Coronavirus–inspired Metaphors in Political Discourse

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Abstract

In the face of the great danger posed by the Covid-19 pandemic, political leaders worldwide, speaking from a position of authority, delivered carefully crafted televised speeches and press conferences, intended to inform the public about the pandemic, its implications and the preventive restrictions they were imposing. The main objective of this paper is to investigate how politicians used language, particularly metaphors, when talking about and interpreting the newly created situation with the Covid-19 pandemic. For the purposes of this study a corpus was compiled of coronavirus-related speeches delivered by several key world political figures – Boris Johnson, Donald Trump, Angela Merkel, and Emanuel Macron. The speeches were delivered on a timeline from March to May 2020, i.e. the period that saw the inception, the peak and the gradual withdrawal of the first 'wave' of the coronavirus in Europe and the United States. A contrastive analysis of the speeches was carried out in order to detect similarities and differences in the use of metaphors on the part of the politicians, at the three specific time points of the pandemic's

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trajectory. The final aim was to ascertain whether any correlation existed between the use of metaphoric language and the outcome of the pandemic, i.e. how people reacted and whether they followed the politicians' instructions and recommendations. The analysis showed that a range of different metaphors permeated the analysed political speeches; however, the war metaphor presenting the pandemic as a fight against a deadly and invisible enemy was the most persistent one. The usage of war metaphor was particularly frequent during the peak of the pandemic but the results suggests that it had no real bearing on the outcome of the pandemic, i.e. people's response to politicians' calls for caution and obedience to the preventative measures.

Keywords: *Covid-19, politicians, speeches, metaphors, persuasive effect*

Introduction

In times of great distress, like the Covid-19 pandemic, people try to find reassurance, guidance and comfort in their political leaders' words. Therefore, during such periods, heads of states, presidents and prime ministers, deliver speeches and hold press-conferences addressing the public, interpreting the situation and giving instructions for people's expected conduct. In such sensitive circumstances, politicians become very aware of the power vested in the language they use, and tend to craft their speeches with a great deal of deliberation and precision.

To increase the level of persuasion of the words they use in their political speeches, politicians resort to using figurative language very frequently. In fact, political discourse is very frequently permeated with figurative language, particularly metaphors. Research has shown that the role of metaphors in political discourse is not purely ornamental. Quite the contrary,

being used to present one thing in terms of another, or in other words, by drawing analogies between a source domain and a target domain[1], based on structure similarities of both domains, metaphors have proven, time and again, that they "play a central role in the construction of social and political reality" (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980, p.159). What this means is that, politicians use metaphors purposefully when addressing the public, as metaphors have proven very useful in construing people's perception of the reality they live in.

The main objective of this paper is to inspect the use of a specific type of metaphors – *conceptual metaphors* (whose aim is to shape and constrain our understanding of the world) in political discourse in light of the Covid-19 pandemic, which took the world utterly by surprise in December 2019 and continued to shake its very foundations throughout 2020. More precisely, a contrastive analysis aimed at identifying similarities and differences in the use of conceptual metaphors was carried out on 11 key political speeches delivered on a timeline from March to May 2020 by central political figures in Europe and the United States – Boris Johnson, Emmanuel Macron, Angela Merkel, and Donald Trump. Being the head of their respective states, right from the start of the coronavirus outbreak these politicians addressed their nations on multiple occasions in order to inform the public about the pandemic and its implications on the economic and social life as well as about the restrictions they were imposing in order to prevent the virus from spreading and claiming more lives. Given the horrific circumstances, with many cases of infected people and

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[1]The terms **target** and **source domain** were introduced by George Lakoff and Mark Johnson in *Metaphors We Live By* (1980). The **target domain** is the domain that we try to understand (life, love, social structure etc.) through the use of the **source domain** (war, journey etc.).

hundreds of lives being lost on a daily basis, on the one hand, and their hugely responsible positions, on the other hand, it was extremely interesting to observe the way in which these key political figures conceptualized the reality and put it into words, metaphorically, to make sure that their message resonates with everybody and really influences people's behaviour.

The final aim of the study is to ascertain whether any correlation can be established between the use of metaphors in political speeches and the outcome of the pandemic in the selected countries in terms of whether the political speeches had any real effect on the way people behaved during the pandemic, i.e. whether they truly obeyed the politicians' restrictions and instructions. A very clear indication of how seriously people took the politicians' orders, warnings and precautions can be found in the number of infected cases and fatalities.

Theoretical background

Cognitive metaphors

Metaphors have traditionally been studied in literature, rhetoric and linguistics, and were depicted as ornaments which decorate texts without affecting their meaning (Curticapean; 2006, p. 17), or ornaments which add a touch of aesthetical upliftment to otherwise prosaic language (Nie et al. 2016, p. 4). Aristotle originally defined the term metaphor as: "giving something a name that belongs to something else; …. or on the grounds of analogy … metaphors are constituted on the basis of our ability to see the similarity in dissimilars" (in Nie, 2016, p. 5).

Cognitive linguistics "altered the status of metaphor from art to instrument, to a crucial device for the formation of

concepts and the conceptualization of reality" (Gavriely-Nuri, 2009, p.155). Thus, metaphor was turned into "more than a figure of speech, it came to be viewed as a mode of thought" (Gavriely-Nuri, 2009, p.155), which has a potential to "create social reality and guide future action" (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980, p.156).

Nowadays, it is increasingly acknowledged that metaphors shape and constrain our understanding of the world by framing it within previous knowledge structures (Bougher, 2012). Metaphors are viewed as a form of analogical reasoning which involves an intelligent transfer of knowledge across domains (Holyoak and Thagard, 1995). Hence, conceptual metaphors are viewed as a process of understanding one idea in terms of another, that is, as a set of correspondences between two conceptual domains, which are known as the source and the target domain (Lakoff and Johnson, 2003, p.4). More precisely, metaphors are effective when (a) the source domain calls to mind a salient knowledge structure (or feeling); (b) this knowledge is well known to speakers of the linguistic community; and (c) the comparison of the target to the source domain is apt in a given culture (Boroditsky, 2000; Bowdle & Gentner, 2005). In contrast, metaphors are ineffective when the source domain does not call to mind a salient structure (or emotion), when knowledge of the structure of a source domain, or its emotional connotation, has limited reach, or when the comparison of the target domain to the source domain is not apt (Flusberg et al. 2018, p.5).

Cognitive metaphors in political discourse

The fact that metaphors allow people to talk and think about complex or abstract information in terms of comparatively simple and more concrete information (Gibbs, 1994; Pinker, 2007; Thibodeau and Boroditsky, 2011), has helped them

become ubiquitous (Geary, 2011 in Bougher, 2012, p. 147). Their presence is especially noticeable "in public discourse, particularly in political discourse" (Otieno, Owino and Attyang, 2016, p. 21).

According to Pérez López (2018, p. 2) the accurate use of metaphors in political discourse is a priceless weapon in the arsenal of any politician, as metaphors not only enhance the message but also catch people's attention and provide a connection between what is already known to people (culture, history, etc.) and the ideology of a political party or a politician. Dittmer (1977, p. 567) claims that politicians employ metaphors to depict political events and relations as less complex and more concrete for citizens or voters. Put differently, choosing a word from our common language and using it in a metaphorical way gives the message a familiar meaning and allows politicians and journalists to move from a more abstract to a more concrete level.

The popularity of metaphors in political discourse is also attributed to the fact that it guides people's understanding and interpretation of political and social events in such a way that metaphors "stress certain details and connections while, at the same time, minimize others" (Van Teeffelen, 1994, p. 384). In fact, the clever use of metaphors in political discourse is regarded as "an ingenious strategy which controls some beliefs and ideologies over the prejudice of others" (Lakoff, 2008, in Pérez López, 2018, p.6).

Research in metaphors used in political discourse points to an existence of many different conceptual metaphors commonly used by politicians. Thus, for instance, Vestermark (2007) analysed the conceptual metaphors in the inaugural speeches of a number of American presidents and detected the following metaphors: the *world as a community* metaphor; the *nation as a person* metaphor, and the *nation acting as human*

metaphor. In her study, she argues that the conceptual metaphors used in political discourse are highly intentional, but not always easy to detect. Wei (2001) discovered that Taiwanese political discussions were inherently and inevitably metaphorical as politicians, in order to promote their visibility and propagate their political ideologies, used a variety of metaphors, such as the *marriage* metaphor, the *show business* metaphor, the *war* metaphor, the *weather* metaphor, the *financial transaction* metaphor, the *revenge* metaphor, and the *journey of spiritual awakening* metaphor.

Taiwo (2010) studied metaphors in Nigerian political discourse and discovered that in Nigerian political discourse the nation is conceptualized as a *family* and as a *person*. He also identified the conceptual mappings of *politics as battle*; *politics as a journey*, and *the politician as a builder*. Shahla et al. (2012) explored metaphorical expressions that made use of *body parts* and the roles they played in Persian political texts. Their findings revealed that in Persian political discourse there were fifteen body parts used in political metaphors, with the *head* metaphor being the most prominent one.

It is important to note that research, so far, has shown that *military metaphors*, or more precisely *war metaphors*, are deeply embedded in public discourse, and in political discourse in particular (Nie et. al, 2016, Flusberg, et al. 2018, etc.). One plausible reason for that is the fact that violence and warfare have been humanity's constant companions for millennia, and people in general have a clear schematic knowledge for a prototypical war and, can easily do the knowledge transfer, i.e. the mapping with any target domain which includes at least two opposing parties. Or as Flusberg et al. (2018) explain:

"*Many common topics of discussion resemble war. They share structural relations and can evoke similar emotions. Everything from arguments, sports, politics, and relationships to healthcare,*

fundamental biological phenomena (e.g. "invasive" species), and even scientific research have something in common with war. Arguments, politics, and sports, for example, are like war because they involve a conflict between opposing forces, require strategic decisions to be made about how to allocate resources, unfold over time, and have identifiable winners and losers. As a result, the domain of war can serve as an apt source domain to structure how we communicate and think about a wide range of topics." (p.4)

War metaphors are considered appropriate in political discourse primarily because of their potential to evoke a sense of fear (Flusberg et al. 2018), which, in turn, motivates people to pay attention, change their beliefs, and take action about important social issues (Hodgkin, 1985). Thus, for instance, when the war metaphor is used in the context of a disease, it helps people recognize the threat that the disease poses to public health, and, this, in turn, leads to increased funding for research on effective treatments (Hodgkin, 1985). Critics of the war metaphor claim that it lost its original effect and strength due to overuse (Flusberg et al. 2018, p. 11); and they also 'blame' it for being misleading at best, and harmful at worst; for leading to an increased political and cultural polarization, and for putting in danger the personal and social well-being of the individual (Flusberg et al. 2018, p. 2).

Research Methodology

As it was previously mentioned, the aim of the study is to investigate the use of conceptual metaphors in political discourse in very specific and rather novel circumstances, the 2020 coronavirus pandemic. To attain that aim, 11 speeches in total, delivered by several very prominent world politicians, were subjected to critical discourse analysis. The politicians shortlisted for this study were: Boris Johnson, the British Prime

Minister, Angela Merkel, the German Chancellor, and Emmanuel Macron, the French President, and the President of the USA, Donald Trump. The speeches of the German Chancellor and the French President were originally in French and German, respectively, but for the purposes of this study the transcripts of these speeches (translated in English) were used.

Three speeches per politician were selected and analysed[2], one speech delivered in March, i.e. when the pandemic saw its inception in Europe and America; one speech in April, when the curve of the pandemic reached its peak, and one speech in May, when the pandemic started to lose ground and the number of infected cases and fatalities started to drop in Europe and the States. Only in the case of the French President, there were 2 speeches analysed - one in March and one in April, as no translated transcript in English of a May speech was available online, to the best of our knowledge.

The speeches were analysed in terms of: a) *the types of conceptual metaphors* the politicians employed in their attempt to depict the pandemic and to impose a proper understanding of the crisis on the part of their respective nations; b) *the incidence with which these metaphors* appeared in politicians' speeches at the beginning of the health crisis, when the health crisis reached its peak and when the pandemic started to recede in strength; and c) *the effect the metaphorical language* used by politicians had on the actual outcome of the pandemic in the politicians' respective countries, in terms of to what extent people followed politicians' instructions and orders, of which a clear indicator is the number of infected cases and fatalities.

Bearing these in mind, the research was based on the following three hypotheses:

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[2] The links to the transcripts of all speeches analysed in this study are provided in the Appendix.

Hypothesis 1: The use of conceptual metaphors, just like the curve of the virus, will gradually intensify at the time when the pandemic reaches its peak and will subsequently subside towards the end of the first 'wave' of the pandemic.

Hypothesis 2: The political leaders will use a variety of metaphors in their speeches to make their speeches more effective and persuasive.

Hypothesis 3: The more present the metaphors are in the politicians' discourse, the more their speeches will influence people's behaviour and the more positive the outcome of the pandemic (fewer infected cases and fatalities) will be.

Results

The presence of conceptual metaphors in politicians' speeches

The analysis of the Covid-19-related speeches of the selected politicians reveals that they all addressed their respective nations in order to bring people up-to-date with the latest developments regarding the health crisis. More specifically, in their March speeches, the politicians were mainly discussing the restrictions they were imposing to stop the virus from spreading; in their April speeches, the accent was placed on the steps their government were taking to relieve the negative effects of the pandemic, and in their May speeches, among the other things, the politicians dwelled on their plans to ease the lockdown measures.

The first step of the analysis was to detect and separate the metaphoric utterances from the fact-based utterances. The analysis of the speeches showed that although the politicians were using predominately fact-based language, their speeches were intersected with a varying number of metaphorical utterances as well (Table 1). In addition, all four politicians

delivered the longest speeches in April, i.e. at the peak of the pandemic, and used more conceptual metaphors then, than in their other two speeches (see Table 1 below).

	Total no. of words	Total no. of utterances with metaphors
Boris Johnson		
March	867	8
April	1095	10
May	889	4
Emmanuel Macron		
March	2621	14
April	3541	33
Angela Merkel		
March	1062	6
April	3591	31
May	1454	8
Donald Trump		
March	1281	9
April	2770	6
May	1952	11

Table 1. The number of metaphoric utterances in the analysed political speeches

In fact, the results show that, generally speaking, Macron and Merkel were much more inclined towards using metaphorical language, and their metaphorical language use was evidently most pronounced at the peak of the pandemic, i.e. in their April speeches. Trump and Johnson's inclination for

using conceptual metaphors was considerably lower in comparison to Merkel and Macron. However, Johnson's inclination towards using conceptual metaphors is identical with the one of Macron and Merkel. He too uses metaphors mostly in his April speech, probably, because the situation with the pandemics gets more serious in the UK at that time. Trump, on the other hand, uses much less metaphorical language in April when the pandemic reaches its peak than in March and May, i.e. than at the beginning of the pandemic and when the pandemic started so show signs of abating in Europe (see Table 1 and Chart 1). Namely, he reduces the use of metaphors at the peak of the pandemic as the focus of his April speech is put entirely on how well his administration is handling the situation and on explication of the measures they are taking. However, the evident rise in the number of metaphors in his May speech can be attributed to the fact that the President realizes that despite all the preventive measures and restrictions put in place, the situation with the pandemic is still not put entirely under control.
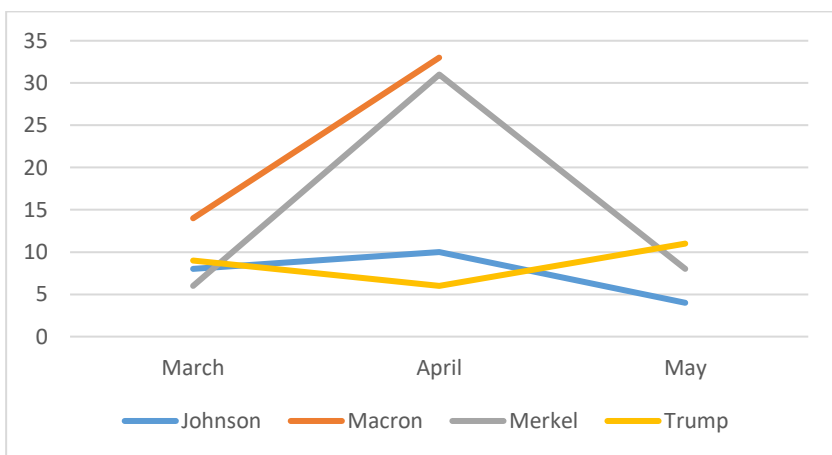

Chart 1. The use of metaphoric language in politicians' speeches

As the results show that three of the politicians use more metaphors in their speeches delivered at the peak of the pandemic, we can conclude that, in general, the overall tendency indeed is as predicted with the first hypothesis (**Hypothesis 1:** The use of conceptual metaphors, just like the curve of the virus, will gradually intensify at the time when the pandemic reaches its peak and will subsequently subside towards the end of the first 'wave' of the pandemic.). This is a clear indication of politicians' heavy reliance on metaphors in shaping people's viewpoints and behaviour amidst the pandemic. When the stakes are truly high, the politicians wish to make a marked impression on people's perception of the severity of the situation and to persuade them to act in a specific manner. Metaphors seem to really come in handy in attaining that goal.

Types of conceptual metaphors in politicians' speeches

Regarding our second hypothesis (**Hypothesis 2:** The political leaders use *a variety of metaphors* in their speeches), we can safely state that the findings of this study confirm its validity. The Covid-19 pandemic clearly inspired politicians to use a number of distinct conceptual metaphors. More precisely, they made use of the *war metaphor, the journey metaphor, the ocean metaphor, the nation as human metaphor, the teacher metaphor*, etc.

Nevertheless, a clear predominance of the war metaphor in almost all analysed speeches is evident. Preference for the war metaphor over the other types of conceptual metaphors was particularly noticeable in Macron and Trump's speeches (Table 2 and Chart 2). Trump uses it more, both at the beginning stage of the pandemic and later on in May when the situation in America worsens.

	War metaphors	Other metaphors
Boris Johnson		
March	62.5%	37.5%
April	50%	50%
May	25%	75%
Emmanuel Macron		
March	78%	22%
April	61%	39%
Angela Merkel		
March	50%	50%
April	45%	55%
May	25%	75%
Donald Trump		
March	100%	0%
April	67%	33%
May	82%	18%

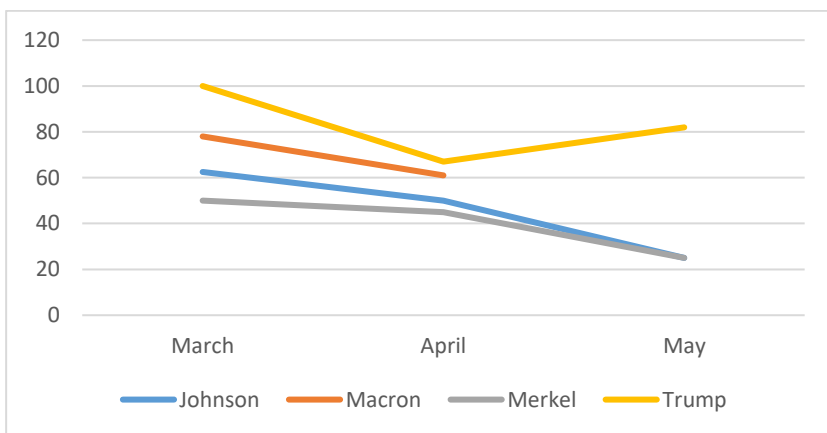Table 2 The use of the war metaphor vs. the other types of metaphors in the analysed speeches

Chart 2 The use of the war metaphor in politicians' speeches

As can be seen from the results, Johnson and Merkel resorted to using the war metaphor in a more balanced way, intersecting their speeches with other types of metaphors as well. In fact, in their post-peak speeches in May, the predominance of the war metaphor is significantly reduced in their speeches and much more space is allocated to the other types of metaphors - the *journey* metaphor, the *body* metaphor, the *teacher* metaphor, the *machine* metaphor and the *servant* metaphor. This signals that as the force of the pandemic was abating, these two politicians aspired towards removing the pressure from the people by shining a different, more optimistic light on the pandemic.

The war metaphor in politicians' Covid-19 speeches

The war metaphor was built by means of vocabulary typically used in the domain of war: *to fight, to combat, to win, victory, fight, war, battle, to defeat, enemy,* and *frontline*, etc., now transferred in the source domain, i.e. the domain of the disease caused by the coronavirus.

Thus, the picture that the politicians create about their countries at the time of the pandemic, with the war metaphor, is one of a war zone. This is particularly true of Macron's first speech, i.e. when he announces the outbreak of the pandemic in France, and practically declares war on the pandemic. Macron acknowledges that France is 'at war' with the Covid-19 pandemic and that it 'fights' with all its resources to 'win a victory' over the virus (<u>We are at war</u>, *admittedly a health war:* <u>we're fighting</u> *neither an army nor another nation).* In order to amplify his war rhetoric, in his March speech, Macron repeatedly uses the same short but effective statement "*We are at war*".

Macron in both speeches depicts himself as a marshal who is at the head of a marching army, carrying his country's

flag (*For my part, I will be <u>carrying the flag</u> for France …; We must <u>march on</u> with calm and courage*.). He commends his 'soldiers' across all army sections for their bravery and conduct; first, those "on the front line" (*Our civil servants, healthcare workers, doctors, nurses, … <u>on the front line</u> are going above and beyond the call of duty to save lives and care for the sick.*); then, those who are "the second line of defence" (*Our <u>second line of defence</u> has been the farmers, teachers, truck-drivers, delivery people, electricians ...*), and, finally, those who are on "the third line of defence" (*And each one of us, in what I would call <u>the third line of defence</u>, through our civic responsibility, respect for the lockdown rules in cooperation with the police, have contributed to a flattening of the coronavirus curve*).

Macron particularly stresses the point that the 'enemy' i.e. the virus – is not to be underestimated and that they have to mobilize all their resources in the war against this 'enemy' (*But the enemy is there<u>, invisible, elusive</u>, and it's <u>making headway</u>. And that <u>requires our widespread mobilization</u>.*). He also highlights the murderous nature of the virus which kills people in more ways than one way – either through infection or by means of the side effects it triggers (*…the virus is not the only thing <u>that can kill you</u> at this time; <u>solitude, neglecting your health in other ways, these can be deadly too</u>*).

In combating the outbreak, as a real army leader, Macron encourages his people to act in unison and solidarity (*I'm certain of one thing: the more quickly <u>we act together</u>, the more we'll <u>overcome this ordeal</u>*), and in order to uphold the spirit of optimism, he reminds his people of the 'victories' they have won up to that point (*These last few weeks … <u>there have been important victories</u>: the doubling of the number of intensive care beds …*). In addition, he urges his 'soldiers' to stay vigilant and on alert as the fight is not over *(There is hope, as I have said, but <u>the battle is a long way from being won</u>).* He reassures them that they

will prevail, but also prepares them for the new post pandemic reality (*Let's take strong action, but let's remember: the day after, when we've won, <u>it won't be a return to the day before</u>.*)*, and for the rebuilding of the country that is ahead of them (*France must keep its financial independence and <u>rebuild</u> our agricultural, sanitary, industrial and technological independence*).

Johnson also gives credit to those fighting on the frontline (*I want to thank everyone who is working flat out <u>to beat the virus</u>, everyone from the supermarket staff to the transport workers, to the carers, to the nurses and doctors <u>on the frontline</u>*); calls on all his people to 'enlist' in the 'army' which is fighting against the virus (*But in this fight, we can be in no doubt that each and every one of us is directly <u>enlisted</u>*), and encourages the British people to fight jointly and in solidarity in order to save lives (Each and every one of *us is now obliged <u>to join together</u>, to halt the spread of this disease, to protect our NHS, and <u>to save many, many thousands of lives</u>.*).

As to the war metaphor in Merkel's speeches, she also talks about Germany being under attack (*The pandemic has <u>hit</u> us in a time of healthy households and strong reserves*.) and the fight that the Germans are putting against it (*Because in the <u>fight against the virus</u> we must always bear in mind that the figures of today reflect the infections from about 10-12 days ago/ This also applies to the decision <u>to combat the coronavirus pandemic</u>, which is of utmost importance for the well-being of the people of this country*). Just like the other politicians, she too singles out and commends healthcare professionals for their participation in the fight against the virus (*Perhaps less seen in public, but equally crucial in <u>the fight against the pandemic</u>, is the role played by the public health service*), and acknowledges that they need to be fit or in proper shape, just like soldiers, in order to be able to withstand the attacks of the 'enemy' (*This is almost 400 local <u>health authorities</u> and if we are to manage to control and contain infection in the coming*

months, then we need <u>these offices in a strong condition</u> and I <u>say in a</u> <u>stronger condition</u> than they were before the pandemic). To uphold this war metaphor, she even uses weaponry-related terms (*It is about supporting our economy and <u>raising a protective shield</u> for workers).*

What is slightly different about her war metaphor is that the virus is not presented merely like an 'enemy' but also like an 'intruder' or 'imposter', who is holding the German people hostages and who is thus breaking their basic human rights (*<u>We</u> <u>have been living with the pandemic for weeks</u>; each of us has had <u>to</u> <u>adapt</u> our lives to the new circumstances, both privately and professionally/ The corona pandemic is a democratic <u>imposition</u>, because it restricts exactly what our existential rights and needs are).* She also warns her people that they should not expect their 'captivity' to be over soon, as the 'intruder' will remain with them for some time (*I understand that life under coronavirus conditions feels very very long for everyone.... <u>We will have to live</u> <u>with this virus for a long time</u>*.).

The outcome of the 'war' according to Merkel will undoubtedly be favourable for Germany and its people (*Nevertheless, <u>we will eventually only end the coronavirus pandemic</u> with a vaccine, at least according to everything we know about the virus today*.). Still she forewarns the Germans of the new and changed reality that awaits them after the pandemic (*It's clear that we initially <u>can't return to everyday life</u> as we knew it before the coronavirus. <u>Everyday life will sometimes look different</u> for the time being even when the current digital tracing models can be used*).

The American President, Donald Trump, also employs the war metaphor and talks about 'fighting' and 'defeating' the virus (…*we will significantly reduce the threat to our citizens and we will ultimately and expeditiously <u>defeat this virus</u>./ Each of us has a role to play in <u>defeating this virus</u>./ We are at a critical time <u>in the</u> <u>fight against the virus</u>*).

In his second and third speech, he upholds the war rhetoric and talks about the 'war' and the 'enemy' even more explicitly by using words such as 'war', 'enemy', 'fight' etc. (*Today I'd like to provide you with an update <u>in our war against the coronavirus</u>./ As we express our gratitude for these <u>hard-fought gains</u> however, we continue to mourn with thousands of families across the country whose loved ones have been stolen from us by <u>the invisible enemy</u>./ We also stand in solidarity with the thousands of Americans who are ill and <u>waging a brave fight against the virus</u>*).

Trump particularly underlines the deadly force of the enemy, i.e. the pandemic, and the damage it has inflicted on his nation (*This global <u>pandemic has inflicted great pain and hardship on our people</u>… We mourn for <u>every life the virus has claimed</u>, and we share the grief of all of you who have lost a loved one...*).

The American President depicts his administration as a commander in chief on the battlefield and praises their strength and resourcefulness (*So we're <u>deploying the full power and strength of the federal government</u> to help States, cities to help local government get this horrible plague over with and over with fast./ <u>To battle the virus, my administration marshaled every resource</u> at our nation's disposal, public, private, military, economic, scientific and industrial all at your disposal./My administration is <u>fighting relentlessly to protect all citizens</u> of every color and creed <u>from this terrible virus, the invisible enemy</u>*). He specifically commends the medical staff for their role in the 'war' by presenting them as incredibly brave warriors (*Day after day we're making tremendous strides with <u>the dedication of our doctors and nurses, these are incredible people, these are brave people, these are warriors</u>*).

Trump, praising the ingenuity and the resourcefulness of his people (*…<u>Americans do whatever it takes to find solutions, pioneer breakthroughs and harness the energies we need to achieve a total victory</u>*), also calls on his compatriots to show solidarity and be united in the face of the 'enemy' (*<u>We are all in this</u>*

together. We must put politics aside, stop the partisanship and *unify together* as one nation and one family).

Finally, the American President also shows optimism about the outcome of the 'war' (*If we are vigilant − and we can reduce the chance of infection, which we will − we will significantly impede the transmission of the virus. The virus will not have a chance against us./ Our future remains brighter than anyone can imagine*), and prepares his countrymen for the process of rebuilding the country and its economy (…*we will defeat this horrible enemy, we will revive our economy and we will transition into greatness*).

The journey metaphor in politicians' Covid-19 speeches

In addition to the war metaphor, the *journey* metaphor, although less frequently used than the war metaphor, still kept recurring consistently throughout all politicians' speeches. With the journey metaphor the pandemic was portrayed as a precarious journey over a challenging, mountainous terrain. Thus, in Johnson's speeches there were 2 to 3 occurrences of the journey metaphor in each speech, and it involved climbing up the down the slopes and reaching peaks of mountains, going through tunnels, etc. (*The way ahead is hard, and it is still true that many lives will sadly be lost./ And yet it is also true that there is a clear way through./ We're past the peak and we're on the downward slope./ We've come through the peak, or rather, we've come under what could have been a vast peak, as though we've been going through some huge Alpine tunnel*). Johnson uses the journey metaphor to help him build a cautiously optimistic tone (*And we can now see the sunlight and the pasture ahead of us. And so, it is vital that we do not now lose control and run slap into a second and even bigger mountain*), and even depicts the rebuilding of the country as part of that journey (*These are careful but deliberate steps on the road to rebuilding our country).*

In Macron's April speech, the military rhetoric that was so vigorously and almost exclusively used in his March speech, was mitigated with the journey metaphor. With the help of this metaphor, which revolved around words/phrases such as: *path, to traverse, to go down a path, to arrive at, to find the path, to find new ways, to get off the beaten track*, etc., the French President clearly tried to depict the crisis as a journey that will eventually take the French to a beautiful destination (*We need <u>to get off the beaten track</u>, reinvent ourselves <u>find new ways</u> of living, not least of all me./ In the coming weeks … <u>I task you with finding the path to</u> that possible future./ My dear compatriots, <u>better days lie ahead</u>, happy days will be here again.*).

The journey metaphor which depicts the pandemic as a difficult travel across a precarious terrain recurs in Merkel's speech too, created with the help of a number of idiomatic expressions such as 'walking on thin ice', 'to be out of the woods', 'get out of breath', etc. (*… <u>we are walking on thin ice, you can also say on the thinnest of ice</u>. The situation is deceptive and we are by no means <u>out of the woods</u>./ Let's all remain wise and careful <u>on the path</u> to the next phase of the pandemic. This is <u>a long route</u> because we cannot <u>lose the drive</u> and <u>get out of breath</u> too early.*).

There was only one instance of the journey metaphor in Trump's May speech and, this one instance, interestingly, was combined with a war metaphor (*Day after day <u>we're making tremendous strides</u> with <u>the dedication of our doctors and nurses, these are incredible people, these are brave people, these are warriors</u>*).

The other types of conceptual metaphors used in politicians' Covid-19 speeches

The *ocean* metaphor was used, although rather infrequently, to compare the virus to a maritime phenomenon, i.e. a huge and daunting wave which has a potential to cause damage to anybody and anything nearby. The ocean metaphor which

depicted the new cases of infected people with the coronavirus as an ocean wave that rises high and can be easily seen on the horizon from afar was found in Johnson's discourse (*That means we can also allow outdoor markets to reopen in a safe way that does not risk causing <u>a second wave of the virus</u>*), as well as in Macron's March address to the nation (*…otherwise they (doctors) will not be able to deal with <u>the wave of serious cases which is already on the horizon</u> in some regions*).

In Macron's second speech, there were several instances of the *country as a human* metaphor. With this metaphor France was depicted as a human being which has its own bodily functions. According to the French President, although these bodily functions are currently weakened by the virus, but in time she will recuperate and rebuild her strength (*It is what we, as a <u>country</u>, need to do to limit the spread of the virus, ensure there are enough hospital beds for all and <u>rebuild our strength</u>./ The essence of what makes France great is <u>alive and kicking</u>*).

Merkel's coronavirus speeches, in addition to the war metaphor and the journey metaphor, instigated the use of the *body* metaphor, as well as several other types of novel and unusual conceptual metaphors: the *teacher* metaphor, the *machine* metaphor and the *servant* metaphor. Namely, in talking about the much needed unity and solidarity among people in such testing times as the coronavirus pandemic itself, she takes a clear recourse to the *body metaphor,* in which parts of the human body like *hands* and *heart* are used to present the idea that people should work together and should be compassionate towards each other (*This helps researchers and doctors at all German university hospitals <u>to work hand in hand</u> on these tasks./This is only possible if citizens do something for their fellow human beings <u>with heart and reason,</u> for their country, call it for the greater good*).

With the *teacher* metaphor the domain of the disease (i.e. the pandemic) as a target domain is mapped onto the teacher domain as a source domain. Thus, Merkel presents Germany like a student 'learning' from a teacher, i.e. the pandemic; the German health care system has 'passed the test'; and other countries are 'tested' by the pandemic too (*We have to learn from the situation, so to say./ The pandemic has taught us that it is not good when protective equipment is exclusively sourced from distant countries./ Thus, today, we can see that our health system has been passing its probation so far./We were, with the decision to suspend all interest and amortization payments this year for the poorest 77 countries in the world able to take some pressure off these heavily tested states….*).

The *machine* metaphor takes a machine and the way a machine operates as a source domain and the protection from the virus as a target domain. In other words, Merkel, here shifts from using the war rhetoric which entails waging a war in order to control and contain the virus, to putting in place 'an emergency mechanism' which just like a machine will be set to motion and 'work under full power' as soon as the virus reappears in any specific region in Germany (*…we also need to develop an emergency mechanism by saying that as soon as regional sources of infection occur, measures must also have to be able to be re-implemented there./ … when infections go up somewhere, then we also have an emergency mechanism./ That is why we are working under full power on expanding capacities for protective goods in Germany as well as in Europe.*)

Hinting at the possibility that Germany might be the first country to invent a vaccine against the virus, Mrs Merkel makes a point that Germany will selflessly share it with the world. In that context she uses the *servant metaphor* depicting Germany and its scientific discoveries as someone that will be put at the service of humanity in general *(But science is never national,*

science serves humanity). The same metaphor is found again when she discusses the disciplined way with which the Germans have endured the pandemic as a result of which they have 'served' or helped the health, the economic and social life of human kind in general (*The more enduring and consistent we endure at the beginning of the pandemic and thus push the infection down, the more* _we serve not only human health but also economic_ _and social life_).

Trump's Covid-19-inspired speeches in April and May, were sporadically intersected with additional conceptual metaphors such as the *family metaphor*, and the *human* metaphor. In fact, there are several instances of *family metaphor* (*We grieve by their side as one family,* _this great American family,_ *and we do grieve …*), where the target domain is the domain of family and the source domain is the domain of country. In other words, just like a family that has lost loved ones due to an unexpected tragic accident, the entire country in this case is mourning the unexpected death of thousands of its citizens who died because of Covid-19. The *country as human* metaphor, where the human being serves as a source domain and the economy/nation/country as the target domain, helps depict the economy/nation/country as a human being whose health should be preserved and maintained (*Ensuring the* _health of our_ _economy_ *is vital to ensuring the* _health of our nation_).

Combinations of different types of conceptual metaphors

Although rarely, there were a few instances in which, within a single utterance the politicians were combining two distinct conceptual metaphors. The British Prime Minister, for instance, came up with a successful combination of two metaphors in a single utterance, by blending together the ocean metaphor and the war metaphor in "… *we are accelerating our search for treatments, we're pioneering work on a vaccine, and we are buying*

millions of testing kits that will enable us <u>to turn the tide on this invisible killer</u>". The term 'tide' comes from the domain of ocean as a source domain; whereas, the term 'killer' from the domain of war. Also, at another point he combined the journey metaphor with the war metaphor (*Two weeks ago, I <u>set out our road map</u> for the next phase of <u>our fight against Covid-19</u>*), in which *road map* comes from the journey as a source domain and *fight* from the war as the source domain.

In Donald Trump's speeches, there were also several attempts at combining the war metaphor with another metaphor in the same utterance. Thus, there was, an instance, of the war metaphor being combined with the *country as human* metaphor (*… <u>we will defeat this horrible enemy</u>, we will <u>revive our economy</u> and we will transition into greatness*); and a combination of the *journey* metaphor and the *war* metaphor which was previously discussed.

One very plausible way of interpreting the combinations of metaphors in politicians' speeches is that these were attempts to intensify the persuasion potential of their speeches and to achieve the aim of curbing the devastating effects of the pandemic. More specifically, the combinations of metaphors were sometimes used in order to highlight the threat from the pandemic, but at times to mitigate it, so as to calm the situation down and give hope to the citizens that everything is under control.

The relation between the use of metaphors in politicians' speeches and the outcome of the pandemic

In this section an analogy is made between the use of metaphors in the selected speeches of the four leaders and the outcome of the pandemic in their countries, respectively. As we have already mentioned in the results section, Macron and

Merkel were more inclined towards using metaphorical language, mostly at the peak of the pandemic in their April speeches. If we compare the graphs published on *Our World in Data* website of the coronavirus infected cases by month in France and Germany (see graph 3), we can see that in both countries the situation was most serous in April and probably that is what instigated the political leaders to impose stricter measures and use more metaphorical language. Obviously, their speeches had effect on the citizens and influenced the outcome of the pandemic in the next month as the number of newly reported cases decreased.

Johnson, on the other hand, uses metaphor much less frequently than the other two aforementioned politicians. However, he still uses most metaphors in his April speech. As can be seen from Chart 3, the situation with the pandemic gets rather serious in the UK in mid-March and April, so we reasonably assume that this might have made Johnson intensify his metaphoric language use in his speech in April. Obviously, the citizens of the three countries took their leaders' words seriously, and as it can be seen from Chart 3, the number of the newly confirmed Covid-19 cases starts to decrease in May and is much lowered in June.
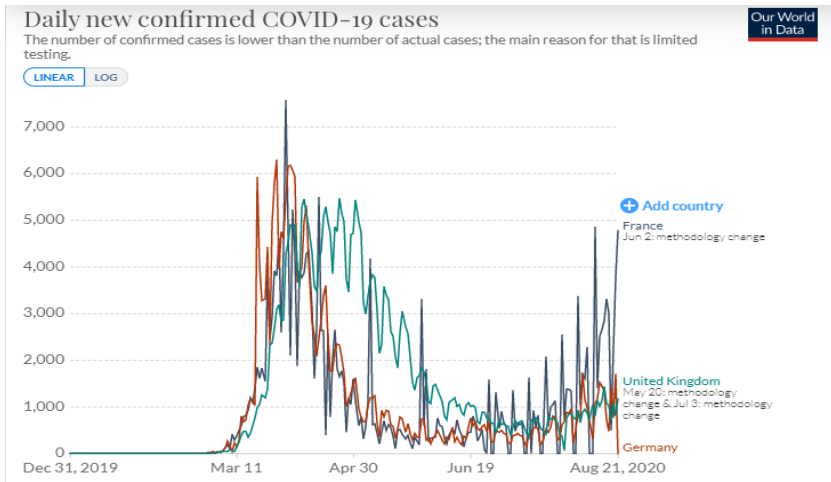
Chart 3. Daily confirmed cases France, Germany and UK, https://ourworldindata.org/coronavirus[3]

As for the American leader, Trump, although he used conceptual metaphors more or less during the three phases of the pandemic, during the peak of the pandemic in April he replaced his metaphoric rhetoric with fact-based rhetoric and focused almost exclusively on discussing his government's achievements in handling the health crisis. Given that the number of new cases in the USA persisted throughout May almost at the same pace as it did in April, he clearly did not achieve the planned aim – to curb the pandemic. Consequently, in May a shift is noticeable in the President's rhetoric once again towards using more conceptual metaphors, which points to an attempt to make people perceive the grave reality of the pandemic and to adjust their conduct accordingly (see Chart 4 below).

[3] Roser, M, Ritchie, H., Ortiz-Ospina, E. and Hasell, J. (2020) - "Coronavirus Pandemic (COVID-19)". *Published online at OurWorldInData.org.* Retrieved from: 'https://ourworldindata.org/coronavirus' [Online Resource].
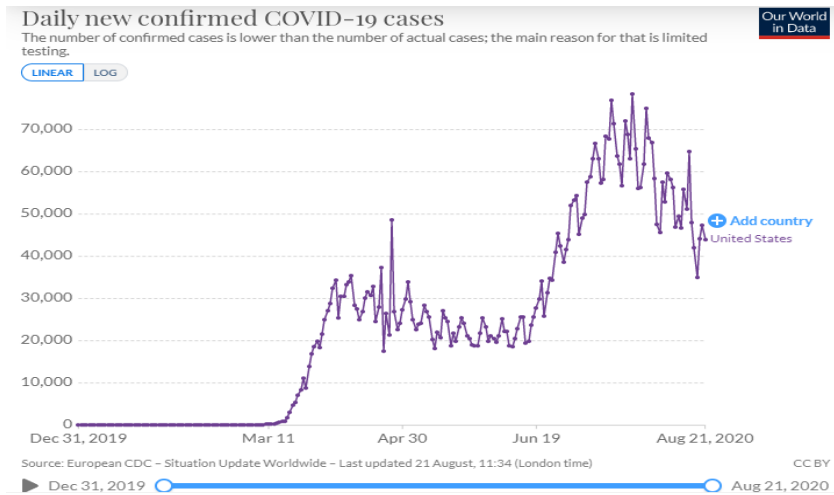
Chart 4. Daily confirmed cases US,
https://ourworldindata.org/coronavirus

Conclusion

This paper aimed to investigate how political leaders use metaphorical language during situations of crisis i.e. what type of conceptual metaphors they used and were predominant in their speeches during the Covid-19 crisis, especially in March, April and May, the beginning phase, the peak of the virus phase and the ending phase of the first wave, and what effect their speeches had on the citizens and their behaviour. The selected speeches were delivered by the leaders of four countries: the UK, the US, France and Germany.

The analysis showed that in terms of content, in their March speeches, the politicians were discussing mainly the restrictions they were imposing to stop the virus from spreading; in their April speeches, the accent was placed on the steps their government were taking to relieve the negative effects of the pandemic, and in their May speeches, among the

other things, the politicians discussed their plans to ease the lockdown measures. The research confirmed our initial expectations that all politicians would use a variety of conceptual metaphors, especially at the peak of the pandemic. Macron, Merkel and Johnson used metaphors mostly in their April speeches, which was the peak of the first wave of the virus in Europe, especially in their countries, France, Germany and the UK respectively. The American president, on the other hand, used metaphors mostly in his March and June speech, when the situation in the US was rather serious.

Furthermore, the analysis showed that the most predominant metaphor was *the war metaphor*, especially at the pandemic beginning phase in March, when the politicians presented the situation as a war-like one, which they have to fight. The politicians used other types of metaphor too. The *journey metaphor*, was also rather frequently used by politicians to present the pandemic as a difficult travel across a precarious terrain. In addition, they used *the ocean metaphor*; *the country as a human metaphor*; *the body metaphor*; *the teacher metaphor*; *the machine metaphor; the servant metaphor; the family metaphor* and *the country as human metaphor*. Frequently, the politicians used a combination of few metaphors, mainly aiming to strengthen the illocutionary force of their statements, when they were expressing the threat they felt from the pandemic, or sometimes to mitigate it, when they were trying to calm the situation down and give hope to the citizens that everything is under control.

Finally, the analysis indicated, as we initially expected, that besides the obviously many factors which influenced the citizens to obey the measures their governments imposed, the use of the metaphorical language most probably also had an impact on their behaviour. The reports of the daily confirmed cases showed a decrease in the number of infected cases after the politicians delivered their speeches in which they used a

great number of conceptual metaphors in order to present the dangerous and threatening Covid-19 situation to their citizens.

We believe that in order to confirm the results presented in this paper, it is recommended that an additional analysis is made on a greater corpus, involving more political speeches delivered from leaders of other countries in the world. However, this research gave indications as to how political leaders generally use metaphorical language during situations of crisis, what type of conceptual metaphors they prefer to use in such situations and what effect they have on the general public.

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Appendix

Emmanuel Macron	March 16th, 2020 2621 words **Address by President of the Republic Emmanuel Macron on the COVID-19 coronavirus** https://franceintheus.org/spip.php?article9658
	April 13th, 2020 3541 words **President Macron's April 13th Address to the Nation** https://www.leadersleague.com/en/news/president-macron-s-april-13th-address-to-the-nation
Angela Merkel	March 22nd, 2020 1110 words **Angela Merkel: Adhere to rules, show sense and heart** https://www.lengoo.de/blog/angela-merkel-coronavirus-address-full-english-transcript-22032020/
	April 23rd, 2020 3591 words **Full English transcript of Chancellor Angela Merkel government statement on the Corona crisis at the Bundestag** https://www.lengoo.de/blog/angela-merkel-we-are-walking-on-thin-ice/

	May 6th, 2020 1454 words **Angela Merkel: The first phase of the pandemic is behind us** https://www.lengoo.de/blog/05-06-2020-angela-merkel-the-first-phase-of-the-pandemic-is-behind-us/
Boris Johnson	March 23, 2020 867 words **PM address to the nation on coronavirus: 23 March 2020** https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/pm-address-to-the-nation-on-coronavirus-23-march-2020
	April 30, 2020 1095 words **Boris Johnson UK Coronavirus Briefing Transcript April 30: Prime Minister Returns from COVID-19 Absence** https://www.rev.com/blog/transcripts/boris-johnson-united-kingdom-coronavirus-briefing-transcript-april-30
	25 May 2020 889 words **Prime Minister Boris Johnson's statement at the daily coronavirus press conference on 25 May 2020** https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/pm-press-conference-statement-25-may-2020

Donald Trump	March 11, 2020 1281 words **Speaking from the Oval Office, Mr. Trump announced a suspension of travel from Europe for 30 days, starting on Friday** https://www.nytimes.com/2020/03/11/us/politics/trump-coronavirus-speech.html
	Apr 27, 2020 770 words **Donald Trump Coronavirus Press Conference Transcript** https://www.rev.com/blog/transcripts/donald-trump-coronavirus-press-conference-transcript-april-27
	May 11, 2020 1952 words **Donald Trump Press Conference Transcript on Coronavirus** https://www.rev.com/blog/transcripts/donald-trump-press-conference-on-coronavirus-testing-may-11