’ (literally meaning ‘to use one’s hand to hit’) portrays the virus as a person with physical capabilities and intentional actions. This human-like agency is further reinforced by emotional attributes (*‘be fed up with’*) and the ability to target vulnerabilities. In Example 2, the ability to ‘negotiate’ suggests a reasoning entity capable of dialogue and compromise. These PERSONIFICATION metaphors in both corpora are extensively used to conceptualize abstract aspects of the pandemic, including the virus itself, its symptoms, variants, mutations, vaccines, breakthrough cases, and super spreaders.

The power of PERSONIFICATION lies in its ability to help the public comprehend these novel and complex pandemic-related concepts through familiar human experiences. By mapping human attributes, motivations, and behaviors onto the virus, these metaphors make the abstract more concrete and comprehensible. While some expressions might evoke military associations, their primary function is to construct the virus as a human-like entity with agency, emotions, and strategic capabilities, thereby making the unfamiliar medical and scientific concepts that emerged since 2020 more accessible to public understanding.

4.2.3 DISASTER Metaphor

Another alternative source domain shared by the two corpora is the DISASTER metaphor, in which the outbreak of the pandemic is like a disaster in nature because the virus and natural disasters both share some features, such as having a natural source and the potential power to cause heavy casualties. Using prevalent metaphorical descriptions of natural disasters in the COVID-19 crisis evokes emotions of fear and conceptually emphasizes the damage of the pandemic. The usage of the DISASTER metaphor in the context of COVID-19 has been discussed in this specific context.

Example 3: 6月2日，武汉公布全民核酸检测结果。这场为期10多天、覆盖近千万人、规模空前的大检测，集中展现中国抗疫的重大成果，也让曾经的疫情，暴风眼，武汉成为外媒眼中的‘最安全城

市’。(On June 2, Wuhan announced the results of the nationwide nucleic acid test. This more than 10-day large-scale test, covering nearly 10 million people and an unprecedented scale, focuses on the major achievements of China’s anti-pandemic, and also makes Wuhan, ‘the eye of the storm,’ the ‘safest city’ in the eyes of foreign media.)

(CCC, 2020-09-08)

Example 4: In our market, you get companies to ramp up production of low-margin items by offering ever-higher prices. So \$1 masks cost \$6. Without a national system for such purchases in a crisis, we are essentially forcing hospitals and states to negotiate the price of water during a drought.

(ACC, 2020-05-08)

In Example 3, the framing scheme of ‘*the eye of the storm*’ cause Wuhan city to gain the world’s attention immediately. In Example 4, the price of protective equipment hindered pandemic control in the U.S., which was conceptualized as ‘*negotiating the price of water during a drought*.’ Thus, the metaphorical language used to discuss natural disasters merits consideration in the development of effective pandemic prevention and control in the future; however, the option of adopting the DISASTER metaphor also backgrounds the role of the government (Hauser and Fleming 2021). One attribute of the DISASTER metaphor that has been projected here is that nothing can be done in the face of the disaster, ignoring the responsibility of the officials and human beings.

4.2.4 CONTAINER Metaphor

The CONTAINER metaphor is another conceptual metaphor that was found in both corpora. The CONTAINER metaphor, in which a concept is represented as having an inside and outside and as being capable of holding something else, is another cross-cultural, universal, and pervasive type of conceptual metaphor. The resonance of CONTAINER metaphors took up 0.27% of CCC and accounted for 2.19% of ACC (See Table 2).

During the pandemic, strict quarantine measures have been taken by many countries, which will postpone the spread of COVID-19 and buy scientists time to develop vaccines and cures. However, the intervention inevitably will cause physical and mental health issues for people; therefore, the bodily experience of containing the virus in some places will promote people’s understanding of the strict measures. After all, everyone wants to end this pandemic and wipe the virus from the earth. At the same time, people will honor the sacrifices made by some cities and all would like to reach out to offer help.

In the CCC and ACC corpora, the Coronavirus has been conceptualized with various metaphorical keywords as shown in Table 3. The similar usage of tokens in both corpora, such as ‘*lockdown*,’ ‘*contain*,’ ‘*shutdown*,’ ‘*out of*,’ etc., also vividly depicts the government’s resolution to control the virus immediately and instantly.

The metaphorical keyword ‘lockdown’ occupies first both in CCC and ACC. However, through the concordance function of AntConc 3.5.5, the difference is obvious. *People’s Daily*, on the one hand, has adopted an official tone, highlighting the positive side of the situation to cheer people up, such as praising the joint efforts and sacrifices made by all walks of life. On the other hand, the language used in *People’s Daily* is relatively high - context, emphasizing moral and emotional appeals. But *the New York Times* has concentrated more on criticism and negative reporting, and the language used is comparatively low - context, revealing the strong individualistic orientation of its culture and people.

Table 3. Comparison of the CONTAINER Metaphor in the CCC and ACC Corpora

CCC Corpus		ACC Corpus	
Metaphorical keywords	Token	Metaphorical keywords	Token
Lockdown_(封城)	12	Lockdown	44
Close_(封闭)	8	Contain/contained	42
Lift the lockdown_(解封)	6	Shut down	14
Block and control_(封控)	2	Out of	9
Lockdown restriction_(封锁)	2	Containment	7
Lockdown a city_(封一座城)	1	Shutdown	5
Seal up_(封住)	1	Pod	4
Province closure_(封省)	1	Spilled	3
		Locking down	2
		Closed its borders	1
		Quarantine pod	1
		Influx	1

4.2.5 LIGHT Metaphor

The LIGHT metaphor is also shared by both corpora in conceptualizing COVID-19, details of which are illustrated in Table 4. Light bears many symbols; it has often been a symbol of good in the world, whereas darkness is usually linked with depression or despair. Spiritually, light is symbolic of guidance and illumination, embodied experiences for all human beings. In line with the underlying embodied experience of this symbolism, the token of ‘dawn’ and ‘rays of light’ in CCC and ACC offer us the hope of defeating the virus, while ‘darkness,’ ‘shadow,’ ‘overshadow’ imply the temporary sufferings we have right now. The employment of the LIGHT metaphor evokes joy, hope, and all the greatest things in life. Especially, the token of ‘light at the end of the tunnel’ in the context of the pandemic reminds us that all the sacrifices we have made up to now are temporary and worthwhile.

Table 4. Comparison of the LIGHT Metaphor in the CCC and ACC Corpora

CCC Corpus		ACC Corpus	
Metaphorical keywords	Token	Metaphorical keywords	Token
Illuminate_(照亮)	5	Light	12
Darkest hour_(至暗时刻)	4	Shadow	5
Light_(光)	4	Light at the end of the tunnel	5
Rays of light_(光芒)	3	Darkness	4
Darkness_(黑暗)	3	Illuminating	2
Light of hope_(希望之光)	2	The glimmer of hope	1
Light at the end of the tunnel_(隧道尽头的光芒)	2	The living flame of the Easter hope	1
Sunnyside_(光明)	2	Overshadow	1
Condensing light into a torch_(聚光成炬)	2	Dawn	1
Candlelight_(烛火)	1		
Gleam_(微光)	1		
Dawn_(曙光)	1		

To sum up, the examples and illustrations above show that the Chinese and English languages share many similarities in conceptualizing COVID-19. Conceptual metaphors arise from embodied human experiences (Lakoff and Johnson 1980). One reason for the occurrence of the same conceptual metaphors in two polarized cultures is

the similarity in the product of human conceptualization, which is profoundly influenced by certain universal properties of the human body, which impose structure onto real life and influence our understanding and cognition.

4.3 Differences in CMs Employed in CCC and ACC

4.3.1 The Unique CMs in *People's Daily*

Three dominant conceptual metaphors unique to *People's Daily* have been retrieved from the CCC corpus. The first type is the EXAM metaphor, which ranked third in the CCC corpus, after the WAR metaphor and PERSONIFICATION. The typical metaphoric expressions of the EXAM metaphor can be seen in Table 5, in which 'big exam' occurs 33 times, emphasizing the gravity of the pandemic the Chinese Government and people face right now. Functions of the EXAM metaphor are discussed through the following example below.

Table 5. Metaphorical Expressions of the EXAM Metaphor in the CCC Corpus

Keywords/Token			
Big exam_(大考)	33	Chinese answer_(中国答卷)	7
Answer_(答卷)	12	Qualified answer_(合格答卷)	2
Grade_(成绩)	8	Examination questions_(考题)	2
School report_(成绩单)	3	Examination paper_(试卷)	1
Stress testing_(压力测试)	2	Compulsory questions_(必答题)	2
Additional exam_(加试)	1	Multiple choice questions_(选择题)	1
Good answer_(精彩答卷)	1	Grade of prevention and control_(防控成绩)	1

Example 5: 面对疫情，各国都面临着无法回避的两难问题：如何兼顾疫情防控与经济发展？这道考题着实不易。(In the face of the epidemic, all countries are faced with an unavoidable dilemma: how to balance epidemic prevention and control with economic development? This exam question is not easy.)
(CCC, 2020-12-15)

In terms of the dilemma of balancing pandemic prevention and economic development, Example 5 illustrates it as an 'exam question.' Therefore, everyone in China tends to see how to solve the problem and then tries to understand and appreciate the actions taken by the government.

The position of the Chinese education system and the beliefs about education in society account for the uniqueness of the EXAM metaphor in the CCC corpus. On the one hand, Western education pays more attention to the exploration of the unknown as well as the cultivation of students as independent individuals to achieve personal values. On the other hand, education in China is deeply influenced by Confucianism, focusing on virtues and morality and fosters and practices core socialist values and the Imperial Examinations (Keju), which are used to select talent for the country's administrative system. There is a common belief in Chinese society that education can guarantee a better life and offer a ticket for a more promising future, which is fulfilled mainly through exams. Hence, in China, exams have a critical role, which can be fully illustrated through the reputation of the national university entrance exam (Gao Kao) as being the one single exam to set the course of a student's whole life. As a foundation of education in China, it also has penetrated every aspect of people's lives. The possibility of enrolling in a university, getting a secure job in the future, and bringing glory to one's ancestors and families depends on

one's performance on certain big exams. This might be why *People's Daily* projects pandemic control as taking an exam to raise people's concerns about COVID-19 prevention and control.

The next typical source domain is the CHINESE CHESS metaphor, the resonance value of which ranked fourth in CCC.

Table 6. Metaphorical Expressions of the CHINESE CHESS Metaphor in the CCC Corpus

Keywords/Token			
Whole chess_(大局)	34	An offensive move_(先手棋)	5
Overall chess_(全局)	24	Layout_(布局)	5
A game of chess_(一盘棋)	20	Dilemma in chess_(困局)	2
Changeable chess_(变局)	13	On the offensive move_(先手)	1
New chess_(新局)	6	Clever move_(高招)	1

Table 6 displays the Communist Party of China, confronting COVID-19 resembles playing Chinese chess—a traditional board game in China that has been played for at least two thousand years and can be seen on every corner of the streets or parks.

The high acceptance of the CHINESE CHESS metaphor in CCC can find its explanation through the strategies and philosophy underlying Chinese chess. In terms of strategies, one basic starting point for winning the game is to consider the whole situation in every move. Namely, as the relationships between the chess pieces are interconnected and inter-restricted, one needs to pay attention to the impact of each move on the whole situation, which can be explained through the proverb of *one careless move loses the whole game*. The corresponding philosophy of Chinese chess is to hold the ideas of the overall situation, which is a demonstration of the collectivistic orientation at the core of placing group goals above individual goals.

Taking the move of the *pawn* chess piece as an example, the *pawn* in international chess has the right to move one or two steps when they are in their original positions and to be promoted to the movements of a *queen*, *bishop*, or *knight* when reaching the bottom line, thus offering them freedom to adventure into the unknown and realize their self-value. On the contrary, the *pawn* in Chinese chess can never go back after reaching the opponent's domain, thus reflecting obedience to the rules on the one hand and the spirit of sacrifice for the whole situation on the other hand. Therefore, when facing an unprecedented event in contemporary history, one strategy employed in China is to consider the whole country as a chess board to mobilize the enthusiasm of all parties and local governments. With respect to COVID-19, the deployment of strategies, methods, and restrictions derives from the perspective of their overall impact on the whole country. Therefore, this holistic view of establishing the idea of obeying and serving the overall situation is fulfilled easily in China by dispatching medical personnel and deploying the necessities from local governments, departments, and non-government organizations.

The application of the CHINESE CHESS metaphor can be explained in the following example.

Example 6: 全国一盘棋、上下一条心，看似无解的难题迎刃而解，战‘疫’初期的困局步步扭转。

(With one game of chess and one mind from top to bottom across the country, a dilemma in chess has been solved, and the predicament in the early stage of the ‘pandemic’ war has been reversed step by step.)

(CCC, 2020-09-08)

In Example 6, ‘*the game of chess*’ demonstrates that the Chinese Government is making a comprehensive arrangement to deploy preventive measures for the pandemic in the whole country; the ‘*dilemma in chess*’ indicates

the dilemma in playing chess, referring to the difficulty in the early stages of the pandemic. The prevention and control of the pandemic cannot be accomplished by any department or region alone. Concerning such a tough battle, everyone needs to play their roles well, gives full play to their advantage. Hence, the unity and tactics in Chinese chess have been projected to confront the pandemic, which highlights the overall view of traditional Chinese culture and encourages people to follow the prevention and control measures and overcome the temporary difficulties together. The CHINESE CHESS metaphor justifies the sacrifices to be made, such as some cities being shut down in favor of the whole nation's benefit.

The WEATHER metaphor also appeared frequently in CCC, ranking fifth in the corpus. The keywords were all related to weather phenomenon and are represented by words in Table 7, some of which outline a beautiful vision for human beings, while others stress the adversity people have to endure.

Table 7. Metaphorical Expressions of the WEATHER Metaphor in the CCC Corpus

		Keywords/Token			
Haze_(阴霾)	12	'Plague' haze ('疫'霾)	1	Go ahead as planned regardless of the weather (风雨无阻)	5
Rainbow_(彩虹)	4	Timely Rain (及时雨)	3	In the same storm-tossed boat (风雨同舟)	5
Sunshine_(阳光)	5	Squally Showers (狂风骤雨)	2	Work unceasingly regardless of the weather (栉风沐雨)	1
Spring_(春天)	2	Spring scenery (春光)	2	Black clouds blotted out the sky (乌云遮天)	1
Wind and rain_(风雨)	11	The sun scatters the clouds (云开日出)	1	A good rain after a long drought (甘霖)	1

The greater portion of the WEATHER metaphor embedded in the reports of COVID-19 in CCC might be attributed to the farming culture of China, which is a big agricultural country with a long history of farming, depending on the observation and mastery of weather changes. Since ancient times, words, and phrases related to weather have been rooted in Chinese farming activities and daily life. The typical representation is to cultivate crops and live a life under the guidance of twenty-four solar terms.

As for the choice of which weather elements to use and how to frame the pandemic through weather-related words and phrases in CCC, this has also been driven by preferences and awareness of cultural sensitivity (Donald 2022). Specifically, Chinese tend to use a lot of two-character and four-character words to express ideas, containing one or two images at the same time, for example, metaphorical expressions like '风雨同舟,' '风雨无阻,' and '栉风沐雨' in Table 7, which adopt two images of 'wind' and 'rain' to describe the difficulties related to COVID-19.

The rich accumulation of weather-related words and phrases formed a relatively stable cognitive model among the huge rural population, and it offers the sources of the WEATHER metaphor—interpreting abstract concepts. The insight into COVID-19 through the WEATHER metaphor enhances the public's awareness of its long-term impact and wins the favor of the public easily, irrespective of educational level, literacy, and profession. Its application can be explained via the following example.

Example 7: 告别极不平凡的 2020 年之际, 世界各国人民共同祈愿风雨之后见彩虹; 更能懂得, 在 2021 年的新征程上, 需要大家携起手来, 风雨同舟, 早日驱散新冠肺炎疫情的阴霾, 努力建设更加美好的地球家园。(On the occasion of saying goodbye to the extraordinary 2020, people from all over the

world pray together to see a rainbow after the wind and rain; we can better understand that on the new journey in 2021, we need everyone to join hands and stand together through wind and rain to dispel the haze of the novel coronavirus pandemic as soon as possible. Strive to build a better earth home.)

(CCC, 2021-01-01)

Example 8: 中国疫苗是许多发展中国家获得的第一批疫苗，堪称‘及时雨’。赤道几内亚总统奥比昂表示，中国疫苗‘为当地抗疫带来希望的甘霖’。(The Chinese vaccine is the first batch of vaccines obtained by many developing countries, which can be called a ‘timely rain.’ Equatorial Guinea’s President Obiang said that the Chinese vaccine “brings a rain of hope for the local anti-pandemic.”)

(CCC, 2021-08-01)

In Example 7 the pandemic is like the ‘*wind and rain*,’ and ‘*haze*’ in daily life; it will disappear and be replaced by a ‘*rainbow*,’ which offers hope to people in hard times. The Chinese vaccine in Example 8 has been compared to ‘*timely rain*,’ and a ‘*rain*’ of hope for other countries; its importance and popularity have been delivered to everyone’s heart.

To sum up, being aware of the Chinese cultural background is a prerequisite for understanding these three prominent conceptual metaphors in CCC. The EXAM metaphor, CHINESE CHESS metaphor, and WEATHER metaphor inevitably reveal the underlying cultural attributes, including historical background, social context, philosophical thoughts, local customs, and so on. At the same time, the employment of these metaphors displays the Chinese government’s resolution to contain COVID-19 and boosts national sentiments and solidarity among people, thus paving the way for building a community of common destiny.

4.3.2 The Unique CMs in *The New York Times*

In the corpus of ACC, four dominant conceptual metaphors typical to English were identified. They are the RELIGION metaphor, GREEK MYTHOLOGY metaphor, DRAMA metaphor, and the SPORTS metaphor.

The RELIGION metaphor ranked fifth compared to other conceptual metaphors in ACC, and its metaphorical expressions are illustrated in Table 8 below.

Table 8. Metaphorical Expressions of the RELIGION metaphor in the ACC Corpus

Keywords/Token							
Doom	2	Prophets	1	Lazarus	1	God’s punishment	1
Jihad	1	Gospel	1	Redeem	1	His glorious	1
Stigma	1	Reckoning	1	Purgatory	2	An act of God	1
God	1	Suffering	8	Redemption	1	Promised land	1
Sins	1	Resurgences	1	The gods	1	A blessing from God	3
Mantra	1	Salvation	3	The devil	2		
Limbo	1	Anthem	2	Holy Grail	1		

Compared to China, religion is rooted in Western cultures and permeates nearly every aspect of social life in the United States, with language not being an exception. Likewise, religion infiltrates the corpus of ACC to depict the pandemic. In the eye of Maulana Saad Kandhalvi, a Tablighi Jamaat leader, the coronavirus is ‘*God’s punishment*,’ and we do not need to fear it. Besides, others hold that the pandemic is ‘*an act of God*’ and that it is an inescapable incident, suggesting a negative attitude toward confronting COVID-19. Former President Trump even claimed that

his catching the coronavirus was ‘*a blessing from God*’ to promote the miracle cure he recommended. Besides, according to the networks of scientists, they are chasing the pandemic’s ‘*holy grail*,’ which is the antibody to protect against all the viruses that may threaten humans. From the virus’s point of view, *The New York Times* commented that ‘the primal instinct of virus is just to do what God commanded to newly created humans in Genesis 1:28: be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it,’ predicting that viruses can evolve, quickly and efficaciously. No wonder one headline warned ominously that ‘*the devil is already here*’ to depict the coronavirus variants up to now. The description of Denmark as the ‘*new Promised Land*’ outlines the vision for peace and the future for other countries adopting the same best practices for controlling the pandemic. On the contrary, religious language is rarely used in official dialogue in China, which can account for the rare appearance of the RELIGION metaphor in *CCC*.

Besides, people tend to express themselves by adopting the stories from Greek mythology, from which arises the GREEK MYTHOLOGY metaphor in the *ACC* corpus. The keywords employed are as follows (see Table 9) and details have been explained in the following example.

Table 9. Metaphorical Expressions of the GREEK MYTHOLOGY Metaphor in ACC

Keywords/Token					
Oedipus	5	Atlas	1	Agamemnon	1
Apollo’s allow	4	Arrows	1	Sphinx	1
Achilles’ heel	1	Ares	1	herculean	1
Athena	1				

Example 9: Testing has proved the persistent Achilles’ heel in the U.S. response. Even in ‘hot zones’, because of a shortage of tests, they were often rationed to the very ill or essential workers. That makes it difficult to guide treatment and nearly impossible to reopen society.

(*ACC*, 2020-05-08)

Example 9 depicts the failure in testing COVID-19 as ‘*the Achilles’ heel*,’ which is fatal in the U.S. response to the pandemic. Even though lots of public health specialists predicted the severity and have regarded COVID-19 as the biological equivalent of Sept. 11 in some ways, the Trump government still failed in the first step of testing the exact number of infected individuals. Through this metaphor, everyone realized where the problem was and there was just no way out at that time.

The next source domain peculiar to *ACC* is the DRAMA metaphor, and Table 10 shows its metaphorical expression to construct COVID-19. In terms of a discussion about how the Trump government is responding to the crisis and the push to revive the economy, a reader commented on citizens’ COVID-19-related sacrifices for the economy in this way: ‘*in a famous skit, the comedian Jack Benny is assailed by an armed thief who demanded “your money or your life”, Benny hesitates to respond.*’ Through this metaphor, the government’s attitude of prioritizing the economy over public health is vividly described. The economy is the government’s priority, in which lives are sacrificed for money.

Table 10. Metaphorical Expressions of the DRAMA Metaphor in the ACC Corpus

Keywords/Token					
Scenario	11	Onstage	2	The protagonist	2
Tragedy	3	Center stage	1	Comedian Jack Benny	1
Playwright	2	Skit	1	A ticket out of the pandemic	1

The last source domain in the ACC corpus is the SPORTS metaphor, as illustrated in Table 11. The type of sports the conceptual metaphors employs varies according to the game, from cards to sports, thus demonstrating the spirit of competition and adventure.

Table 11. Metaphorical Expressions of the SPORTS Metaphor in the ACC Corpus

Keywords/Token					
Game changers	2	In the second inning	2	Bingo card	1
Endgame	2	Play the blame game	1	Wild cards	1
Marathon	2	Playing Whac-A-Mole	1	Baseball game	1
Cards	2	The finish line	1	Handoff	1
Sprint	1	Drops the ball	1		

Americans often emphasize the values and personal growth cultivated through sports, such as teamwork, resilience, and a spirit of adventure. The diversity of sports metaphors in the ACC corpus reflects this cultural dimension, where sports are seen as a source of enjoyment, challenge, and self-improvement. While there are variations within the United States, this perspective aligns with the broader cultural narrative of embracing competition and pushing personal limits. In contrast, Chinese sports culture is shaped by different social and educational priorities. Due to the high-pressure academic environment, students may have limited opportunities to engage in sports unless they are tied to measurable achievements, such as winning games for school recognition or securing opportunities for enrollment or employment. Besides, for Americans, sports have contributed to racial and social integration and have been regarded as the ‘*social glue*’ bonding the country together. These cultural differences not only help explain how sports metaphors resonate differently in American and Chinese contexts but also shed light on why the ACC uses sports as a source domain in its reporting on COVID-19.

Example 10: The bottom line: Wear a mask, and keep your distance. ... Hope for a treatment, a cure, a vaccine. Be patient. We have to pace ourselves. If there’s such a thing as a disease marathon, this is it.
(ACC, 2020-06-02)

The ‘*disease marathon*’ metaphor in Example 10 cleverly shows both the hard work needed and the hope we hold during the pandemic. Just as runners in a marathon know they have a long way to go but can see the finish line in their minds, this comparison helps people understand two things: we need to save our energy and keep going, but we can also look forward to eventually beating the virus through treatments and vaccines. This dual aspect of the metaphor resonates particularly well with American audiences, who culturally value both the character-building journey of athletic endeavor and the achievement of challenging goals.

Based on the analysis of unique conceptual metaphors in CCC and ACC, different source domains exist in framing COVID-19 across different languages. Gibbs (1999) points out that conceptual metaphors do not just arise from the embodied experience alone, but some emerge from bodily interactions that are defined by the culture to some degree. Yu (2008) concludes that “metaphor emerges from the interaction between body and culture. While metaphorical mappings are largely grounded in bodily experience, the choice of one from many possible options in the large pool of bodily experiences depends largely on cultural understanding and interpretation” (p. 259). Therefore, the differences in metaphor choice can be attributed to cultural factors. Thus, the cultural influence on the variation of conceptual metaphors in the two corpora is detailed in the following.

A culture’s formation is related to a certain geographical environment, historical background, economic status, social context, social values, and various other factors. Language is the mirror of culture, and people can see a

culture through its language (Jiang 2000). Each language stands for one culture, as does the metaphor embodied in the language. Chinese culture is greatly affected by ancient Chinese philosophy, while English culture originates from Western philosophy. Different cultural philosophies bring out the variation in the conceptualization of COVID-19 in Chinese and English. Combined with the specific situation, three factors account for adopting different source domains to illustrate COVID-19 between CCC and ACC. They are historical background, the value orientation of collectivism and individualism, and social context.

From the perspective of historical background, China is a country with a long history of agricultural civilization. Therefore, the Chinese tend to talk about abstract objects in terms of 'weather.' In CCC, the token of 'spring,' and 'rainbow' of the WEATHER metaphor projects hope and desire in dealing with COVID-19, whereas the token of 'wind and rain,' 'haze,' etc. represents the dark times of COVID-19. By contrast, the United States' maritime history and geographic location have fostered a culture that values exploration, resilience, and the spirit of competition. These traits align closely with the core principles of sports, such as striving for victory and overcoming challenges. Consequently, the SPORTS metaphor resonates strongly in ACC, reflecting these cultural values. In addition, Western culture also originates from the Greeks and is under the influence of Greek mythology. Further, the United States is a country with a strong religious atmosphere, and religion permeates almost every aspect of social life. Moreover, Western drama has been profoundly shaped by the works of Shakespeare, whose influence on narrative structure, character development, and themes of human nature remains significant in the theatrical traditions of English-speaking countries. His contributions to drama and literature continue to be studied and adapted, reflecting his lasting impact on Western culture. These cultural influences explain why the corpus of ACC demonstrates a preference for GREEK MYTHOLOGY, RELIGION, and DRAMA metaphors.

The value orientations of the East and West are completely different. The research found that the West, which advocates individualism, is comparatively weaker than China in terms of collective cohesion. In CCC, *People's Daily* strives to emphasize the importance of fight against the pandemic together by employing the CHINESE CHESS metaphor, deploying preventive measures in the whole country, and thinking about every aspects of the entire situation.

Concerning social context, the Chinese are under the influence of Confucianism and regard 'family' as the core value in life. The major purpose of living is to honor one's ancestors. Another inevitable social context is that competition in China is extremely fierce, as China is a country with a large population. But resources for school, jobs, promotions, etc. are comparatively limited; therefore, the EXAM metaphor is prevalent in CCC. The Chinese tend to consider everything in their life as an exam; for example, people need to submit a qualified answer sheet to get what they want. Hence, the pandemic in China is similar to an exam for the Communist Party, submitting a qualified answer sheet for the whole country and letting people have faith in the ruling party. While the role of sports in China is not entirely diminished, its prominence is often overshadowed by academic and professional pursuits, particularly in school settings. For instance, physical education classes in some schools are sometimes shortened or replaced by subjects included in high-stakes exams like the college entrance examination. This reflects the prioritization of academic success over physical activity within the educational system. However, sports do play a significant role in broader social contexts, such as fostering national pride during international competitions and promoting physical health through national fitness campaigns. Therefore, while the EXAM metaphor dominates in many areas of life in Chinese context, sports still hold cultural significance in specific contexts.

4.4 Functions of Conceptual Metaphors

The coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) has taught painful lessons, causing countless instances of social instability, economic loss, and human casualties. In the process of combating public health emergencies, the media plays a very important role. Charteris-Black (2004) argues that the main purpose of CMA is to reveal the underlying (possibly unconscious) meaning of the language user. Conceptual metaphors, as a carrier of ‘*meaning*,’ allow human beings to perceive, preserve, and transmit social and historical experiences. Based on the CMA above, this section probes into the functions embodied in these types of metaphorical expressions.

The fundamental function of conceptual metaphors is to transmit information about COVID-19. Conceptual metaphors, as a special way of presenting the pandemic, ease the process of understanding novel medical terms. In *People’s Daily*, the lockdown of a city is similar to pressing the ‘*pause button*’ (COMPUTER metaphor), depicting the preventive measures adopted by the government and signifying the hope at the same time that everything will be back on track one day. The urgency of the pandemic has been described as ‘as pressing as a fire singeing one’s eyebrows’ (BODY metaphor). In *The New York Times*, an international network of researchers were said to have started gathering and analyzing data to ‘*disarm*’ (WAR metaphor) this perplexing new disease in a ‘*Herculean*’ effort (GREEK MYTHOLOGY metaphor); however, given the situation that the virus mutated again and again, much remains unknown and mysterious, while ‘*a fork in the road*’ (JOURNEY metaphor) shows the tough decision undertaken by the government between persistent restrictions and learning to live with the virus. Media reports covered the basic knowledge about the virus, including the outbreak of the pandemic, the seriousness of the event, preventive measures, and control strategies.

The second purpose of conceptual metaphors is to project the emotional preference from the source domain to the target domain, thus performing a persuasive function. ‘*Warrior in white*,’ ‘*fortress*,’ and ‘*launch*’ shared by the two corpora map the cruelty of war onto fighting against the virus, which on the one hand persuades human beings to defeat the common foes together, and also results in feelings about the hard times the public faces at present. The metaphorical expressions of ‘*epicenter*,’ ‘*the eye of the storm*,’ and ‘*ground zero*’ in the two corpora project the devastating damage of the virus on the immune system, medical system, and basic survival of human beings. The FOOD metaphor of the ‘*Swiss cheese*’ model of pandemic defense originated with James T. Reason and was updated by Virologist Ian Mackay, Ph.D., reducing the overall risk of being infected by combing several layers—social distancing, mask-wearing, hand-washing, testing, tracing, and vaccination in *The New York Times*. All these conceptual metaphors strengthen the readers’ understanding of the novel coronavirus, guiding public opinion toward containing the pandemic positively.

Finally, conceptual metaphors, are strategies taken to enhance the power of language expression, conveying certain attitudes and ideologies. Martin and White (2003) confirm that people make use of evaluative resources to build social relationships and communicate their ideas to the reader. During the outbreak of COVID-19, media coverage has taken conceptual metaphors to construct the image of the novel coronavirus and imply the media’s potential stance. The CHINESE CHESS metaphor in *People’s Daily* highlights the government’s resolution to take all measures to prevent people from being infected, and the EXAM metaphor expresses the government’s stance to defeat the virus positively, striving to hand in a qualified answer to the citizens. In *The New York Times*, the testing in the U.S. at the very beginning was referred to metaphorically as an ‘*Achilles’ heel*’ (GREEK MYTHOLOGY metaphor), criticizing the poor strategies adopted by the Trump Administration. The CONTAINER metaphor of ‘*quarantine pod*’ gradually has shaped the new social connections among people, which has let everyone ponder and rearrange their ‘*friendscape*’ post-pandemic.

Taken together, the metaphorical manifestations not only transmit knowledge and influence people’s opinions, decision-making, emotions, and perceptions of threats regarding the pandemic, but they also highlight the potential stance and ideology of society.

5. Conclusion

Since COVID-19 has paralyzed social-economic life and caused more than 6 million deaths (World Health Organization 2022) around the world at the time of writing this article, the media has played a critical role in providing information and making people aware of the devastating situation. Thus, the words, especially conceptual metaphors, which are employed to talk about the current unprecedented crisis in media, can inform us on how we conceptualize the pandemic and react to its variations. In order to see how the Chinese and American mainstream media frame COVID-19 separately through conceptual metaphors, this paper has conducted a comparative analysis of the similarities and differences in conceptual metaphors deployed in the two countries. In addition, using two self-built corpora, we have gained insight into underlying reasons as well as the function of adopting universal and unique metaphors respectively.

The results indicate that *People's Daily* and *The New York Times* cover the pandemic through various source domains. Conceptual metaphors shared by both media include the WAR, DISASTER, CONTAINER, and LIGHT metaphors as well as PERSONIFICATION. In terms of differences, the Chinese tend to illustrate the hard times of the pandemic in light of the CHINESE CHESS, EXAM, and WEATHER metaphors, while the American media incline to use the RELIGION, DRAMA, GREEK MYTHOLOGY, and SPORTS metaphors to demonstrate the severity of the pandemic. The universality and national traits of conceptual metaphors were verified after a contrastive analysis of conceptual metaphors in the two corpora. Further analysis shows that similar cognitive embodiment of human beings facilitates the universality of the COVID-19 metaphor, and the respective variations can be attributed to several cultural factors, including historical background, value orientation of collectivism and individualism, and social context. In addition, *transmitting information about COVID-19, producing a persuasive function, and conveying certain attitudes and ideologies* are three functions of conceptual metaphors adopted in these two corpora.

In this regard, conceptual metaphors of COVID-19 construct the environment as '*threatened by the pandemic*,' which is conducive to catching readers' attention, persuading people to take preventive measures. As viruses know no nationality and respect no borders in reality, the study of the inner influential factors and political stances of conceptual metaphors in the coverage of COVID-19 by Chinese and American mainstream media will boost successful cross-cultural communication and deepen mutual understanding of social ideology to a certain extent, providing insights into the building of a community of a shared future for mankind.

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Examples in: English & Chinese

Applicable Languages: English & Chinese

Applicable Level: Secondary