

# The Universal Culture of COVID-19 as Provoked by the War Against COVID-19 Metaphor

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**Abstract**—Previous studies tackling the subject of the COVID-19 pandemic found that most of the metaphors used in different genres on the subject are related to war. These war metaphors have been found to have the effects of raising awareness and creating a sense of urgency about the situation, therefore gaining support, bringing calm and stability, and promoting some emotional interaction. This study focused on the Arabic metaphors used during the different stages of the COVID-19 pandemic, i.e., from the time the pandemic began to emerge to the time of lockdown and curfew to the invention of the vaccine and of the suggestion of taking multiple doses. Data were collected from Twitter using its advanced search engine. The importance of this study lies in the fact that previous studies tackling the topic have not focused on metaphors using such a diachronic approach. Furthermore, the causes and effects of using COVID-19 metaphors in previous studies were found to be similar to the ones in this study. The resulting metaphors reflected some of the diachronic changes brought on by the COVID-19 global situation. These results are indicative of the match between the global situation invoked by the pandemic and the conceptualization of this situation as realized in language regardless of which language this is or to what culture it belongs.

**Index Terms**—COVID-19, conceptual metaphor theory, universalization, Arabic metaphor, diachronic metaphors

## I. INTRODUCTION

Occurrences that affect humans globally are expected to be thought of globally. When an infectious disease is spread all over the world, it is common sense that people get different emotions about it, and these emotions are expected to reflect the language used (Yu, 1995; Kövecses, 2000, among others). This can be seen in conceptual metaphors such as “the world is at war against the coronavirus (COVID-19)” which was prominently used online since the announcement of the first outbreak of the virus by the World Health Organization (WHO) on January 5, 2020 (accessed 5/25/2020). In this study, metaphors of war about COVID-19 were conceptually analyzed adopting the Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT) framework.

The concept of war can be linked to an instance of fighting between parties. On one side there are allies, and on the other side, there is an enemy. We choose a side or stay neutral. Armies of both sides fight, and civilians stay away and support from afar. Furthermore, war can be divided into battles that end in victory for one party (the winner) and defeat for the other party (losers). Moreover, weapons and equipment are usually supplied by the governments of the fighting parties.

Each of these corresponding concepts was searched for with the keywords “coronavirus” or “COVID-19” online. Resulting examples were analyzed using the Metaphor Identification Procedure Vrije Universiteit (MIPVU), to systematically identify which of them is metaphorical and modify the list of the correspondences associated with the conceptual metaphor “the world is at war against the coronavirus (COVID-19)”.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Many researchers have found that COVID-19 is our enemy in the war that humanity has been experiencing. These researchers include Maierová (2020), Olimat (2020), Rajandran (2020), Wicke and Bolognesi (2020), Fernández-Pedemonte et al. (2020), Abdel-Raheem (2021), Chatti (2021), Gök and Kara (2021), Gui (2021), Atanasova (2021), and Schnepf and Christmann (2022), among others.

It is interesting that Taylor and Kidgell (2021) sent an invitation to researchers to find out how COVID-19 has been construed as an enemy of war. They sent this invitation in the form of an analysis of war metaphors used in different periods of history. They compared metaphors that were used as source domains mapped onto flu-like pandemics in four periods of time before COVID-19. They found the war metaphor was used in each of the periods; however, they also found other metaphors used in some, but not all, periods. For example, one metaphor that has undergone change over time is the “living entity” metaphor. They based this change on the usage of linguistic elements indicating the metaphor, examples of which are in the following list.

1890s: catch; reproduce  
1910s: prey; rampant  
2000s: mutated; evolve

Although war metaphors euphemize death as an acceptable loss, sports metaphors can be better alternatives since they do not involve lamenting defeat as claimed by Chatti (2021). Consider the following correspondences found by Chatti (2021):

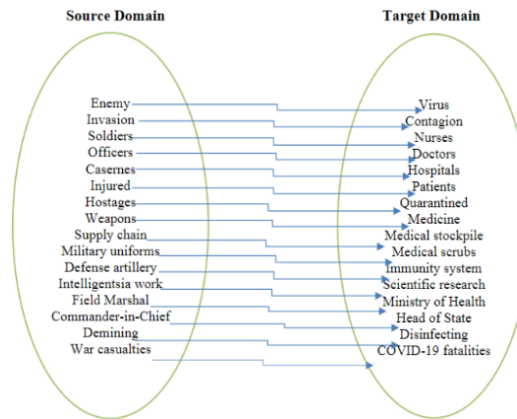


Figure 1. Cross-Domain Mapping of War Onto Disease Adapted From Chatti (2021)

The abundance and diversity of correspondences within the COVID-19 “war” metaphor indicate the seriousness of the situation and the need for narrowing down the target domain in different ways.

The reasons for which war metaphors are used in relation to COVID-19 are to raise public awareness, ascribe responsibility, and prepare the population as found in previous studies by Maierov á(2020), Moln á et al. (2020), Olimat (2020), and Schnepf and Christmann (2022).

On the other hand, some researchers found that using war metaphors for COVID-19 has a negative impact on people. For example, Sabucedo et al. (2020) claim that the COVID-19 war metaphors promote anxiety and downgrade solidarity. They suggest that the war metaphor should be replaced with another metaphor that promotes care for others and cooperation.

From 1946 to 2019, war metaphors were used in the *People's Daily*, a Chinese newspaper. Yang (2021) noted a general decline in the use of war metaphors associated with disease except during two periods: 1966-1975 and 1996-2006. He attributes the increase in these two periods to the cultural and social change in China and/or the sudden appearance of disease. The author also found that the use of offensive metaphors was more than the use of defensive ones due to the demonization of diseases in Chinese culture. He refers to the suggestion of Nie et al. (2016) that peace metaphors, including the journey metaphor, would be more effective in promoting positive attitudes, and which are used in cultures other than those of the Chinese (Yang, 2021).

War on COVID-19 metaphors were also found to be full of emotional language. Moreover, the author also claims that COVID-19 war metaphors have been highly criticized; thus, it is expected to lead to the avoidance of using the metaphor due to its negativity (Atanasova, 2021).

Considering seven languages, Panasenko et al. (2020) found several conceptual metaphors. The most prevailing of which is the metaphor “COVID-19 is an enemy”. Examples of other metaphors listed in that study are the following:

- COVID-19 is a plague.
- COVID-19 is an economic crisis.
- COVID-19 is ruining my business.
- The coronavirus is a natural disaster.
- The coronavirus is the destruction of old patterns.
- The coronavirus is a creation of new patterns.
- The coronavirus is a ferocious animal.
- The coronavirus is reaching/setting a record.
- The coronavirus is a supernatural power.
- The pandemic is a challenge.
- The coronavirus is the ultimate judgment/punishment (from God).

Examples of these languages and their metaphors are the following:

In Polish these metaphors are: fight against/battle against coronavirus, a joint attack of flu and coronavirus, coronavirus finishes off/kills transportation, the virus is retreating.

In Italian these metaphors are: silent war, World War III, invisible enemy, fight, front, incarceration, surround, doctors on the front line, victims, resist, etc. (Panasenko et al., 2020).

English (Maierov á 2020), Singaporean Mandarin, Tamil, Malay (Rajandran, 2020), Hungarian (Moln á et al., 2020), Spanish (Fernández-Pedemonte et al., 2020), Chinese (Gui, 2021) and other languages were the means of communicating the COVID-19 war metaphors. The diverse linguistic backgrounds of the users of the same metaphors indicate the universality of the metaphors which results from the universality of the COVID-19 situation. Notice that

this use of these metaphors is a shortcut to bring about the urgency of the situation, raising awareness of the self-responsibility to protect ourselves from the pandemic, and promoting the sense of fighting a collective, identifiable, and controllable enemy. In addition, using COVID-19 war metaphors may indicate emotional experiences and attitudes toward the target domain.

Considering the studies above, these war-related metaphors found in previous studies can be grouped into five categories as follows:

- Reasons/Influence for the metaphors
- Diachronic patterns of metaphors
- Correspondences of the metaphor
- Occurrence of the metaphor in different languages
- Criticism of using the WAR metaphor

As for the reasons and influences for using the war metaphors, they can be postulated based on contextual cues, which is the approach the researcher followed in this study.

The diachronicity of using the metaphors is also considered using a period of time that is compressed due to the sudden appearance and declaration of the pandemic. This is picked up later in the discussion of the findings. Moreover, the conceptual correspondences were found to be similar to some of those that the researcher found in the current study. (This is another point of discussion considered later in the current study.) Having the same metaphors, and several of the metaphorical correspondences occurring in different languages indicates the universal culture of the war as related to COVID-19 metaphors which were persuaded by the universal pandemic situation. Finally, criticizing war metaphors can be nonsensical when considering these metaphors were used unintentionally as they are ontological and structural.

#### **Research Questions:**

1. What are COVID-19-related metaphors that Arabic-speaking Twitter users use?
2. How similar are Arabic COVID-19 metaphors to COVID-19 metaphors used in other languages?
3. What are some reasons for using these metaphors?

### III. METHODOLOGY

Before collecting the data, the following list of some concepts that are associated with war were logically established:

- Fight
- Parties fighting
- Army
- Battles
- Victory/winning
- Defeat/losing
- Arsenal/Weapons/ Fighting equipment
- People of parties

COVID-19 and a word that refers to one of the systematic correspondences of the metaphor “the world is at war against the coronavirus (COVID-19)” are used as keyword combinations to search for metaphors associated with the conceptual metaphor “the world is at war against the coronavirus (COVID-19)”. These keyword combinations were searched for using the Twitter advanced search engine. All the resulting examples were considered<sup>1</sup>. Additionally, the Metaphor Identification Procedure Vrije Universiteit, (MIPVU) developed by Steen et al. (2010), was utilized to identify the metaphors in the resulting examples.

The dictionary the researcher used to identify metaphors in this study was the Almaany Arabic dictionary. The Almaany dictionary is a compilation of modern and classical Arabic dictionaries including: *Lisan Alarab*, *Alma'ani Aljam'i*, *Alghani*, *Alqamuus Almuhiit*, *Almu'jam Alwasiiit*, *Allughatu Al'arabiati Almu'asirah*, *Mukhtar Alsihah*, and *Ala'id*. The *OED* is an English dictionary that gives the current meaning of the word. Because both dictionaries give the current meaning and can trace the historical origins and changes in words, they were practical and efficient sources of information for the identification of metaphors.

After compiling a list of the metaphors to be investigated, the metaphors were categorized as systematic correspondences in two columns. To the left there were the source domains and to the right were the target domains. These conceptual metaphors and their correspondences did not always appear clearly in the metaphors found. For this, the implicit meaning of the metaphor was proposed based on contextual evidence. This approach is adopted from Kövecses (2008). For example, the conceptual metaphor “an organization is a plant” was presented in Kövecses (2008) as having an implicit metaphorical meaning. This metaphor was concluded by words such as: “branch”, “growing”, and “rooted”, as used in the following expressions:

1. The new branch of the company is under construction.
2. The organization is growing rapidly.
3. This company is rooted in this city.

<sup>1</sup> The resulted tokens ranged from 50 to 150 for each keyword combination.

The keyword “plant” in the conceptual metaphor “an organization is a plant” does not have an explicit match in any of the examples one through three. Despite that, these examples are linguistic representations of this conceptual metaphor.

IV. DATA ANALYSIS

The “war” framework is indicated by some explicit and implicit metaphorical correspondences. The source domain to concretize COVID-19 has been occupied by several concepts. One of them is attributing COVID-19 to the aspect of volitional planning. This is done by conceptualizing COVID-19 as advancing toward humans on a “battlefield of war” which is reflected through using different verbs, each indicating a different manner of undergoing “the war”. “Taking precautionary measures”, “exerting efforts”, “using masks”, and “consulting social science”, to name a few, are used as different weapons conceptualizing “fending”, “confronting”, “challenging”, and “defeating”, also to name a few.

For instance, the word “تصدى” means to stand up to him while raising his face. This indicates a position where the person doing this action is prepared to fend off the opponent from progressing. Consider Example 1:

- اتخاذ الإجراءات الاحترازية للتصدي للفايروس ومنع انتشاره... ناقش الاجتماع  
 naqaf            aliztimaʕ            ʔit:ixað            alizraʔat            aD:arurijah  
 discussed      DEF-meeting      taking            DEF-measure-PL DEF-necessary  
 lit:aSad:i      lilfajrus            wamanʕ            intifaʕuh  
 for-fending    of-DEF-virus      and-prevent      its-spread  
 The meeting discussed.... take precautionary measures to fend off the virus and prevent its spread.

Fending off the virus can be done by taking precautionary measures against it, responding to it, and exerting efforts to fight it.

Similar to the word for “fend”, the word “يواجه” in Arabic (meaning “confront” in English) indicates raising the face, as its root is “وجه”, which literally means “face”, indicates a situation where someone is raising his face or standing up against an oncoming opponent to deter them from advancing. Consider Example 2:

- فريق المعمل يبذل اليوم جهوداً مضاعفة لإنتاج أكبر قدر من الكمامات وملابس العزل الطبية لمواجهة جائحة #كوفيد19  
 Fari:q            almaʕmal            jab ʕil            zuhud:an            muDaʕafah            liʔintaz  
 Team-POSS    DEF-lab            exert            effort-PL            double-PST            for-produce  
 Akbar            qadr            min            alkam:amat            wamalabis            alʕazl  
 big-SUP        amount            of            DEF-face mask-PL      and-wears            DEF-quarantine  
 aTib:ijah        limuwaʕahat            zaʔihat            kufidnainti:n  
 DEF-medical    for-DEF-confront-GER      pandemic-POSS      COVID-19  
 The lab team is exerting doubled efforts to produce as many masks and quarantine clothing (scrubs) as possible to confront the COVID-19 pandemic.

The act of confronting is conceptualized to activate using masks, medical clothing (or scrubs), social science, women on the frontline, vaccine/medicine, and projects.

COVID-19 has also been conceptualized to be defeated. Consider Example 3:

- تعهد الرئيس ترامب في كلمته أمام الأمم المتحدة بهزيمة كوفيد19  
 taʕah:ad            alraʔi:s            tramb            fi            kalimatah            ama:m  
 pledge-PST    DEF-president            Trump            in            word-SG            in-front  
 alʔumam            almut:ahidah            bihazimat            kufidnainti:n  
 DEF-nation-PL      DEF-united            with-defeat            COVID-19  
 Standing in front of the United Nations, President Trump has pledged to defeat COVID-19.

This defeating and overcoming the virus have been conceptualized to be done by a president, a medicine, or immunity. The virus is conceptualized as an enemy against whom these weapons can be used to defeat or overcome.

A person was conceptualized to challenge COVID-19 by going outdoors. Consider Example 4.

- أحد السياح في #الصين يتنقل بأريحية متحدياً #كورونا الجديد  
 Aʕad            as:uʕaʕ            fi            aSi:n            jatanaq:al            biʔarihiʕah  
 One-of            DEF-tourist-PL      in            DEF-China            move-around            with-ease  
 mutaʕad:ijan      kuruna            alʕadi:d  
 challenging    corona            DEF-new  
 A tourist in China is challenging the new coronavirus by moving easily around.

In this example, this tourist was conceptualized as going to the battlefield unafraid of the enemy, COVID-19. This is taken as a conceptual act of challenging the virus, and going outdoors is conceptualized as the means/weapon used to challenge COVID-19.

Being infected with COVID-19 was conceptualized as being directly engaged with the virus, and the amount of time this virus takes is mapped onto the duration of the battle. Consider Example 5:

5. اليوم چودھري طلع من العزل ١٤ يوم اللي كان فيهم في اشتباك مباشر رجال يتصارعون مع #كوفيد19 وانتهى الاشتباك بانتصار چودھري

Aljom	zodahri	Talaʕ	min	alʕazl	arbaʕTaʕf	jom
Today	Djodahri	went-up	from	DEF-quarantine	fourteen	day-PL
il:I	kan	fihum	fi	iftibak	mubaʕir riʕal	jataSaraʕun
which were	in-them	in	contact-GER	direct	man-PL	fight
maʕ	kufidnainti:n	wantaha	aliftibak	bintiSar		zodahri
with	COVID-19	end-PST	DEF-engage-GER	with-victory-POSS		Djodahri

Today, Jodahry was released from a 14-day quarantine during which there was a direct clash with COVID-19 which ended with Jodahry's victory.

In the above example, the fighting parties are the patient and the virus. This battle took place during the time of the infection. No longer being infected after the virus took its course is the victory after the engagement.

In a similar example, human beings are conceptualized as engaging in several battles at the same time. See Example 6, below.

6. المملكة العربية السعودية تخوض عدة معارك في وقت واحد في ظل تهديد وباء عالمي خطير ، وتنتصر بعون الله ،

Almamlaka	alarabijah	as:uʕudijah	taxu:D	ʕid:ata	maʕarik
DEF-Kingdom	DEF-Arabic	DEF-Saudi	gets-engaged-in	several	battle-PL
fi	Zil	tahdi:d	wabaʕ	ʕalami	xaTi:r
in	shade	threat	epicemic	global	dangerous
biʕawn		aʕah			
with-the-help-POSS		Allah			

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is fighting several battles simultaneously under the threat of a serious global epidemic, and God willing, will be victorious.

The conceptual mapping of the metaphor in Example 6 equates the battles to dealing with COVID-19. This is done by referring to multiple battles at the same time by using one referring expression to refer to both the actual and the figurative battles.

While referring to some awful scenes, the “war” metaphor was highlighted by encouraging people to not surrender, as seen in Example 7.

7. ... هذه المشاهد تاكلني "وتُدمي القلب ولكن يجب أن لا نستسلم

Ha ʕhi	almaʕahid	taʕkulni	watudmi	alqalb	walakin
These	DEF-scenes	eat-me-up	and-bleed	DEF-heart	and-but
jaʕib	ʕan	la	nastaslim		
should	that	not	surrender		

These scenes eat at me and bleed the heart, but we should not surrender.

This example indicates a war going on between mankind and the virus where some terrible aftermath is being seen. In Example 8, a throne is conceptualized where several enemies, the reason for all of the deaths, are implied.

8. كوفيد١٩ يسعى جاهدا ليتربع على قمة أسباب الوفاة على مستوى العالم

kufidnainti:n	jasʕa	zahidan	lijatarabaʕ	ʕala	qim:at
COVID-19	seek-3 <sup>rd</sup>	strive-ADV	to-be-square( of sitting on a throne)on		top-POSS
ʕasbab	alwafah	ʕala	mustawa	alʕalam	
reason-PL	DEF-death	on	level-POSS	DEF-world	

COVID-19 is trying hard to assume the throne as the leading cause of death worldwide.

In this example, the war concept does not include humans as taking part in this war but uses COVID-19 as the enemy that causes death and fights with other causes of death (i.e., other “enemies”) for the “throne” – or the number one cause of death in the world.

The conceptual context of “war” also created the use of “battle formation” and “gathering for battle” agreements such as “alliance”, “lines of defense”, and “resistance”, as seen in Examples 9 and 10 below.

9. الموجة الثانية من هجمات فيروس "كوفيد19" أستطاعت #البحرين صد وهزيمة الموجة الأولى بتماسك رائع بين الحكومة والفريق الطبي القائد للمقاومة و الناس بوعيهم وسلوكهم المنضبط و التقيد بالتوجيهات الطبية والتباعد الاجتماعي

Almawjah	aθ:Anijah	min	ħazma:t fairus	kufidnainti:n	astaTaʃ	albahrain
DEF-wave	DEF-second	from	bundle virus	COVID-19	was-able	DEF-Bahrain
Sad fend	wahazimat and-defeat	almawjah	alula	bitamasuk	raʔiʃ	bain
DEF-government	and-DEF-team-POSS	DEF-medical	DEF-leading	to-DEF-resistance		
wan:as	biwaʃjihim		wasulukuhum	almunDabiT	wat:aqaijud	
and-DEF-people	with-their-awareness		and-their-behavior	DEF-disciplined	and-sticking	
bit:awʒihat	aT:ib:ijah	wat:abaʃud		aliʒtimaʃi		
by-guidance-PL	DEF-medical	and-DEF-distancing		DEF-social		

Before the second wave of COVID-19 attacks, Bahrain was able to defend and defeat the first wave with a great collaboration between the government and the medical team, the leaders of the resistance, in addition to the people's awareness, good conduct, and abidance to medical instructions and social distancing.

10. على مستوى إستراتيجيات مقاومة " كوفيد19" وتحوارته فإن الإقبال على أخذ اللقاح من قبل المواطنين والوافدين هي واحدة من أهم المعارك التي يخوضها المجتمع البحريني

ʃala	mustawa	ʔistirazijat	muqawama	kufidnainti:n	wataħawuratuh	
on	level	strategy-PL	resistance	COVID-19	and-mutation-PL-POSS	
faʔin	aliqbal		ʃala	ʔaxð	al:aqa:ħ	min qibal
so-that	DEF-going-forward		on	taking	DEF-vaccine	from front
almuwaTini:n	walwafidi:n	hija	wahidatun	min	aham	almaʃarik
DEF-citizen-PL	and-DEF-expats	is	one	from	important	DEF-battle-PL
al:ati	jaxuDuha	almuʒtamaʃ	albahreini			
DEF-which	get-involved-in	DEF-community	DEF-Bahrain-ADJ			

On the level of the strategies of resisting COVID-19 and its strains, moving forward and getting citizens and expatriates to take the vaccine is one of the most important battles the Bahraini community is fighting.

In Examples 9 and 10, the conceptual “war” resulted in a party of resistance standing up to the advancing enemy. The resistance in Example 9 is led by the medical team, conceptualizing them as commanding officers, with the government officials and their citizens also being members of the resistance party.

In Example 10, the willingness to take the vaccine is one of the strategies of resistance. Such conceptualization divergences highlight the different periods of the pandemic and vaccine development, both of which are discussed in detail in the next section of the analysis.

Examples 11 through 14 represent the alliance of COVID-19 with other “enemies”.

11. #حقتر تحالف مع #كورونا وواجبنا محاربتهما :

ħaftar	tahalaf	maʃ	kuruna	wawaʒibna	muħarabatuhuma
ħaftar	allied	with	Corona	and-duty-POSS	fight-them(DUAL)

ħaftar is allied with COVID-19, and it is our duty to fight them.

12. الإمارات روسيا الصين تحالف سياسي اقتصادي قوي وفعال ازداد تضامنه في محاربة كوفيد 19

Alimarat	rusia	aS:i:n	tahaluf	sijasi	iqtiSadi	qai	wafaʃ:al
Emirates	Russia	China	alliance	political	economical	strong	and-effective
izdad	taDa:munah	fi	muħarabat	kufidnainti:n			
increase-PST	solidarity	in	fighting	COVID-19			

The UAE, Russia, and China are a strong and effective political and economic alliance that has increased its solidarity in the fight against COVID-19.

13. أضحى التتائي بدبلا عن تلاقبنا

و أصبح العبد لا رحنا ولا جبنا  
كوفيدُ والدولار تحالفُ ننتُ  
قد أفسد الأعباد اغتالها فبنا

aDħa	at:anaʔi	badilan	ʃan	talaqina	waʔaSbaħ	
became(forenoon time)	separation	replacement	from	meeting	and-become(morning time)	
alʔid	laruħna	walaʒina	kufid	wad:u:la:r	taħalufun	
DEF-Eid	NEG-go-1 <sup>st</sup> PL	and-NEG-come-1 <sup>st</sup> PL	Covid	and-DEF-dollar	alliance	
natinun	qad	afsad	alʔaʃjada	artalaha	fina	
foul-smelling	which	cause-to-rot-PST	DEF-Eid-PL	killed-them	in-us	

Splitting apart replaces being together.  
The holiday came and we stay still.  
COVID and the dollar make a nasty alliance  
Which ruined the holiday and has murdered us within.

14. جهاز المناعة قد يزيد فيروس كورونا شراسة تحالف مميت " #كورونا #كوفيد\_19 #المناعة"

Tahaluf	mumi:t	kuruna	kufidnaiti:n	almanaʕa	zihaz
alliance	lethal	Corona	COVID-19	DEF-immunity	device
almanaʕa	qad	jazi:d	fairus	kuruna	ʕarasah
immunity	may	increase	virus	Corona	fierceness

"The immune system may increase the ferocity of the coronavirus, making a deadly alliance." #Corona #Covid\_19 #Immunity

In Example 11, the tweeter refers to an alliance between a leader and the virus. This alliance occurs because of the hardship this leader and the virus impose.

Another example that indicates alliance is Example 12. During the pandemic, a political and economic alliance is referred to as being strengthened by the additional medical agreement between the parties of the alliance to fight COVID-19.

Example 13 also indicates an alliance between the coronavirus and the dollar, implying the increased exchange rate and the hardship the virus imposes on people.

A "lethal" alliance between the immune system and COVID-19 was indicated in Example 14. The news speaks about the immune system increasing the fierceness of COVID-19 which invites this feeling of a conceptual alliance.

Certain groups of people have their share of war-related concept usage. They are referred to as a "white army". This use of "army" conceptualizes this group of people as being engaged in a "war" against COVID-19, as seen in Example 15.

15. ليلاً نهارًا يقف الجيش الأبيض ببسالة في مواجهة جائحة كورونا (كوفيد-19) مخاطرين بحياتهم من أجل إنقاذنا

lailan	naharan	jaqif	alzajf	alʔabjad	bibasalah	fi muwazahat
at-night	in-morning	stand	DEF-army	DEF-white	with-valor	in confront-GER
zaʔihat	kuruna	kufidnaiti:n	mxatTri:n	bihajatihim	min	ʔaʕl inqadna
pandemic	corona	COVID-19	resking	with-life-PL	from	sake safe-us

Day and night, the white army stands up valorously against the corona pandemic (COVID-19), risking their lives to save us!

In Example 15, a battlefield scene is laid out by using the words "يقف، ببسالة، مخاطرين"، meaning "standing valiantly, risking".

In Example 16, the immune system was conceptualized as collapsing due to COVID-19 attacks.

16. فيروس #كوفيد\_19... شرس

في أغلب المصابين يتمكن الجهاز المناعي من دحر الفيروس الغازي و تطهير الجسم منه، لكن في حالة انهيار الدفاعات الفيروس سياسة تدمير لكل أجهزة الجسم تقريباً. المناعية... يتبع

Fairuscovidnaiti:n	ʕaris					
Virus COVID-19	fierce					
Fi	aʕlab	almuSabi:n	jatamak:n	alzihaz	almanaʕi	min
In	most	DEF-infectee-PL	is-able	DEF-device	DEF-immune	from
daʕr	al	fairus	alkazi	wataThir	alzism	minh
defeat-N	DEF-virus	DEF-invader	and-disinfect	DEF-body	from-it	
lakin	fi	ʕalat	inhijar	ad:ifaʕat	almanaʕijah	jatbaʕ
but	in	case of	collapse	DEF-defenses	DEF-immune	follow-3 <sup>rd</sup> SG
sijasat	tadmi:r	likul	aʕhizat	alzism	taqriban	DEF-virus
policy-PL	destruction	for-all	device-PL	DEF-body	almost	

COVID-19 is ferocious. In most infected people, the immune system is able to defeat the invading virus and cleanse the body of it, but in the event of a collapse of the immune defenses, the virus follows a policy of destroying almost all bodily systems.

A structural metaphor of "the war against COVID-19" is set in Example 16. The structure includes the following correspondences:

- The virus is a fierce attacker.
- The immune system is a defense system.
- The way the virus infects human bodies is a destruction strategy.

- Getting well is defeating the virus.

In Examples 17, 18, and 19, below, the source domain “first line of defense” was mapped onto different target domains.

17. شُكْرًا لَكُمْ خِطِّ الدِّفَاعِ الْأَوَّلِ،، أَجَارِكُمْ اللَّهُ مِنْ هَذَا الْمَرَضِ وَأَعَانَكُمْ عَلَى تَأْدِيَةِ الْأَمَانَةِ  
 fukran lakum xaT ad:ifaʕ alʔaw:al ʔʕarakum al:ah  
 thanks to-you line DEF-defense DEF-first may(he)give-refuge-to Allah  
 min ha ʕa almaraD waʔaʕanakum-ʕala taʔdijat alʔamanah  
 from this DEF-disease and-may(he)-help-you-on perform DEF-fidelity  
 Thank you, the first line of defense. May Allah protect you from this illness and help you to carry out this responsibility.

18. اللقاحات لا تزال فعالة ضده، وهي خط الدفاع الأول لدينا اليوم.  
 al:aqah latazal faʕ:alah Did:ah wahia xaT ad:ifaʕ  
 vaccination-PL still active against-it and-it line DEF-defense  
 alʔaw:al ladina aljaum  
 DEF-first in-our-possession today  
 The vaccine is still effective against it (COVID-19), and it’s our first line of defense.

19. كوفيد . نفسية المريض خط الدفاع الأول  
 Nafsiat almari:D xaT ad:ifaʕ alʔaw:al kufid  
 Psychology-POSS DEF-patient line DEF-defense DEF-first Covid  
 The psychological state of the patient is the first line of defense against COVID-19

Example 17 indicates that the first line of defense is the group of medical workers. However, in Example 18 it is indicated that the first line of defense is the vaccines. Likewise, Example 19 posits that the third target domain of “the first line of defense” is the psychological state of the patient. The different choices of target domains of the first line of defense indicate the message intended to be delivered. This choice also reflects the appropriateness of the point of time of the pandemic, which is picked up in detail later in this paper.

Some nicknames were used to refer to people involved in COVID-19 situations. For example, medical workers were referred to as “champions” and “heroes”, as seen in Examples 20 and 21:

20. ..! انهض يا بطل  
 #كوفيد19 في الكويت #كوفيد19  
 inhaD yabaTəl kruna fi alkuwait  
 get-up VOC-hero Corona in DEF-Kuwait  
 Get up, hero!  
 #CoronaInKuwait #COVID-19

21. !علمتم لماذا نحبيهم في كل مناسبة تحية الأبطال  
 ʕalimtum lima ʕa nuhajj:him fi kul munasabah taʕijat alʔabTal  
 INTERR-know-2<sup>nd</sup>PL why we-salute-them in all occasion salutation-POSS DEF-hero-PL  
 Do you know now why we greet the heroes on every single occasion?

Example 20 is a call to get up indicating the little sleep someone got before and after which there is a heroic responsibility. Example 21 refers to virtual and actual occasions of honoring and greeting medical workers for being heroes during the pandemic.

The people taking the COVID-19 vaccine are referred to as fortified. This is an example of one of the correspondences of the structural metaphor “a vaccine is a fort”. Conceptual metaphor correspondences that are used on Twitter include the following:

- A vaccine is a fort.
- A person taking the vaccine is protected or fortified, to indicate the Arabic derivative.
- The fort protects against the enemy, the virus.

Consider Example 22:

22. (تقرير الأسبوعي للتحصين بلقاح #كوفيد19 في السلطنة (الجرعة الثانية)  
 Taqri:r alʔusbuʕi lit:aʕSi:n bilaqaʕ kufidnainti:n fi  
 Report DEF-weakly of-fortification with-vaccine-POSS COVID-19 in  
 as:alTanah alʕurʕah aθ:anijah

DEF-Sultanate            DEF-dose            DEF-second  
 The weekly report for fortifying with the #COVID-19 vaccination in the sultanate (the second dose)

Example 22 indicates the general vaccination situation.  
 A person who died as a result of getting infected by COVID-19 was referred to as a martyr in Example 23:

23. أسأل الله ان يتقبلك شهيد بوفاتك بهذا المرض.  
 #كوفيد  
 asʔal at:ah ʔan    jataqab:alak    fahi:d    biwafatik    biha ča    almarad    kufid  
 I-ask Allah    that    he-accept-you    martyr    with-you-death    with-this    DEF-disease    Covid  
 May Allah accept you as a martyr for dying from this disease.  
 #COVID

Example 23 indicates the metaphor “a deceased of COVID is a martyr”. This martyr concept follows the long-existent Islamic religious perspective where a deceased of an illness is a martyr.

Reconsidering the application of the “war on COVID-19” metaphor from a diachronic perspective shows some patterns. Table 1, below, highlights that the words “confront”, “hero”, and “fort/fortified” were used most often during the pandemic; likewise, the months 3/2020, 6/2020, 7/2020, and 4/2020 were the months with the highest number of metaphor varieties, also highlighted in Table 1, below:

TABLE 1  
 THE USE OF THE SOURCE DOMAINS FOUND IN COVID-19 WAR METAPHORS DURING THE FIRST TWO YEARS OF THE PANDEMIC BASED ON TWEET USAGE

	2020												2021												
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	
Fend				*	*	*	*				*													5	
Confront			*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*								5
Defeat			*						*		*													5	
Overcome							*			*														2	
Challenge	*																							1	
Direct engage										*														1	
Victory							*																	1	
Battles					*											*								2	
Surrender					*	*																		2	
Assume the throne							*																	1	
resistance						*										*								2	
Alliance			*				*	*									*							4	
(white) army						*	*							*										3	
Defenses			*																					1	
first line of defense																*		*						2	
Collapse			*																					1	
Destruction strategy			*																					1	
Hero			*		*	*		*		*			*	*		*								8	
Fort/fortified		*	*	*						*		*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	17	
Martyr			*								*													2	
	1	1	9	3	5	6	8	3	2	5	3	4	3	4	2	6	3	2	1	1	1	1	1		

According to Table 1, the words mentioned in only one month each are “challenge”, “engage”, “victory”, “assume the throne”, “defenses”, “collapse”, and “destruction strategy”. Moreover, the months with only one war metaphor each are 1/2020, 2/2020, 7/2021, 8/2021, 9/2021, 10/2021, 11/2021, and 12/2021.

The metaphors, “confront”, “hero”, and “fort/fortified”, which were each used in most months of the pandemic, are expected to be more entrenched in the language or more helpful in the understanding of the context than the metaphors used in fewer months. The metaphor “dealing with the pandemic is confronting the pandemic” was created by using the word لمواجهة [limuwazahat] “to confront”, as in Examples 2.

Notice how the diversity of means used to confront the pandemic indicates how this metaphor is entrenched in the language and reused with concepts related to COVID-19 for a better understanding of an expression referring to the pandemic. In addition to this, it is obvious that this metaphor is ontological since it concretizes the abstract pandemic to serve the purpose of making the pandemic easier to refer to.

The metaphor “a medical worker is a hero” which is created using the word بطل [baTal] “hero” was considered above in Examples 20 and 21. The use of the metaphor “a medical worker is a hero” in these examples was used to indicate acknowledgment and appreciation of the service provided during a dangerous situation. Such acknowledgment and appreciation are economically referred to using this metaphor by referring to each medical worker as بطل [baTal] “hero”.

Derivatives of the root حصن [hiSn], or “fort” and its derivatives “fort/fortified” were used to refer to vaccination. Reassess the fort/fortified metaphor tokens considered above in Example 22. This creates the metaphorical structure in which we have a fort, people protecting within the fort, the process of being protected in the fort, and an enemy beyond

the walls of the fort as some of the metaphor correspondences of the vaccine, people protected after receiving the vaccine, the process of administering the vaccine, and COVID-19 as the enemy beyond the walls. There is also ontological utilization of the metaphor since the vaccination is an abstract concept made concrete by metaphorically mapping the “fort” concept onto it.

The questions “Is this a matter of coincidence? Or is/are there (a) reason(s) for such a pattern?” arise when considering the source domains “confront”, “hero”, and “fort/fortified” as being the ones used most in of the months of 2020 and 2021 and more than any other source domains.

To answer these questions, the researcher considered the availability of Twitter tokens where all of the source domains considered in this study are used and found except for the most related of 9, 6, 8, and 6 different metaphor results, respectively.

To answer these questions as part of the methodology, the researcher repeated the search previously done to obtain the COVID-19 metaphors but this time by using the source domain’s Arabic words as the keywords instead of كوفيد-19 or كورونا “COVID-19” or “corona” respectively. The use of the same methodology helped in controlling the respective factors.

The researcher found that most of the one-word source domains were used every month of the years 2020 and 2021 except for the source domain شهيد “martyr”. The most commonly found conceptual metaphors with these source domains were:

- “love is war”
- “a football match is a battle”
- “being emotional is being at war”
- “keep on behaving is fighting a war”

Considering these conceptual metaphors is, however, beyond the scope of this paper.

Finding all the one-word source domains except for شهيد “martyr” indicates that all the one-word source domains are appropriate for a general structure of the “war” metaphor. A proposed reason for the source domain شهيد “martyr” being an appropriate correspondence within the metaphorical structure of “COVID-19 is an enemy of war” is that in real war death can be the result, thereby making it similar to the conceptual “war against COVID-19”.

The phrase size source domains were not searched for as it was infeasible due to the low probabilities of finding derivatives of each word in a group of words. In other words, to get such probability, researchers would need to multiply the numbers of potential derivatives of the individual words in the phrase by one another.

Moreover, this excludes the possibility of these source domains being generally more common than the others, which calls for a different explanation. As all the one-word source domains are entrenched in the language, the source domains “confront”, “hero”, and “fort/fortified” have semantic advantages over the rest according to the following:

First, the word “confront” indicates the initial stage of dealing with the virus physically such as by using masks and sanitizers, conceptually using science, and being psychologically ready for it, for example. After the development of the vaccine, this confrontation indicates using the means of getting vaccinated as a weapon against the enemy. As for the word “hero”, it is different from other source domains that are used to refer to entities and people in our examples such as “ally” and “martyr” in that it has a meaning that can be generalized to any admired person. This is the part that implies conceptual entrenchment and linguistic usage generality. Finally, the word “fort/fortified” being commonly used can be attributed mainly to the vaccination process as it was the word most often used to refer to vaccination. Consider the data in Table 2.

TABLE 2  
THE NUMBER OF GOOGLE RESULTS OF THREE OF THE MOST COMMON EXPRESSIONS TO REFER TO THE PROCESS OF VACCINATION IN ARABIC

words	The number of results
تحصين	123000
تلقيح	120400
تطعيم	205300

The three most commonly used expressions to refer to the process of vaccination were تحصين [taḥSin], تلقيح [talqih], and تطعيم [taṭʿim]. The word تحصين [taḥSin] is a result of a metaphorical mapping using the source domain حصن “fort” [hiSn], as discussed above. The word تلقيح [talqih] is a derivative of a common name of the vaccine, i.e. لقاح [laqlh]. And the word تطعيم [taṭʿim] is the official word used for this process.<sup>2</sup> Although the word تحصين [taḥSin] is neither an official term nor a derivative of the word for “vaccine”, it is used a little more than the derivative and about two-thirds of the total number of times the official term is used. This goes against the expected usage of the word تحصين [taḥSin] indicating that this source domain is being established in the language due to being entrenched in the minds of the users. Once a metaphor is entrenched, using it is more economical to promote a better understanding of the concept.

The months with more varieties of metaphors are proposed to be the ones when stages of the pandemic were more in more of expressing meaning than other months. Those months are March, June, and July of 2020, and April of 2021. Consulting the World Health Organization (WHO) website and the Macmillan Learning timeline, the researcher posits

<sup>2</sup> The label “official” indicates the use of the term in official websites such as the Arabic ministries of health for vaccination in general.

that, in March 2020, COVID-19 was declared a global pandemic by the WHO. These occurrences aroused the emotions of Tweeters as reflected by the number of different metaphors used. In June 2020, infection rates had started to go down before rising again as U.S. borders prepared to reopen. This is also proposed to have been a motivating factor for the use of a variety of metaphors about the “war on COVID-19”. In July 2020, the United States broke the record of daily cases and large-scale testing started. April 2021 was the period<sup>3</sup> when millions of vaccine doses were administered throughout different Arabic-speaking countries.

In January and February of 2020, the number of metaphors was only 1. This can be attributed to the period before the declaration of the pandemic. Furthermore, after June 2021 the metaphors used were only derivatives of the root *حصن* [hiSn] “fort”. This is attributed to the situation when vaccination was the means of “defeating”, “confronting”, and “overcoming” the virus for months.

Consider Table 3 for a general summary of situations during the first two years of the pandemic.

TABLE 3  
SUMMARY OF THE MAIN SITUATIONS PER MONTH IN THE FIRST TWO YEARS OF THE PANDEMIC

2020	1	1	Virus outbreak	2021	1	3	Vaccines available to first responders
	2	1	Announcement of the official name		2	4	
	3	9	WHO declares COVID-19 a pandemic/Border sealed		3	2	
	4	3	One million cases worldwide		4	6	During the stage of vaccination
	5	5			5	3	
	6	6	Infection rates start to go down but then climbed up as borders prepared to reopen		6	2	
	7	8	U.S. breaks records of daily cases, large scale of testing begins		7	1	Delta variant in 65 countries
	8	3			8	1	
	9	2	One million deaths worldwide		9	1	4.5 million deaths/5.8 million doses of the vaccines administered
	10	5			10	1	
	11	3			11	1	Omicron as a new variant
	12	4	Emergency use of the Pfizer vaccine		12	1	

As for March, April, August, September, October, November, and December of 2022 in addition to January, February, March, May, June, July, August, September, October, November, and December of 2023, consider the following:

- The pandemic situation was about numbers, i.e., the number of infected cases or deaths and the number of countries where a variant is recorded, which might not be very surprising as they gradually reached these numbers.
- The situation was about the non-public use of the vaccine.
- There were new variants identified during the respective period.

## V. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This study reiterates what many of the previous studies found – the war conceptual metaphor in relation to COVID-19 is the most prominent one. Those previous studies concluded that using this war metaphor is to indicate being relieved of responsibility, holding people responsible for getting infected, legitimizing measurements, euphemizing implications, or de-emphasizing the situation (Olimat, 2020; Molnár et al., 2020; Chatti, 2021; Schnepf & Christmann, 2022, and others). Those conclusions were claimed to carry respective illocutions. However, claiming this indicates that conventionalized metaphors, as figured by the very common use of the metaphor, are introduced to language intentionally as opposed to naturally and gradually. This perspective goes against the characteristics of conceptual metaphors that need to be used over and over to become conventional (Kövecses, 2010). In our case, the war metaphor in relation to COVID-19 is an extension of the already existing mapping of the war metaphor in relation to situations of struggle. This extension theory was proposed by Lakoff (1993) and later reintroduced by Kövecses (2002). This explains the abrupt conventionalization of “war” in relation to COVID-19 metaphors as all components of the metaphor except for the target domain have already been conventional (Cameron & Deignan, 2006). This is not to contradict some conclusions of the previous studies that the war metaphor serves the purposes of raising awareness of the urgency of the situation and bringing about a sense of responsibility, for example.

In the current study, the researcher found many war metaphor correspondences in relation to COVID-19. These correspondences are:

When comparing these correspondences to the ones found in other studies, the researcher found some similarities and some differences. Wicke and Bolognesi (2020), for example, listed the source domains used in the mapping as “fight”, “war”, “combat”, “threat”, “battle”, “frontline”, “military”, “peace”, “attack”, “enemy”, “defeat”, “violence”, “army”, “attack”, “struggle”, “resist”, “soldiers”, “weapon”, “victory”, “troops”, “defend”, and “destruction”. Most of these

<sup>3</sup> During other months, the vaccine doses were also given; however, I mentioned this in the analysis due to lack of other reasons for this pattern that could be proposed instead.

metaphors are found in the current study, either explicitly or implicitly, except for “threat”, “peace”, “violence”, “attack”, and “struggle”.

In another study, Chatti (2021) proposes some metaphorical correspondences. Several of the correspondences Chatti found were also found while looking into the data at hand. The matching correspondences are: “enemy”, “invasion”, “soldiers”, and “weapons”. The rest of them are not found in Tweets which can be attributed to them referring to specific people, things, and places and are not expected to occur in such a limited space as in the case of Tweets.

A few previous studies were found to indicate diachronic representations of metaphors. For example, Gui (2021) found that “war” started to be conceptualized as a “preventive war” and eventually as a “total war” due to the development of the pandemic situation.

In another study, Taylor and Kidgell (2021) found that viruses in different decades were structured as reproducing, rampant, and evolving in the 1890s, 1910s, and 2000s, respectively.

In the current study, the researcher found some patterns with regard to the months and the source domains of the war metaphor. During January and February of 2020, the metaphors used that related to war were not varied, i.e., one metaphor was used during each month. This can be because the pandemic situation had not been declared yet. This brings us to the drastic increase in the number of metaphors used during March 2020. Being the month when the pandemic was declared, nine different metaphors were used then. This is significant because it is the highest number of metaphors found in one month throughout 2020 and 2021. During June 2020, the number of infected cases started going down in addition to being the month when the U.S. borders were about to open. Nonetheless, in June 2020, the United States broke the record for the most infected cases and large-scale testing was in full swing. Finally, in April 2021, the COVID-19 vaccine was administered to millions.

Moreover, three of the source domains about war in relation to COVID-19 were used in more than five months, and they are “confront”, “hero”, and “fort/fortified”. The researcher proposed that the reasons for using them in more months than any of the other metaphors were used is that they are one-word source domains and their meanings are not expected to be limited to a certain stage of the pandemic but generalized to all the stages of it.

Finally, considering the war metaphor and its related concepts throughout recent history will be a rich source of conceptual/linguistic patterns for future researchers.

Note:

Glossing and Transcription appendices can be found online at:

<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1yk04DkWelBatnvQe61whAj5rJO99b0dMmnyFpPCGnP8/edit?usp=sharing>

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