Research in English & Applied Linguistics

Comparing
Confidence and Trust
Online and Offline

edited by
Josef Schmied &
Marina Ivanova

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Comparing Confidence and Trust Online and Offline

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Cuvillier Verlag

Preface

This edited volume is the product of two-year discussions on confidence and trust in online (2021) versus offline and hybrid (2022) contexts. It explores different dimensions of confidence and trust in media and academic discourse, from the Coronavirus pandemic to the Russia-Ukraine conflict and the accelerating AI revolution. These events both shaped and were shaped by online discourses in news and social media, raising issues of trust and confidence in information sources' credibility in view of conflicting truths.

The discussions on these issues were held during the pandemic restrictions in 2020 and 2021, when workshops and summer schools on trust and confidence supported by the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD) had to be held online. This added a special practical international and intercultural note to the topic. We are extremely grateful to all partners in these projects, who managed to work together fruitfully and successfully under such challenging conditions.

The public discourse on the Covid-19 pandemic centered largely on controversial regulations like social distancing and vaccination and took place not only on mainstream and alternative media but also on less politically oriented platforms like the entertainment website *9gag*. As a coping and uniting mechanism, society generated many new jokes, memes, words, and expressions. The coronavirus also popularised a mixture of medical and political discourse, represented by the figure of "*the* virology expert", e.g., in the USA by Anthony Fauci.

During the Coronavirus measures, the move to online and hybrid lectures has raised the need to rebuild students' confidence and trust in online learning. In addition to the skillful use of new e-learning technologies, confidence can be expressed through "traditional means" like sound argumentation, scaffolded by diverse cohesive devices. After, the AI boom of tools like ChatGPT has started revolutionizing media and academic writing and teaching by producing credibly sounding texts which, however, can give false confidence to users by "hallucinating" information such as academic references. Students therefore need not only the skills to prompt these tools but also the text analysis skills to scrutinise the results.

AI tools like ChatGPT have also raised issues of accountability – as AI cannot be made accountable or held responsible for errors. Considering that ChatGPT has been trained on other texts, any text copied from ChatGPT could be considered plagiarism. This again raises some questions – would asking ChatGPT to paraphrase its results still count as plagiarism? If teachers pay attention to the implications of word-for-word usage of ChatGPT output, they can benefit from this new technology for quickly creating syllabi and lesson plans, and even integrate ChatGPT in the lessons in the same way corpora have been widely integrated into language teaching. However, educators should keep in mind that materials used in e-learning should be designed with intentionality in mind, i.e., with consideration on how they will be perceived by the students.

In this volume, considerations on the integration of new technologies in teaching and learning are discussed in the general introduction by Josef Schmied. The contribution looks at e-learning strategies from teacher and learner perspectives with respect to the creation of confidence and trust. It deals with the challenges and opportunities of online examinations and generative tools incorporating large language models such as ChatGPT. The contribution calls educators to embrace innovation and profit from it, providing learners with modern professional skills that are intentionally developed through different tasks incorporating e-learning tools and generative AI.

The volume includes seven case studies on confidence and trust in online discourse. The discourse on Covid-19 has extended to platforms that are normally not politically oriented, such as the entertainment platform *9gag*. In their contribution, Ivana Šorgić and Jasmina Đorđević analyze the complex negotiation of truth between persuasive pro-vaccination memes and users' comments on *9gag*. They systematise sociocognitive discourse elements such as emotion and opinion words, as well as global topics and themes mirroring the division of society on the topic of vaccination. While the content on *9gag* was found to be predominantly pro-vaccination, the comment section served as communicative common ground for both pro- and anti-vaccination users. The comment section is shown to be a discourse field of its own, marked by strong opinions about the pandemic and the vaccination, and a domain hosting users' radically different mental models about vaccination and the members of the out-group (i.e., people who do not share their attitudes).

Humorous interpretations of the Coronavirus on the web are addressed in the contribution by Danica Škara and Gordan Matas. They identify several metaphoric frames underlying the perception of Covid-19, such as animals vs. human beings (and vice versa), death vs. life, ethnic groups vs. other ethnic groups with unfamiliar behavior, inanimate entities (object) vs. animate entities, and positive vs. negative government regulations. Humour is seen as part of society's collective adaptation to the environment and as a mechanism of social valorisation through its exclusion, inclusion, and comparison functions.

A major part of society during the Coronavirus pandemic followed "*the* virology expert" who, together with other political figures, needed to gain and retain public trust. In the uncertain initial phase of the pandemic, this confidence could, however, also take the form of linguistic manipulation. Ana Borovina looks at (un)successful uses of speech acts by political figures who aim to master the complex dual roles of medical and political experts. The contribution compares the discourse of US and Croatian major health experts Anthony Fauci and Vili Beroš and identifies discourse strategies such as imperatives and emotion words but also passive voice, which highlights a certain inconsistency. The article thus traces a discourse timeline as the rhetoric is shown to change when more insights into the pandemic were gained.

Language changes happen not only in the broader discourse of speech acts but also in the smaller field of words. Tijana Popovikj thus looks at language change

during previous pandemics and traces the development of terms like quarantine and social distancing as well as new coinages and usages during the Coronavirus pandemic such as *covidiot* and *staycation*. The contribution concludes with an analysis of metaphoric language in political discourse on the media, identifying similar cognitive fields as in Škara and Matas such as *battle* and *fire*. Metaphoric language has thus been shown to permeate different discourse fields to express confidence and unity in the management of the pandemic.

Recently, the discourse on mental health issues has also become more prominent in the online sphere, e.g. in the form of (self-)help forums and online services. Neda Stefanović explores how face threat mitigation strategies are used to build trust in mental health related social media texts. Mental health discourse is particularly liable to politeness strategies dealing with positive and negative face, as discourse participants need to build trust and avoid face threats through judgements or diagnoses. The contribution addresses politeness functions such as collaboration that are employed in Serbian Facebook pages consulting users dealing with mental health issues. The critical analysis concludes with an appeal for social media pages to be particularly responsible in their use of language in order to become informative, understanding, and helpful resources.

The major event which replaced the coronavirus pandemic in the media in 2022 was the Russian invasion of Ukraine on 24 February 2022. The framing of the event as "war", "conflict", or "special operation" depended on the ideology of the media. Mila Vilarova identifies different strategies in the representation of the Russo-Ukrainian conflict in Macedonian and Croatian online newspaper headlines. Through a qualitative analysis of lexical choice, direct speech, and scare quotes in the news outlets, the contribution shows differences between the presentation of the conflict in the two countries. Although the Macedonian news outlets were found to use more affective adjectives, the Croatian were found to engage in more explicit criticism of the Russian invasion.

Finally, this volume turns to confidence and trust in academic writing. The contribution by Maja Joshevska-Petrushevska proposes teaching strategies that can be used to support Macedonian English major undergraduates in creating trust through cohesion. After a corpus analysis of student essays, the article concludes that students mostly resort to additive cohesive devices. To deal with the challenge of a limited range of devices, the paper calls for more emphasis on cohesion in academic writing lessons with a focus on grammatical and lexical cohesion devices like referencing, substitution, and conjunctions. Students should learn to use cohesive relations to guide the reader through the text and gain trust through confident argumentation.

In summary, the volume covers different, so far underresearched facets of confidence and trust online and offline. It offers students, early-carreer and late-carreer researchers an opportunity to critically explore tendencies in national and international media and academic discourse. These analyses are not intended as a model to be followed by graduates in other parts of Europe but rather a documentation of the different conventions and practices of academic writing and

thinking in different parts of Europe, which graduates in this field must be aware of, so that they can make their own decisions about which conventions to follow and which conventions to neglect in their own writings.

As in the previous REAL volumes covering our experiences with South East European researchers over the last ten years, we are proud to be able to include so many contributions that convey what we feel is the right spirit for international academic dialogue and learning.

May 2023   Josef Schmied & Marina Ivanova

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General Perspectives on Confidence and Trust Online and Offline

Confidence and Trust in Online Academic Discourse: Integrating New Technologies into Teaching and Learning

Josef Schmied

Abstract

This contribution summarises the experience gained during the Covid-19 pandemic at international universities in online teaching and learning. It highlights the importance of the central concepts confidence and trust on all levels: the confidence teachers had to gain to "go online" all of a sudden in an emergency situation as well as the confidence students needed to cope with technology, teacher and content as well as the trust students, teachers and administrators had to learn. The general focus is on the importance the pandemic had for strengthening modern concepts of (collective) learning and on the technological innovation push that resulted in the (forced) integration of remote and (a)synchronous learning into everyday teaching and learning practices. The linguistic focus is on linguistic and semiotic clues that may contribute to successful language learning in new technology contexts. Finally, the contribution gives an outlook on the influence of the latest innovation in language learning – chatbots integrating large language models like ChatGPT – and their possible uses as planner, assistant, and agent.

Keywords: social perception, digital tools, innovation, e-learning, technologies

1. Introduction

The outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic in early 2020 forced educational institutions worldwide to change into emergency remote mode (cf. e.g., World Health Organization 2021; German Rectors' Conference press releases 2020-2022). Foreign language teachers and learners had always understood that their work could have the best effect in small intensive face-to-face (F2F) interaction. Now this direct human interaction was abruptly made impossible, which was particularly hard for language teachers who felt that their routine was spoilt by something unnatural.

However, this contribution argues that professional communication had moved already in the digital direction before the pandemic and made remote online collaboration only natural: online language tools like Zoom for communication, Google Docs for collaborative writing, and DeepL for translation had made their way into modern language services earlier on. Thus, a variety of digital tools and

enough practical examples of remote online interaction was available for language teachers and learners who looked around or who established a good professional network to cope with the unprecedented challenges. Although the strain on administrators, teachers and students should not be underestimated, many were ultimately able to master the challenges of forced remote teaching and learning despite technical difficulties, as described in a global comparison in Radić et al. (2021). Thus, the forced remote online academic discourse during the pandemic empowered learners to cope with the rapidly changing digital contexts and tools of modern professional (computer-mediated) communication and even helped build up a certain resilience for future challenges (cf. Wuest & Subramaniam 2021).

2. Useful E-Learning Concepts

The transition to remote online learning was probably comparatively easy for foreign language teachers and learners who were accustomed in theory and practice to certain e-Learning concepts that had developed in the 1960s but gained momentum in the 1990s with the advent of the World-Wide Web (Warschauer 1996). Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL) is well known under various names, from Technology Enhanced Language Learning (TELL) to Mobile-Assisted Language Learning (MALL), Computer-Aided (Language) Instruction (CALI), etc.

Blended learning, the combination of F2F direct instruction and remote mode, has been established as a useful variation for a long time (cf. Whitelock & Jelfs 2003, but also the critique in Oliver & Trigwell 2005). When teachers and students have had an opportunity to develop it in personal F2F classes before going online, this is the best basis of confidence and trust in online teaching afterwards.

Flipped classroom concepts have been practised to encourage students to study texts individually first to save valuable class time and bring the more interesting discussion points to the classroom afterwards (see Akçayır & Akçayır 2018). Again, learners must have enough confidence to work with complex texts individually and teachers must trust them to prepare for the F2F components, so that a fruitful discussion is possible.

Task-based learning has included real-life tasks that require individual attention beyond the usual classwork in books (cf. the review in Lai & Li 2011). This comprises a wide variety of choices that can also be made available to learners in an online learning platform like Moodle.

Personalised learning has been a trend in language teaching that can be particularly fruitfully pursued in asynchronous use of online materials. The flexibility of learning and individualisation according to learning styles can be implemented e.g. in the choice of study materials like personalised articles (Hsieh et al. 2012).

Gamification of language materials has followed general online trends and can increase the interaction and motivation of individual learning enormously. The most commonly applied gamification elements have been shown to be feedback, challenges, points, rewards, and leader boards for competition (Dehghanzadeh et al. 2021).

The autonomous learner has been a central point of discussion in foreign language learning for decades (e.g., Gathercole 1990). As autonomous learners are self-motivated and appreciate flexibility, they can choose tasks from a variety offered on a learning platform (like videos, texts, quizzes, discussions on Moodle) and control their learning progress. The confidence and pride of being able to control their own learning is the best starting point for success in their own learning style according to their personal needs and preferences (Susanti, Rachmajanti & Mustofa 2023).

In the following section, I focus on instructional discourse, although this is only a small part of academic discourse (cf. Schmied 2015), which also includes research discourse, where online communication has been established before and where confidence and trust are important in different ways. The case of online exams, however, deserves a special mention because it is discussed not only in teaching contexts, but also in psychological and legal contexts, which are extremely important here (e.g., online anxiety or the integrity of the exams). Most language teachers had not focused on online testing in their classes, since they preferred to confine this potentially threatening situation to within their usual teaching environment. They did not want to increase their learners' anxiety unnecessarily and wanted to be available as resource persons in case candidates needed help or asked questions, which is much easier in the familiar personal atmosphere of a classroom than online. Moreover, remote online testing opens more opportunities for cheating which can be avoided by exam formats aiming at testing understanding, transfer, and creativity.

3. Confidence Online

3.1. Teacher Perspectives

Although foreign language teachers were forced to go online during the pandemic, many noticed that some learning activities have been more successful online than expected and even than in F2F classes generally. The awareness of such discoveries should make teachers proud of their achievements and strengthen their confidence in their teaching in general and their online teaching in particular (Swanson 2014).

A special advantage of online teaching are breakout rooms because they can be arranged quickly and allow many learners to disappear into smaller groups where interaction may be less intimidating. Since group work is not only an established teaching activity, but also a modern requirement in many workplaces, this brings the teaching world closer to the working reality, which is becoming more and more digital and collaborative anyway. Collaborative tools like Padlet for brainstorming and Google Docs for writing and editing a text are common outside of language classrooms and universities today.

For many teachers, the online tools of polls and quizzes are welcome quick and easy ways to check whether learners are still following or have understood the lesson up to a particular point, which in turn allows them to continue confidently. Many quiz platforms like *Kahoot* and *arsnova* also involve gamification elements

such as feedback, points, nicknames, and competition between the [anonymised] students.

Generally, many sustainable and reusable materials (e.g., video lectures and tutorials) make the work of teachers easier in routine teaching. In all these cases, teachers need personalised professional learning that builds their confidence in integrating (preferably open-source) technology into all aspects of their work.

3.2. Learner Perspectives

For students, online meetings may be intimidating, due to the technology, the online view into their private homes, including their dress and general appearance, and because they feel more exposed in online public than in a classroom. Although confidence is an issue everywhere (Xu 2011), the importance to overcome learning anxiety was particularly obvious during the first stages of remote online learning, when the technology might have been as insecure as the user. However, overcoming challenges is fulfilling and helps with gaining confidence in an online environment as well as in a foreign language.

The technology naturally takes time to get used to and some practice, before an online lesson can be mastered smoothly and with confidence. This includes sound and camera checks and the choice of the preferred background image or personal environment, more or less blurred. The procedures to join online meetings, to mute and unmute microphones and to share screens along with all the other aspects of collaborative learning and interaction must become routine so that learners can concentrate on the content of the lesson. Individual skills training depends on the specific online class, but concentrating on the online work needs some practice. The listening skills and concentrated attention can easily be practiced using educational YouTube videos or Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs), the active participation can be encouraged by asking questions of clarification, expansion or application, etc. The chat is usually a part of online teaching welcomed by the students and although it may split the attention between the presentation and the chat, it reduces the hurdle of joining via microphone for small interventions. An even more minimalistic reaction option are the "status" options such as clapping or thumbs up/down. For student collaboration, common platforms like Zoom or BigBlueButton also provide whiteboards and polls that can be used to create mindmaps and tests (see Kohnke & Moorhouse 2022), and to make quick democratic decisions. Less confident students may practice their skills in video lectures, which are easy to stop and replay and allow them more time to take notes. Many online interactions are not much different from those in the classroom, although the image in the camera frame highlights the learner image and this may make self-conscious students insecure – encouragement by teachers and peers will often help in the course of time.

Some students may prefer to be able to choose their interaction style, if they are too shy to speak, they can comment in the chat box, etc. In some cases, they can exchange ideas with friendly peers directly before going public in the virtual

classroom. Still, oral participation should be encouraged as articulation conveying confidence and trust is a useful professional skill in on- and off-line communication.

Teachers can help learners to gain confidence by helping them to see their progress, empowering them with different online learning strategies, and giving them the autonomy they want or need. This also includes the trust that learners' efforts are appreciated and they do not have to be perfect to gain positive feedback. Praise and criticism can be usefully expressed through concession, as is often done in other genres like reviews (Schmied 2021a).

Finally, the opportunities of asynchronous learning have to be emphasised, as they are frequently mentioned by students. The advantages of learning at one's own pace in one's own best learning time and environment have been well-known for a long time – thus teachers should support confident asynchronous learning, although it is always based on the trust that teachers should find normal with respect to their students.

4. Trust Online

4.1. Teacher Perspectives

Although teachers usually have to trust their students, they can make sure they are attentive listeners and active participants. Internet connectivity may be a problem for students from disadvantaged backgrounds, but insufficient connectivity may also be used as an excuse to switch off cameras, something which is originally based on cultural and social backgrounds – and teachers have to know the backgrounds of their students when working in such contexts. In Cranfield et al. (2021), almost all students did not turn their cameras on, but specifically those from Wales and Hungary, which are countries higher on the individualistic dimension. Therefore teachers have to explain the benefits of multimodal chats including all the non-verbal communication of face, gesture and head or body movements that make student interaction with teachers and peers more personal. This includes encouraging students to respect each other's privacy and personal space to create a safe and respectful environment. Thus online instruction makes participants aware that openness and trust are the natural basis for good and efficient communication and education. Of course, teachers also have to acknowledge individual concerns and address them respectfully.

A special advantage of modern international online teaching is to bring experts from various academic backgrounds into the virtual classroom, which would never have been possible in the traditional classroom, because it would be ineffective in terms of time and expenses. Teachers do not have to fear that renowned colleagues might undermine their reputation or intimidate their students.

Finally, new ways of virtual cultural immersion are possible, not only interaction with native speakers in their cultural environment, but also group and personal discussions (e.g., after participating in virtual tours of cultural landmarks and "visiting" places online) provide students with a more authentic and immersive and hence more effective learning experience.

4.2. Learner Perspectives

From a learner perspective, trust may mean increased autonomy where students can choose their own topics and online interaction modes, their own learning materials and even their own learning plans. This personalised mode is a great advantage of online learning and should be encouraged by respecting learners' choices in terms of learning objectives, pace, and times. Teachers only provide a safe and supportive learning environment where learners feel free, comfortable and confident and even dare to ask questions or try answers when they are not sure, but take the risk of making mistakes – and learn from them. Sometimes this is even easier online than when the teacher's presence is felt in the room.

What the teacher is always needed for is the individual constructive feedback that appreciates all efforts and focuses on learners' strengths and areas of improvement. Whereas positive feedback strengthens learners' confidence and encourages learning even when it means taking risks, negative feedback may damage their self-esteem and confidence. A useful way to provide constructive criticism is to concede the "bad news" and offer suggestions for improvement (Schmied 2021a). Learners must be given evidence that they can trust their teachers to notice and even celebrate their achievements however small they may be. Thus pride is added to the frequently examined emotions of enjoyment and anxiety in language learning. Although all these conventions are well known from traditional teaching and learning, they have to be transferred to the online mode and this is not automatic. The temptation for students to disappear in cyberspace is real, therefore, at least initially, remote online learning always requires special awareness of teachers to create motivation, interaction and finally language learning in a new, but nowadays increasingly commonplace mode.

5. Confidence and Trust in Instructional Discourse Online

While many academic disciplines are concerned with the importance of confidence and trust and how to increase these in human interaction (e.g., psychology or law, Blomqvist 1997). The focus here is on the contribution that language approaches can make in instructional discourse, as a major component of academic discourse (cf. 6 below).

Many linguistic and semiotic signals can be used to increase confidence and trust in online instructional discourse. The familiar face of the teacher is always a good starting point – and should encourage students to switch on their cameras, too. Academic discussions on switching on microphones and cameras have often not based on the confidence and trust that should be the basis of a cooperative modern learning atmosphere (Mpungose 2021).

As with all online communication, instructional discourse is prone to noise, and this is why the basic elements of successful communication have to be considered: Language usage needs to be clear and appropriate for the students' level, and expectations of response and interaction have to be stated explicitly at the very beginning. As students may be particularly sensitive in online contexts, teachers

must be particularly aware of showing respect for individual cultural and linguistic backgrounds, even if this goes against best teaching conditions. Thus some may avoid eye contact, others may use many honorifics and may not be able to address problems directly, and still others may find multimodal communication through gestures exaggerated. Positive feedback is even more important than usual to encourage learners to engage and contribute. In difficult contexts, it is particularly important to show empathy with students. Their efforts are always appreciated, even if their contributions are not perfect. Thus, automated teaching conventions may have to be transferred consciously to the online mode. This may be seen as a case of intentional design, where the learners' interaction is constantly monitored, and this means catering for individual differences of learners. For example, for those preferring authority and directness, instructions should not be made unnecessarily polite, as this might be perceived as negative face threat (Brown & Levinson 1987); for those preferring autonomy, teacher interventions should be restricted to guiding learners to suitable resources and discussion topics.

The style of remote online instruction is not only determined by technical affordances, but also by academic discourse features. In particular, many types of engagement markers can be used to initiate and maintain fruitful academic interaction: direct address (even polite imperatives) can be used to ensure that silent attendees take part actively, appeals to shared knowledge create a community of discourse, personal asides establish a social bond, rhetorical questions encourage learners to think independently, etc. All that is good for F2F interaction is even more important in remote online interaction, as interactive signals have to help bridge the physical distance.

6. Confidence and Trust in Remote Online Examinations and Unsupervised Writing

Instructional discourse is not the only element of academic discourse "disrupted" by the pandemic – research output and student literacy were also affected, but to a smaller extent. Some genres may even have become easier, like taking online lecture notes if the lecture is available online and asynchronous work is possible, which is greatly appreciated by students who prefer to work at their own pace, at their best working time and in their best working environment. However, a great problem during the pandemic were tests that could not be organised in the usual way, whereby all students are present to take the final course or even degree exam at the same time under the same exam conditions with their familiar teachers invigilating them. Since examinations are so important, they also have a legal component. Although there was no alternative to remote online examinations at the height of the pandemic, it was practically impossible to provide the same conditions for all test participants in remote mode. The main problems were not only differences in connectivity and comparability, but the fact that students may not have been used to such exam types, hence the usual confidence and honesty conventions had been insufficiently trained. For the ordinary language teacher, online exam proctoring was practically impossible and when administrations

suggested surveillance tools they were often not in conformity with European (Union) privacy regulations (Barrio 2022).

A specific problem of traditional language tests was the integrity of the assessment through the use of online resources and tools (like collocation dictionaries and DeepL). Nowadays so many language tools are available online that restricting their use in the classroom has become unrealistic when they are all normal or even professional usage in modern language services.

The remote testing problem was, of course, aggravated since often only the most important tests were conducted online and some traditional forms of language skills testing cannot be transferred to remote mode easily, when they require personal interaction, like role plays (Akimov & Malin 2020).

Unfortunately, the problem of cheating and test fraud can hardly be solved by restrictive online proctoring. If candidates' desktop activity, webcam video, and audio are monitored not by a human but by proctoring software that sends the data to an external proctoring service to review, this is hardly within the limits of European data protection regulations. The development of online proctoring software is remarkably fast, but the best way to avoid all these problems is still to set exams that convince the learner that they are a useful step in both, their learning plan and achieving their personal academic and career goals. Teachers have to trust that their students actually want to learn online and not waste their energy avoiding to learn and have to design exams aiming at application and transfer skills that cannot be found in previous exams easily.

7. Outlook: Trust in Using Large Language Models like ChatGPT

The development of language tools has received great popular attention recently and many commentators consider it a "game changer". So-called large language models are being developed and integrated in many other online tools, so that so far it is difficult to predict their impact in general and on foreign language teaching and learning in particular. Nevertheless, it is worth discussing recent developments in this context, because trust is a key element in popular and academic discourse.

Towards the end of 2022, a new tool created heated discussions in many educational institutions: ChatGPT 3 became openly available, a chatbot that allowed practically everyone (who registered and was not held up by server overload) to type short instructions, the so-called prompts, and to receive automatic output that surprised almost everyone. Users have to pay special attention to the formulation of the prompts, as prompt writing in the "internal" language of GPT is a skill which has already created new jobs. The current (May 2023) version "GPT-4, or Generative Pre-trained Transformer 4, is a natural language processing (NLP) system developed by OpenAI for language understanding. It is based on transformer technology and uses a combination of deep learning and statistical methods to generate high-quality text" (Frąckiewicz 2023). Obviously, the tool is so complex that it can be used in many ways in language teaching and learning. The public discourse on ChatGPT on social media like Twitter has been shown to be predominantly positive, yet still causing some

ethical concerns (Tilli et al. 2023). For many users, it came as a surprise that these chatbots using large language models were able to process input texts and generate output predictions which looked so professional, that it has sparked an enormous academic and popular debate on the dangers of artificial intelligence as a whole. This "authentic" "natural" language impression (!) raises fundamental questions, which cannot be discussed in this context.

The debate in international journals has developed quickly, and publishers like Elsevier have already included a "Declaration on generative AI in scientific writing" in their journal guidelines. Quick SWOT analyses (like Farrokhnia et al. 2023) have appeared to discuss pros and cons and offer usage recommendations.

The focal point in our context is that this advanced tool requires trust on several levels to be used effectively. We are not discussing the legal aspects here where problems of honesty and plagiarism prevent us from using it in remote online academic discourse. We are not discussing the fake aspects, where references are "created" or rather "hallucinated" that look extremely plausible, but simply do not exist[1]. We are not discussing aspects of testing, where GPT forces us to give up traditional routines of asking students to reproduce information without applying it to individual knowledge production. We are not even discussing the many fruitful usages, where GPT could be used for brainstorming when writing an article on online academic discourse. As the general risks of "Stochastic Parrots" have been discussed already (e.g., Bender et al. 2021), we can only touch on three aspects that illustrate the wide range of applications of GPT in language teaching and learning.

7.1. ChatGPT as a Curriculum, Course and Lesson Planer

Since there are so many courses available on the internet, it is not surprising that ChatGPT can summarise suitable courses based on its training data in the offline version and based on web data in the online version, leaving teachers the work of selecting the most appropriate for their learners and learning objectives. Trust in the quality of plans depends usually on the reputation of the institution or teacher. Then a well-designed curriculum ensures a comprehensive coverage of all necessary aspects, skills and applications of a foreign language. With sophisticated input elaboration, ChatGPT also generates student assignments (e.g., homework, presentations) and the weights of their grades, which may be appreciated by teachers who find these uninspiring parts of course planning.

From a language skills perspective, chatbot usages can be included in traditional language classes in different ways:

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[1] GPT-4, which is available as a paid version at the time of writing, performs better than GPT-3 on a lot of benchmarks and has reduced the number of hallucinations, but has not eliminated them completely (Awan 2023). Future improvements will reduce these problems further, however the trust in good-looking references should never go too far and diligent internet checking is an indispensable virtue of modern scholarship. Furthermore, GPT-4 is being integrated more and more in online courses or MOOCs like Khan Academy https://www.makeuseof.com/apps-integrate-use-gpt4/

Writing skills have profited from online resources like dictionary and thesaurus, grammar and spell-checkers for a long time. Now the more complex perspectives, like the critical review of idiomaticity and style become more prominent. The well-known problems of cultural bias in technology are crucial in academic discourse and the critical awareness of students can be trained by prompting different responses to similar questions. Confidence in verification skills is necessary to balance the temptation of uncertainty to trust agents (see Schmied 2022).

Reading skills are often neglected in traditional teaching. But in a flipped classroom approach, valuable classroom interaction time can be saved for the more complex and crucial critical reading skills. GPT can support the development of reading habits by offering (hopefully or regrettably) the same content in different forms or genres. Asking GPT to summarise long texts supports effective scanning of texts, asking it to explain technical or complex passages helps to understand difficult passages, asking it to generate exercises helps to check reading comprehension, etc.

Listening to videos and podcasts is easy for learners today as all possible topics are available on the internet and can be suggested by ChatGPT. For written texts, ChatGPT has a "voice master", which allows learners to enjoy simple types of texts without having to look at the screen or helps them to understand complex types, also with additional comprehension support from the screen.

Speaking skills may be more challenging for the individual, but for group discussions and intercultural international communication all online tools are now available easily where communication software is installed and can be used by everyone in all modern internet contexts. For pronunciation, there are new AI-powered apps like *sylby*, and GPT is being integrated in other language learning apps like *Duolingo*. Confidence and trust in these opportunities must be based on detailed knowledge and self-training in the field.

Finally, it must be emphasised that online technologies are already used in professional real-life communication today, so that integrating them into online language learning is a good preparation for life after studies.

7.2. ChatGPT as Teacher Support or Teaching Assistant

For critical and enterprising teachers, ChatGPT can be an excellent time-saving device when preparing their teaching materials: It creates complete texts on a specific topic and that will always include aspects a teacher would have included anyway, but also aspects that even experienced teachers might have neglected – and all of this visibly in "no time". It also creates corresponding comprehension questions and word lists or semantic groups (like a traditional thesaurus) that can be used in vocabulary training, even with explanations at the specific CEFL level of the learner.

For, large language systems are trained to be style-sensitive and can be prompted to supply texts according to CEFL levels, so that scaffolded texts are possible (e.g., first 500 words on A2 and then 600 words on B1 level on the same

topic). Similarly, multiple book reviews of popular literature can be generated for students to work out what constitutes a positive, a negative and a balanced review. In all these cases, students can be trained to see and improve or even correct stereotypical and specific phrases in agent proposals. The fact that GPT produced texts that were perceived as authentic natural English can be used for exercises in language awareness by creating various options for in-group discussion, e.g., in online break-out rooms.

All these opportunities are, of course, based on clever input elaboration and critical output analysis. Here teachers must be trained well enough to be truly confident in evaluating all GPT work. While ChatGPT often gives neutral answers to controversial topics and handles "conflicting truths" (Schmied 2021b) satisfactorily, it has still been shown to have hidden biases like cultural and linguistic bias but also temporal bias since it is trained on data from certain periods of time (Ray 2023). Still, OpenAI warns against some of ChatGPT's limitations when the tool is opened. Since it is so popular, there are enough illustrative resources like YouTube videos that help to use it, even before the relevant books are available.

7.3. ChatGPT as a Teaching Agent

It is clear that using GPT-4 as a teacher is particularly valuable in contexts where critical autonomous learners know how to make use of a conversational agent especially in contexts where no human teachers are available.

The opportunities of GPT-4 for language learners are concisely listed by Frąckiewicz (2023):

> Chat GPT-4 provides several advantages to language learners. First, it allows learners to get immediate feedback on their language skills. The chatbot is able to assess the learner's language proficiency and provide tips for improvement. It can also help learners build their confidence in speaking the language.
>
> Second, Chat GPT-4 can be used to engage learners in conversation. This makes learning more interesting and enjoyable, which can help learners stay motivated. Additionally, the chatbot can provide resources and advice to help learners improve their language skills.
>
> Finally, Chat GPT-4 can be used to simulate real-world conversations. This can help learners understand how native speakers use the language and develop their own conversational skills.
>
> Overall, Chat GPT-4 is an invaluable tool for language learners. It provides an interactive platform to practice the language, immediate feedback, and resources to help them improve their skills. As AI technology continues to evolve, Chat GPT-4 has the potential to further revolutionize the way language learners learn.

It goes without saying that all these self-learning approaches can best be fully utilised by enterprising students who have some experience as autonomous learners. However, for some who are introduced to the tool through playing, the expertise may also develop naturally, if they are confident enough.

The big advantage of GPT is that the explanations of mistakes seem fairly reliable and inoffensive ("In Italian, we prefer to say X and not Y"). This may be an added advantage for self-confident learners, who detest being exposed "publicly" and who may appreciate the intimacy of their "personal agent".

Finally, it needs to be emphasised again that the topics of confidence and trust are always central to foreign language teaching. The latest developments of large language models have highlighted that. Some may see this in various ways as a threat to professional human foreign language teaching. But confident teachers respond in two ways: Tools like ChatGPT may provide a new impetus for serious reflections on assignments and professional learner-specific feedback – and then teachers can always prove that they are better than "chatbots", although GPT output can be integrated as a new starting point in language classes as "Stochastic Parrots" (Bender et al. 2021) provide stereotypical "solutions" that can always be improved by individual refinement, which is crucial for signalling the academic identity of the writer in addition to maintaining existing discipline- and genre-specific conventions (cf. Schmied, Bondi, Dontcheva-Navratilova, & Pérez-Llantada 2023 eds.).

In this way, foreign language teachers and learners can move to the front of developments in artificial intelligence. This is possible when teachers feel confident to take advantage of technological developments and trust their students to use them meaningfully and responsibly. Instead of hoping that their work will not be too much affected, they can hope to be relieved of routines and focus on the more interesting individual creativity of their work. Thus, the global challenges can be seen as a modernisation impetus that can make foreign language work more interesting for teachers and learners.

8. Conclusion

I hope to have shown in this brief overview that the pandemic has forced us to develop a more conscious relationship with technology in language teaching. Human – machine interaction in general and artificial intelligence in particular are key issues today in both, language services and language learning. As professional communication includes more and more technology, language teaching cannot neglect it and has to include it instead, in order to train learners to use technologies with confidence, honesty, and trust on the basis of a sophisticated critical awareness of new challenges and opportunities. If students feel that their instruction embraces the latest language and communication technologies, they may feel motivated to increase their engagement in learning and if they do this efficiently, they even gain free time for more complex tasks. Thus using technologies for simple tasks like creating outlines, allows learners to work more diligently on their individual creativity. Modern technologies have to be seen as tools to help and not a substitute or threat to human judgement and creativity. They are rather an opportunity for teachers and learners to strengthen their critical thinking and creativity, although they force us to reconsider our established practices. We should be confident to use these new mechanisms of knowledge and

capacity building. Such technologies are not only innovations in education, but also in professional language services, so disregarding or neglecting them is not an option for up-to-date language education. We should trust our students that they understand the ethical issues related and use the modern tools neither excessively nor uncritically, and we should also trust ourselves to be able to find the support necessary to adapt to challenges and innovations in language technologies.

Acknowledgements

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Case Studies on Confidence and Trust Online and Offline

Negotiating Truth Between Persuasive Pro-Vaccination Memes and Users' Comments on 9gag

Ivana Šorgić & Jasmina Đorđević

Abstract

The present research focuses on how the truth about COVID-19 vaccination is negotiated in the comment sections accompanying predominantly pro-vaccination memes on the humorous website *9gag*. A total of 341 comments in response to 25 memes were included in the corpus, which was subsequently analysed within the framework of van Dijk's theory of Sociocognitive Discourse Studies (SCDS). SCDS postulates the existence of a sociocognitive interface between discourse and society, and emphasises mental models as one of the most important features of cognition. The most common discourse structures identified in the corpus were opinion and emotion words, as well as global topics and themes. The paper hypothesises that despite overwhelmingly persuasive pro-vaccination content on the website, the comment section will reveal distinct division into at least two opposing groups with different mental models pertaining to vaccination. In times of crisis, the truth about vaccination as one of the most controversial aspects of the pandemic seems to be negotiated and co-created through the interaction of these mental models in the multimodal dialogue between content creators and users on *9gag*.

Keywords: COVID-19 vaccination, sociocognitive discourse structures, memes, comment sections, mental models, negotiation of truth

1. Introduction

In December 2019, when the novel coronavirus was identified in Wuhan, China, the world sunk into the ongoing global COVID-19 pandemic. The so-called corona crisis has affected all aspects of our lives, but primarily social and economic ones. It has led to the postponement of most events globally, and almost all education institutions have switched to online teaching. Finally, it has raised a heated debate on the balance between public health and individual rights. It all began with the issue of wearing masks and escalated with the subsequent vaccination rollout, which caused a lot of controversy and gave way to political tensions and misinformation, mostly circulated on social media. Amongst numerous official reports, conspiracy theories and misinformation, one has been left to seek the truth relying on one's own means.

In the early days of the pandemic, memes were shared extensively for the purpose of comic relief. As Sebba-Elran (2021: 231) writes:

> Disaster jokes [...] have been discussed from various theoretical perspectives: as a psychological tool for channeling threatening emotions and coping with uncertainty, as a social tool for demarcating external and internal boundaries and particularly for enhancing social cohesion, and as an educational tool for disseminating advocacy and propaganda, or alternatively, for expressing social protest.

Analyzing the timing of humorous COVID-19 memes, he concluded that they "responded to state regulations, and reflected public confusion, uncertainty, and loss of control combined with family difficulties typical to the radical disruption in daily routine during that time" (Sebba-Elran 2021: 234).

The starting point that the present research is based on is that the dialogue between meme creators and their audience seems to reflect a general distrust in the scientifically backed stance concerning mass vaccination, which dominates most mainstream media. The reasons behind the distrust are various, but the main ones include the changes in scientific recommendations (i.e., concerning the wearing of masks and how much protection they offer, or which drugs should be included in medical protocols for COVID-19 patients) throughout the pandemic, a general distrust towards governments, and the momentum anti-vaccination movements have gained over the years. As Harvey et al. (2019: 1013) point out: "society has become relatively more media-based instead of evidence-based, especially given the 'noise bombardment' of competing information that cultivates an Internet environment in which disparate vaccine ideas are being perceived with equal credibility".

As was previously mentioned, the scope of memes by far surpasses what in popular imagination is their main purpose – to amuse. Hakoköngäs et al. (2020: 2) write that "memes are used to disseminate political arguments and ideologies, persuade and mobilize the audience".

Following this standpoint, we selected memes from the popular website *9gag* which cover vaccination as one of the main aspects of the pandemic, and, as mentioned above, one of the most controversial ones. *9gag* is known as a global hub for humorous content creation for the younger audiences (18–24). However, regardless of the seemingly young audience, what immediately stands out is the resolute pro-vaccination stance found in the excerpted memes. The medium that we selected does not fall into the category of social media that are generally suggested in the literature as sights of anti-vaccination movements and their proliferation. For example, Guidry et al. (2015) performed a quantitative analysis of 800 vaccine-related pins on Pinterest and found that most of them were anti-vaccine. The most common themes in the analysed pins were vaccine safety and side-effect concerns, as well as the concept of conspiracy theory. Similarly, Kang et al. (2017) analysed semantic networks on social media concluding that negative vaccine sentiment was prevalent. The negative sentiment toward COVID-19 vaccination in the case of *9gag* memes selected for this research was indeed found – if not in the content itself, then certainly in the comment section.

In the attempt to better understand the multimodal dialogue on the topic of COVID-19 vaccination between meme creators on *9gag* and their audience, we utilised van Dijk's theory of Sociocognitive Discourse Studies (SCDS) for the analysis of the comment section which accompanies memes on the website. Readers' comments reflect the interaction between discourse structures and social structures via a sociocognitive dimension and the sociocognitive approach establishes the discourse-cognition-society triangle, thus providing the relevant tools to explore the cognitively mediated relations between discourse and society (Đorđević 2020). By examining the interaction between pro-vaccine content and reactions to it in the comment section, we glimpse into how truth is negotiated between groups with different attitudes and beliefs on one of the most popular humorous websites and learn how the process of vaccination itself along with its advocates and opponents is presented from different perspectives.

In this research, we will first present internet memes in general and then the website *9gag*. Then we will provide details about Sociocognitive Discourse Studies (SCDS) (van Dijk 2018). In the second part of this article, we will present the findings that resulted from the quantitative and qualitative analyses of a corpus of 25 memes covering the topic of COVID-19 vaccination excerpted from the humorous website *9gag*. The findings will show that specific discourse structures reflect the ideological polarizations (us vs. them/pro-vaccination vs. anti-vaccination) that make up a huge mosaic of conflicting attitudes seeking the truth behind the plethora of data and various opinions on the vaccination as the main aspect of the ongoing pandemic.

2. Theoretical Background

2.1. Internet Memes

Internet memes can be defined as a form of discourse which is prevalent in online communication. Seiffert-Brockmann et al. (2018) even go a step further claiming that memes are fundamental features of modern society. The term itself originated from *The Selfish Gene*, a seminal book by biologist Richard Dawkins (1976), who coined the term to describe a theoretical self-replicating unit of cultural transmission that spreads by imitation (Chandler 2013: 1). In the context of new media environments, memes are typically defined as user-generated online content in the form of still images, videos, or animations, which are disseminated from person to person, especially on social media or other virtual platforms (Yoon 2016). Internet memes are often characterized by humour and their intention can be just to amuse the audience, but memes are also used to disseminate political arguments and ideologies, persuade and mobilize the audience (Hakoköngäs et al. 2020), undermine elite influence of mass media (Seiffert-Brockmann et al. 2018), or shape and reflect general social mindsets (Shifman 2014). Aside from sustaining popularity among Internet users, memes have also received attention from journalists, academics, and media organizations that have borrowed elements of Internet memes for advertising and marketing efforts (Akhther 2018).

According to Milner (2013: 2), memes:

> intertwine [...] 'fixity' and 'novelty'. In this way, memes are a multimodal dialogue between individual creator and popular imagination. They're a form of mediated, populist 'vernacular creativity' that depends on a balance between the new and the expected. [...]This interrelationship allows memes to function as a 'media lingua franca'.

From the perspective of van Dijk's (2018) Sociocognitive Discourse Studies, the multimodal dialogue between creators and recipients is made possible by certain knowledge that they share – common ground. Common ground encompasses: (i) shared sociocultural knowledge between participants as members of the same Epistemic Community, (ii) knowledge derived from previous encounters, conversations or e-mails (mental models and context models), (iii) information derived from mutual observation and participation in the same communicative situation and (iv) information derived from what has been said or written before in the same discourse (van Dijk 2016: 13). And memes obviously meet these criteria.

2.2. 9gag

9gag is a humorous website created in 2008. Based in Hong Kong, but hosted in the USA, it boasts an international, primarily younger audience (18–24-year-olds) which has steadily grown in number over the years, attracting150 million users a month (Lo 2018). According to the description of the website it is supposedly "the funniest yet simplest platform for you to publish or collect internet humour" (Wagener 2014: 2489).

Instead of focusing on individual profiles like social media, *9gag* encourages users to create and disseminate original content with the primary aim to amuse. Users can post content in various formats, from pictures, to GIFs and videos. The users choose aliases and avatars, and most often only reveal the country they come from by adding a flag to the nickname and profile picture. Other personal details are not disclosed, which makes the website ideal for speaking one's mind without restraints or censorship. The website, however, strictly forbids pornography, violence, gore, harmful content, hate speech and bullying. Wagener (2014) lists websites similar to but less popular than *9gag*, such as *4chan*, *Memebase*, *Rageshare*, and *IraffIruse*, saying that the typical posts on all of them include rage comics (short stories similar to cartoon strips which employ so-called ragefaces to depict emotions) and memes. Users get to upvote content they like, and the most upvoted content ends up in the 'hot' section. Apart from the perceived 'quality' of the content, users almost exclusively upvote content created in English. During the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic and the onset of the global vaccination rollout, the content posted on the website has been surprisingly in favour of dominant scientific research which has labelled all COVID-19 vaccines safe and efficient and advocates mass vaccination as a way out of the pandemic.

For the sake of clarity and simplicity, this paper analyses only memes consisting of image macros (any piece of digital media, e.g., a picture, artwork), with text superimposed. This means that any other content on the topic of vaccination found

on the website *9gag*, such as videos, GIFs, social media print screens, cartoon strips, etc. was excluded from the corpus. As was mentioned in the introduction, the memes found on this particular website express an overwhelmingly pro-vaccination attitude, which according to the literature seems to be quite uncommon on social media and similar platforms. Trying to offer possible reasons behind this is certainly beyond the scope of this paper, even though the collection of almost propaganda-like memes begs the question. For the time being, we can settle for an explanation offered by Seiffert-Brockmann et al. (2018: 6), which claims that "we cannot infer individual motivations for sharing online content by simply looking at memes".

2.3.   Sociocognitive Discourse Studies (SCDS)

Unlike other approaches in Critical Discourse Studies, which study the relations between discourse and society, the sociocognitive approach claims that such relations are cognitively mediated (van Dijk 2016). "Discourse structures and social structures are of a different nature, and can only be related through the mental representations of language users as individuals and as social members" (van Dijk 2016: 64). The cognitive component in SCDS refers to the mind, memory, mental models, and social cognition, which are all involved both in the production and the comprehension of discourse. Mental models (MM) can be said to represent our unique and individual personal experience. They comprise spaciotemporal settings, participants, actions/events, and goals. MMs are multimodal and contain information processed in different parts of the brain: visual, auditory, sensorimotor, evaluative, and emotional. On the other hand, social cognition is socially shared with other members of the epistemic community. As members of specific social groups, we may also share attitudes (for instance about abortion, or more related to our topic of interest – vaccination, or the ongoing pandemic), or fundamental ideologies, i.e., racism, sexism, etc. Our personal experiences become mental models on the basis of our social knowledge. This knowledge is also referred to as communicative Common Ground.

   Many structures of discourse itself can only (completely) be described in terms of various cognitive notions, especially those of information, beliefs, or knowledge of participants. The discourse structures proposed by van Dijk (2018) include: stress, intonation, word order; meanings of words, sentences or sequences of sentences; coherence; opinion and emotion words; global topics or themes; deictic or indexical expressions; speech acts; evidentials; conventional, schematic, canonical structures; metaphors and ideological polarizations (Đorđević & Šorgić 2021 based on van Dijk 2018).

   By identifying, describing and analysing particular discourse structures within our corpus, in the context of readers' reactions to COVID-19 (pro) vaccination memes, we can see the way different mental models clash and interact in an attempt to recreate or reshape social knowledge about the true nature of the controversial event in question. The identification of discourse structures is in fact the

identification of lexical items that are perceived as individual instances of words and phrases with specific sociocognitive references to a certain discourse structure within a broader context (Đorđević 2020). This paper focuses on global topics and themes, opinion and emotion words, and metaphors and ideological polarisations, which proved to be predominant in the corpus and which illustrate how different social actors (people in favour of and against vaccination, as well as entire governments), social events (the vaccination), and ideological polarizations (us vs. them/pro-vaccination vs. anti-vaccination) make up this huge mosaic of conflicting attitudes seeking the truth behind the plethora of data and various opinions on the vaccination as the main aspect of the ongoing pandemic.

3. The Research

3.1. Hypothesis and Objectives

This research is based on the idea that clear and scientifically backed official guidelines concerning COVID-19 vaccination which appear in the mainstream media are the tip of an iceberg. What lies beneath are at least three different groups of audience: one filled with doubt and distrust towards anything coming from official sources; one fully accepting the attitudes and recommendations offered by health professionals, and the third hesitant about the vaccination. Every individual from each group has a particular mental model constructed based on previous experiences and available information, and in the collision of these opposing models which happens online, in various forums, on social media, and in the comment sections, we see attempts to negotiate the truth about the most crucial aspect upon which we may say the course of the pandemic depends – vaccination. By analysing reactions to persuasive pro-vaccination content in *9gag* memes, we feel the pulse of the public concerning this controversial topic.

In that sense, the hypothesis of this paper can be phrased as follows: despite the overwhelming pro-vaccination content on the humorous website *9gag*, the readers' reactions in the comment sections will reflect the growth and momentum of anti-vaccination movements described in available research. The interaction of these two conflicting attitudes or mental models will give us insight into how, in times of uncertainty, truth is negotiated between a website (as an example of new media) and its audience. Comment sections were chosen primarily because "commenting on news articles is currently the most widely practiced form of audience participation on news websites" (Toepfl & Piwoni 2015: 465). The growing popularity of comment sections has consequently led to an increased academic interest in studying them based on the idea that online commenting allows "citizens [to] talk with journalists, politicians and other citizens" (Weizman & Dori-Hacohen 2017: 39).

3.2. Corpus and Methodology

For the purpose of this research, 25 memes covering the topic of COVID-19 vaccination were selected from the humorous website *9gag*. The search for the targeted content on the website was performed by typing the word "vaccination" in the search field. This yielded numerous results, out of which only memes consisting of an image macro, i.e., any piece of digital media – a picture, artwork, or screenshot with text superimposed were selected, following the guidelines from Shifman (2014). Other formats utilised to create content on the website, such as GIFs, videos, posters, cartoon strips and social media screenshot were excluded from the selection.

The first meme on the topic was posted on December 20th, 2020. The subsequent memes were chosen in order of appearance on the website following the aforementioned date, which did not seem to correspond to the actual time when they were posted. Memes in languages other than English were not included in the corpus, as they could neither be allocated to the recurring ones we chose nor were they posted by different users with minimal changes, i.e., a change in the title. The excerpted memes were coded by using the uppercase letter M and the number of the meme in the corpus [M01, M02, M03… M25], as presented in Table 1:

[M10]	https://9gag.com/gag/aQoAQPw Anti vacciners	

Table 1: An example of a meme from the corpus.

Out of 25 memes, 24 were found to be pro-vaccine, and they were classified into several categories, using the models proposed by Harvey et al. (2019) which we modified slightly as presented in Table 2 and Table 3.

Variable	Definition	Values	
Pro-vaccine or anti-vaccine	Does the meme support or oppose vaccinations?	24 Pro-vaccination	1 Anti-vaccination
Mention of out-group	If the meme is pro-vaccine, does it explicitly or implicitly mention the anti-vaccine movement? If the meme is anti-vaccine, does it explicitly or implicitly mention the pro-vaccine movement? Mentions include the use of words "they," "them," or similar pronouns, or use of "pro-vaxxers," "anti-vaxxers," or a variation of those terms, or mention of doctor names or prominent activists who are supporters of those groups.	10 [M02], [M03], [M04], [M10], [M12], [M13], [M18], [M19], [M24], [M25]	

Number of false statements	Count the number of statements not backed by scientific consensus or fact (based on authoritative sources). This includes claims that are misleading or incomplete. Statements presented as fact but could not be verified should be coded as a false statement.	1 [M23]
Appeal to emotion	How many memes appear to appeal to emotions regardless of whether the emotion was positive or negative?	3 [M02], [M11], [M18]
Appeal to fear	How many memes appear to appeal to fear?	1 [M18]
Appeal to rationality	How many memes appear to appeal to logic/rationality, including the use of statistical or logical conventions?	3 [M12], [M17], [M23]
Use of sarcasm	How many memes appear to employ sarcasm?	8 [M01], [M04], [M09], [M10], [M13], [M19], [M24], [M25]
Use of humour	How many memes appear to have the sole purpose to amuse?	4 [M03], [M05], [M08], [M21]

Table 2: Coding memes in accordance with modified Harvey et al.'s models (2019).

	Theme	Pro-vaccination	Anti-vaccination
1	Bragging/feeling superior about being vaccinated	2 [M01], [M03]	/
2	Bill Gates / microchips and vaccination	2 [M05], [M17]	/
3	Selectivity in questioning the substances one is administered	3 [M06], [M07], [M10]	/
4	Boosting vaccination promotion	3 [M08], [M15]	/
5	Criticising how vaccination is handled by different countries	2 [M16], [M22]	/
6	Glorifying vaccination to fight illness	2 [M12], [M20]	/
7	Personal experience with vaccination	1 [M02]	/
8	Mocking anti-vaxxers	4 [M13], [M19], [M24], [M25]	/
9	Asking opinion / starting general conversation on the topic	2 [M11], [M14]	/
10	Stressing dangers of not vaccinating	2 [M04], [M18]	/
11	Mocking Americans[1]	2 [M09], [M19]	/
12	Attempt to amuse	1 [M21]	/

Table 3: Thematic content of memes.

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[1] There seems to be a running joke on *9gag* concerning who is superior/more stupid: Americans or Europeans.

Following the classification of memes, the comment sections following each meme were carefully examined and coded using the uppercase letter C and the number of the comment in the corpus. For the purpose of keeping each comment section in the context of a particular meme, the memes and the comment sections were presented side by side. The 25 memes chosen for the corpus were accompanied by a total of 341 comments [C001, C002, C003… C341], which were consequently analysed in terms of three most prominent discourse structures: global topics and themes, opinion and emotion words, and metaphors. The analysis served to paint the picture of how the two opposing groups – pro-vaccine and anti-vaccine ones view themselves, as well as the vaccination process itself.

4. Analysis

4.1. Quantitative Analysis

Before identifying discourse structures in the comment sections of the corpus, the comments were classified into several categories for the purpose of presenting general attitudes they express: pro-vaccination, anti-vaccination, hesitant about vaccination (users who are not against vaccination, but believe COVID-19 vaccine in particular is not safe enough), comments about vaccination which do not express attitudes, and finally, comments not related to vaccination (Table 4).

Pro-vaccination	Anti-vaccination	Hesitant	About vaccination, but no attitude	Unrelated
57	50	27	52	155

Table 4: Classification of comments based on attitudes they express.

Even though all comments are a reaction to vaccination-related content, i.e., memes, the most numerous category is the one with comments unrelated to vaccination (155). As was expected and stated in the hypothesis, the number of pro- (57) and anti-vaccination comments (50) is almost identical. Compared to the pilot research, a sizeable group of vaccine hesitant users emerged (27), alongside those who talked about vaccination without explicitly stating their attitude (52). Our research revealed a rather frequent occurrence of three of van Dijk's (2018) discourse structures, i.e., global topics and themes, opinion and emotion words, and metaphors and ideological polarisations, while the other discourse structures van Dijk suggested occurred in rather small numbers. That is why we decided to focus only on the three types of discourse structures that dominated the comments we excerpted and analysed (Table 5).

Discourse structure	Van Dijk's discourse structures		
	global topics or themes	opinion and emotion words	metaphors and ideological polarizations
No of occurrences	155	117	76

Table 5: Frequency of sociocognitive discourse structures in the corpus.

4.2. Qualitative Analysis

In this section, sociocognitive discourse structures will be analysed in greater detail for the purpose of gaining a better understanding of the interacting mental models displayed by the audience on *9gag*. To begin with, we would like to go back to Table 4, which categorises comments based on the attitudes they express. We could identify 57 instances of pro-vaccination comments in the corpus based on the following criteria (all examples from the corpus will be displayed in their authentic forms):

- It insulted the out-group (people opposing vaccination).

  [C0018] Anti-Vaxx people are the scum of the earth

- It openly stated the author had been vaccinated against COVID-19:

  [C0021] Yeah... I'm vaccinated and I'm sorry but this just isn't true

- It invited people to get vaccinated:

  [C0139] don't listen to the idiotic antivax propaganda. get vaccinated, losers. If you are a normal person, without serious life threatening diseases (cancer, or some autoimmune disease), all vaccines work well on you. These vaccines are not "rushed" , it's the evolution of technology which makes it possible to develop them in this short time.

- It contained efforts to disprove vaccination conspiracy theories:

  [C0078] If this where a culling they wouldn't give you the flu V.2.0 , it would be smallpox V.2.0. And population growth is a non issue, developed countries have negative birth rates, once Africa and Asia catch up a bit we'll see a quick decrease.

- It expressed trust towards pharmaceutical companies:

  [C0141] Pfizer made Alprazolam. What's not to trust?

In several instances, it was unclear from the context which category comments belong to. Such cases were classified as 'About vaccination, but not expressing attitude', such as in the following example:

  [C0090] *getting popcorn and reading all the fake woke, dunning kruger type comments

The author of this comment could potentially belong to all three groups (pro, anti, hesitant) and consider the members of the out-groups as overestimating their limited knowledge or competence.

The next category includes 50 anti-vaccination comments classified according to similar criteria:

- Insulting the out-group (people in favour of vaccination):

  [C0042] No. The people who know the jab is bullshit, look at "vaccined" people with pity, like victims of a con.

- Openly stating the author has not been vaccinated against COVID-19:

  [C0039] Yes, I confirm it. That's exactly how my grandparents look at me.

  (Meme [M03] in which the vaccinated look with superiority at the unvaccinated)

- Referring to vaccination as a medical experiment:

> [C0043] it is medical experiment, not vaccine

- Expressing distrust towards pharmaceutical companies:

> [C0136] Biontech : Pfizer...stop lying you fucking shit...

The third category contains comments of users who generally label themselves as pro-vaccination, even though they do not trust the new COVID-19 vaccine, mostly due to the fact that it was developed over a relatively short period of time. There are 27 such comments in total, and their content is incredibly similar – most believe the vaccine was hastily developed and not properly tested:

> [C0024] I'm vaccinated against most stuff, but to be honest if it weren't for the restrictions, I probably would wait a bit until there's more research about the corona vaccine until I get mine. I don't really feel comfortable getting it that soon after such a fast development.

> [C0074] I didn't take the vaccine yet, not because i don't believe in science, but because i believe in science, this vaccine everyone is taking is the 2 years trial version where it's side effects are observed.

> [C0144] It's completely different story. I'm far from being antivaxer, but let's be honest – we'll know if covid vaccine is effective in a year or two from now, not earlier. So I'm not in a hurry to get vaccinated, I'll wait to see if there's a point of that.

The fourth category comprises 52 comments mentioning vaccination and vaccines, but not expressing any particular attitude. The examples below are intended to produce a humorous effect:

> [C0134] look on your mobile... if you see a wifi with the number of your vaccaine than your 5G is active!!!!

> [C0203] Not good they start in the UK. With all the inbread there, nobody will be able to see what the side effects are.

Table 6 presents the most widespread global topics or themes in the discourse of pro- and anti-vaccination users:

Global topics or themes	Vaccination
Anti vaccination	Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, hydroxychloroquine, French health minister Agnes Buzin, Wuhan laboratories, Autism, Viagra, Israeli medical research, Pfizer's vaccine
Pro vaccination	Biontech:Pfizer, India, AstraZeneca, Alprazolam, Facebook, Astra Zeneca, Johnson, India, America, Asia, Flat Earth, Trudeau, Arnold Schwarzenegger
Vaccine-hesitant	FDA, The Queen
About vaccination, but no attitude	Austria, Jehovah Witness, 5G, Karen[2], Bill Gates, Slovakia, Astra Zeneca, Spain, Keanu Reeves
Other	LinkedIn, Dunning Kruger, TicToc, Melinda, Christina Aguilera, Canada, U.S., Edward Jenner, Drake, BTS, Ed Sheeran, Michael Jackson, JFK, Kardashians, Donald Trump, Dwayne Johnson

Table 6: Global topics and themes mentioned by users against and in favour of vaccination.

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[2] Karen is a pejorative slang term for an obnoxious, angry, entitled, and often racist middle-aged white woman who uses her privilege to get her way or police other people's behaviors. (Dictionary.com, n.d.)

Amongst the global topics or themes listed in Table 6, the most commonly mentioned ones include: Pfizer (9), Astra Zeneca (5), 5G (4), Karen (7), Bill Gates (14). The pharmaceutical companies are mentioned by users both in favour of and against vaccination. Whereas the first group expresses their trust in the company's products, the second one claims that they are dishonest and have made mistakes in the past:

> [C0155] Didn't they have decades worth of research (unlike Covid) and still screwed up? I am pretty sure Viagra was supposed to be heart medicine or something, but one of the side-effects was an erection, so they went with the flow and advertised it as a performance-enhancing sex drug

Similarly, the pejorative slang term 'Karen' is used by both groups to describe their opponents, as shown in the following examples:

> [C0010] My mom is a karen and an anti vaxx also dad an anti vaxx
>
> I vacinated my self bruh....[...]
>
> [C0232] Also so Karen to hysterical obligate every person to vaccinate

As for '5G' and 'Bill Gates', they are mostly used for the sake of achieving a humorous effect and mocking conspiracy theories that relate 5G and COVID:

> [C0036] I'm waiting for my second shot to unlock the 5G connection <3
>
> [C0216] lol porpaganda. covid is not real, vaccines will sterilize you, kill you or maim you and in case you survive you will become gmo and proprety of bill gates... just like monstanto had to change dnk to get ownership

It is noticeable that there are a number of celebrity names found amongst global topics and themes, and this mostly came from the debate on which modern celebrity would be the best in promoting vaccination, as this was what Elvis did on national TV in 1956, when he was given a Polio vaccine.

Finally, the last and the most numerous (155) category is the one with comments unrelated to vaccination, which focus on other aspects of a particular meme or reality pertaining to a meme:

> [C0037] Did you mean to post this pic OP?
>
> [C0311] Hurr durr Orange Man Bad

When it comes to opinion/emotion words and metaphors used to describe agents, we can clearly see from Table 7 that vaccine sceptics or those labelled hesitant in the previous tables do not really engage in clashes between those in favour of and against vaccination. The polarisation shown in Table 7 involves exclusively the two groups found at the two opposing poles of the concept of vaccination.

Emotion and opinion words/Metaphors	Used to describe the pro-vaccination group	Used to describe the anti-vaccination group
Anti-vaccination group	Proud, (perceived) intellectual, above average in intelligence, Covidiot bot, sponsored, dumb people, rave about anti-COVID vaxxers, Nazi, hateful, vindictive, close minded, brainwashed fool, Karen, maskers, stupid the most annoying Jehovah Witnesses lab rats, blindly follow	Dissidents
Pro-vaccination group	law abiding citizens, normal person	karen, under avarage IQ, idiot, covidiot, the scum of the earth, dumbasses, idiotic antivax propaganda, losers, people who take illegal drugs, worried about a mass-tested vaccine, buy MDNA on the dark web, dumb people, Crazy conspiracy schizos, dumbfuck, hillbilly

Table 7: Emotion/opinion words, and metaphors found in the description of those in favour of and against vaccination.

Judging by the discourse structures from the corpus, it seems that the anti-vaccination group constructed their mental model based on the following perceptions of the pro-vaccination group: those in favour of vaccination perceive themselves as intellectuals or intellectually superior simply because of the particular vaccination stance they cherish. They also appear very proud, both of their pro-vaccination attitude and the fact that they are promoting mass vaccination. However, an average user opposed to vaccination on *9gag* believes that in reality those in favour of vaccination are the true 'Covidiots', probably sponsored/paid by pharmaceutical companies to spread their 'propaganda' and convince people that vaccines are beneficial. In that sense they are labelled as 'blind followers' and 'lab rats'. Those who oppose vaccination also regard those who endorse vaccination as Nazis and believe they are trying to limit people's freedom of choice by forcing mandatory vaccination. In that sense, users opposed to vaccination refer to them as brainwashed, hateful, vindictive, close-minded and entitled (by referring to them as 'Karen'). They don't mention themselves much, but we can see them referring to themselves as 'dissidents'.

On the other hand, those in favour of vaccination formed a mental model which focuses heavily on those against vaccination being of lesser intelligence. The terms used to refer to this perceived lacking include: *under average IQ*, *idiot*, *covidiot*, *dumbasses*, *idiotic antivax propaganda*, *losers*, *dumb people*, *dumbfuck*, *hillbilly*. Sometimes they refer to users opposed to vaccination as 'crazy schizos' and particularly like to stress that they are the kind of people who would gladly take any illegal drug (*buy MDMA on the dark web*), but are suddenly concerned about what those in favour of vaccination refer to as 'mass-tested vaccine'. Aside from strong language that occasionally turns into hate speech, the main argument users who are

against vaccination employ in negotiating truth with the opposing group is that they want their freedom of choice to be respected. Similarly, it seems that users from the group in favour of vaccination are trying to persuade their opponents that at least they should give it some consideration, given that, as average people, they ingest numerous untested substances they have no knowledge about on a daily basis.

Finally, Table 8 shows the mental models that different groups of *9gag* users have about vaccination itself.

Emotion and opinion words. Metaphors	Vaccination
Anti-vaccination	Effectiveness: 0%, religious posts, deaths, vaccine adverse effects reporting system, testing and development, safe vaccine, hoax, mrna jabs, mass deaths, experimental gene therapy, SARS-1 vaccine side effects, funny, real side effects, overpopulated, lying, trust, honest, effective, believing, health problems, dangerous product, save, kill, believing in Covid, effects of heroine, hurry, new genome therapy, contraindications, screwed up
Pro-vaccination	Protect, matrix, get you high, give boner, life threatening diseases, cancer, autoimmune disease, wanted, family, safe, pretty simple, "dangerous", less consequences, work well, evolution of technology, develop in short time, illegal drug, mass-tested vaccine, side effects, kill, wipe out, cytokine storm, natural selection, harm, anti-mask, eradicated, depressing, life-saving vaccines, pawn
Hesitant	point, made hastily, alter DNA, labs, legal responsibility, good rate of recovery, dangerous product, tested thoroughly, pushed through, shady sh*t, make money, scepticism, rushed vaccine, false information
No attitude	blood clots

Table 8: Discourse structures different groups use to talk about vaccination.

From the discourse structures in Table 8, we can conclude that users who oppose vaccination believe COVID-19 vaccines to be ineffective, dangerous, and hastily produced. Many believe them to be experimental gene therapy with side effects a lot worse than the official reports care to admit. This group also tends to believe that vaccines were produced merely for the profit of pharmaceutical companies or to cause mass death as a solution to overpopulation. To sum up, this group shows profound distrust towards pharmaceutical companies, and its members believe that both the pandemic and vaccination are part of a bigger plan devised by the rich and powerful (such as Bill Gates, whom they mention mostly in the context of his grossly misunderstood 2010 TED talk "Innovating to zero" where the problem of overpopulation is mentioned). In their arguments they rarely if ever employ humour or sarcasm, and instead attempt to instil fear in their interlocutors through the use of emotion words such as: (*mass*) *death*, (*adverse*) *side-effects*, *lying*, *kill*, *dangerous*, etc.

To the contrary, the group in favour of vaccination employs a great deal of humour and sarcasm in their comments (both implicit and explicit – in a number of posts they state that they are being sarcastic). Therefore, a certain overlap in the use of emotion words can be noticed between this and the previous group, the difference being that they are used sarcastically by the pro-vaccine users. Apart from sarcasm, this group refers to vaccine as 'mass-tested' and 'life-saving', also

mentioning diseases which were eradicated precisely due to vaccination (e.g., polio). They believe COVID-19 vaccines are a product of the evolution of technology, which enabled them to be produced in a relatively short period of time. Ultimately, they believe vaccines will certainly have fewer consequences compared to contracting COVID-19. They do not doubt scientific research and official medical professionals' advice concerning the pandemic in general.

Finally, the vaccine-hesitant group surprisingly mirrors the anti-vaccination group to a large extent when it comes to the use of opinion and emotion words. While stressing that they have had all their childhood vaccines and generally agreeing that vaccines are beneficial, they believe there is no point in vaccination for this particular disease. Similar to the anti-vaccination group, they like to stress that COVID-19 vaccines are pharmaceutical companies' attempt to generate a lot of income, and that vaccines were 'rushed' and dubious.

5. Conclusion

To conclude, this paper offers insight into how truth is negotiated between different groups of users on the humorous website *9gag*. In response to predominantly pro-vaccination content, the comment section showed that even though users share a communicative common ground reflecting a sociocognitive dimension marked by a strong opinion about the pandemic and the vaccination, the mental models they have constructed about vaccination, as well as about the members of the out-groups (i.e., people who do not share their attitudes) are radically different. The continuum of mental models ranges from utter disbelief in scientifically-based research and prescribed guidelines concerning COVID-19 vaccination in the anti-vaccination group, to a slightly more neutral stance amongst the vaccine-hesitant users, who strongly believe in the benefits of 'properly developed and tested' vaccines of their childhood, but not the 'hastily developed' COVID-19 vaccine, to the pro-vaccination group whose members adamantly stick to scientific research and maintain that COVID-19 vaccination is the only way out of the pandemic. Our research confirmed our initial hypothesis that despite the overwhelming pro-vaccination content on the humorous website *9gag*, the readers' reactions in the comment sections reflected the growth and momentum of anti-vaccination movements described in available research. What is more, *9gag* users seem to be negotiating the truth about the vaccination with other users on various platforms and media, regardless of the nature of the original content they are presented with.

Although limited in scope and requiring similar endeavours on other media and platforms in order to yield conclusive generalisations, the present research provides grounds for a valuable conclusion: in times of crisis, truth gets co-created and negotiated through discourse structures that reflect a sociocognitive dimension based on various interacting mental models in the digital environment.

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The Virus Caught in a Web of Humour

Danica Škara & Gordan Matas

Abstract

In 2020 and 2021, the global pandemic has become one of the most important topics in social media and private discourse. People often rely on humour as a potential coping mechanism during severe health crises. It challenges social conventions, taboos and the moral order of society. This study will focus on the role of humour at the time of the Covid-19 pandemic. It aims to explore the role of verbal and visual humour in virtual communication, to attain a better understanding of the cognitive and affective components of humour used in the 'corona discourse', and to provide a common pattern underlying the humourous reaction to the global pandemic.

   This paper presents the results of a data-based COVID-19 humour survey. Qualitative content analysis and multimodal data analysis were carried out on a limited number of verbal and visual jokes shared on social media platforms (Twitter, Facebook, Reddit, blogs) and online newspapers between February and August 2020. Cognitive theory is outlined (Lakoff & Johnson 1980, Kövecses 2010, Attardo 2006, Giora 1991, Coulson 2003, Latta 1999) and used in the analysis of the selected sample. The findings revealed six contrastive frames underlying the perception of Covid-19: animals vs. human beings, human beings vs. animals, death vs. life, ethnic groups vs. ethnic groups with unfamiliar behaviour, inanimate entity (object) vs. animate entity, and positive government regulations vs. negative government regulations.

Keywords: humour, metaphor, Covid-19, public discourse, media

1. Introduction

In March 2020, the world faced unprecedented challenges relating to the coronavirus pandemic. During quarantine and isolation, people changed their daily routines and habits. Social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter and Reddit became primary sources of communication. In virtual communication, Internet memes appeared to be widely used during the pandemic. Memes and humourous text messages form a space in which shared anxieties and tensions emerging from the global health crisis are articulated. Memes are often used to comment on common experiences such as handwashing, toilet paper hoarding, quarantine, face masks, and weight gain According to Shifman (2014: 18), the term Internet meme refers to "pieces of cultural information that pass along from person to person, but gradually scale into a shared social phenomenon." They have acquired the ability to change the thoughts of social groups.

This topic deserves our attention due to its novelty, importance, and the lack of systematic cognitive research. This research thus seeks to determine the role of textual and visual humour in shaping our perception of the 'pandemic reality'. We will try to develop an empirical and theoretical framework for evaluating the use of humour in computer-mediated communication.

This study will briefly acknowledge several concepts about humour that preceded cognitive perspectives of humour research. Important contributions include Raskin's (1985) semantic script theory of humour and Attardo & Raskin's (1991) general theory of verbal humour, all of which use semantic opposition as a defining feature of comic effects. This research is based on the theoretical foundation of cognitive linguistics (Lakoff & Johnson 1980, Kövecses 2010 and others) and its concept of the source domain and the target domain, frame-shifting and conceptual ambiguity. Several authors have contributed to the cognitive perspective of humour research: Veale (2004), Giora (1991), Coulson (2003), Latta (1999). Despite the recent increased interest, humour is still a largely marginalized topic in cognitive linguistics. In the next section, we will focus on cognitive aspects of Covid-19 humour.

2. Humour: Theoretical Perspectives and Empirical Data

> "The secret source of humor itself is not joy but sorrow. There is no humor in heaven"
>
> [Mark Twain]

During the global pandemic, people have been using a variety of different frames or conceptual structures in their effort to make sense of their reality of social distancing and the lockdowns. Frames are viewed as a cognitive representation of the real world. The lack of social contacts contributes to the production of 'digital humour' in response to difficult situations such as disease, obesity, loneliness, etc. Digital humour offers new perspectives and new frames of understanding the global crisis. Different authors attribute different functions to the role of humour in the context of crisis.

According to Ridanpää (2019: 901), "[a]lthough humor is generally associated with innocent amusement, in the case of crisis events it has various psychological, social and politically charged effects, both negative and positive". Vaillant (1977) notes that humour can be understood as a way to release or save energy generated by depression or tension. Mulkay (1988) defines humour as a way for people to deal with inherent contradictions in their communication. The spread of the new disease and a lack of transparent communication has caused fear, distrust, and accordingly humorous responses to them.

In this paper, we will try to find common patterns underlying humour related to Covid-19. We will focus on consistent structural features of the humorous mode of discourse used in the selected data. An analysis of humour in this study involves the context in which it occurs (global pandemic, virtual communication), the theme

that it addresses (various frames and source domains), and the cognitive processes[1] through which it is implemented (conceptual duality, ambiguity and frame shifting).

Despite the fact that humour research deals with a variety of topics, many of them can be categorized within the framework of the three main humour theories[2]:

- Theories of release, relief, or relaxation.
- Theories of superiority, criticism, or hostility (aggressiveness)
- Theories of incongruity, inconsistency, contradiction or bisociation

According to Lintott (2016) "Each of the three mutually consistent theories of humor and comic amusement help us understand the nature and experience of different cases of comic amusement by illuminating their cognitive, affective, social, ethical, and psychological aspects".

The relief theory focuses on the release of tension created by one's fears. According to Graesser et al. (1989: 14) "humor and laughter are relief mechanisms that occur to dispel the tension that is associated with hostility, anxiety, conflict, or sexuality". Sigmund Freud is the most outstanding representative of this theory.

Theories of superiority, criticism, or hostility (aggressiveness) are based on the belief that we laugh about others' misfortunes because it makes us feel better about ourselves. Initially, this theory can be found in Plato, Aristotle, Hobbes, etc. Krikmann (2006: 28) notes that this type of humour is "pointed against some person or group, typically on political, ethnic or gender grounds".

The incongruity theory focuses on the cognitive aspects of humour. It states that humour arises when we suddenly notice the incongruity, contradiction between two components or domains (see Veale 2004). This study views some type of incongruity as being a defining characteristic of humour. In verbal jokes, incongruity refers to the relationship between the two parts. According to Koestler (1989: 35) when the situation is perceived in two frames, it is "bisociated", i.e., linked to two associative contexts. These contexts are incompatible with reality and everyday experiences. Krikmann shares a similar viewpoint (2006: 32): "Each joke describes some real situation and evokes another unreal situation". This study aims to show that words and concepts are used in ways that are surprising or unreal, as in the themes inanimate entities (the buttons of the shirt) acting as human beings (social distancing).

According to Ross (1999: 7), "[t]he incongruity theory focuses on the element of surprise. It states that humour is created out of a conflict between what is expected and what occurs in the joke". Devices that can produce humour are ambiguities, unexpected turns and strange resemblances (animal vs. human being). Complex realities, such as the spread of the novel virus, often result in contradictions, incongruity, which the serious mode of discourse is unable to deal with. This unique global situation and the compelling power of humour offer a promising field of study.

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[1] On the cognitive aspects of the joke, see Giora (1991) and Dynel (2018) and Shultz (1976).
[2] For more input on the general theory of verbal humour, see Raskin (1985) and Attardo (1994).

Lakoff and Johnson (1980) argue that our worldviews are based largely on different patterns, frames and schemas. These frames are useful for people to detect, identify, and organize current knowledge, as well as provide a framework for future understanding of new phenomena such as the global pandemic. We laugh when we experience the contradiction in these frames, e.g., bank and face mask:

1. Never in my wildest of wild dreams did I ever think I would go up to a bank teller and request money with a mask on. (B-Man 2020)

Figure 1 represents dog a meme where the funny effect is achieved when dogs act like human beings. This example can be used to illustrate the three stages[3] in humor comprehension:

Figure 1: "The Dogs are Shocked" (The Spoiled Dog 2020).

In the first stage, one frame is activated based on real experience, i.e., face masks. In the second stage, information that is incongruent with that frame is activated, creating ambiguity: face masks vs. muzzles. In the final stage, the ambiguity is resolved and the humorous reaction is initiated. A face mask is conceptualized as a muzzle and animals act like humans, as they talk and wonder why humans wear muzzles.

It is quite evident that humour comprehension is based on incongruity detection and incongruity resolution. When the interpretation leads to semantic ambiguity and contradiction, the renewal of understanding is followed by the sensation of surprise and laughter.

3. Humour and Metaphor

Humour and metaphor both refer to social experiences and cognitive processes that are coherent with each other. It would be difficult to tackle humour without referring to metaphor. In cognitive linguistics, metaphor is viewed as a conceptual process in which the concept of domains plays a vital role. Understanding humour and metaphors requires the ability to perceive relevant similarities and correlations between different domains. (e.g., humans – animals). Two conceptual domains

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[3] See Raskin (1991) for more details on the comprehension of humour.

are involved: a donor (source) domain and a recipient domain (target) domain. Many scholars agree (see Fauconnier & Turner 2008) that metaphors do more than call our attention to some already existing similarities. Much of the power of humorous metaphors stems from the fact that the source and target frames may belong to superficially very different, opposing conceptual domains, e.g., the virus as a wolf. Coulson's (2001) proposition to describe humour as a form of conceptual integration or blending provides a solid foundation for cognitive analysis of humor and metaphor. Kyratzis (2003: 15) states that

> …metaphor becomes a joke and causes mirth in discourse when attention is drawn to the boundaries between the two concepts it brings together; speakers, either intentionally or unintentionally, disjoin the domains that are relevant to the metaphor and emphasize their dissimilarities.

This research is based on the model of conceptual duality and frameshifting: donor domain > target domain. It shows that humour is closely related to many more general cognitive phenomena, such as frame activation and mappings[4] between frames. The perception of some incongruity, the ambiguity between these two incompatible associative frames evokes funny reactions.

In this context, the deep cognitive similarity between metaphor and humour is easy to recognize, and this connection has long been discussed by many scholars (Attardo 1994, Coulson 2001, Grady et al. 1999, Kyratzis 2003). In this study, we rely on a corpus of memes and jokes to explore the way words and concepts can be used to create connections between two distant semantic fields. We will try to determine the range of donor domains used as the source of humour in the Covid-related posts.

4. Corpus Analysis

This study is corpus-based and relies on a collection of online humour, such as jokes, memes, and cartoons. The corpus consists of 200 entries related to the global pandemic, selected from social platforms like Twitter, blogs like Barry Popik's The Big Apple and websites like Bored Panda. A qualitative analysis was performed on a selected sample of verbal and visual jokes (textual jokes pictures, cartoons, etc.) shared on social media platforms (Twitter, Facebook, Reddit, blogs), online newspapers and authors' private messages between February 2020 and August 2020. Using thematic data analysis, the key domains (source domains) were identified and categorized. Humour is also classified according to its dual, contrastive structure or frame of reference. The two frames involved in humour production are identified, after which the type of oppositeness between these scripts is established (e.g., death-life). This method involves coding techniques to organize the data. Thematic coding involves labeling emerging themes (source domain/target domain) and the relationships between them. Similarties between coding categories are extracted and compared. The results include a systematic

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[4] For more about mappings, conceptual integration and formal expression, see Turner and Fauconnier (1995).

survey of the source and target domains identifiable in the data. Key domain occurrences in the corpus are to be used to estimate the productivity of the source domains. The data sources are given in the references.

Overall, the corpus collected for the purpose of this study consists of a high percentage of humorous metaphors based on opposing frames, such as the animal-human being. In the next section, we will present a survey of the most productive types of donor domains and opposing frames used in the collected data.

5. Qualitative Analysis of the Humor Source Domains

5.1. State-Enforced Regulations

The corpus items on state-enforced regulations represented 40% of the dataset. The memes dealt with the enforcement of social norms such as social distancing, face masks and quarantine. The enforcement of new rules and social norms provides a fertile ground for humourous reactions as humour involves deviations from social norms. State-enforced regulations become the main source domains of humour, as shown in the following examples:

2. They said that a mask and gloves were enough to go to the supermarket. They lied, everyone else has clothes on. (B-Man 2020).
3. I never thought the comment "I wouldn't touch them with a six-foot pole" would become a national policy, but here we are! (Kelleher 2021)
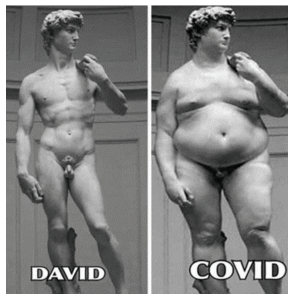
Figure 2: (left) Social distancing ("Time for some well-meming fun" 2020) and (right) quarantine consequences (Andrew Brighton 2020).

Figure 2 presents a humorous reaction to social distancing and quarantine. It suggests that one can fight coronavirus and practice social distancing with the smell of garlic. It also shows that during the pandemic, Michelangelo's David, a symbol of the perfect body, can become obese. Many renowned classical artworks have become the source of humour. People with obesity are often the subject of disparaging humour. The image depicts a deliberately distorted figure of a perfect body and classical beauty to achieve humorous effects. This technique is used to mock government rules and to focus attention on the possible consequences of self-isolation and the long-term lockdown, for instance:

4. If I keep stress-eating at this level, the buttons on my shirt will start socially distancing from each other. (Williams 2020)

These frames enable people to reduce the frustrations inflicted through the imposed rules and conventions.

5.2. Ethnic Groups

In the corpus, 25% of the items dealt with familiar vs. unfamiliar ethnic group behaviour[5]. Oftentimes, the most deeply rooted humorous stereotypes on social media refer to a particular ethnic group, such as Chinese or Italian:

5. What do guns and corona virus have in common. They were both created in China now every American has one. ("Corona Virus Jokes To Laugh Out Loud", n.d.)
6. Corona virus: It's like pasta. Made by the Chinese, spread by the Italians, made unreasonably large by the Americans. (Popik 2020)

Figure 3: Ethnic humor (left: Trupeljak 2020, right: Bill 2020).

Figure 3 shows examples of ethnic humor. On the left side, the aliens say "We are coming in peace" whereas the Chinese respond "What do you think? Are they delicious?". This joke refers to unfamiliar Chinese eating habits. On the right image, Chinese people are also represented as negligent.

Social stereotypes used in humour constitute a complex mixture of assumptions about other people. The data confirm that any act of unfamiliar behaviour that deviates from strict social and cultural norms is the source of humour. These norms often reflect stereotypically "Western" values and priorities. Mocking one social group supports the theory of superiority used in humour research. This type of humour is associated with the distinction between good and bad people. It has recently been branded as hate speech. But, during the course of the pandemic, the focus of the coronavirus humour changed and moved away from attacks on minority groups or stereotypes and focused instead upon important political figures and government rules.

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[5] For more on ethnic humour, see Davies (1990).

5.3. Animals vs. Human Beings

The domain of animals vs. humans accounts for 10% of the corpus. In it, the conceptual domains of animals are mapped on the conceptual domain of humans. Most of the characters are anthropomorphic. Animals like dogs, cats, pigeons, and racoons are portrayed in such a way that they look and act like human beings. These unusual correspondences between animals and humans cause a funny reaction.

7. Day 121 at home and the dog is looking at me like, "See? This is why I chew the furniture!" (Williams 2020)

Figure 4: Anthropomorphisation – attribution of human traits to animals, in this case domestic pets such as dogs. (left: Bawden-Davis 2020, right: Cooney 2020).

In this binary structure (animals – human beings), animals behave as if they were humans without losing their animal appearance. On the left side of Figure 4, the hygiene requirements connected to Covid-19 are parodied as they are juxtaposed to a dog protective cone. On the right side, the dog takes the human responsibility of walking it. These images of dogs acting like human beings are incompatible with our perception of reality. This dichotomy of real and unreal produces a comic effect.

5.4. Inanimate vs. Animate Entity

It is not uncommon in humor to give human characteristics to non-humans. The projections of an inanimate entity or object to an animate entity account for 10% of the corpus. Figure 5 represents the way speakers anthropomorphize inanimate objects. On the left, the circles in the logo of the Olympic games resemble human beings performing social distancing (Balčiauskas 2020). On the right image (Marsh 2020), the beer bottles wear a face mask in the vicinity of the Corona beer, resembling society.

Associative connections between concepts have different density, therefore the semantic distance between different scripts[6], frames can be conceived as closer or farther. The data show that the concepts used in humor are quite distant, e.g., beer bottle vs. human being.

Figure 5: Inanimate entity acting as animate entity (left: Balčiauskas 2020; right: Marsh 2020).

5.5. Death vs. Life

Eight percent of the corpus items deal with Life and Death, two opposing, distant concepts that often serve as a source of humour. The majority of humorous metaphors are based on the 'distance theory' (see Pollio 1996). This type of humour served different purposes. Since death belongs to unpleasant and taboo topics and excludes the concept of life, people often rely on humour to cope with this difficult experience.

Figure 6 uses a lot of cognitive work and background knowledge to reveal the seemingly incompatible parts of this humour (life and death). In April 2020, British Prime Minister, Boris Johnson, survived a severe form of the coronavirus. The collage presents a situation where the (then 94-year-old) Queen did not expect him to answer the phone. Her words violate existing social norms and expected behaviour. These incongruous, discordant frame-shifting[7] related to death and regained life, evoke humorous reactions.

Figure 6: Meme depicting Covid-infected Boris Johnson calling the Queen (Green 2020).

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[6] For more on analyzing scripts in humorous communication, see Brock (2004).
[7] For a more extended discussion on a frame-theoretical analysis of verbal humour, see Norrick (1986).

Another joke compares the experience of walking through a cemetery to the social distancing rules:

> 8. I keep going for walks in the cemetery because no one there bothers me and they're all at least six feet away. (Popik 2021)

According to Dundes (1989: 73), this form of humor acts as a mental defense mechanism "that allows people to cope with the most dire of disasters".

5.6.   Human Beings vs. Animals

The contrast of humans and animals represents 7% of the corpus. Animals and humans are regarded as two, distant and incongruous concepts. Anything that threatens to reduce a person to an animal is the primary source of humor. In Figure 7 on the left side, human beings act as a flock of sheep. On the right side, humans are perceived as animals. Our research suggests that the most common negative attribute is stupidity, as in the representation of human beings as a flock of sheep or a herd of cattle.

Figure 7: Human beings/herd of cattle and Man/dog (left: Anderson 2020, right: "Man Dressed like a Dog..." 2020).

5.7.   Summary of the Corpus Analysis

The analysis of the selected data (200 entries) resulted in the following (opposing) frames or concepts: animals vs. human beings, human beings vs. animals, death vs. life, ethnic groups with familiar behaviour vs. ethnic groups with unfamiliar behaviour, inanimate entities (object) vs. animate entities, state-enforced rules (good vs. bad). Figure 8 visualises the distribution of the source domains in the corpus.
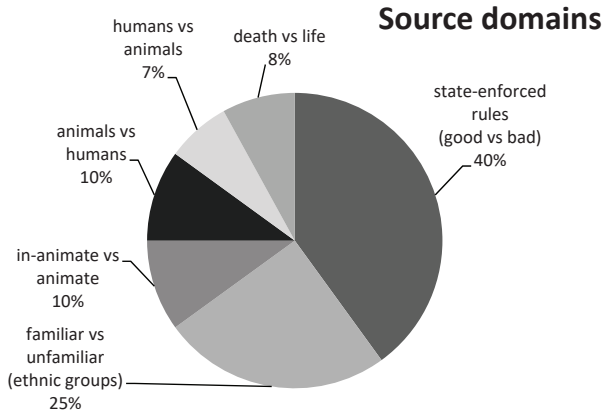
Figure 8: Graphic presentation of the key source domains (N = 200).

The most frequent source domains of humour are state-enforced regulations (40%) and ethnic groups (25%), followed by animals acting like humans (10%), inanimate entities acting like human beings (10%), death/life (8%) and humans acting like animals (7%). The two most popular topics in the sample (state-enforced regulations, ethnic groups) deal with features that are common to many societies during the pandemic. Due to shared experiences of the virus, the global media coverage and similar government rules, humorous reactions are quite similar in different languages (see Norstrom & Sarna 2021).

Raskin (1985) introduced similar categories of script opposition: actual (non-actual), normal (abnormal), possible (impossible), good (bad), life (death), obscene (non-obscene), money (no money), high (low) stature. Overall, the logical patterns and frames discussed above, constitute a 'grammar' of humour. The extent to which an individual will find something humorous depends on their physical, social, and mental environment.

6. Conclusion

During the global pandemic, humour has a prominent place in online newspapers, blogs, and social media like Facebook, Twitter, and Reddit. Politicians and governments have been regarded as the primary source of humour.

Concepts are used in ways that are surprising, unusual, and incongruous, activating other concepts with which they are not normally associated, e.g., social distancing and garlic. Martin (2007: 90) claims: "In order for the text to be viewed as humorous this second, overlapping script must be opposite to the first."

The following functions[8] of humour are reflected in the analysed data: it covers social taboos, such as death, illness, drinking problems, family problems, and it is

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[8] For a more extended discussion about different functions of humour, see Meyer (2000).

used as a form of social criticism of government actions and imposed regulations (social distancing, quarantine, obligatory facial masks, etc.). During the global pandemic, humour enables people to ease some of the tension related to the novel illness. Humour is shared openly on social platforms and privately in private messages as a form of defense mechanism against fear, anxiety, uncertainty, and loneliness.

Humour often involves hostility based on otherness and fear. It includes mocking of some ethnic groups perceived as a source of the virus or as a group of unfamiliar behavior. Lastly, it is also important to emphasize that words have power. The pandemic provides a fertile ground for 'information warfare', causing confusion in the public opinion. Calling Covid-19 the "Wuhan Virus" or "China Virus" causes a rise in racial discrimination. A non-discriminatory strategy, a neutral choice of words, and a truly global, transparent, and inclusive response are essential for this health crisis.

Overall, this contribution has demonstrated that humour has different functions. In addition to being an expression of superiority, it acts as a relief for a wide range of feelings and emotions during the health crisis. According to Mukherjee (2018: 119) "[h]umour also provides a safety valve for the expression of socially unacceptable taboo thoughts, avoiding total suppression by society". Our findings indicate the ambiguity of the role of humour in the public discourse. To conclude, humour is part of our collective adaptation to the environment, and it can be seen as a mechanism of social valorization: exclusion, inclusion, and comparison. During the pandemic, it has been used as a form of rebellion against reality and a broad range of life-threatening situations. The outcome of this research may provide a relevant source for future studies on the role of humour in virtual communication.

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Speech Acts in the COVID-19 Political Discourse: Inspiring Public (Mis)trust

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Abstract

The present study investigates the utilisation of speech acts in the COVID-19 discourse. The findings revealed that both productive and non-productive types of linguistic manipulation (Asya 2013) can be accomplished via utterances that contain: lexical verb in the imperative form, the verbs *be* and *get* in the imperative form and the participle I or II, and the verb *let* in combination with the first-person plural pronoun *we*. According to Ghazala (2011), techniques such as transitivity, modality, permutation, innuendo, and lexico-semantic manipulation serve the purpose of exploitation as performed by the media. Whereas previous studies have shown those means of manipulation to be effective, this study focuses on modality and transitivity.

This paper explores the degree to which old and contemporary sources aim to deceive their readers by misinformation. Mainly, the paper focuses on the media coverage of the COVID-19 pandemic through the contrastive analysis between the discourse of Anthony Fauci and Vili Beroš. The corpus consists of 149 media statements from February 2020 to October 2021, out of which 74 pertain to Beroš and 75 to Fauci.

The results of the analysis show that the discourse of the two public figures changes to a different extent with the development of the insights around the pandemic. Still, the imperative form, the passive voice, as well as emotionally charged words are the main markers of their COVID-19 disourse. The linguistic engineering behind the language of Beroš and Fauci exists in proportion to their role in politics. Beroš and Fauci use political speech which can have manipulative purposes and its persuasion depends on the evoked (mis)trust.

Keywords: speech acts, discourse analysis, fake news, COVID-19, Beroš, Fauci

1. Introduction

Language is more than a means of message transmission; it shapes reality and ideology, according to scholars such as Lakoff (2012), Driven, Hawkins, and Sandikcioglu (2001), to name but a few. Language can affect emotion, persuade, even elicit a desired behaviour or response from the interlocutor. The purpose of this article is to specifically focus on the COVID-19 discourse used by Anthony Fauci, an American scientist and immunologist serving as the Chief Medical Advisor to the President, and Vili Beroš, a Croatian politician and neurosurgeon serving as Minister of Health. The study examines the ways in which their language shapes the way the general population experiences and internalises the

topic of the pandemic. By analysing their media appearances and contrasting their respective manners of speech in the news, conclusions regarding the abovementioned persons' influence on the news recipients' beliefs and ideology shall be reached.

To begin with, however, it is important to note that our primary tool of interaction with the world, language, if to be studied properly, should not be considered separate from the physical and social context in which it is used. In linguistics, Pragmatics is defined as the study of the relationship between the meaning of an utterance and the context in which the utterance is produced. According to Austin (1979), one of the main theorists in the field of Pragmatics, nuances in everyday speech demonstrate distinctions that can be of paramount importance in daily living and thus speech is more than mere utterances. To put it differently, words have an influence that extends beyond the verbal. Austin believed that language is not only used to describe the world, but also to perform various actions. What is more, he rejected the view of utterances as being either true or false. Austin (1979: 235) states that a prerequisite for meaningful communication is, what he called, speech acts, which are "perfectly straightforward utterances […] and yet […] couldn't possibly be true or false. Furthermore, if a person makes an utterance of this sort we should say that he is *doing* something rather than merely *saying* something".

For instance, when one utters 'I do' at the altar, the utterance is neither true nor false, but it performs an action instead. The statement 'I do' completes the marriage ceremony, therefore endowing the utterance with a performative feature, where its meaning lies. There are three types of speech acts: the locutionary act (the act of uttering), the illocutionary act (the act performed in or by the uttering), and the perlocutionary act (the effect and the result of the uttering). "'It is cold in here', for example, may constitute a request or a command for more heat […] and it may cause the hearer to turn the heat up" (Blackburn 2021). Language can 'do' things, in simpler terms, as the title of Austin's published lectures from 1962 imply, 'How to Do Things with Words'.

There is a power to verbal delivery, and this article examines the discourse of two influential figures during the COVID-19 pandemic. The article elaborates on the operatory function, alongside the concept of persuasion as well as linguistic manipulation in sections two and three. The fourth section discusses fake news, more specifically, the techniques used to make fabrications appear as facts. Chapter five focuses specifically on the COVID-19 discourse of Anthony Fauci and Vili Beroš, with a subsection devoted to the February 2020 – October 2021 timeline. It analyses the changes in their discourse and discusses the implications for the trustworthiness of their statements.

2. Operatory Function of Language

At the centre of every communicative act is the human subject with their own speech competence and background knowledge. Language is at the core of every subject's relationship with others, a means of expressing ideas, opinions, and facts.

Alongside this, language serves the purpose of accomplishing missions and tasks. When the subject utters 'I'm sorry', they are apologising; by saying 'Please close the door', the subject is making a request, just like 'Stop talking!' is them commanding the interlocutor.

"Speaking is usually an intentional activity: it serves a purpose the speaker wants to realise [and] the match between intention and planned action takes place" (Pollard 2012: 17). The word 'action' in the citation alludes to the function of language being an operative one, apace with that of message transmission. Language, or more specifically, oral speech, in a communicative situation aims to steer the interlocutor towards performing the actions the speaker desires to have performed. In order for this to take place, specific ways of communicating need to be employed, one of which is persuasion. Persuasion aims to direct or change a person's attitudes, opinions, intentions, or motivations, with both positive and negative effects. It is a form of influence, most noticeable in human activities such as: trade, economy, advertising, consumption of goods, etc. However, persuasion is not only utilised for socio-economic reasons, but (inter)personal as well.

Persuading is getting one's own way through a careful and selective linguistic expression. In other words, the way speech is formed affects the way in which the message therein is perceived. In Ancient Greece and Rome, rhetoric was "teaching public performance, dispute tactics and methods of winning an argument" (Grischechko 2013: 2). Rhetoric was based upon logical thinking and persuasion, and the science was remastered in the XX century, with special emphasis placed on the psychology of the individual. Simply put, logical persuasion became emotional persuasion.

Language not only conceals the speaker's ideas and beliefs, but it has the power to shape the interlocutor's own ideology. In a given dispute, by focusing on the interlocutor's needs and the means of meeting them, whilst simultaneously countering objections, the persuader finds common ground with the interlocutor, making them believe that their best interest is held at heart. That is to say, building rapport and trust, alongside making the interlocutor believe that a common goal is shared, will likely result in a desired outcome for the persuader.

3. Linguistic Manipulation

Al-Hindawi & Kamil (2017: 9) place manipulation in the pragmatic contex, believing it to be more pragmatic than psychological in nature by stating:

> Broadly defined, manipulation is a kind of covert behaviour or a means, whether linguistic or non- linguistic, used by manipulators in certain communicative encounters to achieve their goals, desires, and interests regardless of the perceptual, cognitive, and emotional feelings of their interlocutors. [...] To be successful in doing so, manipulators should have a cognition which enables them to pursue their own interests through making use of some aspects of human cognition, notably reasoning, checking for likeliness, and emotions. As such, manipulators play on their targets' weaknesses to influence their motivation, beliefs, emotions, and reaction.

That is to say, the manipulatior wittingly selects those utterances that conceal their agenda, purposefully omitting any linguistic clues that may reveal their true intentions.

"Manipulation is a psychological impact carried out covertly, to the detriment of the people targeted. [It is] a form of spiritual influence, hidden domination, and control of people, which occurs by non-violent method" (Hrebin, Shyroka 2020: 37). Speech itself allows for manipulation as there is a possibility of a distortion of objective reality to a certain degree, for the speaker can offer imprecise and/or ambiguous statements and denominations. In this regard, manipulative discourse is a mixture of legitimate and false information. When the listener does not realise the speaker's intentions, manipulation is realised. To put it another way, the speaker consciously shapes their speech in such a manner that the utterances formed lack direct signals of their covert objectives.

Moreover, due to the extensive study on the operational force and the manipulative potentiality of speech, a new science called linguistic manipulation is being formed. "Linguistic manipulation is a fruitful communication between the speaker and the recipient, where the speaker aims at getting the desired result by correcting, at his own discretion, the recipient's behavior using speech" (Moiseeva 2020: 28). In this sense, communication is goal-oriented, a tool for control which can execute manipulation both directly and indirectly.

Grischechko explains that the direct method of linguistic manipulation "includes the forms that have a definite meaning in the language system that directly expresses corresponding illocution, i.e., communicative aim of the speaker" (Grischechko 2013: 3). For example, using the imperative mood ('Open the door!') is usually connected with demands and inducement thereof, whereas statements and questions have a connection with the illocution forces of message content and information request, respectively. On the other hand, the "indirect method of expressing communicative intention consists in the usage of linguistic forms to express illocution forces not connected with their direct linguistic meaning" (Grischechko 2013: 3). That is to say, the speaker's intentions are not openly expressed. This can be accomplished via hints ('How about loading the dishwasher?') that partially refer to the aim of the speaker, containing clues as to what the speaker desires to have accomplished.

Asya (2013: 4) states that "linguistic manipulation is based upon mechanisms that compel the listener to perceive verbal messages uncritically and facilitate creation of illusions and misperceptions impacting addressee's emotions and making him accomplish actions advantageous for the speaker". Manipulative affection can, in fact, be non-productive and productive. Non-productive manipulative affection is executed through a covert influence over the interlocutor's consciousness "in order to frustrate him, i.e., impart psychological discomfort" (Asya 2013: 4). That is to say, non-productive manipulation is "linguistic action aimed at manifestation of supremacy over the interlocutor through demonstration of his imperfection, inferiority, which leads to submission to the speaker's demands" (Asya 2013: 4). Conversely, productive manipulation

aims to manipulate the interlocutor's behaviour through exploitation, but by winning the interlocutor over. It is important to note, however, that non-productive and productive linguistic manipulation do not refer to the fruitfulness of the manipulation, the outcome achieved, as results of manipulation are separate from its methods and types.

Linguistic manipulation is usually accomplished via the following means:

> 1) Utterances containing lexical verb in the imperative form […] 2) Utterances containing link verb 'be' in the imperative form and participle I or II. […] 3) Utterances containing the verb 'get' in the imperative form and participle I […] 4) Utterances containing the verb 'let' and a pronoun in the 1st person plural, indicating inducement towards cooperative action. (Asya 2013: 4)

To exemplify this, utterances with lexical verbs in the imperative would be commands along the lines of: 'Stop making so much noise!', 'Tell her to leave me alone!'. 'Be quiet!' would be an example of the imperative of the verb 'be' and the first participle. The imperative of the verb 'get' and the first participle can be expressed like so: 'Get yourself to bed!', whereas the combination of a pronoun in the first person plural and the verb 'let': 'Let us not get carried away'.

4. Fake News

Owing to the ever-expanding Internet and social media usage, the ease of access to vast amounts of information with just a few clicks of the mouse or taps on the screen, has made the modern, 'digitalised' human into the perfect target for manipulation via and by the very technology he relies on daily. Every medium we are exposed to uses its own language to communicate that what it aims to share, be it a true account of certain events, or a fabricated story with a hidden agenda behind it. One way of presenting misleading information, often with the objective of damaging the reputation of a person or entity, is the so-called fake news. A piece of fake news contains problematic information, ranging from disinformation to propaganda, with the intention to deceive. Separating the truth from the fabrication is no easy task for the recipient of such news, especially if the source is one that the recipient deems valid and trustworthy. It is important to note, however, that the digital era cannot be considered the sole culprit for the spread of fake news. On the contrary, news facts have been altered to serve a specific purpose throughout human history, irrespective of the means of transmission. What follows are two historical accounts of large groups of people being misled through the medium of print in the pre-Internet era.

4.1. Historical Accounts

Firstly, in the 8th century, the Catholic Church produced a document with the title of 'The Donation of Constantine'. According to Fried (2007: 3) this document is "the most infamous forgery in the history of the world". The document states that, in the 4th century AD, Emperor Constantine contracted leprosy of which he could not be cured were it not for "the intervention of the Pope [Sylvester I], by whom

he was then baptised and whom he thanked by making generous donations to the Roman church" (Fried 2007: 12). The document was used by the Church to assert control over different lands up until the 15th century when it was discovered that it could not have been written in the 4th century because of the language used. More precisely, The Donation included phrases and words in Latin unknown at the time of the document's alleged creation. In fact, "we know of no Papal document or pronouncement earlier than the mid-11th century that mentions the Constantinian Donation expressis verbis, or at least includes a reference that is beyond all doubt" (Fried 2007: 16).

Al-Hindawi & Kamil (2017: 12) state that "manipulative messages are deceptive in that while they constitute deviations from the principles underlying conversational understanding, they remain covert deviations. The person who is being manipulated does not know that the information is being manipulated". This allowed the Church to keep using 'The Donation of Constantine' as a means of mass manipulation by appealing to people's emotion though the mention of illness and authority figures (Pope, Emperor). Illness is a universal human experience and finding cure for illnesses is humankind's continuous work in progress. Curing an illness is, as it was back then, deemed worthy of praise and award, just like people are conditioned by society to obey and trust figures of authority. Thus, it becomes clear how the mention of these concepts made the document appear unquestionably legitimate for hundreds of years.

The second example of using decrees or proclamations to give legitimacy to forgeries comes from 1271. The Knights Hospitallers, faced with the threat of Baibars, fled to the Krak des Chevaliers, a Syrian fort. The siege cultimated in the Krak des Chevaliers being surrendered to the Baibars "after a fraudulent letter from the Grand Master of the Knights Hospitaller in Tripoli granted permission to the catellan to surrender" (Fudge 2020). The physicality of the letter is, I argue, what convinced the men of the permission's veracity. There is a believability to the physical, as is the case with a decree coming from a figure of authority (the Grand Master). In addition, a permission to surrender contextually made sense, and was perhaps psychologically significant, therefore more acceptable, to the recipients, as it resulted in the relief the men had been hoping to be given, an end to a battle. Manipulation, after all, relies upon the interlocutor's feelings, amongst other things, being made out to be of great concern to the manipulator.

4.2.   Techniques and Examples of News Manipulation

Newspapers and news websites depend upon the favour of their readers, their main objective being that of catching the readers' interest. News are, therefore, not exact representations of truth as the emphasis is placed on the exploitation of interest for financial gain, rather than on factual accounts of events. To elicit interest from their readers, the language of the news ought to be characterised, broadly speaking, by one, or more, of the following features, according to Ghazala (2011): transitivity, modality, permutation, lexico-semantic manipulation, and innuendo.

This section offers a brief explanation of each of the concepts and their roles in linguistic manipulation, subsequently illustrated by examples of fake news articles.

To begin with, transitivity refers to verb voice which can be active or passive. When a sentence is in the active form, the emphasis is on the subject of the verb, a person or thing performing the action expressed by the verb. The passive involves an exchange of the subject for the object which "indicates a change of perspective of the whole sentence elements, not just a matter of focus or emphasis of object rather than subject" (Ghazala 2011: 98). That is to say, the passive voice places emphasis on the action itself, with the subject remaining unknown, hidden, unimportant, or non-essential to sentence comprehension. Verb voice change is a technique used by fake news so that the person(s) involved become irrelevant to the story, only their actions, dehumanising them, but also making the newspaper not responsible for placing the blame on anyone or anything specific. For instance, a confirmed fake-news article from 26 January 2020 states:

1. Last year a mysterious shipment was caught smuggling Coronavirus from Canada. ("Coronavirus Bioweapon" 2020)

It is not mentioned who the shipment was seized by, nor does it mention what the shipment contained, other than it is 'mysterious', a word that has a variety of connotations.

"Coronavirus Bioweapon – How China Stole Coronavirus from Canada and Weaponized It" ("Coronavirus Bioweapon" 2020) is a piece of fake news which relies upon sensationalism; namely, through the mention of a very current event – the COVID-19 pandemic. This is an example of permutation whereby the rearranging of linguistic ele-ments changes the interpretation of the utterance, especially regarding the word the sentence begins with. The word 'Coronavirus' is sure to capture the reader's interest, evoking imagery of danger, illness, death, etc. Furthermore, words such as 'bioweapon', 'steal', and 'weaponise' belong to the categories of war and crime, thus raising alarm in the reader, framing their impression of the information given. This is reiterated in the following citation from the *Journal on Geopolitics and International Relations* found on the GreatGameIndia website, an alternative media source:

2. China's Biological Warfare Program is believed to be in an advanced stage that includes research and development, production and weaponization capabilities. Its current inventory is believed to include the full range of traditional chemical and biological agents with a wide variety of delivery systems including artillery rockets, aerial bombs, sprayers, and short-range ballistic missiles. ("Coronavirus Bioweapon" 2020)

Additionally, the article references 'experts', who are, as mentioned previously, figures in which trust can be placed. In this article, the expert in question is a doctor. Whether or not this doctor is a real person and whether they have done what the news claim they have done becomes irrelevant to the reader because people are more likely to believe the words of a doctor than those of a person without a medical degree. Medical doctors are, after all, caregivers, so the title 'doctor' preceding the person's name takes precedence over the identity of the individual.

3. The findings of this investigation has been corroborated by none other than the Bioweapons expert Dr. Francis Boyle who drafted the Biological Weapons Convention Act followed by many nations. The report has caused a major international controversy and is suppressed actively by a section of mainstream media. (GREATGAMEINDIA 2020)

The use of the passive voice ('Program is believed', 'the report…is suppressed') as well as unspecified agents ('a section of mainstream media') reduce the clarity of the information offered. Also noticeable is the subject-verb misalignment at the start of the first sentence ('the findings…has been corroborated'). According to the study carried out by Iswara and Bisena (2020: 26), the features of language used in manipulating facts are: "(1) acronyms and initialisms, (2) word reduction, (3) letters or numbers, (4) stylized/unconventional spelling, (5) emoticons, (6) stylized/unconventional punctuation, and (7) images or photographs." The article is indeed accompanied by numerous photographs, including X-ray chest images of a patient infected with the Coronavirus. As for initialisms and word reduction:

4. In 2016, an AMMS doctoral researcher published a dissertation, 'Research on the Evaluation of Human Performance Enhancement Technology,' which characterized CRISPR-Cas as one of three primary technologies that might boost troops' combat effectiveness. (GREATGAMEINDIA 2020)

Furthermore, modality is featured in linguistic manipulation as modal verbs indicate "a subjective orientation towards events, processes or conditions" (Ghazala 2011: 88). Due to enhanced subjectivity, the readers are more likely to accept news as facts. Examples of this can be found in the fake news article en-titled "3 Reasons Why You Should Stop Eating Peanut Butter Cups!" (Wolfe 2021):

5. Unfortunately, a deeper look into Reese's ingredients might make you question that last minute purchase at the checkout line. As delicious as they are, Reese's peanut butter cups can be detrimental to your health.

Here, *should*, *might*, and *can* express duty, possibility, and ability, thus making the statements appear as pieces of advice which, if taken, would benefit the reader. Also, there is the imperative form in the title of the article, which is a previously mentioned means of linguistic manipulation. The manipulation becomes obvious towards the very end of the article, where a recipe appears, leading us to the conclusion that the alleged harmfulness of store-bought peanut butter cups is used as a trick to make the reader swap the store-bought variety with the one offered on the news website. In addition to this, the article appeals to the reader's sense of morality and parental obligation by questioning whether the reader would be willing to feed their children something unhealthy:

6. There's no debating the delicious taste of Reese's peanut butter cups. But do you really want to risk the potential health effects by eating them, or feeding them to your children? If peanut butter cups happen to be one of your favourite treats, there are safer ways eat them without putting your health at risk! Look for organic peanut butter cups at health food stores, or make your own! Here's how: […] (Wolfe 2021)

Another method of manipulation is lexico-semantic manipulation which, in the context of news, consists of using emotionally loaded words to express a feeling or an attitude without expressing who the feeling or attitude belongs to. "Lexical

means of speech manipulation constitute the most extensive and frequently used area of tools of speech manipulation" (Kenzhekanova et al. 2015: 326). Because of this, there are many sub-categories of lexical manipulation, one of which is nominalisation, a transformation of a verb into a noun phrase. Kenzhekanova further states that

> nominalisation is a means of a depersonalisation of action which is widespread in a political discourse. A semantic result of replacement of personal forms of verbs with derivative nouns is disappearance of the subject and agent of what about is told. (Kenzhekanova et al. 2015: 326)

For example: 'Early cancer treatment can prevent complications.'

Finally, in the context of speech manipulation, innuendo, according to Ghazala (2011: 193) "is a special kind of ironic statement which is remarkable for what it omits rather than for what it mentions. It is a kind of depreciatory irony that draws heavily on insinuation". For instance, changing a statement into a negation or a question might alter the reader's perception of the statement. In journalism, this is known as Betteridge's law whereby "any headline that ends in a question mark can be answered by the word no" (WhatIs 2021). Betteridge's law

> refers to the poor journalistic practice of writing sensational headlines in the form of a question in order to compensate for the author's lack of facts. […] Examples of headlines that comply with Betteridge's law include: *Can Amazon Alexa be trusted? Should Google Home fear Watson Assistant? Will your next lawyer be named Siri?* (WhatIs 2021).

Taking into consideration all the techniques of linguistic manipulation discussed thus far, the next chapter of this work will examine the strategies used in the selected corpus of media statements regarding the COVID-19 disease.

5. COVID-19 Political Discourse

Towards the end of 2019, a new viral disease started spreading, turning nation-wide epidemics into a pandemic. As is the case with anything novel, the emergence of the pandemic caused news outlets to be flooded with an influx of information, new topics of discussion, and sources of inspiration. Motivated by the urgency to inform, but simultaneously gripped with the fear and panic that had become as widespread as the virus itself, journalists, medical experts, as well as laics, began to publish numerous articles discussing the origins of the new disease, its effects on the human body, potential cures, ways of protecting oneself from becoming infected, and so on. Amongst many individuals reporting on the COVID-19 pandemic, two are relevant for the analysis that is to follow: Anthony Fauci and Vili Beroš. Anthony Fauci, an American physician and scientist, the director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases and the Chief Medical Advisor to the US President, in this section of the article is the selected representative of the Anglo-Saxon news reports on COVID-19. On the other hand, Croatian perspective is given through the public speech of Vili Beroš, a Croatian politician and neurosurgeon serving as Minister of Health. The language of Fauci and Beroš in the news will be analysed from the angle of mass persuasion.

5.1. Overview of the Corpus

The corpus consists of media statements, mainly from the Croatian government website as well as American news websites. The period covered is from March 2020 to October 2021. The overall number of statements included is 149: 74 pertain to Vili Beroš, the remaining 75 to Anthony Fauci.

Firstly, as previously mentioned, persuasion relies upon convincing the interlocutor that the speaker has their best interest at heart. Therefore, when a person of authority addresses the public, which in itself is effective, and said person happens to be a medical professional, the effect achieved is powerful. Undoubtedly aware of this, Vili Beroš alludes to the presupposed trust of his addressees using the collocation *assure safety*. Thus, he states:

1. *Kao ministru zadatak mi je osigurati sigurnost. Svi imaju iste uvjete, nema diskriminacije, nikoga ne tjeramo na cijepljenje.*

    [As the Minister of Health, my goal is to ensure safety. Everyone's conditions are the same, there is no discrimination, nobody is forced to get vaccinated.][1] ("Burno ispred KBC-a Zagreb" 2021)

Vili Beroš's manner of speech is that of convincing the public of his expertise, education, and morality. Beroš expresses himself concisely and professionally, referencing science and his reliance thereon, all the same remaining vague about his sources at times. From the following quote, it is possible to deduce that Beroš distances himself from his statements by emphasising how it is not *he* who has imposed measures, but that a higher authority imposes the measures, namely *science*, of whom he is only an agent. The construction "are not the result of my work", though in active voice, avoids placing Beroš as the agent. Thus, he is removing any potential responsibility from his own person, simultaneously ensuring that, if the facts prove to be fabrications, the blame gets placed elsewhere. Additionally, the passive voice is used in the statement below ("consultations have been made").

2. *U konačnici, ove mjere nisu rezultat mog rada, rezultat su rada struke, struka je dala preporuke, a iskustvo u Europi to opravdava. Prije donošenja mjere su izvršene konzultacije sa stručnjacima i oni smatraju da je zaštita zdravlja iznad svega.*

    [At the end of the day, these measures are not the result of my work, they are the result of science, science has given the recommendations, and the practice in Europe has confirmed it. Before enforcing the measures, consulations with experts have been made, and they believe that protecting our health is a priority.] ("Beroš prosvjednicima: Naš imperativ" 2021).

Evoking a sense of community, Beroš uses the verb *let* and the first-person plural:

3. *Hajdemo hrabro u novi tjedan!*

    [Let us go bravely into the new week!] ("Vili Beroš: - Odlični su nam rezultati" 2021)

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[1] All translations are made by the author.

Additionally, Beroš calls for united effort in combatting the disease by explaining to the public that their role in ending the pandemic is crucial:

4. *Ključ uspjeha je u našim rukama. Ovih blagdana važnije je nego ikada ostati doma. Za zdraviju budućnost moramo djelovati sada i odlučno.*

   [The key to success is in our hands. These holidays, it is more important than ever to stay at home. For a healthier future, we must act immediately and decidedly.] ('Vili Beroš: Ovih blagdana važnije je više nego ikada ostati doma!' 2020)

In this quote, the use of the deontic modal verb *must* is notable, for modal verbs enhance the sense of subjectivity in the reader, alongside the imperative properties of the verb itself. That is to say, *having to* do something creates a mood of urgency, making the reader believe that action is required of them because the issue at hand is real.

Finally, when discussing the issue of non-vaccinated individuals, Beroš's wording is tactical. Instead of overtly appealing to said individuals to get vaccinated, Beroš chooses to address their refusal of free COVID testing, in an attempt to provoke a sense of guilt, but also responsibility, and how a lack thereof could result in financial deprivation. In other words, Beroš extends the issue of non-vaccination from the individual to the public domain. Furthermore, Beroš mentions the law, but in the context of having faith ("believe") that it will be upheld, and if this was not to be the case, he would consider it a personal failure, given how convinced he is that people will ultimately choose to get vaccinated, which is the desired outcome, albeit not explicitly stated.

5. *Oni koji će bez opravdanog razloga, ako nisu cijepljeni ili među preboljelima, odbijati i mogućnost besplatnog testiranja stvorit će nepotrebne probleme prvenstveno sebi, ali i sustavu u kojem rade. Nemogućnosti obavljanja svojih poslova stvorit će problem ustanovi kako nadomjestiti njihov izostanak, a sebi neopravdani izostanak s posla i gubitak naknade za rad. Ne vjerujem da će bilo tko bez valjanog razloga odbijati bilo koju od predloženih mjera, ali ako takvih i bude, tada će morati s poslodavcem rješavati isto u skladu sa zakonskim odredbama. Volio bih da toga ne bude ili barem u najmanjoj mjeri.*

   [Those who, without a valid reason, if they are not vaccinated or among those who have had the disease, will refuse free testing, will create unnecessary problems primarily for themselves, but also for the system they work in. The inability to perform their work duties will create a problem for the institution which will need to compensate for their absence, and for them this will mean unjustified absences from work and loss of remuneration. I do not believe that anyone will reject any of the proposed measures without a valid reason, but if anyone should, then they would have to deal with their employer in accordance with the legal provisions. I would prefer this not be the case, or if so, at least to a lesser extent.] ("Ministar zdravstva Vili Beroš: 'JEDINI CILJ'" 2021)

Overall, Vili Beroš's comments on COVID-19 in the media could be classified as concise, precise and striving to be objective (appeal to science in statement 2). There are no obvious embellishments in his statements; he remains consistent in his recommendations regarding the preventative measures of the COVID-19 spread. However, the same cannot be said for Anthony Fauci. The immunologist has been more emotionally present in his public addresses, visible from his informal register, whereas Beroš has used professional language without his

individuality in the forefront. That said, there are similarities in the manner of speech of both Beroš and Fauci, the following section focusing on Fauci.

To begin with, whether or not a mask would be worn appears to be an issue full of contradictions, according to Fauci, as his statements on the matter are confusing and ever-changing. For instance, first he states that "there's no reason to be walking around with a mask" (Miller et al. 2021) only to retract his original statement:

> 7. Given the fact that there is a degree of transmission from asymptomatic individuals who may not know that they're infected, we need to at least examine the possibility, as long as we're absolutely certain we don't take the masks away from who are health care providers who need them... […] It doesn't need to be a classical mask. But something that would have someone prevent them from infecting others. (Miller et al. 2021)

Moreover, "the typical mask you buy in the drugstore is not really effective at keeping the virus out, which is small enough to pass through the material" (Breuninger et al. 2021), claims Fauci. This statement is made with certainty in contrast to example 7, which expresses uncertainty, typical for the scientific discourse, through the collocation "examine the possibility".

When dealing with a global threat, the public look to authority figures to give them guidelines on how to behave. However, inconsistency makes the authority figure appear less authorative as their statements start being questioned, thus making their veracity and trustworthiness doubtful. In fact, relevant to the discussion on Fauci's discourse, there are strong statements proclaiming his guidelines as lies:

> Fauci has lied about everything—masks, herd-immunity threshold, the origins of the virus. Things he's saying now, I'd have been thrown off of social media for saying, said Steve Deace, author of *Faucian Bargain: The Most Powerful and Dangerous Bureaucrat in American History.* (Bond 2021)

Apart from the mask issue, problematic are also Fauci's statements on the origins of the corona virus. Retracting his opinion on the virus originating in a Chinese laboraty, Fauci uses the first-person plural (*we*) and "many of us" to both distance himself from the discourse as he makes impersonal references to others, and to allude to a sense of community and the importance of joint effort, much like Vili Beroš has done. Differently to Beroš, though, Fauci appears to be more passionate about his public address, making it appear a personal issue:

> 8. Many of us feel that it is more likely that this is a natural occurrence, as has happened with SARS-CoV-1, where it goes from an animal reservoir to a human. But we don't know 100 percent the answer to that ... So, because we don't know 100 percent what the origin is, it's imperative that we look and we do an investigation. And that's how we feel right now. […] You know, as I've said many times, MARGARET, the data are really just at best suggestive. There have been cases that show there may be an effect. (Miller et al. 2021)

Fauci is neither certain about the virus origin nor does he have access to exact data, but nonetheless discusses a *more likely* theory, finds an investigation *imperative*, at the same time using epistemic modality expressing possibility (*may*). What is

more, togetherness is a frequent motif, expressed through the pronoun *we* and the adverb *together*:

> 9. I can only say that I […] prefer to look forward and not to assign blame or fault. […] There are enough problems ahead that we must face together. (Miller et al. 2021)

Still, Fauci makes sure to remind the public of the importance of his own efforts through the personal pronoun *I* in example 9 and in "I'm going to keep pushing" (Cohen 2020).

Going back to the previously mentioned data, Fauci displays inconsistency due to the fact that the scientific data on the novel virus keeps changing, alongside his estimates. However, the public is likely to perceive Fauci's estimates as imprecise and therefore untrustworthy:

> 10. When polls said only about half of all Americans would take a vaccine, I was saying herd immunity would take 70 to 75 percent,' Dr. Fauci said. 'Then, when newer surveys said 60 percent or more would take it, I thought, 'I can nudge this up a bit,' so I went to 80, 85. […] 'We need to have some humility here,' he added. 'We really don't know what the real number is. I think the real range is somewhere between 70 to 90 percent. But, I'm not going to say 90 percent. (McNeil 2020)

The uncertainty in "we really don't know" and "I think" can make the public disregard whichever figures he has mentioned as his informativeness is cancelled out by such statements. One might even go as far as to say that Fauci's statements are made for the sake of addressing the public, out of necessity, rather than with the aim of a definitive information transmission. If the speaker lacks confidence in the content of their own speech, the effect achieved will be that of uncertainty in the listener. After all, it is no easy task to convince others of something the speaker themselves is not conviced.

As to the vaccination issue, Fauci's approach is different to that of Beroš who does not plead with the public – instead, Fauci uses the generalising *we* to "plead with the unvaccinated". He boosts the confidence of his statement with *really* but then softens it with *predominantly*:

> 11. I have said, it is really a pandemic among the unvaccinated, so this is an issue predominantly among the unvaccinated, which is the reason why we're out there, practically pleading with the unvaccinated people to go out and get vaccinated. (Duster 2021)

In the end, Fauci's contradictory discourse can be best summed up by the following statement:

> 12. So, there's a compromise. If you knock down the economy completely and disrupt infrastructure, you may be causing health issues, unintended consequences, for people who need to be able to get to places and can't. You do the best you can. I've emphasized very emphatically at every press conference, that everybody in the country, at a minimum, should be following the fundamental guidelines. Elderly, stay out of society in self isolation. Don't go to work if you don't have to. Yada, yada, yada. No bars, no restaurants, no nothing. Only essential services. When you get a place like New York or Washington or California, you have got to ratchet it up. But it is felt—and it isn't me only speaking, it's a bunch of people who make the decisions—that if you lock down everything now, you're going to crash the whole society. So, you do what you can do, as best as you can.

> Do as much physical separation as you can and ratchet it up at the places you know are at highest risk. (Cohen 2020)

The quote encapsulates the main features of Fauci's discourse: the emotional language, the togetherness motif (*whole society*), impersonal references and distancing (*bunch of people*), epistemic modality expressing possibility (*may*), deontic modality expressing duty (*should*), use of imperative language (*Elderly, stay out*), informal tone (*yada, yada, yada*), and metaphorical language (*ratchet up*, *knock down the economy*).

5.2. Discourse Timeline

This section of the article examines whether any detectable changes in the rethorics of Vili Beroš and Anthony Fauci exist throughout the course of the pandemic. More specifically, the sources used for this purpose are dated between April 2020 and October 2021. Beroš's statements which follow are all cited from the Croatian Government website, starting from 24 April 2020:

6. *Imamo relativno mirnu epidemiološku situaciju s relativno malim brojem novooboljelih, što do dozvoljava da razmišljamo o popuštanju, no oprezni smo i dalje, vidjet ćemo rezultate i po potrebi reagirati na adekvatan način. Naša strategija je ona čekića i plesa, a sad smo u stadiju plesa. Strategija je dugo promišljanja i vrlo egzaktna. Ne očekujemo pogoršanje, ali smo spremni.*

   [We have a relatively calm epidemiological situation with a relatively small number of new cases, which allows us to think about reducing measures, but we are still careful, we will see what the results are like, and react accordingly. Our strategy is that of hammer and dance, and now we are in the dance stage. The strategy has been long thought-out and very precise. We are not expecting things to get worse, but we are ready in case they do.] ("Beroš za RTL: Epidemiološka situacija" 2020)

In one of his first stamtements to the public, Beroš balances out caution with optimism. He underlines the importance of staying alert and monitoring the situation, whilst emphasising how Croatia has a small number of newly infected individuals. *We* is the pronoun he uses throughout, remaining impersonal, and leaving the subject open to interpretation. Additionally, Beroš uses the hammer and dance analogy, which is perhaps one of the few examples of metaphorical language in his otherwise weakly metaphorical expression.

In May 2020, Beroš makes mention of world experts, who remain nameless, in his statement on the existing strategy being implemented, using the passive voice in the Present Simple tense:

7. *Strategija je egzaktna, rezultat je razmišljanja epidemiološke struke, konzultacija sa svjetskim stručnjacima.*

   [The strategy is exact; it is the result of the epidemiological thinking and profession, consultations with world experts.] ("Beroš za RTL: Nastojimo biti" 2020)

The first-person singular pronoun *I* gets introduced for the first time in Beroš's public appearance on 18 June 2020, even though in the last two sentences a switch to plural *we* takes place:

8. *Ja jesam član Vlade, kao takav sudjelujem u politici, ali moja je ideja biti funkcionalan ministar zdravstva i riješiti nagomilane probleme u ovom resoru. Mislim da zdravstvo nije privelo kraju svoju tranziciju. Moramo odgovoriti na brojne probleme.*

[I am a member of the Government, and as such I participate in politics, but my idea is to be a functional Minister of Health and solve the accumulated problems in this department. I don't think healthcare has brought its transition to an end. We have a number of problems to deal with.] ("Beroš: Novi slučajevi" 2020)

In this statement, Beroš is referring to his expertise and public functions, whilst making sure the emphasis is placed on his role of a medical professional, thus reminding the reader that his political work will not interfere with his decision-making to the detriment of the public health. By doing so, Beroš inspires trust, and trust is a prerequisite for belief.

In a later appearance in the same month, more precisely on the 22nd of June, Beroš again, though briefly, talks about himself, but with the aim of detaching from the responsibility of proclaiming the arrival of the second wave of COVID-19:

9. *Nisam epidemiolog niti infektolog. No osobno, na temelju razgovora s kolegama, bih mogao reći da se ne može se raditi o tipičnom drugom valu, jer prvi nije završio, znači radi se o određenom kontinuitetu. Činjenica je da smo danima imali nula novooboljelih što je savršena epidemiološka situacija, ali ne bih mogao ustvrditi da se radi o drugom valu.*

[I am neither an epidemiologist nor an infectologist. But personally, based on conversations with colleagues, I could say that this might not be a typical second wave, because the first one has not ended yet, so there is a certain continuity. The fact is that we have had zero new cases for days which is a perfect epidemiological situation, but I could not claim that this is a second wave.] ("Beroš za NOVU TV: Društveni život" 2020)

Detachment is visible in the use of modal verbs such as *could* and *might*, the former repeating itself in the negative form. Modals enhance the mood of the discourse, express attitude and thus make the discourse more personal to the reader. Here, the epistemic modal verbs serve the purpose of expressing uncertainty, hence the detachment. A feature of Beroš's discourse is him refraining from making premature *claims* before there is enough evidence to justify any proclamation-making.

Apart from this, the passive voice is used yet again (*were taken*), generalising the agent responsible for the taken measures:

10. *Najbitnije je da u svim novim slučajevima znamo način zaraze, da je epidemiološka služba brzo detektirala sve oboljele i da su poduzete sve potrebne epidemiološke mjere.*

[The most important thing is that in all new cases we know how the infection happened, that the epidemiological service quickly detected all the patients and that all necessary epidemiological measures were taken.] ("Beroš za NOVU TV: Društveni život" 2020)

Additionally, Beroš mentions nobody by name when talking about certain politicians who are not adhering to the measures:

11. *Političari koji se ne pridržavaju mjera stožera ne šalju baš najbolju poruku građanima.*

[Politicians who do not adhere to the measures are not sending a very good message to the citizens.] ("Beroš za NOVU TV: Društveni život" 2020)

In a particular instance when Beroš receives criticism for his decisions, he responds without retaliating. Instead, he speaks about his inability to make decisions that would agree with everyone. In other words, it is impossible to please everyone, according to Beroš:

> 12. *Sve mjere su brižno balansirane i tražili smo pravi trenutak. Lako je biti general poslije bitke i govoriti što i kako se moglo drugačije, mišljenja sam da je naš epidemiološka situacija još uvijek jako dobra, čak među boljima. Isto tako smo potpuno svjesni da život mora teći dalje. Ti isti ljudi koji kritiziraju da smo se prerano otvorili, oni su prigovarali kad smo se zatvarali. Prema tome, teško je odgovoriti na sva htijenja i promišljanja.*
>
> [All the measures were carefully balanced, and we were looking for the right moment. It's easy to be the general after the battle and to say what and how things could have been done differently, I think our epidemiological situation is still very good, even amongst the better ones. At the same time, we are fully aware that life must go on. Those same people who criticise that we've opened too early are the same ones who objected when we closed. Therefore, it is difficult to respond to all wishes and considerations.] ("Beroš: Epidemiološke mjere" 2020)

In July of 2020, following an increase of new cases, the first hints of the imperative are beginning to show. Namely, through the mention of the verb *ban*. That said, however, Beroš retains his neutral tone which does not appear threatening or panic-inducing. He blends the positive and the negative pieces of information into a single sentence, i.e., by contrasting the following clauses: "gatherings have been causing an increase in the number of patients" and "the epidemiological measures that have so far yielded results":

> 13. *Okupljanja zadnjih dana uzrokuju povećani broj oboljelih i u našim novim mjerama smo se okrenuli tome, ali tako da ih nećemo zabraniti već ćemo naglasiti sve epidemiološke mjere koje su do sada polučile rezultate.*
>
> [Recently, gatherings have been causing an increase in the number of patients and our new measures are tailored to the situation, but in a way that we will not ban the gatherings, but will instead emphasise all the epidemiological measures that have so far yielded results.] ("Ministar zdravstva Beroš najavio" 2020)

Also in August of the same year, Beroš addressed those who do not follow the rules, judging their behaviour by using the adjective *unacceptable*, whilst recognising the need for spending time with others:

> 14. *Čuli smo da iznajmljuju kuće i brodove za zabave, to nije prihvatljiv oblik ponašanja. Dobro je proveseliti se, zabaviti se, okupati se, ali treba izbjegavati neki bliži fizički kontakt pogotovo s ljudima za koje ne znate iz kakve su epidemiološke priče.*
>
> [We have heard that they rent houses and boats for parties, this is not an acceptable form of behaviour. It's good to entertain yourself, have fun, have a swim, but close physical contact should be avoided especially with those whose epidemiological background you don't know.] ("Beroš za NOVU TV: Moramo biti epidemiološki" 2020)

The implication of this statement for his discourse would be that Beroš allows himself to express a personal stance, a judgement, by scolding the ones who do not adhere to the rules, all the while sympathising with the audience by referencing the universal human need for socialisation. Balancing out disapproval with understanding is a frequent marker of Beroš's manner of speech.

In fact, Beroš respectfully communicates his disapproval of anti-COVID protests, using his medical expertise and his responsibility towards the citizens of Croatia. On more than one occasion, Beroš validates personal beliefs that differ from his own, but acting on those beliefs and potentially endangering others is what he does not approve of. The word "democrat" appears twice in the following statements, once as a noun when describing himself as a "Christian democrat", and another time in the form of an adjective "democratic", in reference to Croatia:

15. *Kao demokršćanin poštujem slobodu i pravo svakog čovjeka na vlastito promišljanje i stajalište o svim važnim životnim pitanjima. Hrvatska je demokratska zemlja u kojoj se njeguje sloboda mišljenja i izražavanja stajališta.*

    [As a Christian Democrat, I respect freedom and everyone's prerogative to think for themselves and have a stance on life's issues. Croatia is a democratic country where freedom of opinion and expression is nurtured.] ("Beroš: Poštujem slobodu" 2020)

16. *Svatko ima slobodu izbora, ali mora biti svjestan i svih posljedica svojih odluka. Kako za sebe tako i za sve ljude u svom okruženju.*

    [Everyone has the freedom of choice, but must also be aware of the consequences of their decisions. Both for themselves and for everyone around them.] ("Beroš: Poštujem slobodu" 2020)

Moreover, the same manner of speech is used when discussing vaccination. Beroš shows understanding and acceptance of different beliefs, but appeals to the common sense of the people, the facts, the numbers, and how important it is to take the situation seriously, which is achieved through the repetition of the adverb *extremely*:

17. *Uvažavam sve slobode, ali nalazimo se u vrlo specifičnim okolnostima globalne pandemije. Virus je oko nas, ugrožava naše živote. Preko pedeset naših sugrađana dnevno umire od ove teške bolesti. Ignorirati tu činjenicu bi bilo krajnje, krajnje opasno.*

    [I respect all freedoms, but these are very specific circumstances of a global pandemic. The virus is all around us, threatening our lives. Over fifty of our fellow citizens die every day from this serious disease. Ignoring this fact would be extremely, extremely dangerous.] ("Beroš: Krajnje je vrijeme" 2020)

As for the information conveyed, Beroš remains consistent, as demonstrated by the following statements on mask-wearing from October 2020:

18. *Ono što je važno jest ukazivati na važnost nošenja zaštitnih maski. Naime, održavanje fizičkog razmaka jedan je od najvažnijih načina sprečavanja širenja bolesti. Naravno da nije uvijek moguće održati distancu i u tim je slučajevima maska vrlo važan element. Možemo reći da ovih dana nošenje maske postaje gesta s porukom – čuvanje je vlastita odgovornost.*

    [What's important is to point out the importance of wearing protective masks. Namely, maintaining physical distance is one of the most crucial ways of preventing the spread of the disease. Of course, it is not always possible to maintain distance and in those cases the mask is a very important factor. We can say that these days wearing a mask is becoming a gesture with a message – caring is your own responsibility.] ("Beroš pozvao građane" 2020)

The consistency also applies to Beroš's stance on vaccination:

19. *Svi zajedno moramo biti svjesni važnosti cijepljenja i to je neupitno.*

    [We all need to be aware of the importance of vaccination and that is unquestionable".] ("Beroš u RTL direktu: Nema alternative" 2020)

20. *Matematika je jasna, cjepivo protiv covid-19 = zdrav i normalan život. Zaštitimo sebe i druge #CijepiSe*

    [The Maths is simple, the vaccine against covid-19 = healthy and normal life. Let's protect ourselves and others #GetVaccinated] ("Beroš u RTL direktu: Nema alternative" 2020)

21. *Cijepljenje je definitivno glavni izlaz iz ove krize i jedna je vrsta preventive koja je u medicini majka svega.*

    [Vaccination is definitely the way out of this crisis and is a type of prevention that is the mother of everything in medicine.] ("Beroš: Cijepljenje kao preventiva" 2021)

There are no mixed messages, no inconsistencies, no ambiguous sentiments on the matter – Beroš advocates vaccination persistently and definitively through deontic modal verbs like *need to*, adjectives such as *unquestionable*, adverbs like *definitely*, and metaphors like *math* and *mother*. This discourse of certainty attempts to reduce the public's fear from vaccine side effects and increase its trust.

In late spring and early summer of 2021, Beroš posed several questions to anti-vaxers, questions specifically addressing their responsibility towards others. These questions are rhetorical as there was no audience before Beroš at the time the questions were asked, so no direct interaction could be established, and no answers received. Rhetorical questions engage the audience's thinking, perhaps even inviting them to agree with the speaker, stirring emotion. Due to this discourse strategy, the effect achieved is guilt-inducing, as Beroš follows the questions up with an answer which states that the readers need not look further than themselves to find answers.

22. *Želite li spriječiti postizanje kolektivnog imuniteta? Želite li produljiti gospodarsku krizu, potaknuti gubitak radnih mjesta? Želite li spriječiti povratak života u normalu? Odgovor i odgovornost su isključivo na vama.*

    [Do you want to prevent herd immunity? Do you want to prolong the economic crisis, encourage job losses? Do you want to prevent life from returning to normal? The answer and responsibility are solely yours.] ("Beroš: Od hospitaliziranih 94" 2021)

On a different note, punishment is a topic Beroš prefers to not elaborate on, as previously mentioned, but he does not avoid the subject entirely. He speculates hypothetical future scenarios using a lot of *if*s and modal verbs such as *should*, *must*, *will*, and *would*. Not only this, but he makes sure to stress his unwillingness to enforce any kind of penalty, unless absolutely necessary, using adverbs such as *reluctantly* and *theoretically* which imply, in plain terms, 'I do not wish to do this, but I will if I have to, though I really do not want to'. Also, he repeats how measures are not a form a punishment:

23. *Mjere nisu kazna.*

    [Mesures are not punishment.] ("Beroš: Od hospitaliziranih 94" 2021)

24. *Nerado razmišljamo o kaznama, ali ako će se pojedinci i dalje ponašati bezobzirno i ugrožavati druge, morat ćemo razgovarati i o takvim mjerama. Nerado, ali ako bude nužno, razgovarat ćemo i o tome. Teoretski je moguće kažnjavanje onih koji ne nose masku, ako vidimo da usprkos apelima i edukaciji i dalje imamo situaciju da se virus prenosi zbog nenošenja maski.*

[Reluctantly, we think about punishments, but should individuals continue to behave recklessly and endanger others, we would have to discuss such measures as well. Reluctantly, but if necessary, we will talk about that as well. Theoretically, it is possible to punish those who do not wear a mask, if we see that despite appeals and education, we still have a situation where the virus is transmitted due to people not wearing a mask.] ("Beroš: Od hospitaliziranih 94" 2021)

As the epidemiological situation started to improve in January 2021, Beroš praised the citizens, generalising *all* and thanking them for their contribution and efforts:

25. *Hvala svim građanima što poštuju epidemiološke mjere i pokazuju visoku razinu odgovornosti.*

    [Thank you to all the citizens for respecting epidemiological measures and showing a high level of responsibility.] ("Beroš: Hrvatska ima najveći" 2021)

Finally, in October 2021, Beroš expressed satisfaction with his own work, the health system, the government, and the current state of affairs in a rather (self)complimentary post, although attempting the remove attention from himself, remaining neutral, despite inserting the rare *I* in a few places:

26. *Nije bitno kako sam ja prošao, i tako sam u ovoj vrućoj fotelji naviknut na određene kritike, iako za mnogo problema u zdravstvu nisam osobno kriv jer su stari desetljećima, ali ono što je najvažnije je da je naš cilj ostvaren. Danas smo podignuli razinu sigurnosti u zdravstvenom sustavu na jednu višu ljestvicu i to je ono što je imperativni cilj ove Vlade - pružiti korisnicima naših usluga maksimalnu sigurnost. To smo i postigli, stoga mogu reći da sam na kraju dana ipak zadovoljan.*

    [It doesn't matter how I fared, and I'm used to criticism in this hot seat anyway, although I'm not personally to blame for many health issues because they're decades old, but the most important thing is that our goal has been achieved. Today, we have raised the level of security in the healthcare system to a higher level, and this is an imperative goal of this Government – to provide the users of our services with maximum security. We have achieved that, so I can say that I am satisfied, at the end of the day.] ("Beroš za HTV: Podignuli smo" 2021)

All in all, the examples above demonstrate that the rhetoric of Vili Beroš did not undergo notable changes between April 2020 and October 2021. The features of Beroš's public speech include consistency, detachment from situations that could lead to controversy, togetherness (*we*), and placing special emphasis on the importance of individual effort and responsible behaviour. Beroš scarsely gives credit to himself, opting to praise science and medicine instead, albeit his last post praising his ministry and the government. By contrast, Anthony Fauci's discourse differs from that of Beroš, as established previously, but with regard to the pandemic timeline as well. More specifically, he uses less formal language, with a significantly larger number of predictions and estimates compared to Beroš.

A characteristic of Fauci's discourse is a lack of clarity, albeit not regarding factual, medical information on the properties of the disease, but regarding measures and ways of preventing oneself from contracting COVID-19. For instance, despite the fact that virus particles can move throughout an indoor space and remain airborne, Fauci is reluctant to argue for travel restrictions:

13. Health officials, myself included, have said in the past that travel restrictions are not gonna stop completely when you have an outbreak. […] If there is, and I hope it doesn't happen, a broad pandemic throughout the world, travel restrictions are not gonna help. You can't just travel restrict everyone. But, I think many health officials would agree that it's not perfect. (Morabito 2020)

The statement above dates to 7 February 2020. Immediately evident are prediction-making and modal verbs (*can't*, *would*), as the virus was not as well studied at that time. Fauci is not advocating for any specific type of behaviour from the US citizens and is expressing hope in a pandemic not taking place in the future. Stating personal opinions and feelings is characteristic of Fauci's language, and in line with that, the first-person singular pronoun appears frequently.

Moreover, on 25 February of the same year, he claims that a plan of action exists, even though his use of the adverb *resonably* and a lack of elaboration on the plan do not exactly inspire confidence:

14. We are reasonably well-prepared. We've had a plan that we put together years ago. (Morabito 2020)

On the other hand, Fauci correctly predicts (using the adverb *likely*) the endemic turning into a pandemic in his statement on 2 March 2020:

15. We're dealing with, clearly, an emerging infectious disease that has now reached outbreak proportions and, likely, pandemic proportions. (Morabito 2020)

At the same time, Fauci bluntly expresses his doubts in the health system on 12 March 2020. This is not a characteristic which exists in Beroš's speech who, irrespectively of personal beliefs, prefers to focus on the positives and instil hope in the public. To have a figure of authority admit to the shortcomings of the system they are a part of not only evokes negative feelings of fear and insecurity, for people rely on direction and action from those in charge, but also mistrust. In the following quote, Fauci admits that the health system is not well-equipped to cope with the demands of COVID-19 by overtly using the word *admit*, posing a question he then gives an answer to. Moreover, his informal phrasing of *let's admit it* is significant as it indicates genuine emotion:

16. The system is not really geared for what we need right now, what we are asking for. That is a failing. Let's admit it. […] We're not set up for that. Do I think we should be? Yes, but we're not. (Morabito 2020)

Fauci elaborates on this by explaining the challenges the system is faced with, using the impersonal *you*:

17. When you test, you find somebody, you isolate them, you get them out of circulation, then you do the contact tracing. When you have a big outbreak, it's tough to do anything but mitigation. (Morabito 2020)

Towards the end of March 2020, Fauci discusses a potential solution to the problem – a vaccine. He asks a question, answers it, makes a prediction, uses the verb *know*, the *need to* modal, and speaks in both the first-person plural as well as singular:

18. We need to be prepared that we'll get a cycle. […] What does that mean for us and what we're doing? It totally emphasises the need to do what we're doing in developing a vaccine, testing it quickly, and trying to get it ready, so they will have a vaccine available for that next cycle. […] I know we'll be successful in putting this down now, but we really need to be prepared for another cycle. (Morabito 2020)

As previously stated, Fauci uses military vocabulary in relation to COVID-19. For instance, in November 2020, he speaks of battling the disease with words like *calvary*, *weapons* and *fighting*:

19. The cavalry is coming but don't put your weapons down, you better keep fighting because they are not here yet. Help is on the way, but it isn't here yet. (Meredith 2020)

However, Fauci switches from a hopeful tone to a slightly alarming one by expressing a lack of confidence in the methods applied in the fight against the virus. This is another contradiction. He conveys his concern in an informal language (*We are not good to go*) and through thought-up indirect speech, thus attempting to mirror the thoughts and discourse of an imaginary member of society:

20. So to me, that is more of an incentive of, 'Please don't give up. Don't despair, the end is in sight,' as opposed to: 'Hey, we are good to go, don't worry about anything.' We are not good to go. We have got to continue to double down on public health measures. (Meredith 2020)

To further impress his feelings of doubt upon his addressees, Fauci generalises *the public*'s knowledge and says:

21. "The public doesn't understand all about vaccines […] including that this disease may, even with vaccines, become endemic". (Meredith 2020)

His point is perhaps best summarised by the claim: "I doubt we are going to eradicate this" (Meredith 2020). The statement explicitly expresses doubt and uses the pronoun *this* to point at an unspecified entity.

Nevertheless, and in the same month, Fauci contradicts his sentiments of doubt and distrust in vaccines by claiming that vaccines will end the pandemic, though the issue of the previously mentioned endemic remains untackled:

22. "Certainly, it is not going to be a pandemic for a lot longer because I believe the vaccines are going to turn that around". (Meredith 2020)

In December 2020, Fauci offers estimates on the timeline of the pandemic, in line with his preference for prediction-making:

23. Let's say we get 75 percent, 80 percent of the population vaccinated. […] If we do that, if we do it efficiently enough over the second quarter of 2021, by the time we get to the end of the summer, i.e., the third quarter, we may actually have enough herd immunity protecting our society that as we get to the end of 2021, we can approach very much some degree of normality that is close to where we were before. (Powell 2020)

In spite of Fauci's subjective speech, he does stress that the discourse should not be about his own feelings, but that the focus should be placed on the problem. Again, Fauci does not miss an opportunity to remind the public of how grave the pandemic issue is by using the adjective *enormous* to describe it. All the public

have to do is "suck it up", which is an informal phrase that carries no specific instruction on the steps to take to rectify the problem:

> 24. It's not about me and how I feel; it's about what the problem is. And the problem is enormous. […] You just have to suck it up and keep going. (Powell 2020)

As 2020 was coming to a close, Fauci reflected on the success of the US in developing a vaccine. The way Fauci chooses to express himself makes it appear as if the US accomplished this against all odds and the disbelief of the unnamed others. The accomplished is grandified with the word choice of sentence-enhancers (*successfully*, *unimaginable*, *historic*, *unprecedented*). Additionally, Fauci communicates his feelings as well as his personal quality of being able to maintain focus using the comparison *like a laser*. What follows are the snippets of this self-congratulatory speech where the US medical team is praised, alongside all the previously mentioned characteristics:

> 25. I think the proudest moment would be the fact that we have successfully done what people would find to be the unimaginable. […] When the coronavirus was first identified in Wuhan, China in late 2019, it was 'brand new,' Fauci said. But by January 2020, scientists were able to sequence the entire novel virus, a crucial step in developing a vaccine. And on Monday, less than a year later, the United States administered the first shots of Pfizer's Covid-19 vaccine, which was approved for emergency use.
>
> That is a historic, unprecedented achievement.
>
> Those are the things that, as a physician scientist and a public health official, are very painful. […] The numbers and the enormity of the problem, it just can actually overwhelm you.
>
> I focus like a laser on what I need to do. (Stieg 2020)

The timeline of Fauci's discourse is as consistent as Beroš's, with both of their individual styles of expression retaining their characteristics throughout.

6. Conclusion

Language is more than mere utterances; it shapes our view of reality, influences our beliefs and ideology, and steers our behaviour. In line with that, language possesses an operatory function which can be utilised to achieve the goals of a manipulator, should they choose to employ specific means of communication. In terms of linguistic manipulation, Grischechko (2013: 3) states that "direct method of linguistic manipulation includes the forms that have a definite meaning in the language system that directly expresses the communicative aim of the speaker", whereas the speaker's intentions are not openly expressed in the indirect method of linguistic manipulation. On a scale broader than just interpersonal communication, as is the case with news outlets that address large audiences, engineering facts can take place via the usage of the imperative form with the pronoun in the first-person plural as well as transitivity, modality, permutation, lexico-semantic manipulation, and innuendo (Ghazala 2011: 193).

The present study on the COVID-19 doscourse in the media appearances of Vili Beroš and Anthony Fauci has shown that both parties rely heavily on medical

expertise in their statements to the media, and because both are politicians as well as medical professionals, their manner of speech, although varying to a degree, echoes their dual roles. In other words, whilst their public statements may contain elements of linguistic manipulation, most notably transitivity and modality, it could not be claimed that Beroš and Fauci employ particular tactics for the sake of mere manipulation. On the contrary, Anthony Fauci demonstrates inconsistency in his statements, and Vili Beroš avoidance of any potentially controversial claims. If the intention of manipulation and/or persuasion existed, on an individual level, it is my contention that there would be no place for confusing and contradictory declarations, emotionally loaded language, and intertwining feelings with facts. However, Beroš and Fauci are not only medical professionals, but are heavily affiliated with politics as well, which leaves room for linguistic engineering. In fact, the two represent politicians, the establishment, and can therefore be said to manipulate, to a degree, their audience, through political speech. Further research could offer an alternative version of discourse whereby the two parties' involvement is with the medical field only.

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Changes in the English Language and the Importance of Language Use During Pandemics

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Abstract

The spread of the coronavirus has not only changed the lives of millions of people, but it has also ushered in new terminology to the public discourse. In addition to the epidemiological and medical terminology, new terms expressing social regulations have been introduced. This contribution aims to shed light on how the Covid-19 crisis has spurred the creation of new word compounds as well as how it has reactivated the use of certain older terms in the English language. The contribution also focuses on the use of new metaphors surrounding Covid-19. Interestingly, although the delivery of precise information to the broader public has proved to play a crucial role during the pandemic, politicians have still used various metaphorical figures of speech. Thus, the second aim of this paper is to provide an insight of how political figures use metaphors in order to gain trust and establish confidence with the public during the challenging times of the pandemic. For the purpose of this paper, a corpus of media texts containing metaphorical expressions on Covid-19, mostly delivered by leading politicians, was complied. The analysis shows several recurring domains like weather and war which have the potential to shape the public discourse on Covid-19.

Keywords: Covid-19, metaphorical expressions, metaphors, political figures

1. Introduction

The Covid-19 pandemic triggered various forms of national and international restrictions such as social distancing and lockdown measures. These newly imposed regulations have vastly altered people's everyday routines. For instance, face to face interactions were largely replaced by digital communication. Recent studies have shown that the number of social media users as well as time spent on the Internet has grown immeasurably when compared to the pre-pandemic period (Effenberger et al. 2020). Moreover, due to the safety measures and national quarantines, many people were obliged to stay and work from home for a longer period of time.

While for some this change brought many advantages, e.g., in terms of commute time, it proved to entail many disadvantages on the long run. For instance, many people have reported a feeling of disconnection and isolation from the "outside" world. Brooks et al. (2020) among many experts argue that the Covid-19 pandemic has had a vast impact on peoples' mental health; anxiety, post-traumatic stress, confusion, anger, and depression are some of the many reported psychological reactions linked to the quarantines that were imposed (Brooks et al. 2020). Studies

have shown that, in delicate times such as the Covid-19 pandemic, the public tends to find comfort and reassurance in their political leaders' speeches (Krishnatray & Shrivastava 2021, Cavalcanti et al. 2020).

 People also tend to rely more heavily on the information presented on media and media technologies. Therefore, one can argue that delivery of exact and precise information plays a crucial role; when used properly, language can encourage action, establish public obedience and most importantly – build trust between authorities and the public. Meanwhile, improper use of language such as vague and imprecise language might trigger confusion, mistrust, and spread panic. While metaphors are an inherent part of language, extreme comparisons between different cognitive domains may also lead to the lack of precision.

According to recent studies, metaphors play a crucial role in creating people's perception of the reality they live in (Kozlova 2021, Panzeri et al. 2021). Additionally, these expressions can be used as a powerful tool in influencing and shaping people's opinions and attitudes. Abdel-Raheem controversially expands this argument by claiming that metaphors can not only create realities, but that they can also manipulate them (Abdel-Raheem 2013). Thus, in order to increase the level of persuasion, very often, politicians use figurative language in their speeches such as metaphors. The transfer of meaning from one domain to another enables politicians to illustrate complex matters. Dittmer (1997) has also claimed that governmental authorities tend to decorate their speeches with metaphors with the aim of representing national or political affairs as less abstract and more comprehensible (Dittmer, 1997). Therefore, politicians tend to craft their speeches with a great deal of deliberation and precision and tend to ornate them with metaphorical expressions.

In order to explore how pandemics influence language use, this contribution outlines examples of language change that has been motivated by global adversities and focuses on metaphors during the Covid-19 pandemic. It discusses the influence of neologisms and metaphors on the public discourse and shows that the shared images created through metaphors have the potential to bring society together in times of crisis.

2. Neologism Constructions

2.1. A Historical Timeline

Language continuously grows, changes, and evolves. Languages have been changing since the evolution of humankind, and they will probably continue to do so as long as there is a necessity for people to interact. Great social alterations entail great linguistic alterations and as Paton shows, that has never been more accurate than in the current, ongoing global Covid-19 crisis (Paton 2020). Nonetheless, this does not apply to the current Covid-19-related situation only; historically speaking, some of the major language changes in the past have proved to be linked with great events such as wars or natural disasters.

To begin with, the ancient term *pestilence* (a *fatal disease*) was first noted in Wycliffe's bible in 1382, shortly after the great devastation that was caused by the plague, which was also known as the Black Death. Surprisingly, this term did not officially appear until 1755. There is a record of a number of other words, which people started using while referring to this deadly disease such as *general mortality* or *general pestilence*. Nevertheless, these expressions were mainly used orally, and thus have not yet been noted as official words in the English dictionaries like Merriam-Webster, Oxford or Thesaurus. Nowadays however, the meaning of the word *pestilence* has become considerably weaker – on the one hand, it may indicate a destructive insect which attacks crops, food, or livestock; on the other hand, it might also refer to an annoying person or a thing (Carmichael 2008).

Another word which entered the English vocabulary as a result of the disasters caused by the Black Death is the currently prevalent term *quarantine*. Namely, in the distant 1347 when the plaque was sweeping lives across Europe, it was the Italian city Venice that was to first to succumb; having one of the busiest trading harbours it was a fertile breeding ground for the spread of the infection (*From Quack to Quarantine* 2021). As a result, in order to reduce the number of contaminated people, Venetian authorities made a decision to close and isolate the port as well as to forbid ships from entering the city for forty days. As this method proved effective, it soon became widely implemented and so did the term *quarantine* (*From Quack to Quarantine* 2021).

Nonetheless, it was the period of the disastrous 17th-century plagues that paved the way for the entrance of new words into the English dictionary. Namely, the spread of certain diseases and the damage they caused levelled up to the point that the invention of new items which would paint a clear picture of the scenario which occurred globally, encompassing major part of the population, was needed. As a result, in the early 1700s, when the widespread plague was looming to wipe out humanity, the words *epidemic* and *pandemic,* were invented. Both of them have Greek roots – *epi* meaning *upon* and *demos people* (upon people) and *pan* meaning *all* and *demos people* – literally meaning *all people* or *upon all people* (Szasz 2020). The current ongoing pandemic has proved to be close to the literal meaning of the word, considering the wide outreach of the Covid-19 crisis. Interestingly, according to online dictionaries, since the World Health Organization (WHO) has declared Covid-19 a pandemic in 2020, the word *pandemic* has become so popular to that extent that to the point of writing this contribution in 2021, it has been in the top 10 online searches (*Dictionary.com* 2020)

Another word which sprouted as a result of precautions taken during the 17th century epidemics is *self-quarantine*. According to a historical description from 1878, the inhabitants of the English village Eyam purposely detached (*self-quarantined*) themselves from the surrounding villages in the year of 1665 in order to prevent the spread of the already existing disease (Race 1995, Whittles & Didelot 2016).

Similarly, the word *self-isolate*, which is nowadays used to express a state of self-imposed seclusion, initially appeared in 1834. Nevertheless, unlike its current meaning, in the early 1800s this word was mainly applied for states or countries

which have made a voluntary decision to separate themselves in a politic and economic manner from the rest of the world (Paton 2020).

The meaning of the word *social distancing* has evolved in a similar fashion; originally used in 1957, the word referred to one's volitional desire to detach from others *socially* and thus, it was more of an attitude rather than a literal distance. Nowadays, however, the word indicates a physical distance which is kept for the purpose of avoiding the spread of a contagious disease (Paton 2020).

As humanity progressed and expanded, so did the diseases, which spurred the urge for creating new word compounds which would portray peoples' new, altered realities in a simpler and less abstract manner. For instance, the appearance of *Spanish influenza*, which was first noted in 1890 has quite an interesting etymology. In times when scientific discoveries were rare, people believed that their fate was dictated by the stars and celestial bodies. Illnesses and infections, whose origin and manner of spreading was inexplicable and puzzling, were instinctively attributed to the *influence* of the heavenly bodies. Hence, being unable to explain the cause of the disease which has been sweeping lives across countries at the time, the public used the Italian word *influenza* (meaning *to influence* something/someone) believing that the deadly virus was a way of the heavenly bodies punishing them (Mayer 2019). Later during the 1918 re-occurring epidemic it was abbreviated to today's well-known term *Spanish flu*.

An additional outbreak which contributed towards enriching the English lexicology was the appearance of the illness *poliomyelitis.* The word itself initially appeared in a journal of clinical medicine in 1874 and has been modelled from the Greek words *polios* (grey) and *melios* (marrow) as well as the addition -*itis* which denotes a disease (Mehndiratta et al. 2014). Since the disease was quite prevalent at the time, it acquired various labels. For instance, colloquially poliomyelitis was also known as *Heine-Medin disease* due to the vast range of medical contributions provided by the physicians Jakob Heine and Karl Oskar Medin in 1840. Moreover, due to the inability of both authorities and experts to successfully cope with the spread of the disease and provide a cure, an epidemic of polio (a commonly used abbreviation for poliomyelitis) started to occur repeatedly every summer during the period of 1940 to 1950. Consequently, panic and anxiety started to spread among the public, especially among the parents of exposed children. Frightened and powerless, the people even referred to this illness as the *Wrath of God* (Mehndiratta et al. 2014). Nevertheless, according to historians, although the word *poliomyelitis* officially appeared in the late 1874, the illness itself dates from ancient times (Mehndiratta et al. 2014).

Epidemics and pandemics in recent decades have also proved to be fruitful for linguistic development in a similar manner. Take for example *acquired immune deficiency syndrome* which appeared in 1982. Due to its excessive prevalence and its widespread use, the term gained the currently well-known abbreviation – AIDS. Similarly, in 2003 there was an outburst of a viral disease named *severe acute respiratory syndrome,* which became recognizable by the abbreviation SARS (WHO 2021).

Overall, this section has shown that major disease outbreaks have often resulted in new concepts. The following section focuses on neologisms in the Covid-19 pandemic.

2.2.   Neologism Construction During the Covid-19 Pandemic: Something Old, Something New

The spread of the coronavirus has not only changed the lives of millions of people, but it has also ushered in new terminology encompassing specific items from the epidemiological and medical fields as well as words which express social requirements of the compulsory distancing and isolation (Kreuz 2020a). Nonetheless, as evident from the previous section, the majority of the currently prevalent linguistic items have to do with older word phrases being "reactivated" and projected in the common usage.

The coronavirus pandemic did not only reactivate and stimulate the creation of disease related coinages – linguists have noted a wealth of new word compounds, where most of them are used orally or in informal speech. Still, these coinages have also found their way in news headlines, advertisements, and public speeches, which have registered the totality of *the pandemic* by framing all of the events in terms of *before*, *during*, and *since the pandemic*. People have started to use the term *pandemic* as a modifier in new, different ways: *pandemic teaching*, *pandemic fashion*, *pandemic depression*, all of which portray how these activities have changed during life in the time of Covid-19 (*Dictionary.com* 2020).

Moreover, the pandemic has altered many aspects of peoples' lives, including work. Restrictions have brought adjustments in working schedules – not only have working hours changed but also many people's workplaces have been adjusted to the new reality. With the aim of reducing the spread of the virus as much as possible, many people started working from home. As a result of the increasing need for connectivity, fast developments in communication technologies have made home-based work manageable. Likewise, the Internet has helped people to practice social distancing, at the same time maintaining the connection with the outside world. Nevertheless, as the developments of technology assisted people in many aspects of the current pandemic life, it has created challenges as well. For instance, in their "new", home-based offices people have started taking shorter work breaks when compared to the ones they used to take while working from their actual offices. Some have even reported to have taken no breaks at all during their working hours (Dishman 2020). Gradually, the once appealing and 'easy' remote way of working from home has started leaving many people exhausted, lonely and even depressed. As a result, people have started feeling as if "the days and weeks just run together" as for many it has become extremely difficult to distinguish between weekdays (Dishman 2020). Consequently, the expression *Blursday* jumped into the pandemic-formed basket of words, referring to one's inability to distinguish between days of the week. However, although this expression has gained its popularity during the pandemic isolation, it is not new. It dates from

2007 where it was used with a completely different reference: it indicated the day after heavy drinking, or the day spent hung over. A term having a similar meaning is *coronacoma*. The term was created to express the never-ending period of shutdown and social distancing (Mirror 2020).

Moreover, since the start of the pandemic, society has been divided on the question whether the virus exists: while many believe that the virus exists and that it can cause serious harm, many believe that the virus is just a myth, made up in order to control the population. Then, among these groups, there are people who obey the rules and follow all of the imposed restrictions people breaking the rules and failing to follow social distance recommendations. As a result, two separate epithets have been assigned for both groups – *covidient* (a word blend deriving from *covid* and *obedient*) and *covidiot* (a word blend deriving from *Covid-19* and *idiot*) (Mirror 2020). The term *moronavirus* can be mentioned within a similar context – having a pejorative connotation, it is used when referring to people who are not following the health protocols. The wordplay is a blend of the words *moron* and *virus* (Mweri 2021).

Another term which has been coined from already existing words (*information* and *epidemic)* is *infodemic*. Namely, the expression refers to an outburst of speculative and often untrustworthy crisis-related information. Although the item has regained its popularity during the current pandemic denoting a propagation of false data concerning Covid-19, it was initially created during the 2003 SARS pandemic (Kreuz 2020a).

Elbow bump is an expression whose meaning got remodelled during the current pandemic; the original sense of this term differs vastly from its current meaning, as by the time it appeared, it was used to convey a celebratory pleasure to a teammate. Nowadays, however, elbow bump is used when one is referring to a "safe" gesture (a greeting or a farewell) which involves a light tapping of two peoples' elbows with the aim of decreasing the risk of spreading an infectious disease (Kreuz 2020b).

Quarantini is a compound which is believed to have initially appeared in a tweet, on March 13 as a tagged reaction referring to "online drinking". Put differently, *quarantini* is used to portray a situation of drinking a cocktail (*Martini*) with one's friends or colleagues but in slightly unusual setting – alone, in one's home in front of a camera during a quarantine period ("It's just a regular Martini but you get to drink it alone in your home") (Dishman 2020).

The expression *loctail hour* has a similar meaning to the above mentioned *quarantini*. Thus, the terms can be used interchangeably as both of them have almost identical reference. The only difference is the type of the cocktail – the latter expression refers specifically to "Martini" whereas the former one does not denote any specific type of cocktail (Dishman 2020).

Essential worker is an expression whose usage has seen a drastic rise since the start of the pandemic. Essential workers are those who conduct a wide range of procedures and services that are typically essential to continue critical infrastructure operations. In the current pandemic situation, the most common

subsets of essential workers are medical staff, emergency response personnel, grocery store workers, and delivery drivers (Dishman 2020).

Additionally, according to Karen Ho, since the onset of the pandemic, people have started to compulsively check and scroll through social media expecting to read more bad news (Wilner 2020). As a result, the term *doomscrolling* came in the spotlight. However, although the term became excessively popularized in spring 2020, it was invented earlier in August, denoting people who gawked at various images portraying apocalyptic-resembling skies over the Bay Area which were result of the intensified wildfires occurring in the region (*Dictionary.com* 2020).

Twindemic is another expression which became widely used with the Covid-19 outbreak. Deriving from a combination of the words "twin" and "pandemic*"* it was initially mentioned in a New York Times article (Hoffman 2020), where it was described as an expression denoting a dual outbreak or a double threat which occurred in the 2020 winter and autumn season. This was a period when the danger from the already existing coronavirus was 'doubled' by the appearance of the seasonal flu (Chopra 2021).

An additional expression which trended as a result of the imposed regulations and restrictions is the newly created term *maskne*. The word itself represents a blend from the terms "mask" and "acne" and it refers to acnes or skin irritation which occur on a persons' face provoked by wearing masks regularly, especially the medical N95 ones (Chopra 2021).

Coronacation is a term that became extremely popular among schoolchildren and their parents, although in most occasions it is used ironically. The term refers to the spare (extra vacation) time children have due to cancelled classes, lectures or other out of school activities due to the pandemic (*New Words We Created Because of Coronavirus* 2020). An expression which is used when one is talking about babies that have been conceived during the lockdown period has also been invented – *coronababies.* It is said that once these babies grow older, they will be known as *quaranteens.* However, not only did the children acquire tags but also their parents did; moms of the *coronababies* became known *corona/ial moms* whereas their fathers gained the label *corona/ial dads* (Chopra 2021).

Further examples of word blending are *coronapocalypse* and *coronageddon.* Similar to the above-mentioned *moronavirus*, these items could also be seen as wordplay; the word play in the blend *coronapocalypse* centers around the term *apocalypse* to which the word *corona* is added. For *coronageddon* the word play is centered around *Armageddon* which is added to the word *corona*.

Staycation or *holistay* are additional portmanteaus which became popular due to Covid-19. *Staycation* is a blend of the words *stay* and *vacation* whereas *holistay* is combined from the terms *holiday* and *stay*. These blends refer to the act of staying home due to the travel restrictions and they could even be regarded as a form of domestic tourism (Mweri 2021).

Another neologism which has been created since the start of the pandemic is the term *covexit*. Namely, as the number of contaminated people started to decrease so did the imposed limitations and social regulations; thus, the blend *covexit* (created

from *covid* and *exit*) denotes the gradual disengagements form restrictions imposed during the Covid-19 pandemic, or the strategy where one exists a lockdown (Lawson 2020).

All in all, the Covid pandemic has proved to be rich source of new expressions which reflect how society deals with the crisis. Many of these like *coronageddon* are also metaphors as they take a sense from one meaning field (*Armageddon, destruction*) and apply it to another (*disease, Corona*). The role of metaphors in the Covid-19 pandemic will thus be the focus of this contribution and will be addressed in the following sections.

3. Definition of Metaphors

The understanding of metaphors has changed throughout history. Metaphorical expressions were used even in ancient Greece where they were considered a powerful communicative tool and they were mainly used to strengthen argumentations, especially in situations when governmental innovations, a rise to power or law enforcements were to be secured (Kozlova 2021). Similarly, they were used in order to add a suggestive power to "elegant" speeches which were usually performed by critics or rhetoricians. More specifically, metaphors were considered as a sign of eloquence; they were used in order to "decorate" public discourses with the aim of leaving a stronger or more credible impact on the addressees (Kozlova 2021). In other words, they were called "lofty…florid speech that impresses with sound" (Cmiel 1991: 21). Ever since, the metaphors' influential power remains undoubted.

As a result, metaphors have attracted the attention of numerous contemporary scholars whose view on their significance and pervasiveness does not differ from the one given by the ancient ones. However, in later, more recent studies, the definition of a metaphor was extended. More specifically metaphors are described as figures of speech that involve talking and, potentially, thinking, about one thing in terms of another, where both things are diverse, but one can perceive certain similarities between them (Kozlova 2021).

Similarly, as stated by Hurford and Heasely, metaphors are "conceptual (mental) operations reflected in human language that enable speakers to structure and construe abstract areas of knowledge and experience in more concrete experiential terms" (Hurford & Heasley 2007: 331). Thus, according to this view of metaphor, interlocutors utilize a familiar area of information, called the source domain, in order to comprehend an area of knowledge to which they are less accustomed, also known as the target domain.

Kövecses enriches the above-mentioned theory of metaphor by stating that with the aim of interpreting an abstract concept, metaphors could also originate from several domains. Moreover, he expresses his scepticisms and suspicions on whether literal language exists at all and claims that cognitive metaphors are the same as conceptual ones (Kövecses 2021).

Cognitive metaphors have a recognised importance as they not only enable an appropriate orientation in the setting, but they also ensure the connection between

cultural values and knowledge. Cognitive metaphors also aid the individual to depict the world and the environment as well as to make a comparison and recognition of the different things that surround them.

The psychological role of metaphorical expressions is no less significant. Metaphors are invaluable suggestive tools shaping social behaviour and thought. They represent a tool for reasoning about the world. This idea that conceptual metaphors can in fact affect reasoning has been corroborated by Thibodeau and Boroditsky (2011). Nonetheless, interestingly, their findings suggest that the impact of the figurative framing effect is covert: people are not aware of the fact that very often metaphors influence their decisions. Instead, they point to more "substantive" data as the inspiration for their problem-solving decision. To put the matter differently, people are not aware that their actions and choices have been if not directed then influenced by metaphors.

When it comes to interaction, cognitive metaphors carry out a set of functions – they harmonise and connect social cognitive processes with individual ones. They become convincing performatives accountable for implied inclination or invitation.

Put briefly, metaphors are mediators between the world and the people as well as between the civilisation and the individual. As for media announcements, metaphoric effects are of keen importance in the sense that metaphorical patterns present replicas of thought and behaviour of the addressees.

4. The Importance of Metaphor Use During the Pandemic

It is believed that the use of certain figures of speech or more specifically metaphorical expressions can affect the way people conceptualize the world and react to it. This has led scholars to focus their studies on how Covid-19 related metaphorical expressions are being utilized in social discourse as well as how they are being handled by politicians and mass media (Panzeri et al. 2021).

Some scholars like Flusberg, Matlock and Tibodeau (2018) argue that metaphors or more specifically war and military metaphors have proved to be a remarkably effective tool in reasoning the public and while reporting about the virus. According to this view, these types of metaphors can positively influence the public opinions of perceiving problems as serious and urgent, as well as increase their willingness to adapt their actions accordingly (Flusberg et al. 2018).

However, the use of military and war metaphors has been harshly criticized, as in certain occasions these figures of speech have proved to have a potentially counterproductive framing effect. Scholars supporting this view claim that although metaphors can be extremely pervasive, they can also be deceptive and in certain cases even harmful. Portraying the virus in such way might be dangerous, since metaphorical references to war are said to provoke negative consequences on the way the audience conceptualize the epidemic situation, and eventually on the way they will react to it.

Other scholars, however, discuss whether the war metaphors alone have the power to influence public's opinion and raise the question whether it is actually the

conditions under which metaphorical expressions affect or do not affect reasoning (Hartung et al. 2020)

5. Study Objectives and Methodology

The second part of this contribution moves from historical language changes in times of pandemics to current use of metaphors. The following sections aim to investigate the influence of metaphorical expressions used during Covid-19. They examine metaphor domains such as war and discuss potential effects of these metaphors on the social discourse. The data used in this paper consists of metaphoric manifestations of Covid-19 analysed from a self-compiled written corpus of media texts. Most of the excerpts were chosen from *The Financial Times* (FT) articles which were published online between February 2020 and January 2021. The FT was chosen as the main data basis because it not only focuses on financial and economic issues but also covers a vast range of subjects and thus attracts audience from various fields. The remaining part of the corpus is a sample of public figures' speeches which contain Covid-19-related terms such as *Covid*, *corona*(*virus*), and *pandemic*. Thus, Covid-19 metaphors will be analysed in media and political discourse.

6. Results and Discussion: Covid-19 Metaphors

Since the beginning of the pandemic, government and science representative figures have faced the challenge of familiarising people with the unknown virus and its consequences as well as with the essential safety precautions which had to be followed, in order to decrease the number of infected.

However, the initial symptoms of Covid-19 are flu-like and it can be difficult to differentiate between them. It is often also difficult to conceptualize the virus itself because it is not visible nor tangible. Moreover, the virus' transmission among people or the spreading process inside a person's body are so complex that professionals need to convey these processes through specific science communication strategies.

According to many experts, the easiest way of acquiring knowledge of inaccessible and distant things is by drawing a parallel between the abstract, unfamiliar concepts and more concrete things, usually ones that they we have already experienced; by use of metaphors the abstract and unfamiliar things are approached in a more comprehensive way (Davidson 1978, Banaruee et al. 2019).

As a result, since the beginning of the crisis, very frequently the virus has been referred to as an "enemy" which is supposed to be "beaten", a "tsunami" on health facilities or sometimes even as "glitter" which "gets everywhere". One of the most common ways of interpreting the Covid-19 pandemic is the use of war metaphors; they have been widely used since early 2020 by many, including some political leaders.

For instance, on 17 March 2020, UK's Prime Minister Johnson delivered the following statement: "Yes, this *enemy* can be *deadly*, but it is also *beatable*…and however tough the months ahead we have the resolve and the resources to *win the*

fight" (Johnson 2020a). Later, on 6 October 2020, when the number of the coronavirus-related deaths in the UK escalated, Johnson referred to the virus as an "alien invader" stating the following: "Your government is working night and day to repel this virus, and we will succeed, just as this country has seen off every *alien invader* for the last thousand years…" (Johnson 2020b).

Announcements with similar military reference have been also made globally, both in political and in media discourse:

1. …the reality of Britain's wartime economy in the era of coronavirus. (FT, 27 March 2020)

Interestingly, in some metaphoric depictions, warnings of danger have been pictured as alarms with a loud noise:

2. US states sound alarm on Covid-19 hospitalizations. (FT, 5 December 2020)

Moreover, the constant reporting on losses caused by the deadly virus has also added to the image of a military disaster with massive loss of lives:

3. Death toll surges (FT, 22 March 2020)
4. … worst day for mortalities in escalating European outbreak. (FT, 22 March 2020)

What is more, pandemic restrictive protection includes increased Covid-19 border control, lockdown, quarantine, social distancing:

5. World on lockdown: West closes borders and orders isolation (FT, 18 March 2020)
6. …western economies took drastic measures to limit public movement on Monday, closing borders, shutting down retailers and ordering citizens to stay in their homes in an urgent effort to arrest the spreading coronavirus pandemic. (FT, 18 March 2020)

Moreover, use of metaphors including weather events or even natural disasters has also been noted in Covid-19 related discussions. According to Semino (2021), weather metaphors tend to focus on the harmful effects of the virus for health systems, but also background the role of authorities liable for properly funding those health systems:

7. There is going to be a tsunami of cases coming in the next two weeks in London. (Triggle 2020)
8. It is in Madrid that there are the greatest tensions to withstand the avalanche suffered by the health system. (Cué 2020)

Among other things, journey metaphors have also been frequently used to indicate a long and challenging process with an ambiguous conclusion. For instance, the Prime Minister of Sweden announced the following statement:

9. We are in a marathon and have to be prepared for the fact that this will be with us for a long time (Ronge & Eriksson 2020)

Fire metaphors have also been widely used while reporting about the deadly virus:

10. Think of COVID-19 as a fire burning in a forest. All of us are trees. The R0 is the wind speed. The higher it is, the faster the fire tears through the forest. But just like a forest fire, COVID-19 needs fuel to keep going. We're the fuel. (Wilson 2020)

If emphasis is put on uncontrollable spread, the image that is evoked is often a forest fire. Further fire-related metaphors have been noted in a New York Times

article in April 2020, when the number of Covid-19 cases on Rode Island escalated and was described as "a state where the coronavirus is a fire raging" (Powell 2020).

An interesting combination of war and wire metaphors has been noted in the Irish Prime Minister's statement in May 2020, when he stated that the virus was a "fire in retreat" but "not defeated," adding: "We must extinguish every spark, quench every ember" (Semino 2021). Generally, fires can spread rapidly, they are hard to control, and grow very large, causing large-scale and irreversible harm. These characteristics can be exploited metaphorically to convey the dangers posed by the coronavirus, and the need for urgent action (Charteris-Black 2017).

As this section demonstrated, metaphors have been a major part of media and political discourse on the Covid-19 pandemic. More humorous metaphors of Covid-19 in the digital sphere are discussed in Škara and Matas (this volume), where similar conceptual fields such as *war* are also found. Society seems to reimagine the crisis similarly through figurative language in different genres from media articles to comics.

7. Conclusion

This contribution looked at language change and metaphors motivated by major disease outbreaks and in particular the Covid-19 pandemic. As indicated by Mweri (2021), "language operates differently in different social situations, it is therefore bound to vary to suit the purpose of the users or a particular social situation" (Mweri 2021: 39). According to Halliday and Matthiessen, languages adjust in order to accommodate not only the needs of their users but also new happenings in the society (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2013). This paper has analysed certain neologisms which were induced as a result of the Covid-19 crisis. With the aim of portraying how social changes influence linguistic changes, the discussion encompassed a historical timeline examining how some already existing words created during past outbreaks have acquired new meanings as well as how completely new coinages have been created through blending and acronymy.

Moreover, the paper discussed the use of certain metaphors during the Covid-19 pandemic as well as meaning they convey. Considerable empirical evidence has shown that in fact, metaphorical expressions have framing effects; they can influence how we think and feel about problems and solutions (Thibodeau 2017). It can be expected that Covid-19 metaphors also have this effect on society.

One can easily claim that this terminology serves as a kind of lexical "social glue" since it brings the public together around a set of collective cultural reference points. For instance, some of the words and expressions discussed above are used to help people to articulate their worries about one of the largest health crises we have seen and experienced in ages. Others serve to keep people safe and informed about the deadly virus. However, certain terminology could be seen as a "verbal play", often undertaken for entertaining purposes, serving in part to bring people closer together or even to challenge already established, "normal" attitudes and views. Overall, in the absence of the regular social contact, shared talk is an important part of helping people feel connected to one another.

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Building Trust in Mental Health Related Texts: Approaching Online Readers' Positive and Negative Face

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Abstract

This paper focuses on trust building pragmatic strategies applied in texts about mental health, used to help readers preserve their *positive* and *negative face*, i.e., the part of the reader that wants to be liked and the part of them that wants to be unimpeded, in order to gain their trust. This construction of trust allows the text to be more helpful to the readers. The corpus used in this research consists of 33 texts written during April and May 2021, compiled from one Facebook page and one website dedicated to mental health. The aim of this contribution is to show, through qualitative analysis, in what way and to what extent strategies from politeness theory are being used in these texts. The analysis also addresses the politeness strategies used with regards to the sensitivity of the topic and specific functions of these texts. The analysis confirms that trust building strategies can successfully diminish the effect of face threatening acts, but also that the framework could be expanded to grasp the goal and context beside the form of the message.

Keywords: politeness theory, positive face, negative face, trust, mental health discourse

1. Introduction

The object of this paper will be pragmatic politeness strategies employed in mental health related online texts. Through our qualitative analysis we will try to show the necessity of employing these strategies in sensitive discourses, like mental health related discourse, even more extensively than in some less sensitive contexts. The reason for this is enabling fulfilment of these texts' function: offering some helpful insights for those who have mental health related problems, or for those who want to understand them better.

The aim of this paper is to explain the importance of politeness strategies in establishing a relation between the author and the reader online, just as it usually happens between people communicating in person (offline), in order to gain trust without manipulation, but by fulfilling the specific illocutionary function. The conveyed message in the specialised language of mental health related texts is particularly important for the discourse. This contribution's goal is addressed in our research questions listed below.

1. Are politeness strategies being used in mental health related texts and to what extent? Are the strategies successfully diminishing face threatening acts (FTAs)?

2. What are the functions, regarding the relation between illocutionary and social goals, that these texts can achieve using different politeness strategies? What does this imply for both the texts and the strategies?

We will try to answer these questions through qualitative corpus analysis of 33 online texts written in the time period from 1 April to 31 May 2021, compiled from the Facebook page *Beleške sa psihoterapije* [*Psychotherapy notes*], as well as from the website *Nesalomivi* [*Unbreakable*]. In answering the research questions, we will also be testing the hypothesis that the balance between the positive and negative politeness strategies employed is needed in order to prevent face threatening acts, but also that the choice of the correct strategies depends largely on the particular context, as well as that the meaning and inferred intention, beside the form, can be a part of the notion of politeness.

In the next section, the background of this research will be introduced: the theoretical background on politeness, trust and the sensitivity of the mental health related discourse, as well as the methodological background of this analysis. After that, we will provide the results from our qualitative analysis, and we will discuss the meaning and relevance of the results we obtained. Finally, we will conclude on the role of politeness strategies in mental health related texts and will propose further research plans and remaining open questions.

2. Theoretical and Methodological Background

2.1. Theoretical Background

The framework of this research will be based on the different forms of *politeness theory*, but mostly on the one by Brown and Levinson (1988). In their theory, preserving both the positive and negative politeness is equally important in maintaining a polite conversation. The notion of 'face' represents

> the public self-image that every member wants to claim for himself, consisting in two related aspects: (a) negative face: the basic claim to territories, personal preserves, rights to non-distraction - i.e., to freedom of action and freedom from imposition (b) positive face: the positive consistent self-image or 'personality' (crucially including the desire that this self-image be appreciated and approved of). (Brown & Levinson 1988: 61)

There is always a tension between these two aspects of self-image, as politeness oriented towards preserving one face can easily become a threat to the other face. Face threatening acts represent "those acts that by their nature run contrary to the face wants" (Brown & Levinson 1988: 65), be it a positive or negative face.

We want to point out that, in our analysis, we will be relying more on their notion of positive and negative face than on their notion of politeness. While politeness in many theories represents behaviour that is socially demanded and that is used to achieve some personal goals, in this paper we will be focusing on politeness which purpose is genuinely oriented on the hearer's (or, in this particular case: the reader's) needs and best interests rather than the speaker's personal social goals. However, we would take into consideration Leech's (1983) idea of different

discourse functions, according to the relation between speaker's illocutionary and social goals.

Leech's (1983) notion of the politeness principle, consisting of different maxims (tact, generosity, approbation, modesty, agreement, sympathy), could be compared to the notion of positive politeness in Brown and Levinson's work. Beside not taking negative politeness into consideration, there are other differences between these two theories that Brown and Levinson themselves pointed out (1988: 4): the fact that Leech tried to make politeness into a principle different than Grice's original cooperation principle, which these authors consider unnecessary and believe it would lead to making principles for every linguistic regularity, as well as the fact that Leech considered politeness a general principle, without taking into account the differences that come from different social roles. Our understanding of politeness in general will be somewhere in between Leech's and Brown and Levinson's. We will be assuming that the general reason for writing texts such as those from our corpus is the desire to help, so the notion of politeness as well-intendedness will be closer to Leech's understanding of it. However, we will acknowledge that politeness is generally used in order to achieve a social goal, as both Leech and Brown and Levinson point out. But, we will add to that an assumption that texts such as these from our corpus have goals oriented towards the benefit of the collocutor (the reader) instead of the locutor (the author). In the first section of this paper, we will be relying more on Brown and Levinson's notion of face than on the Leech's notion of maxims. We believe that the understanding of politeness could be broadened for both of these theories, as we will try to show later in this paper. In some further research, we would like to conduct more research on the idea of politeness oriented toward receiver's (reader's or listener's) benefit in discourses with sensitive topics such as mental health.

What we will be focusing on in particular as well is Leech's notion of illocutionary functions: competitive, convivial, collaborative, and conflictive, in regard of the relation between illocutionary and social goals that the speaker (or the author, in the case of our research) is trying to achieve. We will try to re-examine this classification having in mind the notion of negative politeness as well, and we will also try to infer what kinds of functions the texts from our corpus can have.

When it comes to the reasons why we believe that the mental health related texts should be looked at through the politeness framework, we would like to point out some previous research that we are relying on in this respect. They will also help us expand the politeness theories in order to be more applicable to the discourses on more sensitive and specialised subjects like our focus on mental health.

There are some psychological insights that people who are struggling with mental health problems usually have a negative interpretation bias (Cowden Hindash & Amir 2012), which we believe could make them more sensitive about both their positive and negative face. Even if we do not assume that many of the readers of the texts from our corpus have some mental health problems themselves, we believe that the general discourse on mental health should be constructed in a

way that is sensitive to these people's views of it. Meanwhile, there are studies suggesting that psychotherapeutic discourse is completely different from ordinary conversation discourse when it comes to politeness (Lakoff 1989), which could make us reconsider how we talk about mental health or talk with people having mental health problems outside the psychotherapeutic environment.

Finally, the notion of trust is important for this analysis, as it is an important goal achieved through using politeness strategies, but also a medium of achieving an even greater goal, which is making the texts, besides being trustworthy, also be helpful and convey an important message. It is especially interesting that, if we look at the classification of transformational models of trust (Lewicki et al. 2006: 1007), the level of trust we believe to represent the ideal that these texts strive for is actually the highest one: identification-based level of trust. The two levels preceding this one are calculus-based and knowledge-based level. Once again, this classification is perhaps more applicable to the live spoken conversations than to asynchronous written discourse, which makes this research topic even more interesting, since the reader knows almost nothing about the author, and still needs to believe in their good intentions, knowledge, and credibility in order to consider the advice that the text offers. We believe that the level of trust depends on factors included in the first two levels: calculus-based and knowledge-based. There has to be a calculation of the reasons why texts like this would be helpful, and some knowledge based on previous experience with this type of texts or particular websites where these were found, or based on information about the authors' profession (which are provided in the texts from our corpus). Still, once these two levels are satisfied, the reader could recognize the genuine understanding in the text they are reading, causing them to give their trust on the identification-based level, in order for these texts to fulfil their function completely.

Of course, there were many previous approaches to mental health discourse through politeness. This discourse sphere and politeness strategies were put into a correlation through different points of view: the ways that individuals with mental health problems use politeness (e.g., Roberts 2019), the way politeness is integrated or avoided in the psychotherapeutic process (e.g., Syafryadin 2021), studies focusing on online discourse specifically (Sharma et al. 2021), or on the stigma around mental illnesses (Imai & Dailey 2015). Still, we believe further research on this topic is very much needed, since the analysis should not be only about the applications of politeness strategies in mental health discourse, but also about understanding the specificity of mental health discourse, as well as other discourses on sensitive and stigmatized topics, broadening the notion of politeness, its form and functions, and refinement of its aims.

2.2. Methodology

In our analysis, qualitative methods were employed to answer our research questions on the use of politeness strategies in mental health related texts, their diminishment of FTAs, as well as the possible illocutionary functions of these

texts. The reason why the quantitative response to these questions could not have been offered is, primarily, the great context-sensitivity of face preserving strategies, FTAs, as well as illocutionary functions. In the background of our research questions, as well as the attempts of giving answers for them, was a hypothesis that the balance between positive and negative strategies is needed to provide a face preserving and trusting discourse, but also that the choice of particular strategies, in order to achieve this goal, is largely context-dependent, and that we should not forget about the meaning when we are focusing on the form, which is usually the main focus when we are talking about politeness.

The corpus for this research consists of the 33 texts, altogether with just under 18 thousand words, written by psychotherapists, published during April and May of 2021, compiled from two Serbian online sources: the Facebook page *Beleške sa psihoterapije* [*Psychotherapy notes*], where quotes and passages from different books, magazines and psychologists' articles are being shared, as well as from the online site *Nesalomivi* [*Unbreakable*], for which only specialists in psychology and psychotherapy wrote texts that are more formal and professional. The authors of all the texts from our corpus were psychologists or psychotherapists.

3. Qualitative Analysis: Results and Discussion

3.1. Politeness Strategies Usage

The first research question we posited was about the usage of politeness strategies in the texts from our corpus. As mentioned above, the main reason for the qualitative approach to this question is the fact that the context plays a role in determining whether something should be considered a politeness strategy, especially when it comes to strategies that are a bit vaguer, like presupposition manipulations, where it can be difficult to determine if there is such a manipulation in a given sentence. Even more, a qualitative approach is crucial for determining whether the usage of the strategy was successful in preventing FTAs. There are also some positive and negative strategies that are very similar, where one sentence could belong to either a positive or a negative politeness attempt, so that only context could help us understand which one it is (although it may still be ambivalent). For example, using particles or modals to question the topic may show negative politeness by not assuming too much. Another example would be showing positive politeness by seeking agreement and including the hearer in the conversation:

1. *Ako znam gde je problem, zar ne treba da pomognem?* (20.4, *Beleške sa psihoterapije*)

   [If I know where the problem is, shouldn't I help?[1] (20.4, *Psychotherapy notes*)]

The results we obtained show that different strategies are being used, and that they seem to prevent FTAs quite well. Still, there are texts or paragraphs in which there is no balance between positive and negative politeness, so it becomes more

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[1] All translations of the examples from the corpus are the author's.

possible for one of the faces to feel threatened. Also, even when there is a balance of using positive and negative politeness strategies, there are some examples where we believe face threatening acts were not successfully avoided, because of the particular context.

In this section of the paper, we will, firstly, point out the different positive and negative politeness strategies that could be used (following Brown & Levinson (1988)), and the strategies that we found in the texts from our corpus. We will then show some examples of sentences and paragraphs where both strategies were employed, so that the FTAs were, as we believe, successfully avoided. We also identify the examples where there was mainly just one type of strategies used, so that the opposite face was at danger of feeling threatened. Additionally, we look at the cases where both types of strategies were used, but not the ones that were context-appropriate enough to prevent a FTA. We believe that the effect of FTAs that happened because of extensive usage of positive politeness, for example, cannot be diminished by using any negative politeness strategy, but only by using the negative strategy that is somewhat opposite from the strategy that was used in the first place.

In Example 2, we can see positive face threatening through disagreeing, diminished through positive politeness strategies of giving advice and understanding, in form and content. In Example 3, we can see positive politeness through using first person plural, and negative politeness through making statements seem as a general rule; but without managing to diminish the positive FTA of being pessimistic in the whole text, nor the negative FTA through making things sound absolute, without the possibility of changing anything, again on the level of meaning.

2. *(...) Ponavljate iste greške. Birate ljude koji nisu dobri za vas. I ko je onda kriv što vam nije dobro? Pa naravno, vi ste krivi! Ali! Krivljenje i kinjenje sebe vas neće daleko odvesti. Razmišljanja i ponašanja koja vam nisu od koristi nećete promeniti kriveći i kinjeći sebe. Sva "iracionalna" razmišljanja i ponašanja su nekada, u nekim okolnostima, itekako imala smisla. To je bilo najbolje što ste znali i umeli. Sada vam više ne služe, štete vam.* (30.5, *Beleške sa psihoterapije*)

   [(...) You're repeating the same mistakes. You're choosing people who aren't good for you. So whose fault is it that you're not well? Well, yours, of course! (...) But! Blaming yourself won't take you far. All the irrational thinking and behavior once, in some circumstances, made sense. It was the best that you knew and could. But now they are no longer serving you, they are hurting you. (30.5, *Psychotherapy notes*)]

3. *Ako je majka do te mere depresivna da je defakto u psihološkom smislu mrtva mi se povlačimo duboko u sebe i postajemo i sami sasvim nedustupni. To biva jedini način da u psihološkom smislu preživimo. Ubacimo se u svoje unutrašnje sklonište, pobegnemo od užasnih anksioznosti, ali time i od mogućnosti da se povežemo s drugima. (...) Logično, takve osobe izrastu u ljude koji nemaju odnose s drugima, ponekada čak ni za života ne ostvare emotivnu vezu. Kada im i pođe za rukom, to često biva seksualna, površna i kratkotrajna veza. Žive u fantazijama.* (3.5, *Beleške sa psihoterapije*)

   [If the mother is depressed to such an extent that she is psychologically dead, we are retreating into ourselves and becoming unavailable. It becomes the only way to survive. We are getting into our internal shelter, running away from anxiety, but also from the

possibility of connecting with others. (...) Logically, these persons grow up to become people that have no relations with others, that sometimes don't achieve an emotional relationship in a lifetime. Even if they do, that becomes a sexual, superficial, short-term relationship. They live in their fantasies. (3.5, *Psychotherapy notes*)]

Face preserving positive and negative politeness strategies that Brown and Levinson mention (1988: 91–227) cannot be fully applied to our analysis, which was expected, considering the fact that the subject of our research is written discourse, and also that the topic of the texts from our corpus is specific. Some of the strategies could not be applied to our corpus, such as those that were particularly made for a live conversation, e.g., using slang or dialect as in-group identity markers; agreeing through repeating what the other person says; paying attention to the hearer – although it could be somewhat employed through positing (rhetorical) questions. Other inapplicable strategies were particularly connected to some specific situations that we cannot expect to find in our corpus, e.g., the negative strategy of "going on record as incurring a debt, or as not indebting a hearer" (Brown & Levinson 1988: 210) in requests or offers.

There were many examples in the corpus of what we believe showed successful usage of politeness strategies, because the particular strategy was serving the purpose of the text as a whole, and also because it did not represent an FTA, by virtue of the other strategies employed, that preserved the other face in the text as a whole. For example, there is a negative politeness strategy that says "state the positive face threatening act as a general rule" (Brown & Levinson 1988: 206) in order for the hearer/reader not to feel like his personal positive face was directly threatened. We found examples of this strategy in the corpus:

4. *Osećanja tuge, praznine, beznađa, besmisla, krivice, crne misli i manjak volje i snage, <u>po pravilu</u>, dovode i do povlačenja u sebe i narušavanja socijalnih veza.* (26.4, *Nesalomivi*)

   [The feeling of sadness, emptiness, hopelessness, senselessness, guilt, as well as dark thoughts and shortage of will and strength, by the rule, lead to withdrawal into oneself and ruining social connections. (26.4, *Unbreakable*)]

This is a sentence that belongs to the text with the title "Social life despite depression – not easy but worth the struggle. Here's the way how." As we can see, putting this statement as a rule helps the reader not to feel personally attacked by the author of the text which could happen if the sentence was stated with a second person pronoun as "These feelings will lead you to ruining your social connections". Moreover, stating this as a rule helps the reader feel involved, because they are not the only one with a problem; especially in the context of the text that is speaking to the positive face of the reader, as we can assume from the title itself. This is one of the examples that we mentioned, where a positive or negative strategy could be almost ambiguous. It also shows, as we argued, that the meaning must be taken into consideration more extensively when it comes to the politeness, instead of focusing primarily on the form.

Another example that we find successful, this time in the domain of positive politeness, is the strategy of giving reasons or asking for them. This strategy was frequently used in the corpus. For example, there is a whole text consisting almost

entirely of posing questions about what is so appealing about giving in to our weaknesses and taking a temporarily easier way out through addiction, and giving answers and reasons why that is never a good idea.

5. *Alkohol nikad ne pobedi depresiju. Zašto? (...) Zašto se misli da alkohol pomaže u rešavanju problema, da anestezira i briše neprijatna i tužna sećanja, popravlja raspoloženje? Da li se ikada iko posle pijane noći probudio ujutru u drugoj realnosti od one koja je provocirala pijenje alkohola?* (26.4, *Nesalomivi*)

[Alcohol never beats depression. Why? (...) Why is the alcohol considered to be helpful in solving the problem, to be anesthetizing and erasing unpleasant and sad memories, improving the mood? Did anyone wake up in the morning, after the drunk night, in a different reality than the one that provoked drinking alcohol? (26.4, *Unbreakable*)]

There are many other texts with a similar structure: asking a question about the topic of the particular text and then giving arguments and reasons for the answer that the text is offering.

6. *Psihoterapija narcizma nije laka i ljudi koji imaju problem povezan sa narcizmom se rijetko odlučuju da dodju na terapiju. Zašto je to tako?* (25.5, *Beleške sa psihoterapije*)

[Therapy of narcissism isn't easy, and people dealing with narcissism hardly make a decision to start therapy. Why is that so? (25.5, *Psychotherapy notes*)]

Giving reasons and asking for them is a positive strategy that could rarely threaten to endanger negative face, since it is intrinsically balanced with some negative strategies, such as those that suggest questioning and hedging on everything. So, this strategy represents subtler involvement of the reader, instead of some more intrusive way of evoking in-group feelings.

There are, however, examples where we believe FTAs could be found in our corpus, implying that the strategies were not used to successfully diminish these situations. We believe, of course, that FTAs were not there intentionally. We also admit that not every FTA can always be avoided without the cost to the point of the text, but we still believe that the avoidance is something to strive for.

There were examples in the corpus of negative face threatening acts, such as using too many imperatives through giving advice (Brown & Levinson 1988: 65) – there are whole texts in the corpus consisting mainly of advice, possibly putting pressure on the reader despite its good intentions. For example, in a text titled "Ten ways to deal with the isolation and save mental health", the first section is neutral and very successfully polite, since it is stating facts impersonally, not threating negative face, yet with empathy, not threatening positive face. However, in the second section, there is a list of tips and reasons why one should do suggested things, which are all signs of positive politeness, but possible threats to negative face.

7. *Održavajte rutinu (...) Pripremajte zdravu hranu (...) Razgovarajte s ljudima za koje znate da će vas oraspoložiti (...) Meditirajte, bavite se jogom, vodite dnevnik.* (26.4, *Nesalomivi*)

[Maintain a routine (...) Prepare healthy food (...) Talk to people who will cheer you up (...) Meditate, do yoga, keep a journal (...) (26.4, *Unbreakable*)]

It is interesting that, as we believe, this FTA could have been avoided through some negative strategies, such as stating this advice more generally, instead of directing them towards the reader in the imperative. Still, maybe it could have been avoided just by choosing different positive strategies and employing ones that pose less of a threat towards negative face – such as showing more empathy towards the fact that following these tips may not always be as easy as it may sound to an average reader.

Meanwhile, there are examples of positive face threatening through being direct, disagreeing and disapproving some patterns of behaviour. Again, we assume that these texts are written with a good intention, and the disapproval is oriented towards some toxic behaviours, but it can once again make the reader's positive face threatened. For example, in a text that is structured as an imagined conversation between a therapist and a patient, whose role the reader should put themself into, there are the following disapprovals:

8. *Ako i dalje veruješ da ipak možeš ti, da si toliko moćna, i da imaš takav uticaj – grešiš.* (20.4, *Beleške sa psihoterapije*)

   [If you think that you are that powerful (that you could help those who can't recognize it), that you have that kind of influence – you are wrong. (20.4, *Psychotherapy notes*)]

In this text there is a balance between positive and negative politeness. However, the positive strategies used are focusing on the reader through giving them advice and asking questions. These are not the strategies that could diminish the face threatening effect of disapproving and disagreeing, because this advice also implies disagreement, so the right strategy would probably, again, require some kind of empathy and understanding. In this particular text, when we look at it as a whole, there are these strategies as well, but perhaps not about the same aspects that are being hardly criticized.

Finally, we would like to raise a question about strategies being used but not in a way predicted by the theory. For example, when we talk about being optimistic as a positive politeness and being pessimistic as a negative politeness strategy, what is meant by that is the attitude towards the accomplishment of our request or offer, and a form with which we will express it ("You will give me one of these, won't you?", as opposed to: "You wouldn't happen to be able to give me one of these, would you?"). But, we believe that we could find the balance between optimism and pessimism in some texts from our corpus on the level of meaning. For example, talking about depression, there were attempts to balance between pessimistic and optimistic statements. On the one hand, there were pessimistic statements about the seriousness of depression and the necessity of considering it a mental disease, in order to raise awareness and prevent people from taking it lightly if they have depressed individuals in their environment. On the other hand, there were optimistic statements about the ways they could be helped by the professionals and by the people that care about them.

9. *Iako su kvalitetni socijalni odnosi važan činilac mentalnog zdravlja, depresivna osoba je, zbog same prirode tegoba, u riziku da upadne u začarani krug, gde depresija dovodi do povlačenja iz socijalnih odnosa, čime se depresija dodatno produbljuje, a održavanje*

> *bliskih odnosa postaje još teže. (...) Rešenje je u iskrenoj i otvorenoj komunikaciji o tome kako se osoba oseća, šta joj je potrebno, i u sagledavanju reakcija i postupaka bliskih ljudi koje joj odmažu i doprinose tome da se još više udalji. (26.4, Nesalomivi)*

> [Although the quality social relations are an important factor of mental health, a depressed person is, by the very nature of the disease, in risk of entering a circle where depression leads to backing out from social relations, which leads to deepening the problem with depression, and makes keeping the close relations even harder. (...) The solution is in sincere and open communication about the way this person feels, what they need, and realizing the way their close people react which can be unhelpful to that person and contribute to their distancing. (26.4, *Unbreakable*)]

The level of meaning, of course, does not necessarily need to be considered connected to politeness. Leech (1983) made a distinction between courtesy, which applies to the real actions, and politeness, which applies to language. However, although we could say that politeness in these strategies oriented towards meaning actually is courtesy because it shows a will to be informative and helpful about depression, it also shows a will to talk about it in such a manner to gain trust. This is achieved by giving pessimistic information first in order to get the readers' attention about seriousness of the problem and by giving advice for more optimistic outcomes later. Formal politeness strategies still need to be employed in order to convey the information without FTAs, but the way information is structured in discourse, and the choice of information which would be helpful even if it does not seem so on the first glance, lays in between of the real-world actions (if we assume that the act of helping as the goal of these texts was achieved) and the language.

3.2. The Illocutionary Functions

Another research question that we wanted to address in our analysis was about the illocutionary function of the texts from our corpus. Possible illocutionary functions are competitive, convivial, collaborative or conflictive (Leech 1983: 104). They depend on the social goals we are trying to achieve through using different forms of utterances, on different levels of politeness. In this framework, we are assuming that politeness will appear in every situation, just to a varying degree, which is something that Brown and Levinson (1988) criticized about Leech's (1983) theory. Assuming that, the question asked is: is the speaker polite to the hearer while actually trying to achieve a. something essentially bad for the hearer, b. something good for the hearer, c. something for what it is irrelevant how it would make the hearer feel, or d. something the speaker wants the hearer to find impolite and bad (Leech 1983: 105)?

The competitive illocutionary function represents trying to be polite while trying to achieve something essentially discourteous (like demanding, asking, ordering), so that there is a tension between these two goals. The convivial function represents intrinsically courteous and extrinsically polite acts (like offering, congratulating, thanking). The collaborative function represents trying to be informative and not depending on courtesy. The conflictive function represents

intentionally being discourteous – it is called conflictive because of the contradiction of the idea of being polite while trying to be impolite (Leech 1983: 104).

When it comes to our corpus, we could immediately discard the conflictive function, as we did not expect to and did not find it. It was obvious as well that positive politeness strategies have a convivial function in the texts from our corpus as well as anywhere. What we wanted to address were three other questions: a. Can positive strategies have competitive function in our corpus, and what functions do negative strategies have?, b. Could there be a similar classification of impolite utterances with courteous intentions?, and c. Are there any parts of the texts from our corpus with a truly collaborative (neutral) function?

When it comes to negative politeness strategies, we believe they would still be considered the same as positive strategies, in Leech's sense of the functions and Brown and Levinson's sense of negative politeness. Since these are the strategies that still belong to the conventional notion of politeness, they are considered something positive, but used to obtain a positive or a negative goal. Negative strategies are oriented towards negative face, and aim to make it unimpeded – so, if the negative strategy of minimizing the imposition is being used in order to respect that requirement, that is in no way a negative (as in the sentiment it would cause) illocutionary act. In the following examples, we can see one negative (as a technical term non-related to sentiment) politeness strategy: minimizing the imposition (Brown & Levinson 1988: 176), well-intendedly, so the reader's negative face would not be threatened.

10. *Hoću samo da kažem da razlika nije u intenzitetu, već u prirodi iskustva.* (26.4, *Nesalomivi*)

[I *just* want to say that the difference is not in the intensity, but in the nature of the experience. (26.4, *Unbreakable*)]

11. *To ne znači da ste toksična osoba, već samo da imate neka ponašanja na kojima valja poraditi.* (3.4, *Beleške sa psihoterapije*)

[That doesn't mean that you are a toxic person, it *just* means that you have some treats that should be worked on. (3.4, *Psychotherapy notes*)]

This indicates that both positive and negative politeness strategies can have a convivial function, but it brings us to the other part of the question: can they have a competitive function? We believe that it depends on the way we perceive "negative social goal". If by that we include every action that causes slightest discomfort to the hearer (in this case: the reader), then perhaps we could say competitive function is possible, because there are examples from the corpus where the author asks the reader to do something, or even tells them that they have to do it, even if it is softened by different politeness strategies, e.g., stating a demand as a general rule, using negative politeness, as in Example 12:

12. *...neophodno je da, pored preuzimanja odgovornosti za sopstvene tegobe i rad na sebi, preuzmemo odgovornost i aktivno radimo na dobrobiti naše zajednice...* (26.4. 2021, *Beleške sa psihoterapije*)

> [...it is necessary, beside taking responsibility for one's own difficulties and self-development, to also take responsibility and actions for the welfare of our community... (26.4. 2021, *Psychotherapy notes*)]

However, there are two important factors that make the competitive function less possible in our corpus. First, we should consider the topic and goal of these texts: they are all oriented towards helping the reader, so even when the author asks them to do something or even demands them to do so, it is implied that the author does so for the reader's own good. Second, the fact that we talk about written discourse also makes the situation different from spoken discourse, because the author and the readers do not even know each other, and the author cannot really benefit from anything the reader does. So, once again, we believe that we need to take the context into consideration, and that we cannot say the function of some part of the text is competitive only because it includes some formal markers like asking someone to do something.

The other question we wanted to raise brings us back to the politeness of the meaning rather than politeness of the form. If we consider FTAs a marker of impoliteness, we also need to have in mind that they cannot always be entirely avoided, and also that they sometimes could be used for the reader or hearer's own benefit: to take them out of their comfort zone, and make them think about things that they maybe would not otherwise. Yet, this could not be done without trust being previously established in discourse, through regular politeness strategies. Without that, we believe the reader or the hearer would back out and that would stop the message being conveyed. For example, the part of the text disagreeing with all the usual approaches to the depressed individual could threaten the positive face of the reader who recognizes themself in the descriptions followed by criticizm, as in the examples bellow.

13. *Ovi i slični „saveti“, iako mogu biti dobronamerni i imati cilj da pomognu osobama koje pate od depresije, samo dovode do produbljivanja problema. Depresija oduzima energiju i oslabljuje volju, i ovakve preporuke treba izbegavati, jer se osobe kojima ih dajemo nakon toga najčešće osećaju još gore.* (26. 4. 2021, *Nesalomivi*)

[These and similar pieces of advice, although they could come from good intentions and have the goal to help people suffering from depression, only deepen the problem. Depression takes away the energy and weakens the willpower, so these recommendations should be avoided, because people who we give them to only feel worse after that. (26. 4. 2021, *Unbreakable*)]

14. *Sličan, negativan, efekat po mentalno zdravlje obolelog imaju i sugestije tipa: „Vidiš da imaš decu/posao/roditelje... ne bi smeo da budeš nezadovoljan/depresivan“. Ili: „Kako ovi drugi mogu, a ti ne možeš?“* (26. 4. 2021, *Nesalomivi*)

[Similar, negative, effect on mental health have the suggestions like: "You see that you have your children/job/parents... you shouldn't be unsatisfied/depressed", or: "How come that others can, and you can't?" (26. 4. 2021, *Unbreakable*)]

However, with acknowledging of good intentions and all the good ways of helping, with giving the reasons why some patterns are wrong, as in the rest of the previously mentioned text, with an example bellow, face threatening could be avoided on the level of the whole text.

15. *Kako je svako individua za sebe i kako su depresivna osećanja međusobno različita, teško je ukazati na univerzalni savet. Ipak, rečenice i stavovi tipa: „Razumem da je teško, hajde da probamo zajedno“, „Znam da nije lako, ali probaću da ti pomognem“, mogu pomoći da osoba obolela od depresije razume da nije usamljena i da pored sebe ima nekoga ko želi da joj pomogne.* (26. 4. 2021, *Nesalomivi*)

[Since everyone is an individual, and since depressive feelings can be different, it is hard to give a universal advice. However, sentences and attitudes such as: "I understand it is hard, let's try to do this together", "I know it is not easy, but I will try to help you", can be helpful for the person suffering depression to understand that they are not alone and that they have someone willing to help. (26. 4. 2021, Unbreakable)]

So, this returns us to the importance of establishing trust through genuine understanding of the audience, with noble goals of being helpful and making a difference. If we were to accept this point of view, we could make quite similar classification of impolite utterances' illocutionary functions, that would perhaps look like this: those whose social goal is beneficial to the hearer or the reader (competitive), those whose social goal is not beneficial to the hearer or the reader (convivial), those whose social goal has no interest in the hearer or the reader (collaborative), and those whose social goal would be to make someone feel good, probably, as it would be contradictory – maybe again through being ironic, as with the same function in polite statements in Leech (1983) (conflictive).

Finally, we wanted to look back at the collaborative function in the classification of the polite discourse (not the impolite one, although this function is the least different in these two classifications out of the four functions). Of course, there are undoubtedly utterances that have the primary goal of conveying information, and not trying to make someone feel a certain way about something. It is also worth noting that, in discourses with objective topics, the truth absolutely should not be subordinate to courtesy and making people feel good. However, and especially when the topics are not that objective, when the information is conveyed in a way that does not try to awake any particular attitude towards the information, it still does not stop the readers to make their inferences, nor the text to have some implications. Although the author cannot affect the readers' impression and is in no way responsible for it, the author can try to make the text itself less suitable for wrong interpretations by talking more sensitively about sensitive topics. This brings us back to the politeness in discourse structuring, and to the importance of the context. The information that is true cannot be collaborative nor fair if it is only partial, or if it is influenced by other pieces of information in the surrounding context. The information that has a collaborative function by itself rarely can maintain it in the context.

As expected, and thankfully – although this could be used for manipulation in other discourses, which could also be a topic for further research – the examples in our corpus are usually positive ones. In other words, these are the examples where the collaborative function of one segment becomes a part of the convivial function of the whole text, and it doesn't serve for manipulation. It contributes to the convivial function, for example, by stating the information in the form of definitions or explanations, and by using them in the text to help the readers be

more understanding and emphatic towards these groups of people. Since these goals could be in no way interpreted negatively, we can conclude the texts are predisposed for a reading which ends up being convivial.). In the following examples, we can see how giving a neutral definition or explanation can imply to the reader the need for empathy towards, in this case, adolescents or people with suicidal tendencies.

16. *Adolescenti kao glavni mehanizam odbrane koriste reakcije ispoljavanja osećanja kroz ponašanje – postaju razdražljivi, besni, ljutiti...* (26.4, *Nesalomivi*)

[As a main mechanism of defence, adolescents use reactions of showing emotions through behaviour – by getting sensitive, angry... (26.4, *Unbreakable*)]

17. *Jedan od modela za razumevanje samoubilačkog ponašanja jeste stres-dijateza, koja daje sledeće tumačenje: postoje ljudi koji su ranjiviji, osetljiviji i koji pod uticajem jakog životnog stresa ili teških porodičnih odnosa odreaguju suicidalnim ponašanjem. Vunerabilnost, ranjivost, određena je genetski, biološki i ranim životnim iskustvima, i odražava se...* (26.4, *Nesalomivi*)

[One of the models for understanding suicidal behaviour is stress-diathesis, which gives the following explanation: there are people who are more vulnerable, sensitive, and who react to stress with suicidal behaviour. Vulnerability is influenced by genetics, biology, and life experiences, and it is shown by... (26.4, *Unbreakable*)]

4. Conclusion

This study concludes with several points that we find especially important as guidelines for further research on the notion of politeness, different ways of being polite, the specificities of the mental health discourse and written discourse, and other ways of potentially upgrading the politeness theory. From our corpus analysis we concluded that politeness strategies that Brown and Levinson (1988) discuss are being used in our sample, or at least most of those strategies that are not intrinsically unsuitable for a written corpus. We also found that they are being used with different levels of successfulness in preventing FTAs.

There were examples where both positive and negative politeness strategies were being employed, appropriately for the particular context, with strategies that are opposite in a way, so that they are mutually diminishing FTAs. There were also examples where using politeness strategies was not that successful in preventing face threatening, for a few different reasons. Sometimes only one type of politeness strategies was employed, either positive or negative, and that would make the opposite face more prone to threatening. There were also some examples where both positive and negative strategies were employed, but, as we believe, not those that were suitable for the context in order to mutually diminish face threatening.

Finally, and not related to the successfulness, we believe there were some examples that could possibly represent some politeness strategies but not on the level of the form, but rather on the level of meaning and discourse structuring. This led us to the question about what lies in between of politeness of the linguistic form and courtesy of the real actions (particularly if we consider the text's function to be helping the reader, and if we assume that it *will* help at least some of them).

In the second section of our analysis, the focus was on the different illocutionary functions that could be achieved in the texts from our corpus. Since the classification of these functions comes from a framework where the formal politeness is viewed as a default value, and also where a distinction between positive and negative politeness is not made, we wanted to raise a few new questions and try to answer them in our analysis. One of four functions, the conflictive function, was immediately dismissed, as it was intrinsically incongruous with the nature of the texts from our corpus. We came to a conclusion that both the positive and the negative politeness strategies would mostly belong to the convivial function, as it is the one that coincides the most with the whole point of the texts in our corpus. However, we tried to show how the competitive function could be possible with the opposite distribution of illocutionary and social goals, if we take into account the politeness on the level of meaning and discourse structure, through FTAs on the level of form, but with a good reason for them in the bigger picture. We also tried to point out some problems with the collaborative function, and the need for a compassionate discourse about sensitive topics, in order to avoid negative interpretations and implications as much as possible.

There are many other questions that we believe should be further researched: How similar is the politeness in written discourse to the one in spoken discourse? Is the online written discourse more similar to the spoken discourse than other types of written discourses are? What can the way that people with mental health issues write and the politeness strategies they use on the website "Nesalomivi" (*Unbreakable*) show us about the way they think? And, most importantly, can the social goal oriented towards the reader be a criterion for the classification of utterances with different levels of politeness and of FTAs, and even be a criterion for a distinction between genuine and manipulative politeness?

Our main conclusion is that politeness is very important in building trust in sensitive topic discourses such as mental health discourse. Still, we also need to think of politeness in a broader sense, when we analyse and when we create these kind of texts, related to the context, and sometimes more substantially than formally. This is necessary in order for politeness to achieve all of its functions and to be successful in making mental health discourse in general achieve its goal, which is to be informative, understanding and, above all, helpful.

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The Represenation of the Russo-Ukrainian Conflict in Macedonian and Croatian Online Newspaper Headlines

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Abstract

This research aims to investigate the representation of the ongoing Russo-Ukrainian conflict through the usage of linguistic features and discursive devices employed by two Croatian and two Macedonian online newspapers. The data were gathered from the newspapers' official websites and eighty headlines in total were analysed. By implementing Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), the research relies on the CDA framework proposed by Fairclough (1995). The data is categorized into five sections: lexical choice, scare tactics, direct speech, emotive language, and the use of scare quotes. The results show that both newspapers make use of similar lexical choice, rely on quotations to lend authority to their story and criticise the political practices of Russia. Differences in the lexical choice demonstrate the different editorial policies of both newspapers or possibly personal views and beliefs of the journalists. The Macedonian newspapers prefer subtle criticism, whereas the analysis of some headlines taken from the Croatian newspapers show a greater freedom of expression and explicit condemnation.

1. Introduction

Life nowadays is highly reliant on mass media which has been changing and shaping public opinion for years. In today's predominantly digital media world, online newspaper articles are taking the lead and are quickly progressing to the top as the major source for quick access to information. One important aspect of online articles are headlines. They are the keywords summarizing the news story (Dor 2003: 706) and act as click baits, thus ensuring readers click on the link leading them to the whole story (Kadri et al. 2020: 126). The effectiveness of headlines lies in their success to attract the reader's attention.

The Russo-Ukrainian conflict is one of the major political issues that the world has faced in recent decades and therefore it is not surprising that it receives enormous media attention all over the world. Digital media now possess the utmost power in the process of informing people about this major political issue due to the advents in technology. Despite serving as informative sources, online newspapers use a variety of strategies to present news, shape and alter people's views, beliefs, and opinions (Van Dijk 1995). Sometimes, in the process of presenting news, journalists, editors, and other media-workers are prone to subjective colouring of the content they present due to personal opinions, ideological affiliations and

newspaper ownership. Since headlines are the first language elements that are grasped by the reader's mind in the process of scanning or reading an article, they can also be strategically written to serve a certain purpose such as influencing people's beliefs and perceptions in line with the newspapers or journalists' social, political, and cultural predispositions. As Nisar and Bleich (2020: 6) put it, "headlines offer the opportunity to gauge perceptions towards groups and issues that are at the forefront of the public conscience and that reinforce and shape the attitudes of readers toward those groups and issues". As an issue that has been "at the forefront of public conscience" for months, this article aims to investigate the representation of the Russo-Ukrainian conflict in online newspaper headlines by outlining the strategies and tactics utilized by journalists to inform and shape readers' opinions and perceptions on the conflict.

2. Recent Research on News Headlines

The discourse of news headlines has been studied in different national contexts. Javed and Mahmood (2011) use the perspective of Critical Discourse Analysis to investigate the representation of the Pakistani budget by analysing headlines from local Urdu papers, and local and international English papers. They conclude that headlines reflect editors' ideologies.

Ulum (2016) carried out a cross-cultural study on headlines about Syrian refugees. The results show that newspapers present the issue from different points of view. Western newspapers are concerned with the impact on Europe in relation to the high refugee flow, whereas Turkish headlines represent the hard conditions that refugees face in their attempt to reach European countries.

Pasitselska (2017) investigated the representation of the Ukrainian-Russian conflict 2013-2017 on two prominent Russian channels by utilizing ideological discourse analytic tools. The article concludes that the ideological discourse created by the two TV news channels is exploited by the Russian government with the aim of achieving political goals.

Nisar and Bleich (2020) investigate how group status and geographic location influence media coverage of marginalized communities such as Muslims and Jews. They examine headlines about the representation of Muslims and Jews in *The New York Times* and *The Guradian* between 1985 and 2014. The study concluded that Jews are more positively viewed than Muslims.

Ahmed (2020) examines the discursive devices employed by ten British and American newspapers in headlines delivering news about Prince Harry and Meghan Markle's decision to step down as senior members of the British royal family. The overall conclusion of these studies is that newspapers make use of various discursive devices and linguistic features to express their different ideologies.

3. Theoretical Framework

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) investigates the deeper meanings embedded in different layers of language (Ahmed 2020: 139). Fairclough (1995) regards discourse as a form of social practice. As previously mentioned, this research relies on the CDA framework proposed by Fairclough (1995) which consists of three fundamental levels of any communicative event: description, interpretation, and explanation. The first level includes description of the chosen lexical items. The second level, which provides interpretation of the discursive devices and strategies employed such as the use of direct speech, emotive language, scare quotes, etc., gives insight into the journalists and newspapers' opinions, perspectives, and ideologies. The third level puts discourse in a wide socio-cultural context and aids the understanding of the reasons for the portrayal and representation of the communicative event in such light.

4. Methodology

This small-scale research is based on a corpus of 80 headlines, 41 from the Croatian newspapers *Index.hr* and *Vecernji.hr* and 39 from the Macedonian newspapers *Sloboden Pecat* and *Vecer.mk*. The headlines were gathered from the official websites and represent the news provided by the two newspapers on February 24th and February 25th, the first two days of the armed conflict between Russia and Ukraine. These newspapers were chosen due to their popularity among readers in both countries. According to Baotič (2020), *Index.hr* is one of the most visited online newspapers in Croatia, together with *Net.hr* and *Tportal.hr* and *Vecernji.hr* profiled as one of the most dominant media outlets in the Croatian online domain. Brautovič (2011) considers *Index.hr* to be "the most journalistic" online newspaper in Croatia due to the investigative journalism awards that it has received. When it comes to *Vecer.mk* and *Sloboden Pecat*, the latest reports from Similarweb.com in 2021 rate them as the 1st and 2nd best on the list of the most influential news portals in North Macedonia ("TOP 15 informativni portali" 2022). The analysis is administered by using the perspective of Critical Discourse Analysis in particular, by employing the CDA framework proposed by Fairclough (1995) consisting of three fundamental stages of any communicative event: description, interpretation, and explanation. The analysis is carried out by focusing on lexical choice, scare tactics, direct speech, usage of emotive language, and the usage of the scare quote.

5. Results: Data Analysis and Interpretation

In this section, the linguistic features and discursive devices employed by the four newspapers will be discussed. The devices are divided into five categories: lexical choice, direct speech, scare tactics, emotive language, and the scare quote. The original headlines are presented together with their English translation, which is done by the author.

5.1. Lexical Choice

5.1.1. Similarities in Lexical Choice

Lexical choice mainly describes the writer's point of view towards the news, as writers have the freedom in choosing lexical items to characterise a news event (Nurjannah 2017: 20). *Index.hr* and *Vecernji.hr*, Croatia and *Sloboden Pecat* and *Vecer.mk*, North Macedonia show a great deal of similarity in the lexical choice of headlines regarding the Russo-Ukrainian conflict possibly due to using each other's articles and headlines as sources and translating them into their own language or using the same international media outlets as sources such as BBC, CNN, etc. Twenty-three headlines in Croatian and Macedonian are compared with the English translation provided below:

1. *H1: Index.hr – Zelenskij rekao da je u cijeloj Ukrajini uvedeno ratno stanje, ljudima poručio da ostani mirni*

2. *H2: Sloboden Pecat – Зеленски соопшти дека е воводена воена состојба и ги повика луѓето во Украина да останат смирени*

   [Zelenski said that a state of war had been declared and called on the people of Ukraine to remain calm]

3. *H3: Vecer.mk – Русија им се закани на Шведска и на Финска*

4. *H4: Sloboden Pecat – Русија им се закани на Шведска и на Финска*

5. *H5: Index.hr – Rusija zaprijetila Švedskoj i Finskoj*

   [Russia threatened Sweden and Finland]

6. *H6: Index. hr – Skoro 100 tisuča Ukrajinaca napustilo svoje domove, tisuče pobegle u inozemstvo*

7. *H7: Sloboden Pecat – УНЦХР: Околу 100.000 украинци ги напуштија своите домови, неколку илјади бегаат во странство*

   [Nearly 100,000 Ukrainians have fled their homes, thousands have fled abroad]

8. *H8: Index.hr – Ukrajinske snage kažu da su srušile pet ruskih aviona i helicopter*

   [Ukrainian forces say that they shot down five Russian planes and a helicopter]

9. *H9: Sloboden Pecat – Киев тврди дека собориле пет руски авиони и хеликоптер*

   [Kiev claims that they shot down five Russian planes and a helicopter]

10. *H10: Index.hr – Ukraina zabranila muškarcima od 18 do 60 godina da napušte zemlju*

    [Ukraine has banned men between the ages of 18 and 60 from leaving the country]

11. *H11: Sloboden Pecat – Забрана во Украина: Мажите од 18 до 60 години не смеат да ја напуштат земјата*

    [Ban in Ukraine: Men between the ages of 18 and 60 are not allowed to leave the country]

12. *H12: Sloboden Pecat – Американски разузнавачи прогнозираат: Киев ќе падне за најмногу 96 часа*

    [US intelligence predicts: Kiev will fall in a maximum of 96 hours]

13. *H13: Vecer.mk – Американски разузнавачи: Русите ќе го заземат Киев за најмногу 96 саати*

    [American intelligence: Russians will occupy Kyiv in no more than 96 hours]

14. *H14: Index.hr – Američki objaveštači: Rusi če zauzeti Kiev za najviše 96 sati*

    [Russians will occupy Kiev in no more than 96 hours]

15. *H15: Index.hr – Macron nazvao Putina, tražio da zaustavi napad na Ukrajinu*

    [Macron called Putin, asked him to end the attack on Ukraine]

16. *H16: Sloboden Pecat – Макрон побарал од Путин веднаш да ја прекине офанзивата во Украина*

    [Macron called on Putin to immediately end the offensive in Ukraine]

17. *H17: Vecer.mk: Макрон му се јавил на Путин и барал да прекине со воените операции*

    [Macron called Putin and asked him to end the military operations]

18. *H18: Index.hr – Zašto se Ukrajinci i Rusi uopče bore za Černobil?*

    [Why are Ukrainians and Russians fighting over Chernobyl?]

19. *H19: Vecernji.hr – Zašto se Ukrajinci i Rusi bore za napušteni i radioaktivni Černobil?*

    [Why are Ukrainians and Russians fighting over abandoned and radioactive Chernobyl?]

20. *H20: Sloboden Pecat – Зошто на Русите им беше важно да го заземат Чернобил?*

    [Why was it important for the Russians to occupy Chernobyl?]

21. *H21: Vecer.mk – Зошто се водат борби за Чернобил?*

    [Why fight for Chernobyl?]

22. *H22: Index.hr – Kina, Mađarska, Srbija: Tko su Putinovi saveznici i zašto?*

    [China, Hungary, Serbia: Who are Putin's allies and why?]

23. *H23: Vecernji.hr –Kina, Mađarska, Venezuela, Srbija... Tko su sve Putinovi saveznici i koji je njihov interes?*

    [China, Hungary, Venezuela, Serbia: Who are Putin's allies and what is their interest?]

As can be seen from the translation and comparison of the examples above, lexical similarity in the headlines of the four newspapers is achieved through the usage of lexis, including nouns, verbs, and adjectives. Moreover, the grammatical constructions are similar, if not identical in most cases. One possible explanation for the lexical and syntactic similarity is that the newspapers use each other's articles and headlines as sources or rely on international media outlets as sources and translate their headlines into their own language.

5.1.2. Lexical Items Used for the Representation of the Conflict

One of the important characteristics of headlines that reveals the hidden ideologies of newspapers and journalists is the word choice since words carry connoted as well as denoted meanings (Richardson 2007). Choosing specific lexis, such as specific actions verbs or modifiers like adjectives plays an essential role in

exposing the news practitioner's predispositions (Ahmed 2020: 141). Twenty-two headlines from all four newspapers were analysed which reveal the journalist/ newspaper's conceptualization of the conflict. The analysis showed that both the Croatian and Macedonian newspapers view the conflict as an "invasion", "war", and "aggression" – words that carry a negative connotation. *Index.hr*, *Vecernji.hr* and *Sloboden Pecat* mostly use the word "invasion", whereas *Vecer.mk* represents the conflict as a "war".

24. *H24: Sloboden Pecat – Целиот свет ја чекаше реакцијата на Кина за руската инвазија на Украина: Не е инвазија, туку военa операцијa*

[The whole world has been waiting for China's reaction to the Russian invasion of Ukraine: It is not an invasion, but military operation]

The writer of the headline in *Sloboden Pecat* reports China's view on the conflict while at the same time states their own perspective on the conflict describing it as an invasion.

25. *H25: Sloboden Pecat – ФОТО| Од Токио до Њујорк масивни протести против Руската инвазија*

[PHOTO| From Tokyo to New York massive protests about the Russian invasion]

26. *H26: Sloboden Pecat – Видео Втор ден Руската инвазија во Украина: Киев е подготвен за преговори со Русија за неутрален статус?*

[Video| Day two of the Russian invasion in Ukraine: Kyiv is ready for neutral status negotiations with Russia?]

The same subjective colouring of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict is seen in headlines from *Index.hr*, *Vecernji.hr* and *Vecer.mk*:

27. *H27: Index.hr – Putinova invazija na Ukrajinu več je utjecala na odnose u regiji*

[Putin's invasion of Ukraine has already affected relations in the region]

28. *H28: Vecernji.hr – Putin objavio invaziju na Ukrajinu, Ukrajincima poručio: Položite oružje; Biden: Rusija če odgovarati*

[Putin announced the invasion in Ukraine, he told the Ukrainians: Lay down your arms; Biden: Russia will be held responsible]

29. *H29: Vecernji.hr – Večernjakov urednik Robert Bubalo o invaziji: Putin ima tri cilja*

[The edirot of Vecernji.mk, Robert Bubalo, about the invasion: Putin has three goals]

30. *H30: Vecernji.hr – Kako doživljavaju Rusi invaziju: Mnogima je rat nezamisliv, rijetki se otvoreno protive*

[How Russians view the invasion: For many a war is unimaginable, few are openly opposed]

31. *H31: Vecer.mk – Почна војна: Украинците соборила пет руски авиони, Русите уништиле воздушни бази во Украина*

[A war has started: Ukrainians shot down five Russian aeroplanes; Russians destroyed air bases in Ukraine]

32. *H32: Vecer.mk – Почна војна: Русија ја нападна Украина*

[A war has started: Russia attacked Ukraine]

33. *H33: Vecer.mk Поради војната во Украина, ќе поскапат повеќе производи*

    [Because of the war in Ukraine, products will become more expensive]

Four examples from *Vecernji.hr* and *Vecer.mk* represent the Russians' action in Ukraine as an "aggression", portraying the journalists and newspapers' perspective on the conflict and their disagreement with the current political and military practices of Russia:

34. *H34: Vecernji.hr – Što agresija Rusije znači za Hrvatsku?*

    [What does Russia's aggression mean for Croatia?]

35. *H35: Vecernji.hr – Milanovič ostro osuđuje Rusku agresiju na Ukrajinu, u stalnom je kontaktu sa premijerom Plenkovičem*

    [Milanovic strongly condemns Russian aggression against Ukraine, he is in constant contact with Prime Minister Plenkovic]

36. *H36: Vecernji.hr – Ruska agresija može se pretvoriti u tragediju za cijeli svijet*

    [Russian aggression may turn into a tragedy for the whole world]

37. *H37: Vecer.mk – Масовни протести во Грузија против Руската агресија во Украина*

    [Mass protests in Georgia against the Russian aggression in Ukraine]

Another example of how word choices reveal the journalist or the newspaper's predispositions, and affiliations is the following headline from Vecer.mk:

38. *H38: Vecer.mk – Русија не признава дека почнала војна, тврди дека ова е обид да се спречи глобална војна*

    [Russia does not admit that it started a war, claims that this is an attempt to prevent a global war]

The first part of the headline "Russia *does not admit* that it started a war" (emphasis added) is coated with the journalist' personal view on the conflict. In their opinion it is indeed "a war".

Moreover, *Sloboden Pecat* and *Vecernji.hr* published articles in which they emphasize Putin's role and represent the current conflict as "the invasion/campaign of Putin".

39. *H39: Sloboden Pecat: Крвав поход на Путин врз Украина*

    [Putin's bloody campaign against Ukraine]

40. *H40: Vecernji.hr – Putin krvavom invazijom stvara novi međunarodni poredak*

    [Putin creates a new international order by bloody invasion]

41. *H41: Vecernji.hr – Kako je Putin sa svojim batinašima preuzeo medije i uveo strahovladu: Kijev pada u krvi, a Rusi slave oslobodilačku vojsku*

    [How Putin with his beaters took over media and brought fear: Kyiv is falling in blood, and Russians celebrate the liberation army]

42. *H42: Vecernji.hr – Pogledajte oružje s kojim Putin ruši po Ukrajini: Dosad je ispalilo milijardu i pol eura proektila!*

    [Look at the weapons with which Putin demolishes Ukraine: So far it has fired projectiles worth one and a half billion euros!]

Headlines 41 and 42 highlight Putin's role in the beatings in Russia as well as the current practices of Russia in Ukraine. As an individual, Putin is held responsible for the beatings and demolition of Russia, even though he is not directly involved in those actions. With the usage of phrases such as "bloody campaign", "bloody invasion", "Putin with his beaters", "Putin demolishes", the journalists criticize Putin's involvement and the current military practices in Ukraine.

Three more headlines from *Index.hr* and *Vecernji.hr* show explicit criticism towards Russia's deeds and the president Vladimir Putin:

43. *H43: Vecernji.hr – Ovo je napad na cijeli demokratski liberalan svijet. Tajming nije slucajan*

    [This is an attack on the entire democratic liberal world. Timing is not accidental]

44. *H44: Vecernji.hr – Ukrajinci se neče tek tako predati zlu koje ih želi pregaziti*

    [Ukrainians will not surrender to the evil that wants to overrun them]

45. *H45: Index.hr – Zašto se obožavatelji ludih diktatora ne sele u Rusiju, nego u Njemačku i Irsku?*

    [Why are fans of crazy dictators not moving to Russia, but to Germany and Ireland?]

In headline 44, Russia's actions are represented as "the evil" that wants to "overrun the Ukrainians". The usage of the phrase "crazy dictators" in the third headline exemplifies the journalist's disrespect and contempt towards Vladimir Putin. The journalists'/newspapers'perspective on the conflict is illustrated by the word choice used to describe the conflict itself. By depicting the conflict as an "invasion" and "war", journalists reveal their own conceptualisation of the situation. *Vecer. mk* and *Vecernji.hr* portray an even greater disapproval of Russia's actions with the use of the word "aggression" that carries a strong negative connotation. Furthermore, the employment of words and phrases referring to Putin and his role, such as "evil", "crazy dictator", "Putin with his beaters", "the weapons with which Putin demolishes", and "this is an attack on the entire democratic liberal world" show the newspapers explicit criticism of Russia's actions and emphasize Putin's responsibility.

5.1.3. Scare Tactics

The following headlines represent another characteristic usually employed by mass media, the scare tactics. Four headlines from the Croatian newspapers only were analysed since this discursive strategy was not used by the Macedonian newspapers:

46. *H46: Index.hr – Je li ovo početak trečeg svetskog rata?*

    [Is this the beginning of World War III?]

47. *H47: Index.hr – Rusi su granatirali grad koji je bliže Hrvatskoj nego Rusiji*

    [The Russians bombed a city that is closer to Croatia than Russia]

48. *H48: Vecernji.hr – Što čeka Balkan nakon Putinovog napada? Najveća opasnost prijeti BIH, hrvatski specijalci u pripremi za rat*

[What awaits the Balkans after Putin's attack? The greatest danger threatens BIH, Croatian special forces in preparation for war]

49. *H49: Vecernji.hr – Video Jeziva snimka ruskog napada na aerodrome u gradu odaljenom 500km od Hrvatske*

[Creepy footage of the Russian attack on airports in a city 500km from Croatia]

The lexical choice in the headlines 46 and 48 is intended to spread fear as the imminence of a world war is questioned. Both articles are published on 24th of February, the day that marked the start of the armed Russo-Ukrainian conflict which makes the future course of events relatively unknown. However, the journalist suggests that the impeding reality is that of a World War III. *Vecernji.hr* also emphasizes the impeding danger of a war by using the phrase "greatest danger" and informes the public about the Croatian special forces that prepare for the war. This is further enhanced by the lexical choice in headlines 47 and 49. Instead of giving the location and name of the city, the information that the journalists provide in these headlines is the proximity of the Ukrainian city to their country.

What is noticeable from the representation of the headlines in this section is that most of the time newspapers report on the same news with striking similarity in the choice of words. Croatia and North Macedonia are Balkan countries that speak similar languages. The reason for this may be the fact that the two newspapers use each other's headlines and articles as sources and translate them into their own language or they use international media outlets as sources. The four newspapers use words that carry a negative connotation to represent the conflict such as "invasion", "war", and "aggression". However, some differences can be observed. *Index.hr* and *Vecernji.hr* publish commentary articles in which journalists critically assess the current situation with a total and complete freedom in the choice of words whereas such headlines or articles could not be found in *Sloboden Pecat* and *Vecer.mk*. The reason for this might be the different editorial policies of the two newspapers.

5.2.   Direct Speech

Direct speech is a widespread discursive divice for transferring statements in news media. As Floyd (2000: 43) states, "[b]y relying on quotes from those who are "involved", journalists substitute other people's opinions for the facts of real-life phenomena because of the aura of authority attached to certain frequently heard voices such as high-status sources in government". Quotes offer newspaper writers the opportunity to lend authority to the story (Zelizer 1989: 371) and absolve themselves from responsibility (Tuchman 1978: 86). Twenty newspaper headlines, which report on international political relations of power and authority, include direct speech:

50. *H50: IndexHR – Ursula von der Layen: Putin je vratio rat u Europi*

[Ursula von der Layen: Putin brought the war back in Europe]

51. H51: *Sloboden Pecat* – Фон дер Лајен: Путин ја враќа Европа во војна, знаеме дека рускиот народ не сака војна

    [Von der Layen: Putin brings the war back to Europe; we know that the Russians do not want war]

52. H52: *Index.hr* – Scholtz: *Putinov rat, je "ozbiljna pogreška"*

    [Scholz: Putin's war is a "serious mistake"]

53. H53: *Sloboden Pecat* – Шолц: Ова е војна на Путин, направи голема грешка со неа

    [Scholz: This is Putin's war, he made a big mistake with it]

Headlines 52 and 53 show differences in terms of the lexical choice. *Index.hr* describes the mistake as "serious", whereas *Sloboden Pecat* describes it as "big". However, in this context the two words are synonymous. Moreover, the journalist from *Index.hr* uses the scare quote ("serious mistake"). Scare quotes will be discussed in section 3.1.4.

54. H54: *Vecer.mk* – Порошенко: Путин е современ Хитлер

    [Poroshenko: Putin is the modern Hitler]

55. H55: *Index.hr* – *Bivši ukrajinski predsjednik: Putin je moderen Hitler*

    [The former Ukrainian President: Putin is the modern Hitler]

56. H56: *Vecer.mk* – Порошенко со калашников на улиците на Киев, вели: Путин е луд

    [Poroshenko with a Kalashnikov on the streets of Kyiv, says: Putin is crazy]

57. H57: *Sloboden Pecat* – Видео Порошенко со калашников на улиците на Киев: Путин е луд, тој му објави војна на целиот свет

    [Video Poroshenko with a Kalashnikov on the streets of Kyiv: Putin is crazy, he declared a war to the whole world]

58. H58: *Vecer.mk* – Бајден: Путин одбра војна со предумисла

    Putin chose a premeditated war

59. H59: *Vecernji.hr* – *Biden: Odgovorit ćemo na napad Rusije na Ukrajinom. Putin je odabrao rat sa predumišljem*

    [We will respond to Russia's attack on Ukraine. Putin chose a premeditated war]

60. H60: *Vecer.mk* – Кремљ за нападот: Ќе трае онолку колку што ќе биде потребно

    [Kremljn about the attack: It will last as long as deemed necessary]

61. H61: *Index.hr* – *Kremlj se oglasio o napadu na Ukrajinom: "Trajat će koliko bude trebalo"*

    [Kremlin spoke about the attack on Ukraine: "It will last as long as deemed necessary"]

62. H62: *Vecernji.hr* – *Oglasio se Kremlj: Ruska vojna operacija u Ukrajini trajat će Koliko bude trebalo*

    [Kremlin spoke: The Russian military operation in Ukraine will last as long as deemed necessary]

63. H63: *Vecer.mk* – Зеленски до австрискиот канцелар: Не знам уште колку долго ќе останам жив

[Zelensky to the Austrian chancellor: I do not know how much longer I will stay alive]

64. *H64: Index.hr - Austrijski kancelar: Predsjednik Ukrajine mi je rekao da ne zna koliko će dugo ostati živ*

[Austrian chancellor: The President of Ukraine told me that he does not know how much longer he will stay alive]

65. *H65: Vecernji.hr – Bivši ukrajinski diplomat u Hrvatskoj: "Idemo u rat kao što ste vi išli 1991"*

[Former Ukrainian diplomat in Croatia: "We are going to war like you did in 1991"]

66. *H66: Index.hr – Ukrajinski diplomat: "Idemo u rat kao što ste vi išli 1991"*

[Ukrainian diplomat: "We are going to war like you did in 1991"]

The writer's perspective and view on the event being reported can also be implicitly stated through the lexical choice as in the following examples:

67. *H67: IndexHR – Rusija: Ovo nije početak rata, ovo je kraj rata*

[Russia: This is not the beginning of a war, this is the end of a war]

68. *H68: Vecer.mk – Захарова: Ова не е почеток, туку крај на војната*

[Zakharova: This is not the beginning, but the end of the war]

69. *H69: Sloboden Pecat – Контроверзни изјави на Лавров и Захарова: Русија е подготвена за дијалог, ова не е почеток на војната туку крај!*

[Controversial statements by Lavrov and Zakharova: Russia is ready to talk, this is not the beginning of a war, this is the end of a war!]

The three newspapers use direct speech in reporting the event. However, *Index.hr* and *Vecer.mk* use neutral language by relying on the quotation only without coating the headline with subjective perceptions, whereas the use of the word "controversial" in the headline 69 reflects the journalist's view on the statements being made by the Russian authorities, showing disbelief and disagreement with what is being quoted. Furthermore, the Macedonian title shows a degree of ambiguity and vagueness. It is unclear what were the precise statements made by the two people being quoted and it seems that both politicians stated that Russia is ready for a dialogue and that the current conflict is the end of a war. However, this is not the case. To clarify the ambiguity, the statements from each politician which were quoted in the article with the headline 69 are given. Lavrov stated: "Russia will always be ready for a dialogue that will brings us back to justice and the principles of the UN Charter" whereas Zakharova stated: "First of all, this is not the beginning of the war. We are trying to prevent the course of events that could potentially escalate in a world war. Secondly, this is the end of the war".

It can be concluded that the newspapers use direct speech acts to lend authority to their stories. Using direct speech in the headlines when reporting on statements made by people who emit aura of authority gives the impression that the message being sent is reliable and true. What is also important to be mentioned is the usage of the word "controversial" in the headline from *Sloboden Pecat*. Even though direct speech is used to report the communicative event, subjectivity is observed on the part of the journalist indicating his disapproval of what the politicians said,

in this case "the end of the war". By using the word "controversial", the journalist implies that the war has just started. Thus, the quotations are not merely cited impartially but also evaluated and discussed.

5.3.   Emotive Language

Emotive language is often used by journalists to create a significant impact on readers, evoke readers' emotion on the subject and by being applied on headlines, emotive words create the feeling of sensation towards readers and bait them into clicking the link (Kadri et al. 2020: 126). The analysis of ten headlines shows the usage of adjectives arousing emotions.

70. *H70: Index.hr – Hrabri Rusi masovno prosvjeduju protiv napada na Ukrajini, pogledajte snimke*

[Brave Russians massively protest attacks on Ukraine, check out the footage]

The word "brave" carries a positive connotation evoking the feeling of unity and fearlessness. Mentioning the footage that can be accessed through the link serves to the enhancement of the elevated emotion in readers' minds since visual representations contribute to the construction of an event as real even though readers are far from the actual situation themselves. The word "massively" also enhances the feeling of unity and bravery. The journalist praises the Russians' solidarity with the Ukrainian people, which indicates their support for Ukraine.

71. *H71: Vecernji.hr – Uznemirujuca snimka: Oklopno vozilo pregazilo civilni automobil u Kijevu*

[Disturbing footage: An armoured vehicle ran over a civilian car in Kyiv]

72. *H72: Sloboden Pecat – Трогателни сцени од Харков: Украинци клекнуваат да се молат на градскиот плоштад*

[Moving scenes from Kharkov: Ukrainians kneel to pray in the town square]

73. *H73: Sloboden Pecat – Паника и очај на улиците на градот Мариопол*

[Panic and despair in the streets of Mariupol]

The choice of the words "moving", "panic" and "despair" portrays the newspapers' aim of evoking the feelings of sympathy and sorrow in readers. The mental image created by the phrase "kneel to pray" symbolizes unity and faith despite the terrible situation as well as helplessness – it paints a picture of people turn to God for help in times of despair and misery.

74. *H74: Sloboden Pecat – Галерија| Потресни сцени од украински град: Испружени тела пред гранатирана зграда*

[Gallery| Shocking scenes from Ukrainian city: Stretched bodies in front of a shelled building]

75. *H75: Sloboden Pecat – ВОЗНЕМИРУВАЧКИ СНИМКИ| Ако не сте знаеле, вака изгледа војна: Пекол на небото и на земјата во Украина*

[DISTURBING FOOTAGE| If you did not know, this is how war looks like: Hell in heaven and on earth in Ukraine]

76. *H76: Sloboden Pecat – ВИДЕО| Драматични снимки од Киев: Руски тенк згмечи автомобил во кој имаше човек*

    [VIDEO| Dramatic footage from Kyiv: Russian tank crushed a car with a man in it]

77. *H77: Vecer.mk – Драматични снимки од Киев: Се слушаат експлозии, гори зграда, има и повредени*

    [Dramatic footage from Kyiv: Explosions are heard, a building is on fire, and there are injured]

78. *H78: Vecer.mk – Морбидно видео од ЗМИСКИОТ ОСТРОВ: Убиени сите војници откако рекле Е**** СЕ!*

    [Morbid footage from the Snake Island: All soldiers are killed after saying F*** YOU!]

These headlines are rich in emotive language. The usage of the affective adjectives and nouns "shocking", "disturbing", "hell", "dramatic", and "morbid" portray the terrible conditions in which people in Ukraine live, try to survive and die. The word "disturbing" which is written in capital letters suggests the enormity of the situation in question. Also, the second-person pronoun used in the phrase "if you did not know" can be interpreted as brining the readers closer to the situation and the reality of it.

79. *H79: Vecer.mk – ЕМОТИВНО ВИДЕО: ТАТКОТО СЕ СОЛЗИ СЕ ЗБОГУВА ОД ЌЕРКА СИ: Еве зошто никој не сака војна*

    [EMOTIONAL VIDEO: FATHER IN TEARS SAYS GOODBYE TO HIS DAUGHTER: This is why nobody wants war]

Headline 79 appeals to readers' emotions by using the word "emotive" and the phrase "in tears" to build on the image of despair and helplessness. The phrase "this is why nobody wants war" represents the journalist's construal of the conflict as "a war" and their belief that the separation of families is the reason why nobody wants to be in these types of situations.

Having analysed these headlines regarding the usage of emotive language, it can be concluded that the Macedonian newspapers rely more heavily on the usage of affective adjectives than the Croatian newspapers. The intent of creating mental images evoked by the lexical choice of words such as "moving", "panic", "despair", "kneel to pray", "shocking", "disturbing", "hell", and "dramatic" is to project these emotions onto the readers. This also examplifies the journalists' view on the events; the terrible conditions in which Ukrainians live and try to survive.

5.4. Scare Quotes

The scare quote is identical to the quotation with the only difference being that it covers only some words and not an entire sentence. The scare quote has multiple uses such as drawing attention to an unusual or innacurate use of the lexical item, signaling the usage of a word or a phrase in an ironic or referential sense, giving ownership of the words to someone else, distancing from what is being quoted, displaying disagreement, and intending a meaning opposite to the words enclosed in scare quotes. An example of the usage of the scare quote was given in section

3.1.2 (Putin's war is a "serious mistake"). Two usages of the scare quote are provided in this paper; the journalist giving ownership of the term in scare quotes to someone else, which is the case with the example above, and the journalist giving prominence to the words with the aim of showing that they believe the opposite, such as the example below:

> 80. *H80: Index.hr – Ovako su Sovjeti "uvodili mir" po Europi. Iza sebe ostavljali smrt*
>
> [This is how the Soviets "brought peace" to Europe. They left death behind]

The usage of the scare quote in the example above indicates the journalist's disapproval of the actions of the Soviets by correlating the past events with their present actions. "Brought peace" in scare quotes means the opposite of the meaning of the lexical items in their regular use. "Left death behind" is what the journalist thinks of Russia's deeds both now and in the past, the Soviets' military interventions in Hungary, Czechoslovakia, and Afghanistan. The phrase itself conjures up an image of cruelty – leaving something behind without looking back.

6. Discussion and Explanation

It can be seen from the description and interpretation section above that all four newspapers employ linguistic as well as discursive devices to shape readers' perspectives and views on the Russo-Ukrainian conflict. Similarities can be observed in their choice of most lexical items and their representation of the conflict as an "invasion" and "war" which reveals their view on the situation. The news outlets also make use of direct speech in their headlines when they report on opinions and statements made by individuals of political eminence and authority. Emotive language with affective adjectives is mostly used by the Macedonian newspapers ("shocking", "disturbing", "hell", "dramatic", "panic", "despair", "emotive". Meanwhile, only the Croatian newspapers employ the scare tactics ("Is this the beginning of World War III?"). Moreover, the newspapers differ in terms of the way they express criticism. The Macedonian newspapers lean more towards implicit criticism (presenting the conflict as "invasion" or "war"), whereas certain lexical items in the Croatian newspapers, such as "crazy dictators", "Putin's beatings", "Putin demolishes", "an attack on the entire democratic liberal world" reveal greater freedom in expressing strong disapproval of Russia's political practices and contempt towards Vladimir Putin as an individual.

Political ideologies can be observed by the usage of the scare quote and lexical choices with positive and negative connotations. Numerous instances show the journalists or newspapers' support for the Ukrainian forces and people, and their criticism of Russia's actions. The reason for this tendency may be the fact that both countries are members of NATO, which, as it is widely known, is a military opponent of Russia, and in terms of representation of news some mass media are in accordance with their country's political ideology.

7. Conclusion

The Critical Discourse Analysis of the chosen corpus has shown that the newspapers *Index.hr* and *Vecernji.hr*, Croatia and *Sloboden Pecat* and *Vecer.mk*, North Macedonia use similar lexical choice in headlines. Both newspapers consider the conflict as an invasion or war, although they employ different strategies in presenting news to the readers. *Sloboden Pecat* and *Vecer.mk* rely on the usage of affective adjectives more heavily than the Croatian newspapers. *Index.hr* and *Vecernji.hr* on the other hand engage in more explicit criticism. Certain limitations of this research are observed. Firstly, the analysis focuses only on two newspapers from each country. To obtain more conclusive results that could be indicative of a certain trend in the representation of news on a national level, headlines from other newspapers should be collected and analysed. Secondly, individual interviews with journalists from the four newspapers will provide a more in-depth understanding of editorial policies and political ideologies adopted by these newspapers. Although limiting in scope and sources, this research provides some insight into the representation of the Russo-Ukrainian conflict-related news in Croatia and North Macedonia.

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Creating Trust Through Cohesion in Academic Writing: Supporting Macedonian English Major Undergraduates

Maja Joshevska-Petrushevska

Abstract

For successful written communication in English, the appropriate use of cohesive devices (CDs) to create a cohesive and coherent academic text is of utmost importance. Many researchers have investigated their use across a variety of text types (argumentative, expository and data commentary texts), as well as the relationship between these devices and writing quality (Rahimi 2011, Liu and Braine 2005). However, the results of these studies point to different directions. The frequency of use of cohesive devices does not necessarily lead to higher writing quality. The present classroom-based research aims to identify the subcategories of conjunctive cohesive devices which are frequently used by Macedonian English major undergraduates in their argumentative essays and investigate whether task-fulfilment is dependent on the use of CDs to express logical connections and create trust in the reader. A total of 32 argumentative essays written by Macedonian first-year English major students at the Department of English Language and Literature at UKIM Skopje were analysed. The results identified that the most commonly used conjunctive relations are of the additive type. This contribution explores how successfully the students express logical connections by using these devices and create trust in the reader. In addition, the findings will be extended as suggestions for academic writing course syllabi.

Keywords: conjunctive cohesive devices, argumentative essays, logical connections and task fulfilment, trust

1. Introduction

When it comes to teaching academic writing, the concepts of 'cohesion' and 'coherence' are an inevitable part of the course syllabus since they guide the reader through the text and signal relationships between the ideas, which enables a more successful written communication. Being of great importance, not only are they incorporated in the course syllabi, but they are also one of the features of academic writing which are tested in Academic English exams. With reference to students' academic writing, some students show a tendency to underuse, misuse, or even overuse cohesive devices in their attempt to write a more cohesive and coherent composition (Stojanovska-Ilievska 2018, Trajkoska 2022). Trajkoska (2022) in her Bachelor's thesis mentions some of the reasons behind this phenomenon, such as: students' desire to impress the teacher; students aiming to achieve a higher grade, or simply students trying to sound more fluent. Impressing the course instructor and aiming to get a higher score are two factors which are related, and

they introduce yet another aspect of academic writing which is audience awareness. So, apart from striving to achieve better cohesion and coherence, students should also consider the effect their composition has on the target reader in terms of content. In other words, the target reader should be not only informed but also convinced by the writer's argumentation. In that respect, this paper explores the use of conjunction as a type of cohesive relation to achieve better cohesion and investigates whether good cohesion affects the quality of argumentation, thus achieving the communicative goals of the text and creating trust.

2. Literature Review

A substantial amount of previous research investigating the use of cohesive devices by both native and non-native speakers across a variety of text types has been conducted, however, their results and implications point to different directions. From a methodological perspective, different features connected to their use have been explored, such as: (i) identification and classification of such devices using a certain taxonomy, which results in the choice of terminology; (ii) frequency counts or ratio of occurrences, and (iii) the relationship between frequency of use and writing quality, as a dominant type of correlation. With regard to some of the relevant characteristics mentioned above, some key research will be presented.

With reference to the taxonomy used for the classification of the cohesive devices, the following three major studies provide the theoretical background to this paper. First, Halliday and Hasan's typology (1976) covers all types of cohesive relations: reference, substitution, and ellipsis (grammatical cohesion); conjunction, and lexical cohesion (Halliday and Hasan 1976: 6). The follow-up studies by Meisuo (2000) and Lui and Braine (2005), analyse reference devices, conjunction devices and lexical devices, identifying lexical devices as most commonly used by their participants, namely Chinese English major students and Chinese non-English major undergraduates respectively. The second classification is the one by Fraser (1999), who provides a comprehensive analysis of discourse markers with the intention of enabling researchers to better compare their results. This resource is found to be particularly useful for written discourse analysis. Jalilifar (2008), Rahimi (2011), and Modhish (2012) analysed the use of discourse markers by their participants, all of whom are non-native speakers of English. What is interesting is that all three scholars identified elaborative markers as most frequently used in their students' compositions, namely descriptive, argumentative, and expository texts. Another study which followed Fraser's taxonomy in the data analysis is the one carried out by Duckinoska-Mihajlovska and Joshevska-Petrushevska (forthcoming), however, Macedonian L1 English major students wrote data commentary texts, and the results highlighted the prevalence of contrastive discourse markers (DMs). This means that the use of discourse markers is dependent on the text type i.e., "different text types do not necessarily cohere in the same way and require different textual links given the type of macrostructure

they have…" (Rahimi 2011: 74). Another finding from the studies analysing students' writing worth mentioning is the limited repertoire of DM use (Modhish 2012; Stojanovska-Ilievska 2018; Duckinoska-Mihajlovska and Joshevska-Petrushevska forthcoming). Finally, another study conducted in a Macedonian undergraduate setting is Stojanovska-Ilievska's study (2018) which used Celce-Murcia and Larsen-Freeman's classification of logical connectors (1999) and identified an overuse of additive logical connectors. What was also evident was students' reliance on logical connectors they were more familiar with, hence the limited range. This finding is attributed to L1 transfer, i.e., students prefer "English logical connectors that have direct translation equivalents in Macedonian" (Stojanovska-Ilievska 2018: 162).

Of particular methodological interest to most of the studies mentioned above is the relationship between the frequency count of CDs and writing quality, yet the results have been somewhat contradictory. Meisuo (2000), Rahimi (2011), Modhish (2012) and Duckinoska-Mihajlovska and Joshevska-Petrushevska (forthcoming) have found that the use of a higher number of DMs does not necessarily lead to better cohesion when evaluating the quality of writing. On the contrary, the studies by Lui and Braine (2005) and Jalilifar (2008) have shown direct positive correlation between the number of correctly used cohesive ties and writing quality.

The findings of this classroom-based research are discussed with reference to the previously mentioned studies, aiming to identify the general cohesive features of conjunctive relations as used by Macedonian L1 English major students in their argumentative essays, as well as the relationship between cohesion and task-fulfilment.

3. Study Design

3.1. Motivation and Purpose

There is a limited amount of research into the use of cohesive devices to achieve better cohesion in academic texts produced by Macedonian English major students. The available studies deal with some of the following issues: typology of CDs, the frequency of (in)correctly used CDs, and the effect they have on writing quality in argumentative and data commentary text types (Stojanovska-Ilievska 2018, Trajkoska 2022, Duckinoska-Mihajlovska & Joshevska-Petrushevska forthcoming).

In an earlier study (Duckinoska-Mihajlovska and Joshevska-Petrushevska forthcoming), we analysed the types of DMs used as cohesive devices in data commentary text types and established a correlation between their frequency of use and writing quality. The classification of the used cohesive devices is text type specific, so in order to gain a broader understanding of other aspects of CD use and the effect it has on other properties of the written text, this classroom-based research was designed.

The corpus material for this research is comprised of argumentative essays written by Macedonian L1 first-year English major students. Apart from identifying the subcategories of CDs used which are specific to argumentative essays, this paper aims to discuss yet another relationship. Namely, the intention is to find out how successfully students express logical connections in the text and create trust in the reader by using CDs. In other words, the purpose of this paper is to answer the following research questions:

> RQ1: Which subcategories of cohesive devices are used by Macedonian L1 first-year English major students in argumentative texts?
>
> RQ2: Is task fulfilment dependent on the use of cohesive devices to express logical connections and create trust in the reader?

3.2. Theoretical Framework of the Study

"Cohesion occurs where the interpretation of some element in the discourse is dependent on that of another" (Halliday & Hasan 1976: 4). Basically, it refers to relations of meaning, which makes it a semantic concept. It is a specific kind of meaning relation which may be realised partly through grammar and partly through vocabulary. As a result, we may refer to grammatical and lexical cohesion.

This study explores the use of conjunction as a type of cohesive relation, which is mainly grammatical but also carries a lexical element, according to Halliday and Hasan (1976). We are to follow their classification for the data analysis. It is a very simple but comprehensive taxonomy which distinguishes the following four classes: *additive*, *adversative*, *causal*, and *temporal*.

In an earlier study (Duckinoska-Mihajlovska & Joshevska-Petrushevska forthcoming), for the purposes of the analysis we followed Fraser's taxonomy (Fraser 1999, 2009) as we were analysing discourse markers in data commentary text types. Fraser's classification of discourse markers into *contrastive*, *elaborative* and *inferential* was more appropriate for the respective text type and the profile of our participants, namely fourth-year undergraduates. However, this classroom-based research analyses argumentative compositions written by first-year English major students, who are a lot less experienced in academic writing, and are believed to be under stronger influence of their L1 in their choice of CD use. In addition, the specific text type presupposes the use of temporal conjunctive cohesive devices to express sequencing of ideas which are specific to Halliday and Hasan's taxonomy (1976).

The following four categories of conjunctive relations were targeted in our study:

1. *Additive*, or the so-called '*and relation*'; E.g., *and*, *or*, *furthermore*, *similarly*, *in other words*, *for instance*…
2. *Adversative*, the basic meaning of which is '*contrary to expectation*'; E.g., *yet*, *but*, *however*, *in fact*, *instead*, *anyhow*…
3. *Causal*, including relations of *result, reason* and *purpose*; E.g., *so*, *thus*, *therefore*, *for this reason*, *because*, *as a result* (*of*)...

4. *Temporal*, expressing *succession in time*: E.g., *then*, *at the same time*, *first*, *next*, *secondly*, *finally*…

4. Methodology

4.1. Participants

A total of 32 (*M = 7, F = 25*) Macedonian L1 English major students in their first year at the Department of English Language and Literature at the Faculty of Philology at UKIM in Skopje participated in this classroom-based research. Their age ranged from 18 to 21. At the time when the students were given the assignment, all of them were attending Academic Writing 2, which was a mandatory course in their second (winter) semester. Their English language proficiency level was not formally established since all of them had already passed a mandatory 15-week Modern English 1 course (including Academic Writing 1) at B2 level according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR).

4.2. Materials and Procedure

The corpus consisted of students' argumentative essays, which were set as a compulsory homework assignment part of a writing portfolio as a means of continuous assessment. Each student could choose one of four offered essay topics (see Appendix A). Since each student was obliged to submit two drafts of the same essay, both of which were given feedback by their course instructor. For the purposes of this study, only their first submissions were evaluated.

All essays comprised a corpus of 7,562 words and underwent CD identification by the author of this study by using AntConc (Anthony 2022), a free corpus analysis toolkit for text analysis. All CD occurrences identified by the software were then manually revised by the author to check whether they displayed the respective properties according to the taxonomy used, namely Halliday and Hasan's typology. They were also categorized accordingly in one of the following categories: *additive*, *adversative*, *causal*, and *temporal* and the frequencies of the correctly used CDs were determined. Next, each essay was marked by two raters[1] using Cambridge English B2 First assessment scales developed with reference to the CEFR (see Appendix B). The scales consist of four subscales: *Content*, *Communicative Achievement*, *Organisation*, and *Language*. For the purposes of this research, the texts were marked with respect to the scales *Content* and *Organisation* from 0 to 5. In cases when the grades did not overlap, a mean grade was calculated.

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[1] The first grade to all submissions was provided by the author of this study, however, the second one was provided by one of two other raters (one rater assessed 19 texts, while the other one graded the remaining 13).

5. Data Analysis

The purpose of this classroom-based research was to investigate the cohesive devices expressing conjunctive relations used by Macedonian L1 English major students to achieve better cohesion in 32 argumentative essays. To this end, a total number of 207 target words or expressions as categorised according to Halliday and Hasan's taxonomy (1976) were analysed. First, the frequency of use of the conjunctive relations by type was calculated to answer RQ1. Then, a quantitative analysis on the relationship between the use of cohesion and the quality of argumentation was conducted using the Pearson correlation coefficient. To answer RQ2, a correlation between two assessment criteria was established – *Organisation*, which refers to cohesion and coherence and *Content*, which refers to students' argumentation and development of ideas. The idea was to investigate how much the use of good cohesion that entails logical progression of the ideas affects the quality of argumentation, thus informing the reader and creating trust.

6. Results and Discussion

The findings reveal that students used all four types of cohesive devices expressing conjunctive relations, with *additive* CDs being most frequently used amounting to almost 40% of the total number of conjunctive relations (see Table 1). They are followed by *causal* and *temporal* CDs, both of which are represented by a somewhat similar percentage, 20.8% and 22.2% respectively, which added together is slightly bigger that the share of additive CDs used independently. Surprisingly, the least frequently used subtype is the *adversative* one with only 36 occurrences, which is about 17% of the total number of all occurrences. Since three of the assigned topics for discussion included an element of comparison and contrast, and 24 students chose to write on such a topic, one would have expected to come across adversative CDs more frequently.

Conjunctive relations	Number of occurrences	Percent
Additive	82	39.6%
Adversative	36	17.4%
Causal	43	20.8%
Temporal	46	22.2%
Total	**207**	**100%**

Table 1: Number and relative frequencies of conjunctive relations of the additive, adversative, causal and temporal type.

Looking at the variety of devices used per category (Table 2) one cannot but notice their limited range. Out of a total number of 153 different cohesive devices of the conjunctive type as offered by Halliday and Hasan (1976: 242-243) only 37 (across all four subcategories) were used by our participants, which is about 24% of the total share. This fact demonstrates a highly limited repertoire of CD use. This may be attributed to at least four factors. First is the limited exposure to CD use. Our participants are first-year students who have only been introduced to cohesive

devices at the beginning of their studies. The assumption would be that little or no attention to cohesion was paid in their secondary education. Secondly, we should also consider the influence of L1 transfer. Undergraduate students may opt for English CDs to which are direct translation equivalents in the Macedonian language used in a similar manner. Another reason would be the relationship between the frequency of use and language competence. Some CDs are rarely used as they are associated with higher level language competence. The last factor would be the scarcity of teaching materials and limited practice of these devices.

Additive	N	%	Adversative	N	%
and	42	51.2	but	19	52.8
also	11	13.4	however	4	11.1
or	10	12.2	despite	4	11.1
for example	7	8.5	although	3	8.4
furthermore	3	3.7	yet	1	2.8
for instance	3	3.7	though	1	2.8
additionally	2	2.5	still	1	2.8
nor	1	1.2	in fact	1	2.8
moreover	1	1.2	instead	1	2.8
in this way	1	1.2	on the other hand	1	2.8
besides	1	1.2			
Total	**82**	**100**	**Total**	**36**	**100**

Causal	N	%	Temporal	N	%
because	29	67.5	first/firstly/first of all	13	28.3
thus	5	11.6	in conclusion/to conclude	10	21.7
so	4	9.3	then	8	17.4
hence	2	4.7	before then/this	5	10.7
therefore	1	2.3	after this/that/ [specific time interval]	3	6.5
as a result	1	2.3	until	2	4.4
here	1	2.3	finally	2	4.4
			secondly	2	4.4
			earlier	1	2.2
Total	**43**	**100**	**Total**	**46**	**100**

Table 2: Number and relative frequencies of all types of CDs.

6.1. Conjunctive Relations of the *additive* Type

The *additive* cohesive devices are most frequently used with 82 occurrences. However, they have a rather limited range of occurrence. Only 11 different devices are used, with *and* being at the top of the list with about 50% of the share in the total number of the additive CDs. From 221 hits in AntConc, in only 42 cases the *and* relation operates conjunctively to give cohesion to a text. In all other instances, *and* was used as a coordinate conjunction, which is a structural relation. The other two additives with an independent share of more than 10% are *also* and *or*.

1. Technology has allowed us to instantly communicate with the entire world, just by utilizing a small device that we carry around in our pockets. *And* this is not the only thing technology has allowed us to do...

This finding is in line with the findings of previously conducted research, highlighting the prevalent use of *additive/elaborative* expressions (Jalilifar 2008, Rahimi 2011, Modhish 2012, and Stojanovska-Ilievska 2018).

6.2. Conjunctive Relations of the *adversative* Type

The least frequently used conjunctive relation was the one expressed by *adversative* CDs, with only 36 occurrences altogether, despite the fact that students were expected to express comparison. The most commonly used adversative was *but*, being used 19 times which is about 53% of all occurrences of the adversative CDs. This demonstrates the limited repertoire of the adversative CDs used in the essays, which is quite similar to the case of additive CDs. *But* is followed by *however*, *despite* and *although* which are used 11 times altogether. At the bottom of the list are *yet*, *though*, *still*, *in fact*, *instead* and *on the other hand*, each of which is used only once. What is also surprising is the fact that the typifying adversative *yet* was used only once. This may be due the fact that ESL learners are first introduced to the temporal use of *yet* (an adverb used in present perfect at A2 level according to CEFR, cf. the Cambridge, Oxford and Macmillan online dictionaries[2]), whereas the adversative use of *yet* (the conjunction) is typical of B1/B2 level. Another reason could be influence of L1, hence Macedonian learners would opt for *but* to express contrast. Here are some examples from the corpus.

2. Don't get me wrong, I have nothing against these content creators using their platform to earn their living. *But* I would like them to promote products they use themselves.
3. The IT sector is difficult, challenging, and growing industry, *however*, there aren't as many IT experts as there are musicians, artists or filmmakers, hence why they are valued to a great extent.
4. I think that people's opinions are pretty divided, *despite* new-found research on this topic.
5. *Although* I scroll on their feed occasionally, I do not support nor believe all of them.

6.3. Conjunctive Relations of the *causal* Type

The *causal* CDs are used 43 times, with only seven representatives. *Because* is the prevalent one (29 occurrences), followed by *thus*, *so* and *hence*. Apart from the limited repertoire, there is yet another similarity between this type of conjunctive relation and the adversative one, which is the fact that the typifying causal CD, namely *so*, is not at the top of the list. *So* was used only four times, which is about 9% of the total share of the causal CDs. This finding could be attributed to the fact

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[2] https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/yet
https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/definition/english/yet_1?q=yet
https://www.macmillandictionary.com/dictionary/british/yet

that the cause and effect relationship is used to link more complex ideas which would "require profound logical reasoning" first to understand the relationship and then to formulate it (Stojanovska-Ilievska 2018: 160). Some examples follow.

6. In my opinion, surveillance cameras are beneficial *because* they can combat street crime and manage traffic.
7. …acknowledging that a certain criminal is facing 20 years in prison for kidnapping due to the evidence from a public video tape, reduces the likelihood that another criminal is going to do the same thing. *Thus*, increased public video surveillance plays a big role in reducing law transgression.
8. Most of our lives revolve around our Instagram or Facebook profiles, *so* it comes as no surprise that the people who can get our attention and keep it (usually with shiny objects like fancy cars, clothes, and dinners) will be the most popular…

6.4. Conjunctive Relations of the *temporal* Type

The last conjunctive relationship with approximately the same share as causal CDs is the one expressed by the *temporal* conjunctive expressions with 46 occurrences. The two expressions which are used in 50% of all occurrences of temporal CDs are the ones that typically start and end the argumentation in an essay, namely *first/firstly/first of all* and *in conclusion/to conclude*. If we look at the remaining used temporal CDs (*then, before this, after this, until, secondly, finally* and *earlier*), we can notice that they are primarily used for sequencing of ideas rather than for chronological ordering of events, which is in line with Stojanovska-Ilievska's finding (2018). Teaching the use of temporal CDs for sequencing of ideas is part of the Academic Writing course syllabus, and basically when using them students rarely make any mistakes, mainly due to the similarity of both language systems in this respect. Examples from the corpus follow.

9. *First of all*, in many countries the primary and the secondary education are obligatorily and the people must educate themselves till their 19th year.
10. *Secondly*, once people graduate they look for a job and try to make money.
11. *In conclusion*, our society needs more people that can value themselves in order to be appreciative of others.

All in all, the results revealed that the conjunctive relations of the *additive* type were most commonly used in the argumentative essays. Previous research has also shown that elaborative markers were used most frequently in descriptive, argumentative and expository compositions (Jalilifar 2008, Rahimi 2011, Modhish 2012), as well as additive logical connectors as used by Macedonian learners of English in their essays (Stojanovska-Ilievska 2018). Nevertheless, the findings of the study analysing data commentary texts suggest otherwise (Duckinoska-Mihajlovska and Joshevska-Petrushevska forthcoming). Here the prevalent type is the contrastive one. This understanding is indicative of the need to consider the nature of the writing task. Consequently, different text types require establishing different relationships between the ideas. The elaborative discourse markers or additive cohesive devices (depending on the used classification) tend to be more closely related to descriptive, argumentative and expository compositions. In such

text types, writers use cohesive devices to sequence and explain their ideas, support their arguments, and ultimately convince the reader and create trust. However, in data commentary texts the writer is expected to interpret data by comparing and contrasting the different trends, thus relying on the use of contrasting markers more extensively.

A second important result of this study is the highly limited range of cohesive devises used regardless of their type. With respect to this phenomenon, Modhish (2012) attributes it to the reoccurrence of a set of markers in the teaching materials in the Arab world on the one hand, and inadequate exposure or neglect of such linguistic items, on the other hand. Jalilifar (2008) assigns this excessive and repetitive use of some DMs, such as *and*, to the writers' language competence level and unawareness of the needs of the audience. The reason behind the limited repertoire of used CDs, according to Stojanovska-Ilievska (2018) is the students' preference to choose a connector they are familiar with. Similarly, we also believe that students are affected by the L1 transfer in their choices of cohesive devices, and secondly, they are reluctant to experiment with a device they are less familiar with.

6.5. Relationship Between Cohesive Devices and Task Fulfilment

This study aimed to determine if cohesion affected task fulfilment to express logical connections and create trust in the reader. To this end, Pearson correlation was calculated to measure the relationship between the two variables in our study: the numerical compositional score for the criterion *Organisation* and the numerical compositional score for the criterion *Content*. Table 3 presents the calculated mean grade (numerical compositional score) assigned to each student for the above-mentioned criteria.

Student	Organisation (mean grade)	Content (mean grade)
Student 1	5	4.25
Student 2	4.5	4.5
Student 3	4	4
Student 4	4.75	1.5
Student 5	2	1.25
Student 6	4.75	4
Student 7	1.75	2.5
Student 8	3.25	2.75
Student 9	4.5	4.75
Student 10	3.75	4.25
Student 11	2.75	3
Student 12	3.25	2.5
Student 13	4.25	4
Student 14	3.25	4
Student 15	4	4.25
Student 16	2.25	2.5
Student 17	4.5	4.25

Student 18	2	1.5
Student 19	5	4.75
Student 20	2	2
Student 21	2.75	2.5
Student 22	2.5	2
Student 23	5	4.5
Student 24	2.5	1
Student 25	5	4.25
Student 26	4	2.75
Student 27	4.75	4.25
Student 28	4.25	4
Student 29	4.75	4.5
Student 30	1	1.75
Student 31	2	0.5
Student 32	1.5	0.5

Table 3: The mean grades for the criterion *Organisation* and the criterion *Content* assigned to all compositions.

Table 4 below shows the calculation for the correlation between the said criteria, namely *Organisation* and *Content*. The results show a *strong positive relationship* between the two variables (*r=0.814*). *Organisation* is the criterion that refers to the organizational patterns and the use of cohesive devices to achieve good cohesion and coherence in a text, while *Content* refers to the relevance of the ideas used and the effect they have on the reader. *Content*, also known as *Task Fulfilment*, focuses on how well the writer has completed the task. In other words, it gives information on how much the task requirements have been successfully addressed and appropriately developed, so as to inform and convince the reader.

	Organisation	Content
Organisation	1	
Content	0.814804198	1

Table 4: Pearson correlation coefficient for *Organisation* and *Content.*

Since the results suggest that there is a strong positive correlation between *Organisation* and *Content*, it means that content/task fulfilment is dependent on the use of cohesion to express logical connection and create trust in the reader. Basically, writers use cohesive devices to develop the argumentation and by establishing a strong logical relationship between the ideas through the use of cohesive devices, the target reader would be better informed and convinced by the argumentation, thus gaining trust in the writer.

7. Pedagogical Implications

The results of the present study have shown the significance of the use of cohesive devices to achieve better cohesion in a text and its effect on the development of the argumentation. As a result, they may have a number of pedagogical

implications for the teaching and learning of academic writing as part of EFL learning.

Firstly, the cohesion of the text has a positive effect on the argumentation, which means that the better the cohesion the more convincing the argumentation would be. Therefore, it is of great importance to raise students' awareness of the role of the target reader and of the appropriate use of cohesive devices to express logical connections in the text. Besides being given explicit instruction on how to use cohesive devices, students need to gain more experience in writing compositions and receive feedback, so as to become more self-aware of the use of CDs.

Secondly, the findings have also shown that Macedonian learners of English do not use a wide range of cohesive devices to achieve better overall cohesion and coherence in the text. In about half of all occurrences of the identified *additive*, *adversative* and *causal* CDs, the students used *and*, *but* and *because*. This finding is a clear indication of the necessity to train students to paraphrase words and expressions to be able to express logical connection by using (i) different cohesive devices of the same type and (ii) different cohesive relations. By paraphrasing, not only are students made aware of grammatical features of the used CD, but they also learn how to use a different CD, thus improving their writing style, avoiding repetitions, and making their compositions more vivid and effective. To be successful in using different CDs of the same type and constructing a more thorough and diversified critical argumentation, students need to leave their comfort zone and experiment with cohesive devices they are less familiar with. Here are some examples.

12. Big companies sought potential to promote themselves, *so* they started sponsoring influencers.
13. *Since* big companies sought potential to promote themselves, they started sponsoring influencers.
14. Big companies sought potential to promote themselves. *Hence*, they started sponsoring influencers.
15. Big companies sought potential to promote themselves; *therefore*, they started sponsoring influencers.
16. Big companies sought potential to promote themselves. *Thus*, they started sponsoring influencers.

Once students have practised the various types, meanings, and uses of cohesive devices, next they should be introduced to other cohesive relations that contribute to the overall cohesion of the text, namely grammatical and lexical cohesion. Let us consider the following paragraph.

Once people graduate, *they* look for a job and try to make money. DOING SO, *they* put aside savings *and their* life is more financially secured in *their* thirties rather than in *their* twenties. As a result, *their* children will have better conditions for living.

This paragraph demonstrates the use of several cohesive devices: *referencing* (in *italics*), SUBSTITUTION (in SMALLCAPS), conjunctive cohesive devices

(underlined), and lexical cohesion (curved underlining). Ultimately, even though writing is a strenuous skill, by analysing and practising cohesion, students learn how to create a coherent and cohesive text which will have a positive effect on the reader.

8. Conclusion

This study aimed to provide an account of the different conjunctive relations as used by Macedonian L1 first-year English major students in their argumentative essays. The results show that students used all four types of conjunctive cohesive devices, with *additive* CDs being predominantly used, in about 40% of all occurrences of all conjunctive relations in total. They also revealed that the successful use of cohesive devices to create logical connections in the text has a positive influence on the target reader by strengthening the argumentation; thus, creating trust in the reader.

However, a major limitation of the study was that it was confined to only a single faculty, involving a rather small sample. A second limitation was the range of cohesive relations, namely the study targeted only conjunction. The scope of the study also did not allow for a systematic analysis in terms of word frequency. A comparative study between the devices used by the Macedonian English speakers, the devices used by native speakers, and the devices featuring in Halliday and Hasan (1976) would be interesting to infer about the role of language competence in academic writing.

Nevertheless, several important pedagogical implications arise from this study. To address the problem of the limited range of cohesive devices, students should be encouraged to experiment and practise using more advanced, less frequent CDs; and they should be made aware that they could also express logical connections by using other cohesive relations, such as grammatical and lexical cohesion. The cohesive relations should guide the reader through the text and gain their trust, by developing more convincing argumentation, and ultimately enabling better written communication.

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Appendix A:

Write your *opinion paragraph* on ONE of the following topics:

1. Technology experts seem to be more valued by modern society than musicians, artists or filmmakers. To what extent do you agree or disagree? Provide relevant arguments supporting your opinion.
2. Influencers and Youtubers have soaring incomes today. What is the outcome for (impact on) society of such a rise in popularity? Discuss your opinion with relevant arguments.
3. In many cities the use of video cameras in public places is increasing in order to reduce crime, but some people believe that these measures restrict our individual freedom. Do the benefits of increased security outweigh the drawbacks? Provide relevant arguments and an example supporting your opinion.
4. In today's day and age, it is very common for people to get married and have children in their thirties rather than in their twenties. Will this trend benefit society or not? Provide relevant arguments supporting your opinion.

Word limit: 200 – 250 words

Appendix B:

Writing Assessment subscales for B2 First for Schools

As with other Cambridge English exams, candidates' writing for B2 First for Schools is assessed in terms of Content, Communicative Achievement, Organisation and Language. The detailed band descriptors are as follows:

B2	Content	Communicative Achievement	Organisation	Language
5	All content is relevant to the task. Target reader is fully informed.	Uses the conventions of the communicative task effectively to hold the target reader's attention and communicate straightforward and complex ideas, as appropriate.	Text is well organised and coherent, using a variety of cohesive devices and organisational patterns to generally good effect.	Uses a range of vocabulary, including less common lexis, appropriately. Uses a range of simple and complex grammatical forms with control and flexibility. Occasional errors may be present but do not impede communication.
4	*Performance shares features of Bands 3 and 5.*			
3	Minor irrelevances and/or omissions may be present. Target reader is on the whole informed.	Uses the conventions of the communicative task to hold the target reader's attention and communicate straightforward ideas.	Text is generally well organised and coherent, using a variety of linking words and cohesive devices.	Uses a range of everyday vocabulary appropriately, with occasional inappropriate use of less common lexis. Uses a range of simple and some complex grammatical forms with a good degree of control. Errors do not impede communication.
2	*Performance shares features of Bands 1 and 3.*			
1	Irrelevances and misinterpretation of task may be present. Target reader is minimally informed.	Uses the conventions of the communicative task in generally appropriate ways to communicate straightforward ideas.	Text is connected and coherent, using basic linking words and a limited number of cohesive devices.	Uses everyday vocabulary generally appropriately, while occasionally overusing certain lexis. Uses simple grammatical forms with a good degree of control. While errors are noticeable, meaning can still be determined.
0	Content is totally irrelevant. Target reader is not informed.	*Performance below Band 1.*		

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Academic writing assessment criteria (Cambridge Assessment English 2020: 23)