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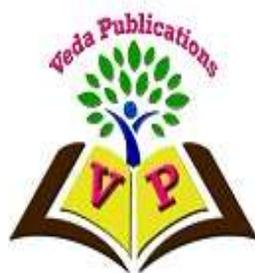
AN INVESTIGATION OF INTIMIDATION STRATEGIES IN COVID-19 DISCOURSE

Valiyeva Sonasi¹, Dr. Davud Kuhi²

¹(MA candidate, Milana Abbasova Khazar University, English Language and Literature Department, Azerbaijan.)

²(PhD candidate Milana Abbasova Khazar University, English Language and Literature Department, Azerbaijan.)

ABSTRACT



With the fast spread of Covid-19 from China to the world, the virus has become one of the mainly discussed topics by journalists, politicians, health officials, various organizations. While discussing the virus, discourse about Covid-19 is creating a distance between the virus and the group who is exposed to virus by depicting the latter as the victim of virus exposure. Moreover, Covid-19 discourse uses intimidating elements in the dichotomous construal of victimized group and virus intruder. For the understanding of dichotomous relationship between the Covid-19 and the victimized group and the role of intimidation strategies in this construal of dichotomy, we chose critical discourse analytic approach, in particular proximization theory through identifying spatial-temporal deictic markers which signal the narrowing of distance between alien entity in the form of the virus and home entity within the center of Discourse Space. The results showed that intimidation strategies, such as metaphorization, the comparison of the virus with other historical events, low and high modality markers, to put emphasis on the necessity of preemptive action against the virus intrusion, contribute to the negative portrayal of the virus in the form of alien entity within spatial-temporal framework and create credible speaker or writer who use these elements as a tool for persuasion to legitimate claims about the dangerous nature of the virus and the necessity of preparedness against the virus exposure.

Keywords: Covid-19, Covid-19 Discourse, Intimidation Strategies, Fear-Generating Dichotomization, Legitimization.



INTRODUCTION

In December 2019, scientists discovered a novel coronavirus in Wuhan, China which was believed to have originated from animals. After the rapid spread of the virus globally, there has been extensive coverage of the virus in various types of discourse that can be classified under Covid-19 discourse. In that sense, the rapid spread of virus from China to the world and its high transmissibility, which led to increased number of infected people, brings international attention to the virus. Higher infection and death rates force governments to hold daily press conferences and briefings in order to keep the people informed about the coronavirus. Politicians, health officials, organizations frequently provide updates on coronavirus situation. Moreover, Covid-19 content dominates the international media. As Chaiuk and Dunaievski stated, "the intensive media coverage of the coronavirus pandemic is unprecedented: no other disease has become the core of vigilance of the media dominating the news cycle" (187).

While informing people on Covid-19 situation and discussing various themes related to coronavirus, Covid-19 discourse is using intimidating language that enriches the content with fear elements. Several studies have been dedicated to the analysis of intimidating language in discourse about Covid-19. Sun found that fear narratives about Covid-19 and racism-singed sensationalism dominate in the tabloid media and on shock-jock radio (34). Similarly, in the investigation of Covid-19 language of fear in Pakistani newspapers' political cartoons, Aazam, Baig T., et al. revealed that the political cartoons of coronavirus convey fear-generating messages related to its audience (44). Xue, Chen J., et al. found that almost 50 % of the Covid-19 Tweets carry the elements of intimidation about the unknown nature of Covid-19 (7). Discourse about Covid-19 also sets a distance between the virus and the group, who is vulnerable to Covid-19, through presenting virus's encroachment as negatively consequential to the group and uses intimidating elements in order to give negative portrayal of the virus within this dichotomous construal of victimized group and the virus. As mentioned, though various studies attempted to identify intimidation elements in Covid-19 discourse, the use of these elements in the negative construal of the virus within the dichotomy is needed to be investigated. Taken this into consideration, we aim to identify intimidation strategies that contribute to the negative characterization of the virus and the main purposes of characterizing the virus in such a way within a dichotomous construal of Covid-19 and the victimized group.

METHODS AND THEORY

For the analysis of intimidation strategies, we selected 42 articles (news articles, headlines, opinions, analyzes) taken from American and British news and media websites (Time, CNN news, BBC news, Guardian, Newsweek) and 23 transcripts of press briefings and press conferences held by WHO, the current Prime Minister of United Kingdom Boris Johnson and the former president of United States of America Donald Trump. After the close examination of selected material, data which carries the elements of intimidation, were identified. The analysis of the intimidation tactics was carried through proximization theory. Proximization theory reflects the interdisciplinary nature of critical discourse studies since "the approach is essentially critical discourse analytic, combining insights from pragmatics, cognitive linguistics, text linguistics and several non-linguistic theories within social and political sciences" (Cap). "It is a discursive strategy of presenting physically and temporally distant events and states of affairs as directly, increasingly and negatively consequential to the speaker and her addressee" (Cap 3). Proximization examines through producing fear how home-group depicts out-group as a threat by warning about narrowing of distance between the two groups within discourse space. Cap proposes that "communication nearly always presupposes distance between the Self party (the home group of the speaker) and the Other party (the possible "intruder") in a way that the "good" and "right" are conceptualized and then lexicalized as "close to Self" and the "wrong" and "evil" as peripheral, "remote to Self" (339). "The threat comes from DS-peripheral entities, referred to as outside-deictic-centre (ODCs) entities, which are conceptualized to be crossing the Space to invade the inside-deictic-centre (IDC) entities,



the speaker and her addressee" (Cap 16). Moreover, the dichotomy between ODC and IDC is achieved through spatial-temporal-axiological proximization framework. Spatial proximization warns about the narrowing of distance between peripheral and home entities since ODC is encroaching IDC in the center of Discourse Space. Temporal proximization generates fear by signaling the threatening impact of ODC encroachment within past, present, future frames. Axiological proximization creates the dichotomy through presenting ODC values as negative and IDC values as positive.

Spatial-temporal-axiological proximization framework constructs a dichotomy between the deictic peripheral and the deictic center by using a number of lexico-grammatical markers. These deictic markers aim to legitimate the threat coming from peripheral entities. In our analysis, we particularly focused on spatio-temporal proximization framework by identifying spatial and temporal lexico-grammatical markers. In other words, the data, which carries intimidation elements, has also been analyzed for the identification of spatio-temporal items. Cap distinguished between six categories of spatial proximization framework:

Noun phrases conceptualized as elements of the deictic center (IDCs), noun phrases conceptualized as elements outside the deictic center (ODCs), verb phrases (VPs) of motion and directionality conceptualized together as indicators of movement of ODCs towards the deictic center and vice versa, verb phrases of action conceptualized as indicators of contact between ODCs and IDCs, noun phrases expressing abstract notions conceptualized as anticipations of potential contact between ODCs and IDCs, noun phrases expressing abstract notions conceptualized as effects of actual contact between ODCs and IDCs. (60)

Spatial proximization framework sets up a dichotomous relationship between the virus in the form of Other-group and the Self-group or home-group, exposed to virus intrusion and characterizes virus's intrusion as dangerous. In that sense, the peripheral virus becomes outside deictic center that attempts to enter Discourse space and the Self-group represents inside deictic center. Since the virus's encroachment upon IDC is generally depicted as destructive, peripheral entity is always characterized as negatively. For the characterization of encroachment of the peripheral entity as destructive, various intimidation strategies have been adopted. As mentioned above, we also identified temporal proximization markers in order to analyze the dichotomous relationship between ODC and IDC within past, present, future framework.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The results show that discourse about Covid-19 use intimidation strategies, such as metaphorization, the comparison of the virus with other historical events, low and high modality markers, the frequent emphasis on the necessity of preemptive action against the virus intrusion, within spatial-temporal dichotomous construal of peripheral virus entity and home-entity in order to generate fear in the public.

Metaphorical construction of the virus intrusion frames Covid-19 as "the enemy" by using "Disease is an enemy" conceptual metaphor. In that sense, the portrayal of the virus as "invader", "invisible enemy", "dangerous enemy" alarms that peripheral entity, in the form of the virus, is encroaching Discourse space and threatens home entity. Negative metaphorization of Covid-19 through spatial deictic items depicts the virus as "an evil" invading the IDC. As a result of the invasion of "enemy" entity, IDC entities within Discourse space become the victim of the virus intrusion.



Table 1. Spatial lexico-grammatical markers in the selected data	
Across the country we're attacking the enemy in all fronts, including medical, scientific, social, logistical and economic. (Donald Trump)	Across the country, we, the enemy
We're fighting an invisible enemy and no one is safe, frankly, until we're all safe. (Boris Johnson)	We, an invisible enemy, no one, weall

"Pandemic/disease is big/main natural force" is another conceptual metaphor, adopted by Covid-19 discourse, to warn against the virus's threatening intrusion within IDC space. In particular, the warning effect is attained through spatial lexical-grammatical items of motion and directionality such as "surge", "spread" which indicate the virus's destructive goal through negative metaphorization of its impact towards the home entities.

Table 2. Spatial lexico-grammatical markers in the selected data	
As coronavirus cases surge around the country, laboratories are facing crippling shortages of key supplies and growing backlogs of samples (Time)	Coronaviruscases, surge around thecountry, laboratories,

Covid-19 discourse is frequently referring to the concept of death for the intimidating characterization of the virus. In that context, the virus is negatively characterized as "invisible killer", "deadly disease" through spatial noun phrases. Similar to above mentioned examples, spatial proximization framework uses "Disease is an enemy" conceptual metaphor for the negative metaphorization of the virus encroachment upon IDC. Moreover, Covid-19 is frequently portrayed as the leading cause of death which signals that the "deadly" virus has already entered IDC space.

Table 3. Spatial lexico-grammatical markers in the selected data	
We're seeing the devastating impact of this invisible killer. (Boris Johnson)	We, invisible killer
Covid-19 was the biggest cause of death in Wales(BBC news)	Covid 19, in Wales

Covid-19 discourse generates fear by comparing the virus with other historical events such as 2009 flu pandemic, 9/11 attacks. In that sense, the analogy aims to intimidate the audience by portraying the virus even more deadly than other historical events. Furthermore, past analogy and flashbacks also warn about the future destructive consequences of the virus spread. For example, in comparative context, spatial proximization deictic marker "tragedy" signals the probability of tragic death toll in the future.



Table 4. Spatial lexico-grammatical markers in the selected data	
If the US suffered a loss of life on the scale of the 9/11 attacks -- 50 times over -- the tragedy would be incomprehensible. (CNN)	US, thetragedy
We know that COVID-19 spreads fast, and we know that it's deadly, 10 times deadlier than the 2009 flu pandemic (WHO)	Covid 19,spreads,it

Covid-19 discourse uses high and low modality markers to predict high and low degree of destructive impact of the ODC in the form of virus upon home entity. Generally, in spatial proximization framework, high and low degree of probability of devastating consequences of the virus intrusion is expressed through modal auxiliaries in combination with verb phrases of action and noun phrases of abstract concepts. As seen in the following examples, spatial deictic markers "infect", "tragedy", "cause" warn catastrophic consequences of the virus invasion.

Table 5 Spatial lexico-grammatical markers in the selected data	
As the virus continues to surge in many regions, the tragedy will be national (Time)	Virus continues tosurge, in manyregions,the tragedy
A number of coalescing forces could cause dramatic increases in deaths in the coming months, although they are far from inevitable (Guardian)	A number ofcoalescingforces, couldcause dramaticincreases in deaths

Intimidating effect is also produced by emphasizing the necessity of preemptive action against threatening virus spread. In order to achieve this emphasis, discourse about Covid-19 frequently uses lexical-grammatical items such as "effective action", "international action". Spatial proximization markers support the preparedness against the virus intrusion through warning about the fast intrusion of Covid-19 within home entity.

Table 6. Spatial lexico-grammatical markers in the selected data	
The third point I want to make today is we need effective international action to reduce the impact of the virus across the globe. (Boris Johnson)	We, impact of the virus, across the globe

The close examination of data shows that temporal proximization is achieved by the use of present, present progressive, present perfect tense forms, and a number of time adverbs, time adverbials. While present and present progressive tense forms signal that the virus is in the deictic center and its negative



impact is still continuing, present perfect tense warns about the destructive consequences of this impact. Moreover, the three tense forms alarm that if the virus spread is not taken under control, its expansion will be more devastating in the future.

By looking at above-mentioned examples, we conclude that intimidation tactics, which depict Covid-19 as dangerous through metaphorical constructions, analogy, modality markers, personify the virus as "Other-group" in a way that the "Self-group" in the deictic center becomes the victim of virus in the form of "Other-group". In other words, spatial-temporal dichotomy between the virus and home entities is realized through negative personification of Covid-19 by the help of various intimidation strategies. As Marko stated, "constructing the identity of the Self-group, based on negative differentiation from the others, usually requires the discourse of fear for its construction and this shared fear of a common enemy leads to self-victimization" (211). Intimidation victimizes the "Self-group through the portrayal of the virus in the form of ODC as "bad". In that way, the victimization generates the fear of "others". Moreover, victimization presents the society as "insecure" since intimidation warns about the higher probability of destructive impact of ODC spread on its members. In that sense, intimidation aims to impose persuasive effect on the audience. The strategies adopted by Covid-19 discourse attempts to persuade the listener and the reader that the virus is dangerous. Furthermore, to depict the virus as dangerous also aims to persuade that preemptive action is needed to stop the Covid-19 spread. The negative characterization of the virus signals the necessity of preparedness against the ODC intrusion. As Dijk emphasized "we are not easily persuaded to march in a protest demonstration against a new nuclear plant unless we believe that nuclear waste products are dangerous for people and the environment in the first place" (83). In a similar way, pre-emptive action is necessitated after portraying the virus as threatening. In addition, persuasive goal of intimidation strategies aims to legitimate the above-mentioned claims about the destructive nature of ODC entity within the spatial-temporal proximization framework and the necessity of preparedness against peripheral entity. The persuasive goal supports legitimating claims by enhancing the credibility of the speaker and the writer. As we stated, the spatial-temporal deictic items and intimidation tactics in the form of lexico-grammatical markers contribute to producing legitimating effect. Similarly, Baldi also emphasized that "linguistic and pragmatic tools effective in influencing the collective imaginary and the feelings and beliefs of the people and contribute to achieving persuasive effects by evoking a common cognitive ground as the basic dimension of legitimization" (337). It has been stated that these linguistic and pragmatic tools dichotomize between home-entity in the center of Discourse Space and personify the virus who is encroaching upon the center of Discourse space. In that sense, fear-generating dichotomization is one of the ways to achieve legitimating effect since it divides between ODC through negative personified depiction of Covid-19 intrusion and IDC as the victim of threatening invasion of the virus.

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