

Group Buying Broker of Shanghai: Deliberate Metaphors in Shanghai's COVID-19 News Reports

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The outbreak in Shanghai, China in 2022 brought huge challenges to this protracted battle against the epidemic. Based on the deliberate metaphor theory, this study uses the news reports of Shanghai's fight against the COVID-19 pandemic as the corpus and uses quantitative and qualitative methods to analyze the types and characteristics of deliberate metaphors and its pragmatic purpose in a specific context. The results show that there are various types used in news reports, among which War metaphor, Climate metaphor and Education metaphor are used more. The deliberate metaphors makes the news more understandable attractively and pleasantly, thus evoking the emotional resonance of the public.

Keywords: deliberate metaphor, COVID-19, news report

Introduction

The outbreak and unlimited spread of COVID-19 in Shanghai has brought China's epidemic prevention and control to a deadlock again. The fast spread has had a disastrous economic and political impact on Shanghai, the economic center of China, that cannot be underestimated. In this human crisis, metaphors are naturally a powerful tool for describing the COVID-19 pandemic. A large number of novel and deliberate metaphorical expressions are still emerging in the development stage of the epidemic. Many metaphors have emerged in the news reports of the severe Shanghai epidemic. The news report is the main carrier of information dissemination, and to a large extent plays a role in constructing and maintaining social relations. There are a large number of metaphors in news reports, and the media attitudes behind them are simultaneously transmitted to the public. As a global health event, the COVID-19 pandemic is a news topic that has been widely concerned and reported by the media from all walks of life. Judging from the number and time span of news reports, its attention is far greater than that of similar social events in human history. In recent years, deliberate metaphor has emerged as a way of communication. Deliberate metaphors allow the recipient to accept indiscriminately and consciously map across domains. Therefore, this study starts with the deliberate metaphor theory, and focuses on the use of deliberate metaphors in Shanghai's COVID-19 news reports. We try to explore how deliberate metaphors are purposefully constructed and how they enhance the discursive purpose of the discourse itself, and what role they play in the process of construction.

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Deliberate Metaphor Theory

Metaphor is defined as a way of thinking and cognitive means and is rooted in human experience (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). Conceptual metaphor theory (CMT) believes that metaphor is a cross-domain mapping of conceptual systems. However, Steen's research indicates that the theoretical definition of metaphor as a cross-domain mapping does not mean that metaphors also exhibit cross-domain mapping during cognitive processing. Most understandings of metaphors may not require the construction of cross-domain mapping. This also goes against the universal character of metaphors in CMT. Furthermore, CMT focuses heavily on conceptual systems and unconsciousness in the analytical process. It only reveals part of the facts, and in fact, there are many conscious situations in the generation and reception of metaphors. These make researchers re-examine the conceptual metaphor theory under the two dimensions of language and thinking.

The originator, Gerard Steen, began his research in 2010 and has produced many publications (Steen, 2008; Steen 2010; Steen 2011a; Steen 2011b; Steen 2011c; Steen 2013; Steen 2015; Steen 2017). The deliberate metaphor theory has received all kinds of attention, support and criticism since its birth. In the article *Developing, Testing and Interpreting Deliberate Metaphor Theory* published in 2015, Steen proposed the deliberate metaphor theory. The emergence of deliberate metaphor for the first time brought "communication" into the metaphorical analysis mode and tried to solve the metaphorical paradox existing in the two dimensions of language and thinking. Steen believes that "the understanding of metaphor should be transformed into a three-plane model of language use, thinking style and communicative function" (Steen, 2008, pp. 213-241). He emphasized that metaphor is an intentional tool used in communication, and proposed the Deliberate Metaphor Theory (DMT). A metaphor is called deliberate when it is used as a metaphor in communication between language users. The addresser chooses a specific metaphor to express a specific situation, and the addressee has no choice but to consider the source domain as an independent conceptual domain to examine the target domain. This reflects the deliberate behavior of the addresser, intentionally modulating the listener's attention and enabling the addressee to construct an online cross-domain mapping. After incorporating the communicative dimension, the analysis mode of metaphor has also expanded from the two-dimensional model of language and thinking to the three-dimensional model of language, thinking and communication. Deliberate metaphor theory provides a theoretical basis for our exploration of how to use deliberate metaphors in news reports and what different pragmatic effects may be achieved.

Data and Methodology

Based on the social background of the Shanghai epidemic, this study focuses on the news reports on the "Shanghai COVID-19" published on the China News Service (a well-known Chinese news portal www.chinanews.com.cn/) from March 2022 to June 2022. News reports on the theme of "Shanghai COVID-19" are the research objects. The corpus is established based on the 453 pieces of Shanghai Covid-19 news reports. We identified, calculated and summarized the deliberate metaphors in the news reports of the Shanghai epidemic. Regarding how to identify, we use the metaphor identification program MIPVU to perform accurate metaphor identification. On this basis, we further use the deliberate metaphor identification program DMIP to extract. We used Corpus World Parser and Antconc4.0.1 software in the construction of the corpus. The deliberate metaphors collected from the corpus are summarized and classified, and selected metaphorical examples are studied for an

in-depth analysis of deliberate metaphors. We used quantitative and qualitative analysis methods. A self-constructed corpus was used to filter out the use of deliberate metaphors, and the obtained data results were analyzed. The specific research questions are as follows:

- (1) What are the types of deliberate metaphors used in news reports regarding the Shanghai epidemic?
- (2) What function do these deliberate metaphors play in news reports?

Table 1.

Deliberate Metaphors in Shanghai's COVID-19 News Reports

Source domain	Target domain	Carrier Words	Frequency	Incidence (%)
War	Measures, policy, people	团长 Group Buying Broker, 主战场main battlefield, 突击队 commando、武器 weapon	317	33%
Climate	Difficulty, Overcoming difficulty, Resurgence of COVID-19	倒春寒 late spring coldness, 阴雨 rain, 阳光 sun, 冬天 winter, 春天 spring, 雨过天晴 sunshine follows the rain	255	27%
Education	Experience, Difficulty, Process and Result	抄作业 copying homework、考试 exams、考题 exam questions、答卷 answer sheets、必修课 compulsory courses、思政课 ideological and political course	198	21%
Plant	Policy, Material	压茬推进 make soild progress、稻草 straw, 粮草 grain straw, 菜篮子 vegetable baskets	96	10%
Human	Difficulty, City	体检 physical examination, 休克 shock, 躺平 lie down, 动脉 arteries, 脉搏 pulse	87	9%

Findings and Analysis

As shown in Table 1, metaphors can be used to directly map the COVID-19 pandemic itself or people, policies, measures related to COVID-19, or indirectly construct other related issues. After screening and analyzing the collected news reports corpus, and then according to the different source domains, we roughly summarize the metaphor categories, carrier words and frequencies used in news reports.

Considering the frequency, salience and cultural characteristics of these deliberate metaphors, we have selected war, climate, and metaphors for further analysis and discussion, and to explore the important function of metaphors in news reports.

War Metaphor

War is defined as “when there is fighting between two or more countries or between opposing groups within a country, involving large numbers of soldiers and weapons (Bullon, 2009).” As a social phenomenon, it is the highest form of conflict. War metaphors are widely used in multiple public health emergencies, such as foot-and-mouth disease (Nerlich, Hamilton, & Rowe, 2002, pp. 90-108), SARS (Chiang & Duann, 2007, pp. 579-602), avian influenza (Nerlich & Halliday, 2007, pp. 46-65), H7N9 avian influenza (Zhang, Mao, & Wang, 2015, pp. 100-108, 169-170) and other related reports. Since the outbreak of COVID-19 in 2020, news reports have also used a large number of war metaphors to describe this highly contagious and sudden disease. As the epidemic in Shanghai worsens in 2022, new war metaphors have also appeared in news reports.

Example (1)

团长, 无疑是现在上海小区中最受欢迎的人。手机是他们的“武器”, 微信群是他们的“主战场”, 生活物资是他们的“战略目标”。

Group Buying Broker is undoubtedly one of the most popular people in the Shanghai community now. Mobile phones are their “**weapons**”, WeChat groups are their “**main battlefield**”, and living materials are their “**strategic goals**”.

From Example (1), we can identify the deliberate conceptual metaphor “EPIDEMIC IS BATTLEFIELD”, the image schema of war will be activated in the human brain. Elements that belong to the category of war will subtly emerge in the human brain and thus be expressed through language. Soldiers on the battlefield fight to defend the country and the people. People in the epidemic should carry out epidemic prevention and control to reduce the risk of infection. While the epidemic prevention and control is in full swing in Shanghai, there is the problem of difficulty in buying food. After masks and disinfectants, vegetables also seem to be in short supply during the epidemic. “Group Buying Broker” is the highest commander of a regimental unit in the army. The Group Buying Broker of Shanghai is the general person in charge of the group buying vegetables and daily necessities in each community. In this mega-city and super-large-scale epidemic prevention and control battle, they relieved the urgent needs of many families in Shanghai. Together with the front-running medical workers, they guarded Shanghai and guarded the residents’ three meals a day. Thus, the similarity established between their purpose and nature with the warriors, we can identify the deliberate conceptual metaphor “GROUP BUYING BROKERS ARE SOLDIERS”, with this being activated by 武器 *wǔ qì* weapon, 主战场 *zhǔ zhàn chǎng* main battlefield and 战略目标 *zhàn lüè mù biāo* strategic objective. The war metaphors show the beautiful quality of mutual help among neighbors during the epidemic, which helps to dilute the fear and despair caused by the widespread of the epidemic, and highlights the warmth and hope in dealing with the epidemic. It also can stimulate the public’s emotional resonance and reduce the chaos and fear caused by the worsening of the epidemic.

Climate Metaphor

According to Boers, “a source domain is more likely to be used for metaphorical mapping as it becomes more salient in everyday experience” (Boers, 1999). The climate phenomenon is a universal phenomenon familiar to us in everyday life. As one of the basic human experiences, it is also more likely to be a source domain that is directly recognized by the public, thus allowing us to construct a framework for climate metaphors.

Example (2)

上海连日的阴雨已经收止, 阳光正在赶来的路上。“倒春寒”终将过去, 等待所有人的将是明媚春光。

Days of **rain** in Shanghai have stopped and the **sun** is on its way. The “**late spring coldness**” will eventually pass and a **bright spring** day awaits everyone.

From Example (2), We can recognize the conceptual metaphor “EPIDEMIC IS NATURAL PHENOMENON”. 阴雨 *yīn yǔ* the rain refers to the severe form of the epidemic in Shanghai, and 阳光 *yáng guāng* the sun and 明媚春光 *míng mèi chūn guāng* bright spring refer to the end of the epidemic in Shanghai and the continuation of a better life. They establish similarities with the emotions brought to the people by the epidemic situation and constitute a metaphorical expression. 倒春寒 *dào chūn hán* late spring coldness refers to

the weather phenomenon in which the temperature rises faster in early spring (usually in March), while the temperature in late spring (usually in April or May) is lower than in normal years. Since the outbreak of COVID-19 in 2020, our country has been stubbornly fighting against it for more than two years. Because of the concerted efforts of the people across the country to fight the epidemic, China has maintained a very low infection rate and case fatality rate. In March 2022, Omicron hit Shanghai, which is another huge challenge to the epidemic prevention work. Similarities are established between changes in climate and changes in epidemic forms, and Chinese agricultural history has endowed a certain cultural sensitivity, leaving readers with no choice but to build a cross-domain mapping from the source domain of climate to the target domain of epidemic situations. So it can be recognized that this is also a deliberate metaphor—THE RECURRENCE IS LATE SPRING COLDNESS. By using this deliberate metaphor, the editors are telling the public that we should not feel pessimistic in the face of another round of epidemic attacks, but rather that we should keep our spirits up.

Education Metaphor

Education begins at birth. Each age group receives a different education. In particular, China is the birthplace of examinations, and the imperial examination system did not leave the stage of history until 1300. Today, education is more closely related to people's daily life. Since the outbreak of COVID-19, education metaphors have frequently appeared in news reports, such as concepts such as “exam questions, copying homework, and compulsory courses.” Therefore, the education metaphor is a novel metaphor used during the COVID-19 period.

Example (3)

专家提醒，奥密克戎是更难的“**考题**”，公众要克服侥幸心理和麻痹情绪，避免出现低估奥密克戎危害等认知误区。

Experts remind us that Omikron is a more difficult “**exam question**”, and the public must overcome fluke and paralysis, and avoid cognitive misunderstandings such as underestimating the harm of Omikron.

In Example (3), 考题 kǎo tí the exam question is a question encountered in an examination. This activates the deliberate conceptual metaphor that COVID-19 PREVENTION AND CONTROL IS AN EXAM. The difficult questions we encounter in prevention and control are the more difficult “exam questions”. The source of the Shanghai epidemic is the Omicron variant. Compared with the delta virus, the BA.2 clades of the Omicron variant have a shorter incubation period, shorter infectivity, and faster spread. This is a difficult task for epidemic prevention and control. Based on the feature of “difficulty completion”, the metaphorical mapping of the “difficult job” to the more difficult “exam question” forms a deliberate metaphor of “DIFFICULT JOB IS EXAM QUESTION”. For example, people need to go to class to acquire knowledge for exams. Taking classes is necessary because it is an important way to acquire knowledge. In order to prevent the spread of the virus, the task of disinfecting during the epidemic is indispensable. The use of education metaphors play a certain role in resonating with readers' emotions. Since we have been educated since childhood, it make us realize the difficulty of fighting the epidemic and the efforts we need to make to be successful in fighting the epidemic.

Conclusion

We empirically examined three typical metaphor cases. They all originate from physical and sociocultural backgrounds. We analyzed their deliberate use in communicative functions: the war metaphor emphasizes, the solidarity, and moving of people in the face of the pandemic and thus plays a primarily positive emotional role; the climate metaphor, which changes with the weather and temperature, is used to evoke strong emotions such as confidence; the education metaphor combined with socio-cultural knowledge can explain the problems and difficulties in the fight against the epidemic and persuade readers to side with editors in calling for effective social governance.

The deliberate metaphors in the news reports innovated the way of dissemination of news language. While delivering the epidemic information to the group on time, it also stimulates the audience's feelings and arouses a positive and strong emotional resonance among the masses. Based on the deliberate metaphor theory, this study breaks through the scope of previous metaphor research. Instead of focusing on the unconscious characteristics of metaphors in the past, this paper analyzes and studies the conscious generation and reception of metaphors. Future research can also focus on deliberate metaphors in some specific cultures for cross-cultural comparative analysis.

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