Adi Maslo, Sofia Kefalidou

SPREADING LIKE A VIRUS: CONCEPTUAL INTEGRATION AND DISCOURSE VIEWPOINT IN INTERNET MEMES ABOUT THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC[1.]

This paper analyzes internet memes pertaining to Covid-19. We analyzed more than 200 memes over nine months. By utilizing Blending Theory and Discourse Viewpoint, we attempt to explain the creative inner workings of memes as well as how meaning is negotiated on the internet. We were clearly able to detect memes synchronously following the actual development of Covid-19. We show that meme makers use visuals metonymically to address the current state of Covid-19 while the overall message of memes is driven by simile. As much as memes draw on the concept of Covid-19, they also feed back to it in a loop of self-reference. Along with their underlying metaphoric nature, memes convey a *feels-like* attitude with two main phases emerging from their usage, i.e., the Observer Phase and the Experiencer Phase. The former showed memes at a stage where Covid-19 was not yet a pandemic (but perceived through media coverage from elsewhere) while the latter, the Experiencer Phase, clearly showed that meme creators had experienced the virus themselves. As for the timeframe covered, however, we conclude that memes do not show full conceptual integration as Covid-19 was not yet fully entrenched.

Keywords: Covid-19; conceptual integration; discourse viewpoint; memes; cognitive linguistics

---

1. INTRODUCTION

Covid-19 hit the world as few phenomena before. It was all over the media and in everyday lives of people around the planet. Its omnipresence seems to be unmatched by anything before. Hence, the Covid-19 pandemic offered itself globally for discussion. Starting off in the Chinese city of Wuhan at the end of 2019, Covid-19 apparently reached the rest of the globe by March 2020. The outbreak of the new Coronavirus brought the world into chaos with governments across the globe introducing emergency measures to prevent the spreading of the disease. Most salient among the safety/emergency measures were lockdowns across the globe, mandatory masks, and so-called social distance. Neither of the measures and consequences left the world population indifferent. There were rallies against emergency measures while authorities of each state were pushing regulations and even "Corona laws" to fight both the disease itself and its negative impact onto public health and the economy. To keep their population informed, several governments rolled out Coronavirus smartphone apps.[2] It seems that no part of public life remained unaffected, and almost all of them had their presence in social media.

The global population took part in the discussion about Covid-19 through social media. In sharing their viewpoints, each person, regardless of their place of living, shaped the way the new Coronavirus is conceptualized, thus framing the pandemic in alternate ways. The fact that the disease was pandemic in nature brought forth the cross-linguistic notion of the phenomenon. Having said that, there are several reasons why the discussion about Covid-19 is of particular interest to the cognitive linguist. Firstly, it is the global scale. With people around the globe sharing their views and/or experience, the conceptualization can be traced cross-linguistically and across nations. Secondly, owing to the accessibility of data, solid conclusions about the conceptualization process itself can be made. On the one hand, data is captured in real time and reflects how people think and talk of the pandemic. On the other hand, once the pandemic and the virus became part of our common ground, the virus served as a source to figuratively talk (and think) about other targets. Finally, the variety of media used to express people's views on the pandemic offers us insight on multimodal thinking. We are thus able to monitor how meaning emerges, is distributed, echoed, recycled and, as importantly, to pinpoint how context or common ground (a central but some-

---

2.   https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=de.rki.coronawarnapp&hl=en&gl=US&pli=1 (Germany), https://www. gov.uk/guidance/nhs-covid-19-app-download-and-set-up-guide (UK), https://coronavirus.app/map (US) (retrieved Nov 5th 2023).

what elusive concept in the study of meaning) affects and shapes meaning. Following the realization of the unique opportunity that the development of the pandemic offers, as early as in March 2020 the Reframe Covid-19 initiative, taken by Cognitive Linguists such as Inez Olza, Elena Semino and Veronika Coller offers an open-source database in which linguists from around the world are invited to contribute examples of figurative conceptualization of the Covid-19 virus. Crucially, the project aims to capture metaphorical expression of the virus featuring as source domains other than the WAR frame, seeking to "offer alternative ways to look at the current global emergency" (from the initiative's web page) as war related language dominating public discourse is found not only to obscure important aspects of the PANDEMIC frame and to put additional stress to people but also to manipulate people's viewpoints and evaluations of the emergency state they find themselves into. Finally, and following the first two points, the need soon emerged to systematize the enormous and ubiquitous data into a comprehensive framework that will give insights into how the new Coronavirus is conceptualized. A first move in that direction was done by the Thessaloniki Cognitive Linguistics Research Group who organized an online workshop on "Coronavirus and Figuration" in July 2020. This paper, stemming from the above-mentioned workshop, is a contribution to the figurative conceptualization of the new Coronavirus.

The aim is to utilize a well-established theory in Cognitive Linguistics, namely, Conceptual Integration Theory (Blending Theory) and its extension as proposed by Dancygier and Vandelanotte (2016, 2017a, 2017b), that establishes a discourse viewpoint space constructed on-line for the purposes of processing semiotic products and generating meaning to try to scrutinize Internet memes on 9gag.com, a social networking site that features user-generated content. In the "selfie culture" (Lakshmi 2015; Peraica 2017) it seems that "[i]mages are the core of society today" (Farías 2015: 74), in the social media context at least. Human propensity to use images as a means of communication speaks in favor of that claim.[3.] Combined with captions, short descriptions giving the rationale for the picture at hand, images have huge communicative potential. Using the Blending Theory model, this paper will try to systematize the user-generated content displayed in multimodal inputs, i.e., memes present an "evolution" of the conceptualization of Covid-19. This so-called evolution of figuration of the new Coronavirus will be proof of how the general public perceives and labels new occurrences surrounding Covid-19. The main hypothesis in this paper

---

3.   As an illustration, more than 500 million Stories daily on Instagram only (source: https://www.omni coreagency.com/instagram-statistics/; retrieved on Nov 27th 2020)

is that through systematic analysis of Internet memes on Covid-19 several stages of internalization of the new virus can be traced, along with the meme creators' emotional viewpoint. The fact that the study encompasses contributions from users all around the globe in all the different stages is of crucial importance and cannot be highlighted enough. In light of this hypothesis, several research questions arise which the paper tentatively tackles, since such broad research areas put forward broad theoretical issues that require time and collective effort to be adequately addressed: a) Can we trace the stages of the internalization process that we hypothesize in the data?; b) Can we systemize the study of the manner in which context participates in the generation of meaning? c) and how viewpoints are generated and negotiated within multimodal inputs?

2. INTERNET MEMES AND IMAGE MACROS

In 2012, South Korean musician Psy released "Gangnam Style", a song more remembered for its peculiar dance than for the lyrics. With over two billion views on YouTube, Gangnam Style remained the most clicked music video on the platform for years. More importantly, it has been replicated numerous times with viewers themselves adapting the dance (and the song). This is representative of what is called "participatory culture" (Burgess 2008). The initial definition of the term "meme" comes from evolutionary biologist and ethnologist Richard Dawkins who, speaking of examples of memes such as sounds, ideas, clothing etc., says: "Just as genes propagate themselves in the gene pool by leaping from body to body via sperms or eggs, so memes propagate themselves in the meme pool by leaping from brain to brain via a process which, in the broad sense, can be called imitation" (2006: 192).

Before any further analysis is introduced, the distinction between (mere) Internet memes and Image macros need to be made.

> "Internet memes encompass all kinds of online objects that are copied and imitated, altered and modified, propagated and diffused by participants on the web. Image macros are a specific example of such online content, consisting of text superimposed on an image. Whereas the image and discursive theme of image macros are typically fairly consistent in the replication process, the text is particularly open to the online "remix culture" that characterizes Internet memes." (Zenner and Geeraerts 2018: 167)

Image macros are interesting for the cognitive linguist for reasons of multimodality, i.e., a combination of image and text. In more detail, an image macro consists of

the image, a top text (TT), and a bottom text (BT). In its intertwining of creativity and stability, the image macro is naturally related to the Cognitive Linguistic notion of construction (Langacker 1987; Goldberg 1995; Croft 2001). Constructions are "form and function pairings" that are characterized by variation in fixedness and conventionality, and that can be expressed across different degrees of schematicity (Zenner and Geeraerts 2018: 174).

Image 1 – Scumbag Steve image macro

Memes do have some history – there are meme series that revolve around specific image-TT pairings with numerous instantiations of the same visual scenario. They are called typical image macro memes (Dancygier and Vandelanotte 2017a: 573). Some of them feature stock characters like "Success Kid" and "Scumbag Steve" (*Image 1*). Those are visuals that depict non-famous, actual people whose pictures happened to be used by the meme community.[4.] With odd etymologies at times, such memes appeared seemingly accidental, e.g., in forum threads or as comments stories and posts on social media. Another type of image macros depicts famous people like the "Leonardo DiCaprio Laughing" meme or the "Conspiracy Keanu" meme. Those do not behave particularly differently than the former. Rather counter-intuitively, the fact that famous people are shown does not significantly contribute to the meaning-making process. Just like with stock characters, it is more the situation and/or the facial expression of the celebrity at hand that is at the heart of the meaning-making

---

4.   A history of verified memes can be found on knowyourmeme.com.

process. Image macros sometimes draw on a particular event surrounding a celebrity[5.], however, detailed knowledge is not required for a basic understanding of the overall meme. Apart from humans, image macros also depict animals such as "Advice Dog" or "Confession Bear". Just like with memes featuring humans, animal memes are mainly cherished for the animals' odd "facial expressions" or situations they are in. It is not far-fetched to say that the anthropomorphic qualities of animal memes make them utilizable. As a matter of fact, the TT and BT "give animals a voice". Interestingly enough, even objects carry meme potential. However, that is only one part of the story. A case in point and proof of the proliferation and recycling of image macros and their features, Scumbag Steve's hat (extensively covered in Dancygier and Vandelanotte 2017a) also gained meme status. The peculiarly patterned hat that is shown in the original Scumbag Steve image macro became metonymically representative of Steve's behavior/character, thus being put on other individuals or even things. One such image macro shows former US president Obama with a scumbag hat on, with the TT writing "promises change" while BT wrote "changes promise".

All of the above-mentioned verified memes can be looked upon the meme database knowyourmeme.com. Some memes are actual photos taken for non-meme purposes ("Success Kid", "Advice Dog" etc.) while some are screenshots from movies. A certain level of "meme literacy" (Milner 2013, cited in Zenner and Geeraerts 2018) is required to fully appreciate image macro events that utilize. The reason for this may be that typical image macro memes are recurring images with the same background logic (usually derived from or coded in the image macro's name). However, background knowledge on the meme's history is not a must-have to reach *some* level of understanding. Additionally, metonymy largely facilitates rendering proper meanings. Besides metonymy as an all-present feature of thought and language[6.], meaning is, we claim, coded and decoded easier in the pandemic context because meme users (both makers and viewers) have an active experiential basis. An additional feature of image macros is incongruity between textual and the visual inputs. That kind of cognitive challenge viewers are presented with forges proper meaning in rich and nuanced ways. It is usually the discrepancy between the meme character's beforehand

---

5.   Lou (2017) explains a meme featuring Miss Philippines on the 2015 Miss Universe pageant. The background of the story is that Steve Harvey, an announcer at the pageant, incorrectly declared the winner of the contest. In the meme, Miss Philippines is shown in four successive frozen images that recapture the incident. However, it is more the juxtaposition than knowledge of the concrete event that fosters understanding, thus making the image suitable for similar awkward real-life occurrences.

6.   Jakobson (2002) calls metaphor and metonymy "the two basic modes or ways of thought".

agreed-upon traits and the TT/BT. This is true for a number of memes and at times presented in the very name of the meme (advice-giving dogs or Scumbag hats).[7.]

Frozen motion, one of the features of memetic photos in Shifman's view (2014: 94), offers itself for participants to "complete a seemingly unfinished movement" and add interpretation. The image macros that make up the corpus are only to a small percentage well-established memes in the sense of the ones named above. Frozen motion and actual pictures are, in fact, utilized in a majority of instances. However, that does not mean that mems pertaining to the Coronavirus are not fabricated. It simply means that a wider variety of images potentially offer themselves as mems that address the Covid-19 pandemic.

3. METHOD

9gag.com, the social media site under scrutiny, features more than 80,000 memes tied to Covid-19 up to date. Those memes have been presented in various world languages. However, only memes written in English were considered for the study. As the main focus of our research is the systematic analysis of the manner in which context (in the sense of the broader conditions that forge immediate response by means of our symbolic ability) shaped meaning during the pandemic, we decided that the study of viewpoint can be a revealing tool to monitor the emergence of new conceptualizations and frame knowledge. From this respect, our search was not restricted to conceptualizations of the virus itself. Instead, we established the following criteria a) the timeframe of meme production (from February through October 2020) in order to look at the evolution of the views on the pandemic and of the pandemic's framing, and b) the relevant aspects of the pandemic frame that we are searching for so that we can view what interests users and public opinion. We also used the memes' caption (the title provided by the meme maker) to cross-check our interpretation of the meme and to establish how the meme was meant and what aspect of the pandemic it was designed to refer to. As mentioned above, we did not solely focus on the way that the virus is conceptualized but rather we searched for memes that involve an emotional reaction to the virus, or to show how different aspects of the pandemic frame are gradually formed/added/become highlighted: emotional reactions to news/ information/ facts about the virus, sanitary and preventive measures, views on the fact that the virus supposedly originated in China, evaluation of the response of the health sys-

---

7.   With the types of memes mentioned, we do not attempt to provide an exhaustive account of all categories there are. The types mentioned are only among the most salient ones.

tems etc. In light of these, memes first underwent an initial skimming process in order to determine the different aspects of the newly formed frame of the virus and next on the basis of these aspects to detect potential meme candidates for analysis. Since we were mostly interested in the study of the way context shapes meaning, we selected memes in which the virus itself is either the source or the target. That stage yielded around 200 memes. The second stage of analysis involved grouping the memes chronologically, establishing their commonalities regarding their focus of attention and searching for recurrent aspects of the pandemic frame being highlighted. In this stage we also selected memes that received the most reactions, because this meant that they corresponded to a common viewpoint or at least that they caught the public stance towards the virus: people's worries, reactions etc.[8.] This process resulted into what appeared to instantiate "the evolution" of conceptualization of Covid-19 pandemic. Eventually, three stages have been established showcasing the portrayal of the new Coronavirus. These insights were then confirmed by a similar quick and coarse-grained search in the Know Your Meme website.

The data have been qualitatively analyzed using Fauconnier and Turner's Conceptual Integration Theory (2002) and Dancygier and Vandelanotte's (2017) framework on Discourse Viewpoint. We used Blending Theory to pinpoint the aspects of the pandemic frame that were considered relevant and were selected to project to the generic space and feed the blend but also to determine the stance expressed towards the pandemic and the virus as the latter is revealed by the selection of the input space that the pandemic frame is blended with. Since blending is a process of online meaning construction drawing on frames as long-term schematic knowledge (Fauconnier and Turner 2002: 40), instances of memes will give us feedback on what the PANDEMIC frame contains. Following the analysis of the data using Blending Theory, we further scrutinized the data tapping into the concept of Discourse Viewpoint as proposed by Dancygier and Vandelanotte (2017). Analysis of the Discourse Viewpoint enabled us to monitor the intersubjective relevance of the memes thus providing us with insight into the way context, publicly available viewpoints, and publicly shared knowledge generate new meaning. Finally, memes were analyzed with respect to the figures motivating them (metaphor, metonymy, and irony) in order to see their interaction within multimodal discourse and their contribution to multimodal intersubjective constructions.

---

8. For each meme we also captured points (up-votes). However, that is only relevant to the date of capturing since they can go either up or down. We could have an orientation of the respective meme's popularity though.

3.1. Blending Theory

Based on Fauconnier's (1985) Mental Spaces, Blending Theory has been reported to be an explanatory tool for various disciplines such as art, literature, poetics, mathematics, political science, musicology, linguistics, theology, psychoanalysis, and film (Fauconnier and Turner 2002: 417). In simple terms, the theory revolves around the human ability to cognitively entertain different entities and/or scenarios and fuse them into a particular scene that sheds light on the issue at hand. More fundamentally, the theory structures a cross-domain mapping between the input spaces, matching corresponding counterparts while proposing a structure with at least two distinct input spaces, a generic space, and a resulting blend. Since blending is based on mental spaces, the entire conceptual integration network (with all its integral spaces) is evoked for local understanding. Relevant aspects to the topic at hand are accessed, matched, and mapped in an ephemeral meaning-making scene – the blend. Linguistically speaking, blending deals with verbal inputs primarily. Prototypical instances of blending like the "Bhuddist Monk", "Debate with Kant" or "Regatta" (Fauconnier and Turner 2002) are foremost textual examples that show blending as a cognitive faculty. However, memes are image driven. "[A]udiences are likely to see the image first before processing the text" (Lou 2017: 118). Thus, in memes, we see multimodal conceptual integration networks. The generic space employs general enough, relevant aspects of a given frame to be able to forward them to either of the input spaces. In order to be utilized online, mental spaces need to have a background frame to connect to. From a Cognitive Linguistics viewpoint, it is "the world out there" (Evans and Green 2006: 7), i.e., the actual physical world that concepts are derived from. It follows that both meme makers and viewers, living in pandemic times, derive the concept of Covid-19 from shared experience, first as a media event only, later also as real-life experience. That is to say, memes that deal with the Coronavirus both draw on the concept of Covid-19 and feed back to it. By following the evolution of memes, we will get a big picture of what the PANDEMIC frame looks like.

> "We do not establish mental spaces, connections between them, and blended spaces for no reason. We do this because it gives us global insight, human-scale understanding, and new meaning. It makes us both efficient and creative. One of the most important aspects of our efficiency, insight, and creativity is the compression achieved through blending." (Fauconnier and Turner 2002: 92)

The mapping between spaces and the emergence of new structure are made possible by underlying vital relations. Vital relations are the connectors that serve to identify counterparts within and across mental spaces (Evans 2007: 220). Fauconnier and Turner (2002: 101) list most common vital relations, which are: change, identity, time, space, cause-effect, part-whole, representation, role, analogy, disanalogy, property, similarity, category, intentionality, uniqueness. As suggested above, the compression of vital relations is key to meaning making. Compression is used to simplify complex causal relationships, both so they can be more readily understood, and so that they can be construed with motivational human scale frames (Coulson and Oakley 2006: 64). With memes, it seems, compressions are performed highly intuitively, and accurately at that. However, all that is only possible against the background of, in the case our corpus, the PANDEMIC frame/real-life knowledge. The tendency to reach a human scale induces meme viewers to compress odd relationships, e.g., identity (e.g., receiving comments from "Grumpy Cat" or random people representing a country).

> "Mental spaces are built up dynamically in working memory, but they can also become entrenched in long-term memory. For example, frames are entrenched mental spaces that we can activate all at once. Other kinds of entrenched mental spaces are Jesus on the Cross, Horatio at the bridge, and the rings of Saturn." (Fauconnier and Turner 2002: 103)

In the light of the current study, the dynamic aspect of language processing will be of high importance. Recurring aspects of the Coronavirus utilized in blending will be proof of them being entrenched in the PANDEMIC frame. Once established, features of the pandemic frame can further proliferate and become source domains in figurative language. In our current approach, Blending Theory is responsible for the inner workings, i.e., the overall construction of the message (image and text combined) and its ties to the PANDEMIC frame.

3.2. Discourse Viewpoint

Dancygier and Vandelanotte (2017a) draw upon Construction Grammar, Mental Space Theory (Fauconnier 1985) and Dancygier's framework on the processing of stories (2008) to address the issue of processing image macros altogether. Dancygier and Vandelanotte (2017a: 567) claim that Internet memes qualify as constructions since they are pairings of form – specifically multimodal configurations of forms – with identifiable meanings, while, at the same time the principle of constructional

compositionality (ibid) "a particular constructional version of frame metonymy" enables the addressee to flesh out full frames on the basis of salient enough characteristic constituting parts and details of the frames. Furthermore, the TT sets the tone for the meme event while the BT answers the question, both against the background of an image that guides the meaning-making process in viewers.

Crucially, they treat memes as intersubjective constructions that evoke, embed, recycle and reproduce viewpoints available in public discourse in order to negotiate them and align with them or distance from them. Of course, the meme itself comes with its own viewpoint (the meme maker's viewpoint) and for the recipient to appreciate it and accommodate it with his/her own viewpoint, it is essential that s/he establishes a space that has access to all viewpoints (both the explicitly expressed and those that are implicitly evoked) from where s/he can resolve any incongruities, find analogies and fill in any gaps. This space is dubbed Discourse Viewpoint Space. "Reaching intersubjectively available viewpoints not expressed in the meme itself and reconciling them with the meme maker's standpoint and one's own requires a bird's eye view of the network from what we call the Discourse Viewpoint Space" (Dancygier and Vandelanotte 2017a: 585).

The concept originated from Dancygier's (2008) work on the processing of stories. According to her analysis, narrative discourse is ultimately a multi-space text containing genre specific space builders, narrative anchors, that serve as guidance for the recipients to meaningfully and coherently handle the relevant viewpoint spaces as discourse unfolds. The configuration of the network of viewpoints is realized from a bottom-up mega-blend, the Story Viewpoint Space, that also contains the parameters constituting the communicative instance within which the story is supposedly being told. Having access to all the viewpoint spaces, the Story Viewpoint Space brings together aspects from several viewpoint spaces by means of viewpoint compression, re-alignment etc. to yield a coherent plot. Along the same lines, Discourse Viewpoint Space is thus a mega-blend established for the purposes of processing discourse (multimodal also) supervising the dynamic network of mental spaces constructed as any stretch of discourse unfolds, continuously re-evaluating, compressing and decompressing important aspects of the conceptualizations involved in the individual mental spaces that constitute the network (Dancygier 2017). Discourse Viewpoint Space brings together and thus reconciles the viewpoints that individual mental spaces carry, taking into account the *overall discourse* and finally yielding coherent meaning. The term overall discourse or "global communicative context" (Dancygier 2017: 1) needs some clarification. It does not refer to just immediate or even broader context. It en-

compasses whatever an embodied subjectivity at any given time and space and during whatever usage event highlights as relevant for meaningfully interacting with another embodied subjectivity. Langacker (2001: 144) points out that "the conceptualization inherent in a usage event includes the interlocutors' apprehension of their interactive circumstances and the very discourse they are engaged in. It thus incorporates their apprehension of the ground (G) and the current discourse space (CDS)".

It is thus evident that "viewpoint is a discourse phenomenon" (Dancygier 2017: 2) and that Discourse Viewpoint Space framework [...] treats perspective in terms of discourse driven viewpoint networks and proposes mechanisms which lead to coherent interpretations of various forms (ibid.)

By allowing individual mental spaces to feed Discourse Viewpoint Space with conceptualizations and respectively by allowing Discourse Viewpoint Space to embed individual viewpoints and compress important aspects that constitute them, resolving at the same time any incongruities, we have at our disposal a significant explanatory tool to address issues and describe factors that have been long and vaguely categorized as contextual in a more systematic way. Furthermore, the framework seems to acknowledge and handle sufficiently the assumption that discourse is intersubjective, that is, is driven towards the negotiation of meaning, since it enables the representation, in terms of networks, of simultaneously present multiple viewpoints. The idea that semiotic products can serve the handling and manipulation of multiple viewpoints is not new within Cognitive Linguistics but it is certainly gaining ground as Cognitive Linguistics turn to the study of discourse and more functionalist views on language. Studies such as Dancygier and Sweetser (2012), Dancygier and Vandelanotte (2009), Israel and Tobin (2012), Verhagen (2005) and Verhagen and Van Duijn (2019), put forward the importance of recognizing that certain constructions go beyond the mere embedding of viewpoints and enable viewpoint evocation and/or the handling (contrasting, juxtaposing, associating to or dissociating from) of multiple viewpoints in parallel. This is particularly important for the study of (Covid-19) memes as the internet as a discursive, semiotic, and cultural environment is by definition a virtual public space where meaning is recycled, reproduced, deconstructed, negotiated and collectively created. Furthermore, it facilitates immediate response to events, especially those that count as emergency, and thus features the multiplicity of emotional, epistemic and evaluative viewpoints of societies responding to a world in flux.

4. RESULTS

Following a skimming stage, the second stage of meme selection yielded a total of 180 image macros spread across nine months. Results strongly suggest that the Coronavirus pandemic was viewed from a non-Chinese perspective during the month of February. This is what we call the Observer Perspective (OP). That is, the position of the meme creator is one that views the not-yet-pandemic as a media event, spreading through China only. An entire series of image macros viewed Covid-19 from the OP, as *Image 2* shows. Other memes in the OP phase referred either to various examples of Chinese alleged bat eating habits (where the Coronavirus apparently emerged from) or the city of Wuhan. As for the visual input (taken to be the source domain since it aids the contextualization of the experience under conceptualization process, as is the case with *Image 2*, it seems that meme makers relied on concepts known outside the Coronavirus. Another image macro from the OP, dubbed "Batman slaps Robin", captured Robin saying "Let's go to China to save them from the Coronav—" with Batman slapping him mid-sentence and saying "I'm the main dish in China". Winning something on the internet (*Image 2*) and comic book character Batman are well-known concepts, thus suitable for source-domain exploitation.

Image 2 - OP of the Coronavirus[9.]   **Image 3** - transfer from OP to EP

Memes on the Coronavirus do in general sway between a US focus and a European focused viewpoint. *Image 3* shows a strong European focus while simultaneously indicating a transfer to the next phase.[10.] By the end of the month, results show, the

---

9.   Discussed in more detail in section 5.

10.   The meme's date corresponds to the sudden increase Italy saw in number of Covid-19 cases (https://www.who.int/docs/default-source/coronaviruse/situation-reports/20200225-sitrep-36-covid-19.pdf?sfvrsn=2791b4e0_2).

Coronavirus was viewed by users as a pandemic. March onwards, the memes analyzed showed an inside perspective, which is what we call the Experiencer Perspective (EP). EP showed the PANDEMIC frame forming. Most salient features of the frame are: hand sanitizers, going out vs. staying in, Coronavirus testings, media attention, quarantine, social distancing, working from home, lockdowns, and wearing masks. Once established, the frame is able to provide necessary feedback for various memes and their structure.

The EP was split into two phases – the lockdown phase and the post-lockdown phase. In the lockdown phase, several novel behavior patterns seem to have surfaced. *Image 4* is a representative of a fair amount of image macros that addressed restrictions in outdoor activities. Memes of this sort also addressed introverts (perhaps introverts themselves being the meme makers) who "capitalized on" the pandemic as their pattern of behavior matches the restrictions. Other image macros representative of the lockdown phase include memes on hairstyle, video calls, and presenting Covid-19 as a menace in general. Their common ground is the graduality with which new aspects to the PANDEMIC frame were being added. Working from home became a recurring feature and saw new aspects within itself being added. Some of them were slow internet, bed looking comfy, no IT guy, teacher (who can afford to be) drunk during online classes. The lockdown phase in memes ostensibly matched the actual lockdown duration in a majority of countries. By the end of May, memes of the fist EP phase ceased to exist.

As the world population was anticipating the end of the lockdown so were netizens. *Image 5* marked the transfer from the fist to the second EP phase, timely so it seems, since it dates back to early June 2020. Perhaps surprisingly, the image macro in *Image 5* features an emotional reaction that speaks in favor of the quarantine. Another meme featuring "Confession Bear" wrote: "I missed my friends and family but" (TT) "I absolutely loved working from home during quarantine" (BT). As public life restarted, masks being mandatory, a fair amount of memes addressed masks from various aspects. One meme showed a stock image of a boy doing a facepalm with TT writing "Me in front of the supermarket" while BT wrote "didn't bring my mask". Most of the mask-related memes actually criticized people who do not obey the rules.

Image 4 - restrictions to go outdoors

Image 5 - post-quarantine

As the actual Coronavirus and its consequences were evolving, we see reactions in memes for every major event regarding the pandemic. Immediately after Russian officials announced their Covid-19 vaccine, meme makers reacted. An image macro dating from August 16, 2020 showed a topless Putin with apparently female breasts upon which the BT wrote "Russian covid vaccine. No side effects. Confirmed". Another meme pertaining to the Sputnik V vaccine showed Putin's face pasted onto Trump's head again referring to side effects while yet another meme showed the alleged picture of the vaccine with a Vodka label on it.

Immediately after US president Trump tested positive for the Coronavirus, the same day, October 2, the meme community reacted in a number of ways.[11] Most of the memes were devised as to reflect Trump's apparently bad reputation. One meme showed a "Tornado Selfie" typical image macro that announced the Trump-tested-positive memes (*Image 6*) while most of the memes hailed the fact that Trump was tested positive.
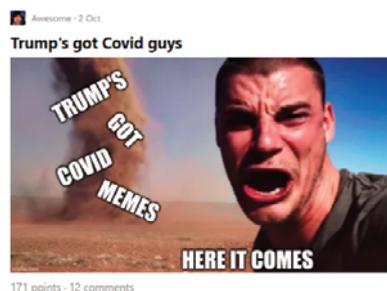
Image 6 - Tornado Selfie

---

11. Eleven memes appeared only on that day.

Apart from the apparently opportune memes that show new features of the Coronavirus as it developed, ubiquitous lineaments of image macros presented Covid-19 as an obstacle to life plans. Those can be found throughout the entire corpus.

5. DISCUSSION

As outlined in the Results section, memes do seem to synchronously follow the actual development of the perceptions of the Coronavirus pandemic. We see immediate responses to new occurrences pertaining to the virus. Meme makers utilize existing knowledge on the virus to render multimodal representations of its current state. This speaks in favor of our "evolution hypothesis". An important finding was to see the developmental phases of the pandemic perception. Memes from February, the first month analyzed, showed a clear outside-China perspective, i.e., the Coronavirus was viewed as a media event only. It is important to stress that at that point people's conceptualization of the pandemic is mediated only through its mass media representations, which in turn are not transparent reflections of reality. Rather, they are shaped by what the seminal paper of Galtung & Ruge (1965) labelled new values, among which we find two that are relevant for the study of the shaping of people's perspectives on the pandemic: namely, threshold and meaningfulness. The former predicts that events have to pass a certain threshold (of intensity, numbers etc.) before being recorded by the media and therefore public opinion as relevant. The latter posits that cultural proximity of events warrants their media representation. *Image 2* (Coronatulations) and *Image 3* (PTSD Europe) from above illustrate the point clearly.

In *Image 2*, the meme tells a small story: the meme character is happy because he has just been informed that he won a free trip only to find out that the trip is to China. The disappointment in his face is apparent and the meme's interpretation requires a recognition of an emotional viewpoint by the viewers, yielded by a facial expression (which is quite representative of the emotion of surprise globally). The compression of the various discourse spaces and the visual input is taking place at the Discourse Viewpoint Space level[12.], to yield a meaningful story. The textual input, by constructional compositionality (Dancygier and Sweetser 2005; Dancygier and Vandelanotte 2017), metonymically evokes the frame of winning free stuff over the internet, along with its positive evaluations, which essentially provides an overarching frame of interpretation, available at the Discourse Viewpoint Space. As far as the textual input we have TT (Congratulations, you have won) and BT (free trip to China) in which

---

12. Which functions also as a Discourse Viewpoint Space, cf. section 3.2 above.

Adi Maslo, Sofia Kefalidou *Spreading Like a Virus: Conceptual Integration and Discourse
Viewpoint in Internet Memes about the Covid-19 Pandemic*
DHS 3 (24) (2023), 231-258

the speaker is the automated reply of the internet page and the addressee is the meme character depicted right next to the text, integrated with the visual input 1 and 2 into a higher level space to yield a narrative space containing a (mini)plot. It's crucial to notice that the implied positive evaluation of TT is visually represented by the facial expression of meme character, while the implied negative evaluation of BT is again visually represented by the facial expression of the meme character. Viewpoint compression and re-alignment of identity is happening at the Discourse Viewpoint Space. This type of meme (which was often encountered in our corpus) resembles a lot with the classic when-memes: The textual input could be very well paraphrased as "when you win a free trip and then you find out that it's to China"). As is the case with memes and when-memes[13.] in specific, these basic spaces are accessible from the current communicative instance, the Discourse Viewpoint Space so that "the emotional viewpoint in the image is attributed to the meme maker" (Dancygier and Vandelanotte 2017: 589) as a response to an imaginary situation where one wins a free journey over an internet contest only to find out that the trip is to China. The incongruity and contradiction of winning a free trip and at the same time being completely disappointed about it and the reversal of the inherent positive evaluation of the frame can be accommodated and resolved intersubjectively only at the Discourse Viewpoint Space, which grants access to all the lower level spaces. Crucially, the ironic and humorous effect can be appreciated through the alignment of the meme's viewer to the reaction of the meme character and the evaluation of the meme maker. Discourse Viewpoint Space views the pandemic as happening *there* whereas meme maker and meme viewer are *here*. More importantly, the meme does not seem to say something about the pandemic. It says something about what is happening in China. Finally, following Lou's categorization (2017), the specific meme belongs to the 3rd type, whereby the interpretation of the visual does not require culturally specific knowledge and relies on the recognition of a facial expression[14.]. Rather, we should add, it is the textual input that requires very specific cultural knowledge (a very specific *when* and *where* as well as knowledge about what is happening right now in China). Given that the visual input is a standard meme template labelled by the 'Know your meme' website as "disappointed black guy" that is a four-panel reaction image-macro pertaining to cases where we have a clash between expectations and reality, we can say that an

---

13.   "[A] popular internet meme which prototypically juxtaposes a when clause with an ostensibly unrelated image" (Lou 2017: 106).

14.   It is true that not all non-verbal language is global, but the facial expressions etc. that were part of our corpus can be unfailingly understood (as was confirmed in the image macors' respective comments sections).

already entrenched format is retrieved to comment on a novel situation. Similar remarks can be made about *Image 3*. Again, a small story is depicted that can be appreciated for its humorous and ironic effects only if it is interpreted intersubjectively from a Discourse Viewpoint Space with a very specific *here* and *now*, providing access to all the lower discourse and viewpoint spaces as well relevant knowledge of the current ambient conditions. Furthermore, the visual input consists in an entrenched image macro (Sleeping Shaq[15.]) that is used to convey a perceptive and kinesthetic reaction to a situation that is experienced as a breach on one's normality.

Memes from that phase went a rather facetious direction with meme makers even provoking a fallout (*Image 7*). This is highly important in the light of Discourse Viewpoint, as this stage was dubbed Observer Phase, providing the meme maker's position/viewpoint as an outsider. In *Image 7*, the rest of the world population (outside China) is metonymically represented by a child-like figure that pokes at the metonymic representation of the Coronavirus. Originating in the webcomic *White Ninja*, originally represented to be poking a dead fish, *Image 7* employs two input spaces – the comic space and the Coronavirus space. The emergent structure resulting from the image macro depicts the world population's jolliness in poking/provoking a Corona-fallout. Discussing when-memes, Lou (2017: 108) states that the visual image, despite appearing unrelated, prompts viewers to negotiate the incongruity of the visual element and to select meaningful aspects of the image to retain and make sense of. Meme viewers may not know where the image macro (in *Image 7*) emerged from, however, owing to decompressions to the blend, i.e., its ties to the respective input spaces, viewers can reconstruct (decompress) the structure of each input space. This is because "at the moment of solution, the entire integration network is still active in the brain" (Fauconnier and Turner 2002: 57).

Image 7 - the fallout meme

15.   https://knowyourmeme.com/memes/sleeping-shaq.

Apart from the finding following our assumption that memes evolve simultaneously to the Coronavirus, another finding, counter to previous assumptions, also occurred. Namely, the initial assumption was that the conceptual integration network features a *single-scope network*, much like conceptual metaphor. However, the incongruity between the visual input and the verbal part of the artifact's multimodal construction calls for a revision of that view. It is the dissimilarity between the visual and the verbal that induced such a conclusion. It is as though, perhaps owing to "intersubjectively accessible assumptions" (Dancygier and Vandelanotte 2017a: 594), that the Coronavirus can be rendered multimodally using almost any image. It follows that it is the target (occurrences surrounding the Coronavirus) that dictates which attributes of the source domain are going to be utilized. This finding is in line with Lakoff's Invariance Principle which states that "metaphorical mappings preserve the cognitive topology (that is, the image-schema structure) of the source domain, in a way consistent with the inherent structure of the target domain" (Lakoff 1993: 215). In other words, it is not the background knowledge/experience coming from the source domain that is mapped onto the target but rather select instances of the target domain that seek their counterpart in the source domain[16]. This is what Dancygier and Sweetser (2014) call a *limited-scope blend* (following Moder's 2008, 2010 notions of *narrow-* and *broad-scope* similes). The selective nature of the target's "picky" mapping is what makes this blend limited in scope (however, only limited by the creative potential of the meme maker). We could argue that first a non-obvious similarity between two frames is brought into our attention and then we work our way back to the rest of the role-values similarities. In this sense we have metonymy as the basic licensing cognitive mechanism of similes. As a result, memes are useful in dealing with the pandemic exactly because they highlight specific aspects of a dynamic frame and convey this *feels-like* feature that everyone shared. The selective nature of the mechanism is apt for a process of conceptualization in which context (in the sense of being aware of broader conditions that define, during the specific period, our lives) plays the defining role. As new aspects of the pandemic arose following the way our lives had to adapt to unprecedented conditions, each of these new aspects, at any point, may become the focus of our attention, forcing us to search for ways to conceptualize them. The process or re-adapting can reach the point in which our cultural standards need to be re-evaluated. The most characteristic example of cases like that

---

16. We assume that meme makers first experienced/perceived a particular event surrounding the Coronavirus after which they either chose an image that suits their viewpoint (emotional standpoint) or created the image macro themselves.

are the memes that retrieve an already existing cultural categorization of people as introverts and extroverts and make it relevant, as the one below, dubbed Rookie numbers.

Image 8 – Rookie numbers image macro

In western civilization, people are profiled as extroverts vs introverts with the former being defined (following the online Cambridge Dictionary) as "an energetic person who enjoys being with other people" and the latter as "someone who is shy, quiet, and prefers to spend time alone rather than often being with other people". The meaning of the meme (and its following humorous effect) seems to be something along these lines: what is a real achievement for the extroverts is just rookie numbers for the introverts. The Discourse Viewpoint Space is aligned with the introverts' perspective; in the meme it is their reaction that is multimodally represented and the image itself comes with a built-in frame and carries a structure of its own: Mathew McConaughey, re-aligned intersubjectively as introverts in Discourse Viewpoint Space, is the mentor of the young stock broker (re-aligned as extroverts in Discourse Viewpoint Space). Two points are useful here. First, the fact that context activates and makes more prominent one aspect of the introvert/extrovert frames than others: exactly the one that has to do with staying at home. The other is that from a social and cultural perspective being an introvert is often evaluated negatively (even for the person itself) while in the image schematic level *in* is associated with hidden, unnoticed, unknown, unavailable whereas *out* is associated with public, available for use and

known. *Image 8* seems to reverse the negative evaluation of staying in, responding to an actual adoption dictated by our need to survive the new conditions, by which staying in is the socially responsible thing to do.

In discussing when-memes, Lou (2017) suggests that there is no full integration of input spaces into the blend. What viewers are given are cues as to how to make meaning of the artifact. Hence, Lou proposes that the underlying trope is, in fact, multimodal simile.

> "Whatever construction is used to express it, a simile prompts a blend which is similar to a metaphor blend (single-scope), but the cross-mapping is more focused and is usually not expected to yield rich inferences […] In extended discourse contexts, however, similes, like metaphors and analogies, can play more elaborate roles in construing concepts in new ways – but (as with metaphor and analogy) that depends on the discourse, rather than on the nature of the mapping itself." (Dancygier and Sweetser 2014: 148)

We suggest that image macros in a corpus-driven study represent an extended discourse context, hence, similes found in memes do provide us with relevant inferences.

Owing to the selective and limited (in Dancygier and Sweetser's view) nature of mappings occurring between input spaces in the conceptual integration network, images with varying degrees of (dis)similarity to the actual pandemic can be utilized. In other words, even though single instances of blends do not provide rich inferences, the spectrum of images that can be used to address the pandemic is rather broad. As Lou (2017: 114) points out "simile's selective mapping lends itself to be structured in the image-macro form". In this way, the PANDEMIC frame is fed back to in rich and nuanced ways. *Image 5* is a case in point there. The Toy Story meme forges a farewell scenario in which Andy Davis, a major character, leaves his toy friends. The visual input (space) is aligned with what the meme maker intended to present as "leaving quarantine habits/routines behind". The emergent structure of the blend gives novel insights, rather surprising ones, into the PANDEMIC frame, i.e., fondness for the quarantine.

Memes on the Coronavirus convey a *feels-like* attitude. "Emphasizing one specific feeling or attribute is one of the rhetorical strengths of the simile, and we see that this is the same strength being augmented in its multimodal form" (Lou 2017: 117). The discrepancy between visual and verbal input induces the viewer to select the proper *feels-like* sense based on what the source-domain bears in terms of relevance to the target (Covid-19). In fact, Vandelanotte and Zenner (2018) define multimodal simile as image-text combinations using a source domain scene as a depiction, with textual

cues helping to guide the interpretation. That is, the visual part of the image macros represents the source domain in which only select attributes are metonymically featured with the intent to evoke certain emotional responses. The metonymic labelling is usually achieved by captions written over parts of images that should stand for attributes from the target domain. From that viewpoint, it is interesting to observe that, despite being very different in their respective visual inputs, all the memes pertaining to Trump tested positive for Covid-19 managed to convey their own nuanced meaning/emotion. The proper meaning can only be successfully conveyed given the knowledge on the current state of the pandemic and being acquainted with the meme scene. It is, then, that memes pertaining to Covid-19 can only be broad-scope similes (as defined in Lou 2017). In other words, it is not that the entire decoding potential (on the viewer's part) is vested in the multimodal artifact itself. It is rather that viewers actually need to know the current state of the pandemic to arrive at proper meaning. *Image 4* conveys the feeling that the meme maker (obviously) has in terms of going outside with the government being metonymically represented by a mean-looking wrestler[17.] waiting in ambush. Even "waiting in ambush" is not an inherent part of the wrestling frame, meme viewers are able to successfully align the roles and values provided in the visual. The selection process, it seems, is performed intuitively, facilitated by common background knowledge (on the Coronavirus).

6. CONCLUSION

The aim of the study was to show how context-depending meaning in memes pertaining to Covid-19 is generated. As could be seen, instances of image macros synchronously depicted the actual state of the Coronavirus, speaking in favor of the propounded evolution of memes. The highly creative blends yielded rich inferences for the Coronavirus. Owing to the conceptual network structure and selective mappings, various features have successfully been added to the PANDEMIC frame. It was shown that multimodal simile is responsible for meme layout. Most notably, we were able to detect two major phases – the Observer Phase and the Experiencer Phase – when it comes to meme content and proliferation, i.e., meme usage reflected the actual spread of the virus on a global scale with netizens first addressing Covid-19 in Chinese terms only while focus significantly shifted when the virus became a pandemic and resulted in memes that clearly show actual experience of the disease. It was

---

17. The Undertaker in the „Undertaker Standing Behind AJ Styles" meme (not yet confirmed by knowyourmeme.com).

shown that meme makers selected visuals that addressed the current state of the Coronavirus and their personal viewpoint. A somewhat surprising result was that not only deeply established and verified (by knowyourmeme.com) image macros had their place in Covid-related memes. It was suggested that meme creators perhaps chose memes that correspond to what they wanted to communicate at a given time. Shared experience between meme makers and meme viewers in a pandemic context facilitated understanding of multimodal inputs, e.g., *Image 8* was fully comprehensible at the time of creation because it corresponded to global events at the time of creation. On the flipside, the same image is perhaps of little meaning (as posted originally and shown in this paper) today, three years after it was generated (one might ask "What numbers?"). In other words, meme creators forged a link – a temporary one, we should say – between the visual part and the textual part (i.e., the actual state of affairs regarding Covid-19). Of the almost two hundred memes that made it into the final pool, most illustrative image macros were used in the paper according to the two phases detected and proposed in the paper. Blending Theory and Discourse Viewpoint were used as a theoretical foundation in the paper because of their compatibility and argumentative power in explaining the multimodal nature of memes. Blending Theory was responsible for explaining the creative part of the meme as to how an otherwise unrelated image can be meaningful in a context it was not originally created for while Discourse Viewpoint served as a theoretical framework by which we tried to explain what holds the meaning-making process together and how meaning is negotiated over the internet.

It was observed that memes have a *feels-like* flavor to them, with simile and metonymy as most salient tropes. Images that fit the intended message were chosen, as we suggested, on the basis of metonymical representation (*Image 7* is a very good example for that) while the content of the image at hand was understood as to what holds true for the actual state of affairs (at the time). In other words, simile emerged from emphasizing a specific feeling projected into the meme (again, relevant at a certain time) which is why we claimed that memes have a *feels-like* (the current state of Covid-19) attitude.

The findings show that memes are a powerful and opportune communicational tool that allows its users to convey their viewpoints in multimodal ways. Text-image pairing resulted in surprisingly nuanced meaning both powered by the PANDEMIC frame and fed back to it. Monomodality seems to have given way to multimodal artifacts that better represent the contemporary way of communication, and with social media on a high, multimodality is expected to further proliferate. As for the timeframe

covered (nine months in 2020), it was claimed that properties of the Coronavirus were not yet entrenched, i.e., rooted, because we only witnessed the virus unfolding, simply not having the big picture. The World Health Organization officially ended Covid-19 on May 5, 2023, almost three years after the timeframe for which we studied memes, which means that we covered only one third of the virus, and which also answers the question why Covid was not yet entrenched at the time of data collection.

Even though the study tried to systematize a huge corpus into a meaningful framework, its limitations are still scope-bound. The study did not classify memes according to types to show whether typical image macros function differently than images that are in meme format. Further research will be needed to see if entrenchment (typical image macros) yields finer-nuanced meaning as opposed to creative blends (images that do not yet have meme status). Future studies pertaining to the Coronavirus in memes (perhaps, memes in general) may also tackle memes in GIF format to see whether video clip-based visuals behave any differently than frozen image. Another attempt to get more insight into memes pertaining to the Coronavirus may go in the direction of humor research since the overall tone of memes (as is their general nature) was facetious. Such a study could provide us with understanding the degree and types of humor that can be found in memes around Covid-19, perhaps also, even somewhat outside the field, if and in what way humor-based memes help meme makers and viewer in coping with the pandemic.

REFERENCES

1. Berger, Jonah, Katherine Milkman (2012), ″What Makes Online Content Viral?,″ *Journal of Marketing Research*, 49(2), 192–205.
2. Burgess, Jean (2008), ″All Your Chocolate Rain Are Belong to Us? Viral Video, YouTube, and the Dynamics of Participatory Culture″, in: Geert Lovink and Sabine Niederer (ed.), *Video Vortex Reader: Responses to YouTube*, Institute of Network Cultures, Amsterdam, 101–109.
3. Coulson, Seana, Todd Oakley (2006), ″Purple persuasion: Conceptual blending and deliberative rhetoric″, in: Luchjenbroers, J. (ed.), *Cognitive Linguistics Investigations: Across languages, fields and philosophical boundaries*, John Benjamins Publishing Company, 47-65.
4. Croft, William (2001), *Radical Construction Grammar: Syntactic Theory in Typological Perspective*, Oxford University Press, Oxford

5. Dancygier, Barbara (2008), ″The text and the story: Levels of blending in fictional narratives″, in: Oakley, Tod, Anders Hougaard (eds.) *Mental Spaces in Discourse and Interaction*, 51-78.

6. Dancygier, Barbara (2017), ″Viewpoint phenomena in constructions and discourse″, *Glossa: A journal of general linguistics*, 2((1)37), 1–22.

7. Dancygier, Barbara, Lieven Vandelanotte (2016), ″Discourse viewpoint as network″, in: Dancygier, Barbara, Wei-lun Lu, Arie Verhagen (eds.), *Viewpoint and the fabric of meaning*, de Gruyter, Berlin, 13-40.

8. Dancygier, Barbara, Lieven Vandelanotte (2017a), ″Internet memes as multimodal constructions″, *Cognitive Linguistics*, 28(3), 565–598.

9. Dancygier, Barbara, Lieven Vandelanotte (2017b), ″Viewpoint phenomena in multimodal communication″, *Cognitive Linguistics*, 28(3), 371–380.

10. Dawkins, Richard (2006), *The Selfish Gene (30th Anniversary Edition)*, Oxford University Press, Oxford

11. Evans, Vyvyan (2007), *A Glossary of Cognitive Linguistics*, Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh

12. Evans, Vyvyan, Melanie Green (2006), *Cognitive Linguistics An Introduction*, Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh

13. Farías, Gabriela (2015), ″Selfie and the Experience of the Virtual Image in Tarun Tapas Mukherjee″, *Rupkatha Journal on Interdisciplinary Studies in Humanities*, 7(1), 74-81.

14. Fauconnier, Gilles (1994), *Mental Spaces: Aspects of Meaning Construction*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge

15. Fauconnier, Gilles, Mark Turner (2002), *The Way We Think*, Basic Books, New York

16. Galtung, Johan, Mari Holmboe Ruge (1965), ″The structure of foreign news: The presentation of the Congo, Cuba and Cyprus crises in four Norwegian newspapers″, *Journal of Peace Research*, 2(1), 64-90.

17. Goldberg, Adele E. (1995), *Constructions: A Construction Grammar Approach to Argument Structure*, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago

18. Jakobson, Roman (2002), ″Metaphoric and metonymic poles″, in: Dirven, René, Ralf Pörings (eds.), *Metaphor and Metonymy in Comparison and Contrast*, Walter de Gruyter, 41-47.

19. Koestler, Arthur (1964), *The Act of Creation*, Macmillan, New York

20. Lakoff, George (1993), ″The Contemporary Theory of Metaphor″, in: Andrew Ortony (ed.), *Metaphor and Thought* (second edition), Cambridge University

Press, 202-251.

21. Lakshmi, A. K. (2015), ″The Selfie Culture: Narcissism or Counter Hegemony?″, *Journal of Media and Communication Studies*, 5(1), 1-4.

22. Langacker, Ronald W. (1987), *Foundations of Cognitive Grammar vol I.* Stanford CA Stanford University Press.

23. Langacker, Ronald W. (2001), ″Discourse in Cognitive Grammar″, *Cognitive Linguistics*, 12(2), 143-188.

24. Lou, Adrian (2017), ″The "when" meme in social media discourse″, *English Text Construction*, 10(1), 106–131.

25. Peraica, Ana (2017), *Culture of the Selfie: Self-Representation in Contemporary Visual Culture*, Institute of Network Cultures, Amsterdam

26. Ristanović, Tatjana (2021) ″Konceptualizacija koronavirusa u online novinskim člancima na bosanskom/hrvatskom/srpskom / Conceptualization of Coronavirus in Online Articles in Bosnian, Croatian and Serbian″, *Journal of the Faculty of Philosophy in Sarajevo / Radovi Filozofskog fakulteta u Sarajevu*, 24, 193–211.

27. Shifman, Limor (ed.) (2014), *Memes in Digital Culture*, MIT Press, Cambridge, MA

28. Sweetser, Eve (2012), ″Viewpoint and perspective in language and gesture, from the Ground down″, in: Dancygier, Barbara, Eve Sweetser (eds.) *Viewpoint in Language – A Multimodal Perspective*, Cambridge University Press, 1-22.

29. Zenner, Eline, Dirk Geeraerts (2018), ″One does not simply process memes: Image macros as multimodal constructions″, in: Winter-Froemel, Esme, Verena Thaler (eds.) *Cultures and Traditions of Wordplay and Wordplay Research*, De Gruyter, 167-194.

Online resources

1. 9gag.com
2. omnicoreagency.com/instagram-statistics/
3. knowyourmeme.com

ŠIRI SE POPUT VIRUSA: TEORIJA KONCEPTUALNE INTEGRACIJE I DISKURSNOG STAJALIŠTA U ANALIZI INTERNETSKIH MEMOVA KOJI SE ODNOSE NA PANDEMIJU COVID-19

Sažetak

Ovaj rad analizira memove koji se odnose na Covid-19. Analizirano je više od 200 memova u razdoblju od devet mjeseci. Koristeći teoriju blendinga i teoriju diskursnog stajališta, pokušavamo objasniti kreativne unutarnje mehanizme memova kao i to kako se značenje sukreira na internetu. Jasno je utvrđeno da memovi sinkrono prate stvarni razvoj virusa Covid-19. Pokazujemo i da kreatori memova metonimijski koriste vizualne elemente kako bi referirali na trenutno stanje virusa Covid-19, dok memove u cjelini pokreće trop poređenja. Koliko se memovi oslanjaju na koncept Covid-19, jednako se vraćaju na njega u krugu samoreferencijalnosti. Zajedno sa svojom temeljnom metaforičkom prirodom, memovi prenose *osjećaj* s dvije glavne faze koje proizlaze iz njihove upotrebe, a to su faza promatrača i faza doživljavača. U prvoj fazi prikazani su memovi kada Covid-19 još nije bio pandemija (ali je percipiran kroz medijsku popraćenost s drugih mjesta), dok je druga faza jasno pokazala da su kreatori memova sami iskusili virus. Međutim, što se tiče obuhvaćenog vremenskog okvira, zaključujemo da memovi ne pokazuju potpunu konceptualnu integraciju jer Covid-19 još nije bio u potpunosti ukorijenjen.

Ključne riječi: Covid-19; konceputalna integracija; diskursna stajališta; memovi; kognitivna lingvistika

Adrese autora
Authors' address

Adi Maslo
Džemal Bijedić University of Mostar
adi.maslo@unmo.ba

Sofia Kefalidou
Aristotle University of Thessaloniki
sokefali@eled.auth.gr