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Investigating Metaphors of COVID-19 – in Related English Texts

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Article Information	Abstract
  Correspondence: E-mail: Mazin.fawzi70@uomosul.edu.iq	This study investigates metaphors in COVID-19- related English texts. The study shows an overview on how people are suffer from pandemic and its negative effects, it is not preferable to talk about COVID-19 always explicitly. Metaphorical expressions assist in conveying meaning successfully. They are essential in transferring message of text appropriately and successfully for they are capable of adding force to the meaning conveyed. Study utilized Conceptual Metaphor Theory by Lakoff and Jonson (1980) as a model to analyze chosen data. Conceptual Metaphor Theory has been adapted by adding frames and mind maps to simplify metaphorical project from source domain onto target domain. Data are selected from English social media like Twitter, Facebook, and other websites like medical websites, online articles and journals concerning pandemic expressions related to metaphors. Ten English COVID-19 metaphorical expressions have been chosen for analysis. It is found that virus has been used as an Abstract Target Domain. Also, it is found that Concrete Source Domains (Fire) and (war) are the most frequent ones and they occurred five times separately out of total number of data.

استقصاء الاستعارات المتعلقة بفايروس كورونا التاجي في النصوص الانكليزية

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المستخلص

تستقصي هذه الدراسة الاستعارات في النصوص الإنكليزية المتعلقة بالفايروس التاجي المستجد (كوفيد−١٩). تلقي هذه الدراسة الضوء على معاناة الناس من الجائحة وتأثيراتها السلبية، حيث انه ليس من المستحب الحديث عن كوفيد−19 بصورة واضحة وقاسية دائماً. كما وتساعد التعبيرات الاستعارية على نقل المعنى بشكل صحيح. تعتبر هذه التعبيرات هي الاداة الجوهرية لنقل رسالة النص بصورة مناسبة وبشكل صحيح بحيث تكون قادرة على اضافة القوة والمتانة للمعنى المراد نقله .

تستخدم هذه الدراسة نظرية الاستعارة المفاهيمية كأداة لتحليل العينات المختارة. تم تعديل هذه النظرية بإضافة الخرائط الذهنية والأطر الدلالية لدعم تحليل العينات وتسهيل الإسقاط الإستعاري من المجال المصدر على المجال المستهدف. تم اختيار العينات من مواقع التواصل الانكليزية مثل تويتر وفيسبوك وبعض صفحات الويب الطبية والمقالات والجرائد التي تضم التعبيرات الاستعارية المتعلقة بالجائحة . تم اختيار عشرون تعبير استعاري انكليزي يخص كوفيد−19 للتحليل. وجدت هذه الدراسة بأن الفايروس تم استخدامه كمجال مستهدف مجرد، كما وجد ايضا بأن المجالان للمصادر الملموسة او المادية (النار) و (الحرب) هما الاكثر تكرارا؛ فقد تم تكرارهما خمس مرات كل على حدي ضمن العدد الكلي للعينات.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الاستعارة، كوفيد−19، الادراكي، نظرية الاستعارة.

1. Introduction

While people are suffering from the pandemic and its negative effects, it is not preferable to talk about COVID-19 always explicitly. People need to communicate positively and support each other by manipulating the language they use. In order to debate such a sensitive issue, they need metaphor to approximate ideas and directions to the community by using positive metaphors at a time and negative ones at another, depending on the context in which they are used.

Metaphorical expressions assist in conveying the meaning successfully. They are essential in transferring the message of the text appropriately and successfully for they are capable of adding force to the meaning conveyed. If they are well understood, they will do their job in the best way, and readers will receive the message successfully. However, if metaphorical expressions are not well received by readers who may take them at their face value, a problem may arise and misunderstanding may turn up.

The data are selected from English social media like Twitter and Facebook, and other websites like medical websites and online articles and journals concerning the pandemic expressions related to metaphors. Twenty English COVID-19 metaphorical expressions have been chosen for analysis.

The model used in the present study is eclectic, consisting of three models adapted to suit the purpose of the study, they are: Conceptual Metaphor Theory by Lakoff & Jonson (1980) , Image Schema Theory by Jonson (1987) and Encyclopaeidc theory by Vyvyan Evans, Melanie C. Green (2006).

2. Metaphor: Definitions and Views:

Metaphor, as the *Encyclopedia Britannica* (Metaphor | Definition & Examples | Britannica, 2017) puts it, is a "figure of speech that implies comparison between two unlike entities, as distinguished from simile, an explicit comparison signaled by the words 'like' or 'as' ". Metaphor is defined as "an expression which describes a person or an object in a literary way by referring to something that is considered to have similar characteristics to the person or subject you are trying to describe". In this definition, and unlike the one before, metaphor is not conceptualized as a figure of speech, but as a 'literary way'. Besides, in this definition there is no clear-cut distinction between simile and metaphor; there is an overlap between the two definitions (Salem, 2014: 68).

Wilkinson (2008: xi) refers to metaphor as "a means of expressing one thing in terms of something else, as if someone were to say 'it`s no use crying over spilt milk' to a friend uselessly laminating something lost beyond recall". Similarly, Semino defines metaphor as "the phenomenon whereby we talk and, potentially, think about something in terms of something else" (Semino, 2008: 5). The definitions of Wilkinson and Semino do not confirm that there is a fundamental element of similarity, on which the metaphoric structure lies. The definitions are too general; all other speech characters may fall within the concept of metaphor following theses definitions. Idioms and proverbs can also be used as metaphors (Salem, 2014: 68).

Dickins (2005: 228) defines metaphor as "a figure of speech in which a word or a phrase is used in a non-basic sense suggesting a likeness or analogy with another more basic sense of the same word or phrase". Again, in this

definition, metaphor is not necessarily distinguished from simile. Kövecses refers to metaphor as "a figure of speech in which one thing is compared to another by saying that one is the other, as in 'He is a lion' " (Kövecses, 2002: vii). It may imply the metaphor exclusively refers to phrases with a subject, a verb "to be" and a predicate. A statement such as 'the lion' will not be a metaphor, where 'Lion' applies to 'a specific orator.' By analyzing closely these distinct meanings, we find they have a lot in common and that they validate the following information on metaphor, its characteristics and its components together:

- It is a figure of speech.

- It is based on a likeness between two entities.

- The entities can be people or objects.

- The type of comparison is implicit, i.e. comparative is not used.

- The literal meaning of words is changed.

- Metaphor may involve one word or a phrase.

- Metaphor is a cognitive phenomenon used in thinking

These functions allow us to establish a modern and more full definition of metaphor: Metaphor is a cognitive figure of speech based on an abstract similarity between two distinct entities (without any comparative particle) in which the literal meaning is shifted.

To sum up the above metaphor definitions, we can assume that the metaphor at least includes the following in its narrow meaning:

1. A comparison.

2. This comparison being implied (there is no preposition/particle of comparison).

3. The comparison being between entities that are originally unalike.

4. The use of a word or phrase in a non-literal meaning (Salem, 2014: 70).

In the wide sense, metaphor covers all figures of speech. In this study 'metaphor' will be used in the narrow sense only.

3.The Effectiveness of Metaphor:

Metaphor is effective when :

(a) the source domain calls to mind a salient knowledge structure (or feeling).

(b) this knowledge is well known to speakers of the linguistic community.

(c) the comparison of the target to the source domain is apt in a given culture (Flusberg et al., 2018: 4).

In contrast, metaphor is inefficient where the source domain does not bring to mind a salient structure (or feelings), when understanding the nature of a source domain, or its emotional social context, has limited scope, or when the comparison of a target domain to the source domain is not suitable (Ibid).

4. Conceptual Metaphor Theory

This paradigm was suggested in their 1980 book *Metaphors We Live By* by George Lakoff and Mark Johnson for the first time and was elaborated in a number of later works. The CMT has been one of the first cognitive semantic enterprise theoretical framings, and it supplied much of the early theoretical motivation for the cognitive approach. The primary premise of the theory of conceptual metaphor is that metaphor is not just a stylistic characteristic of language; rather the thought itself is metaphorically essential in nature. According to this perspective, conceptual structure is organized by 'cross-domain mapping' or correspondence between conceptual domains. Some of

these mappings occur because of pre-conceptual experiences and others build on them to make more sophisticated conceptual structures. For example, we can think and speak about QUANTITY as a VERTICAL ELEVATION, as in *She got a really high mark in the test*, where *high* does not literally refer to physical height but a good mark. According to CMT, that is because the 'conceptual domain' QUANTITY is conventionally constructed and so interpreted in terms of conceptual domain VERTICAL ELEVATION. Conceptual activities requiring mappings are more commonly known as "conceptual projection" such as conceptual metaphor. The assertions claimed by conceptual metaphor theorists like Lakoff and Johnson and their colleagues link directly to two of the essential assumptions connected with cognitive semantics. The first is 'the embodied cognition thesis' that contains the conceptual structure based on the embodied experience, and the second is 'that semantic structure reflects the conceptual structure' (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980).

5.Data Analysis

Text (1): "Poet May Sarton says that without the **darkness**, nothing comes to **birth**, as without **light** nothing **flowers**. He considered the **COVID-19** virus and its consequences; he could not help but remember how the light kept peeking through the dark clouds."
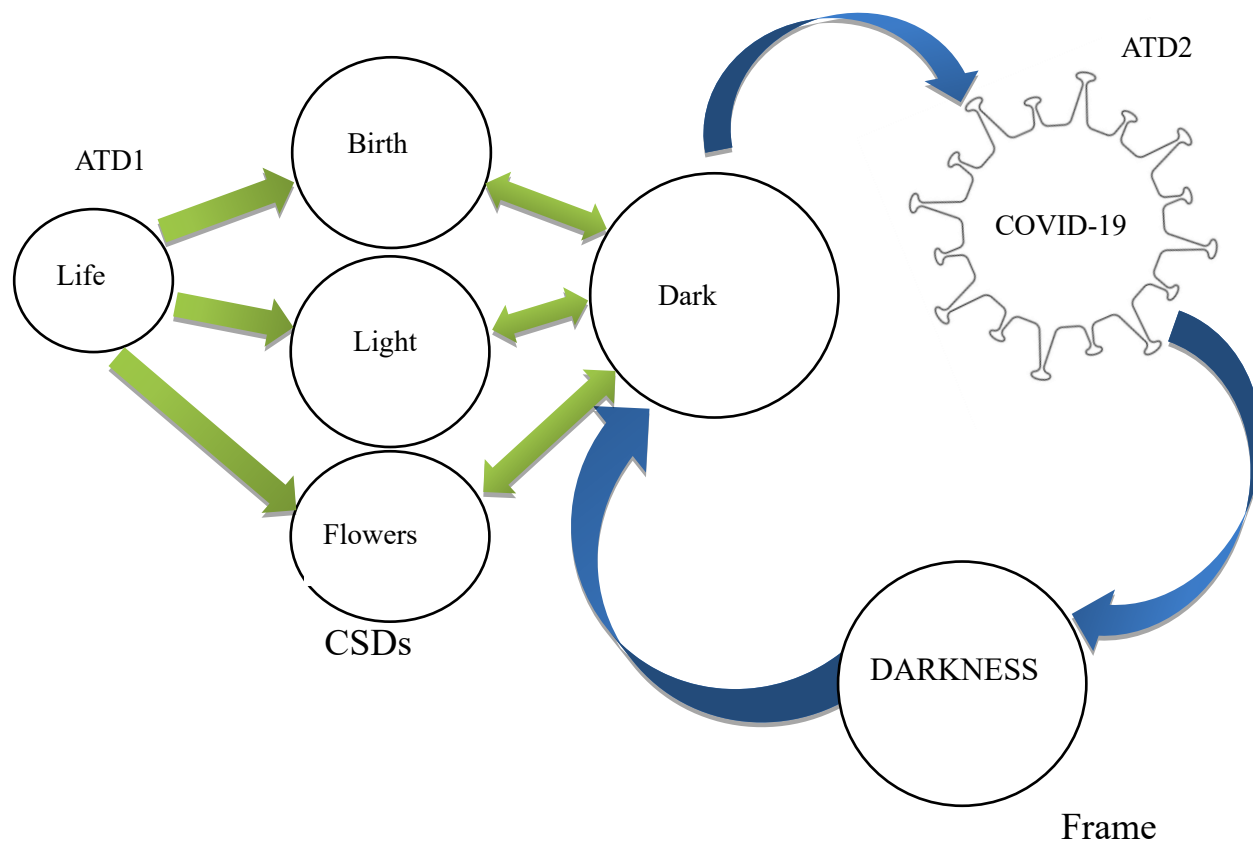
Figure (1) Analysis of text (1)

Discussion:

The poet makes an implicit comparison between COVID-19 and the natural circle of daily life. We can derive further knowledge about the given metaphorically used set of elements in the source domains. This additional kind of source domain knowledge is the 'metaphorical inference'. The metaphorical inferences of this text are: COVID-19 IS DARKNESS and THE LIFE WITHOUT COVID-19 IS THE BIRTH, THE LIGHT AND THE FLOWERING. We conceptualise the abstract target domain or ATD2 (COVID-19) in terms of the concrete source domain or CSD (Darkness) and the abstract source domain or ATD1 (Life) in terms of (Birth, Light, Flowering).

Text (2): "In April 2020, when new daily infections were increasing fast on Rhode Island, New York Times article described it as "a state where the **coronavirus** is a **fire raging**."
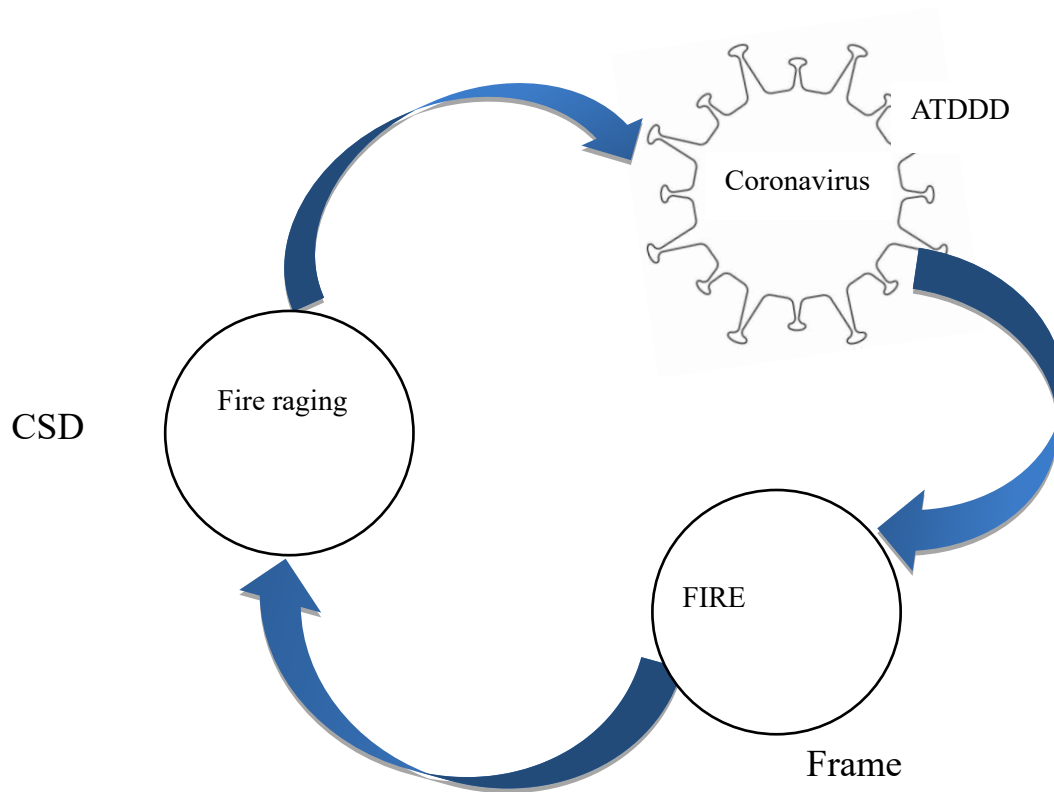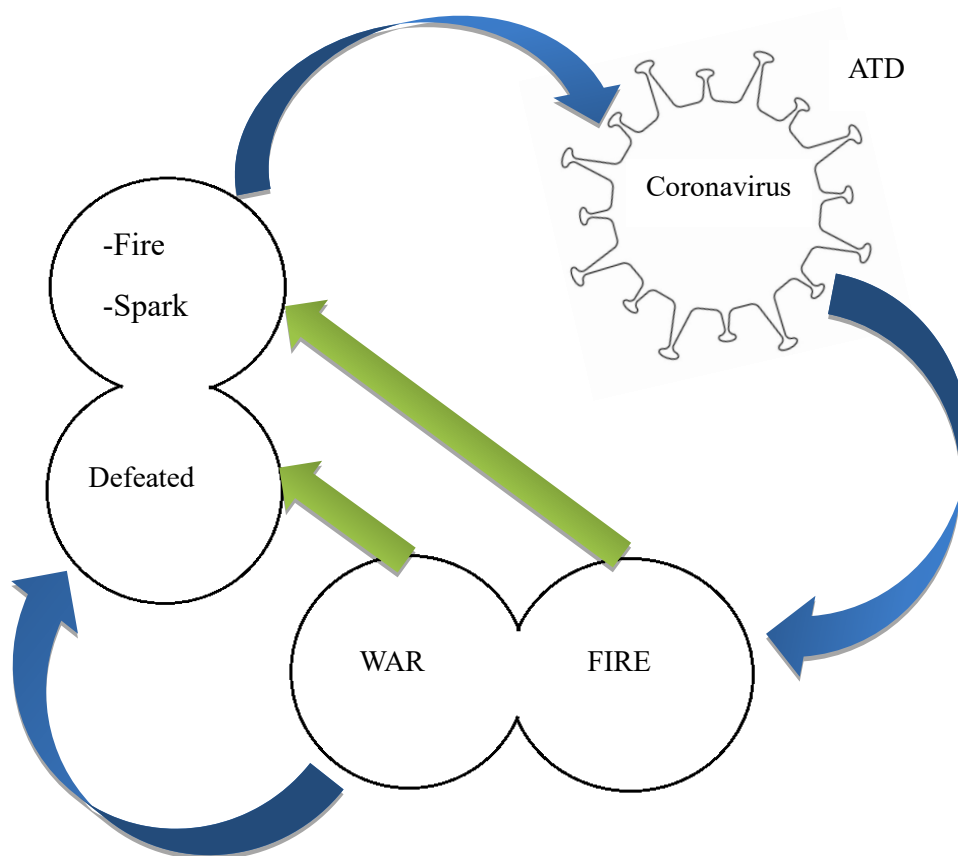

Figure (2) Analysis of text (2)

Discussion:

The metaphorical entailment in this sample is: CORONAVIRUS IS A FIRE RAGING where the ATD (Coronavirus) is described in terms of the CSD (Fire raging).

Text (3) : "In May 2020, the Irish Prime Minister stated that, in Ireland, the **coronavirus** was a **fire** in retreat but not **defeated** ... we must **extinguish every spark**, **quench every ember**."

Frames
Figure (3) Analysis of text (3)

Discussion:

As this text illustrates, the meanings associated with the metaphorical words often draw upon the advanced experience of knowledge. The metaphorical entailments are: CORONAVIRUS IS A FIRE, SPARK AND EMBER where the ATD (Coronavirus) is conceptualised in terms of the CSDs. (Fire, Spark, Ember), and CORONAVIRUS IS AN ENEMY where the CSD (Defeated) is mapped onto the ATD (Coronavirus).

Text (4) : In late March 2020, Medscape (Medical Journal) is describing the situation of the pandemic by saying: "**people** are **trees** that provide **fuel** to a **forest fire** driven by **wind**."
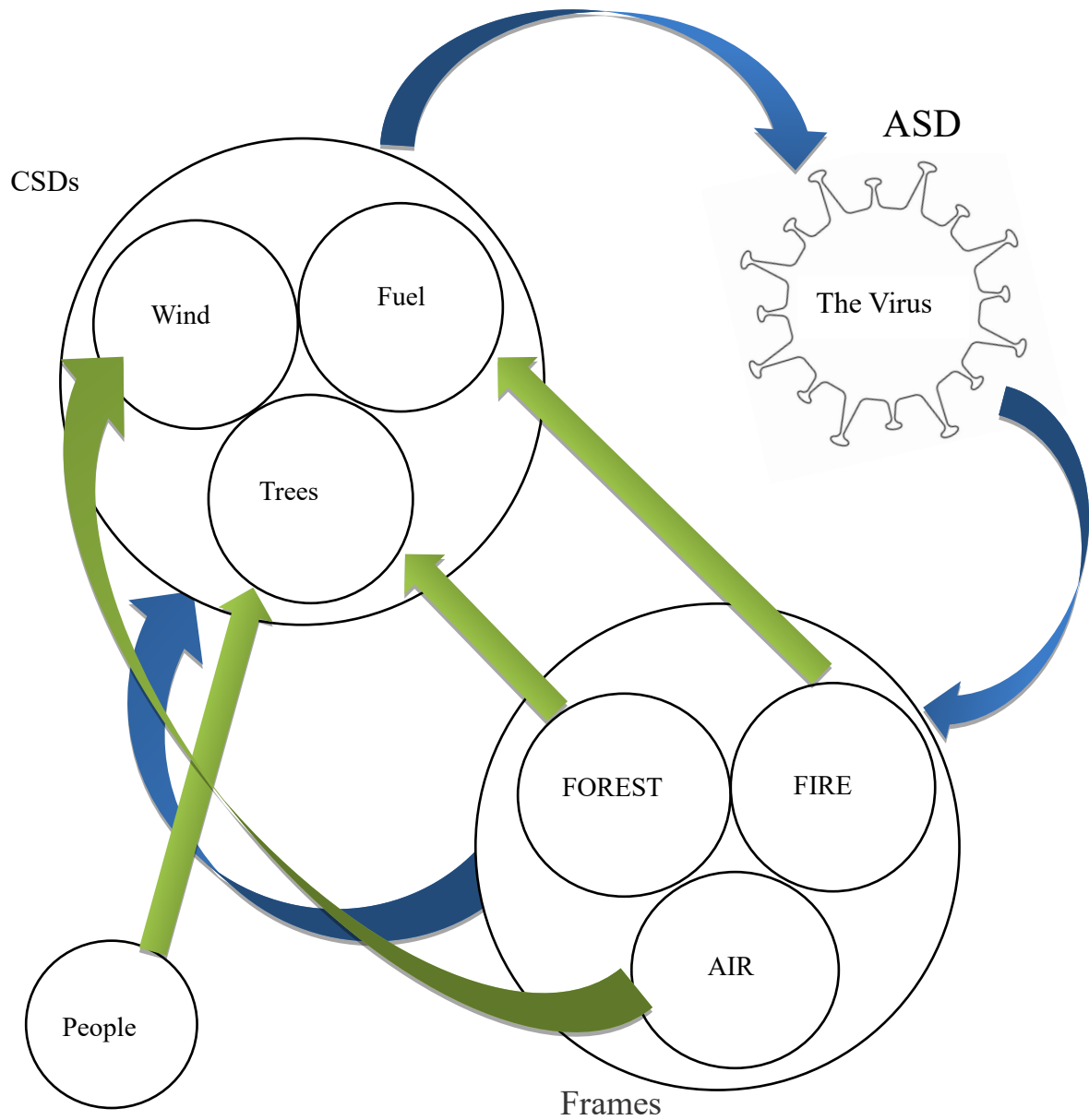

Figure (4) Analysis of text (4)

Discussion :

The metaphorical inferences of this text are that: PEOPLE ARE TREES and THE VIRUS IS FIRE, as (People) and (The virus) are conceptualised in terms of (Trees) and (Fire) respectively. (Trees, Fuel, Wind) are CSDs. Derived from the non-war frames: FOREST, FIRE and AIR through the pandemic.

A few **fire** "**Text (5) :** In Medscape, Dr. Wilson in 2020 is talking to people : **lines** _quarantines and social distancing measures_ keep **the fire** from hitting all "the **trees**.
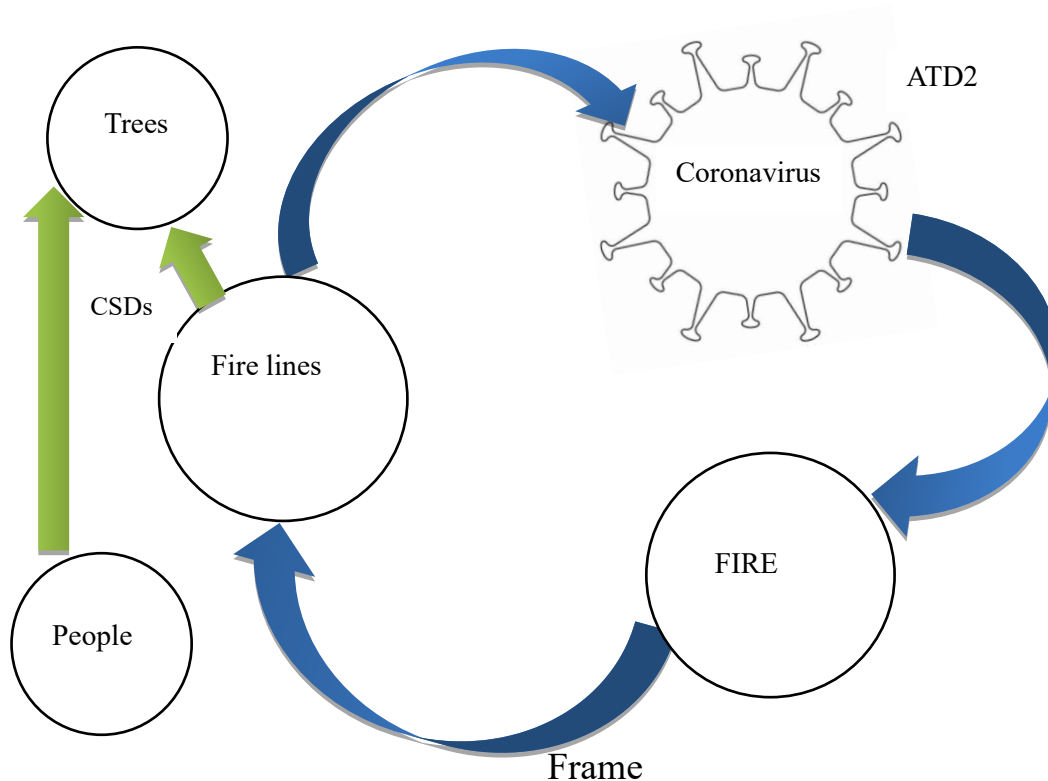

Figure (5) Analysis of text (5)

Discussion:

The text holds three metaphorical entailments: PEOPLE ARE TREES, CORONAVIRUS IS FIRE and FIRE LINES ARE QUARANTINES AND

SOCIAL DISTANCING MEASURES, as (Trees, Fire, Fire lines) are CSDs conceptualised as a metaphorical structure in terms of the ATDs (People, Coronavirus, Quarantines and social distancing measures) respectively.

Text (6): "Healthcare workers are inevitably positioned as firefighters who run into raging blazes for the sake of everyone else, plus, our **firefighters** would no longer be **overwhelmed**."
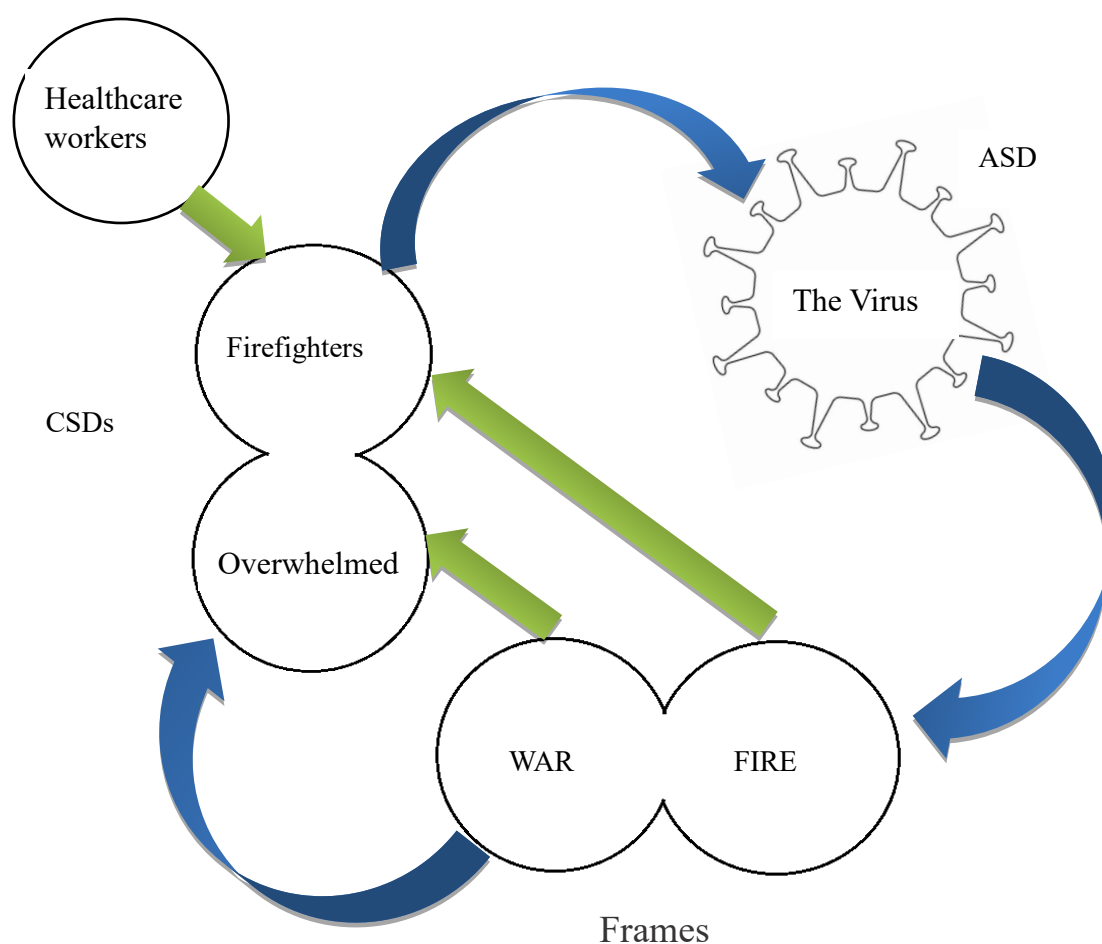

Frames

Figure (6) Analysis of text (6)

Discussion:

Starting from the metaphorical inferences: HEALTHCARE WORKERS ARE FIREFIGHTERS where the TD1 (Healthcare workers) is conceptualised in

terms of (Firefighters), and THE VIRUS IS ENEMY where the CSDs (firefighters, overwhelmed) activate the conceptual structure of the cognition of the ATD2 (The virus) .

Text (7) : "If this **virus** were **a physical assailant**, **an unexpected and invisible mugger** -which I can tell you from personal experience, it is- then this is the moment when we have begun together to **wrestle** it to the floor."
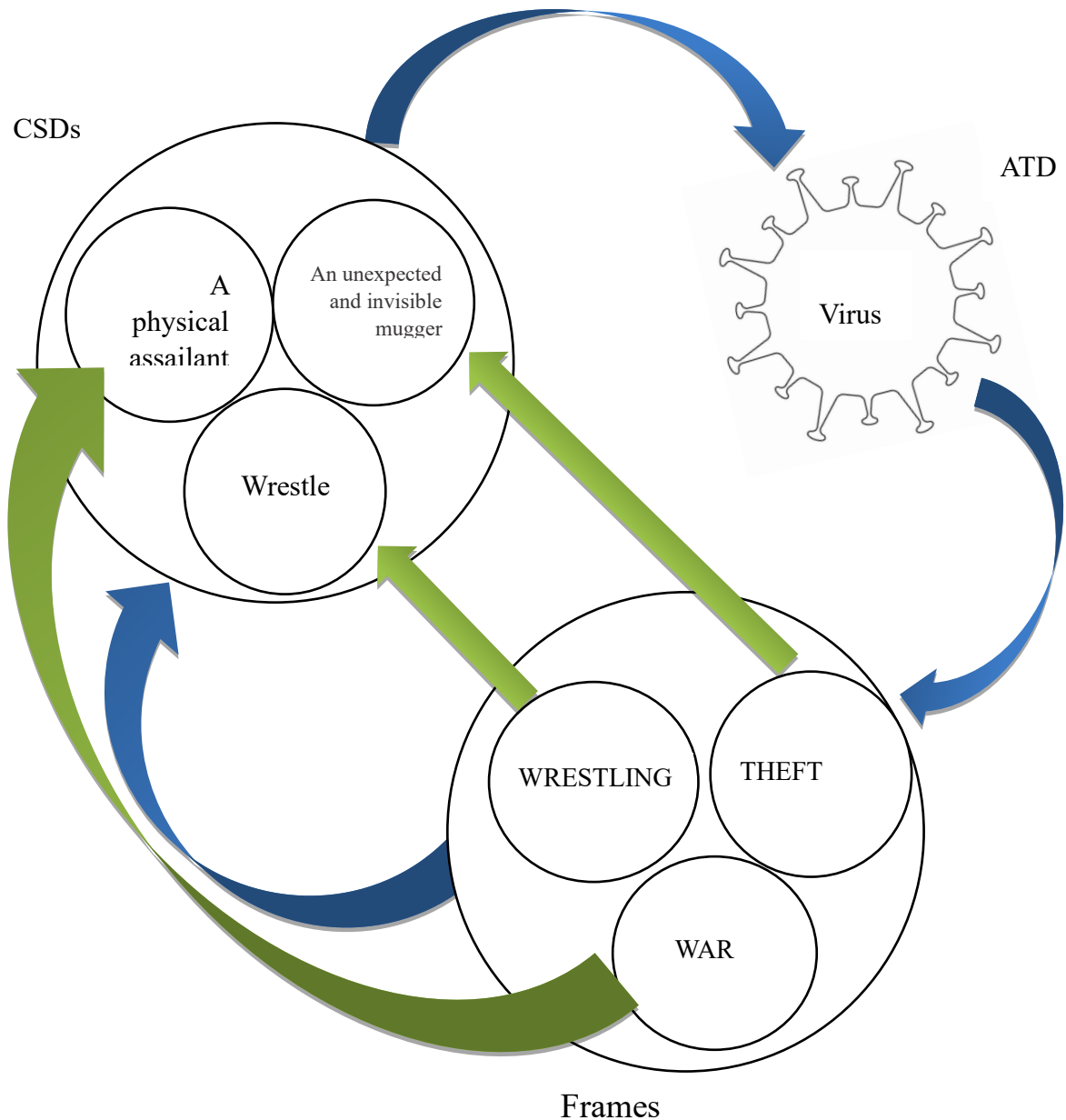

Frames
Figure (7) Analysis of text (7)

Discussion:

Starting with the metaphorical entailments which are embodied in the text: THE VIRUS IS AN UNEXPECTED AND INVISIBLE MUGGER, THE VIRUS IS A PHYSICAL ASSAILANT and THE VIRUS IS WRESTLER, it is a metaphorical way to think and talk about the virus in terms of (enemy) where the CSDs (an unexpected and invisible mugger, a physical assailant, wrestle) refer to an existing enemy. The conceptual projections from the CSDs (an unexpected and invisible mugger, a physical assailant, wrestle) are mapped onto the mental ATD (Virus) to form the conceptual metaphor.

Text (8):

The more we learn about the **coronavirus** the more questions arise, we are " "**learning** while we are **sailing**.
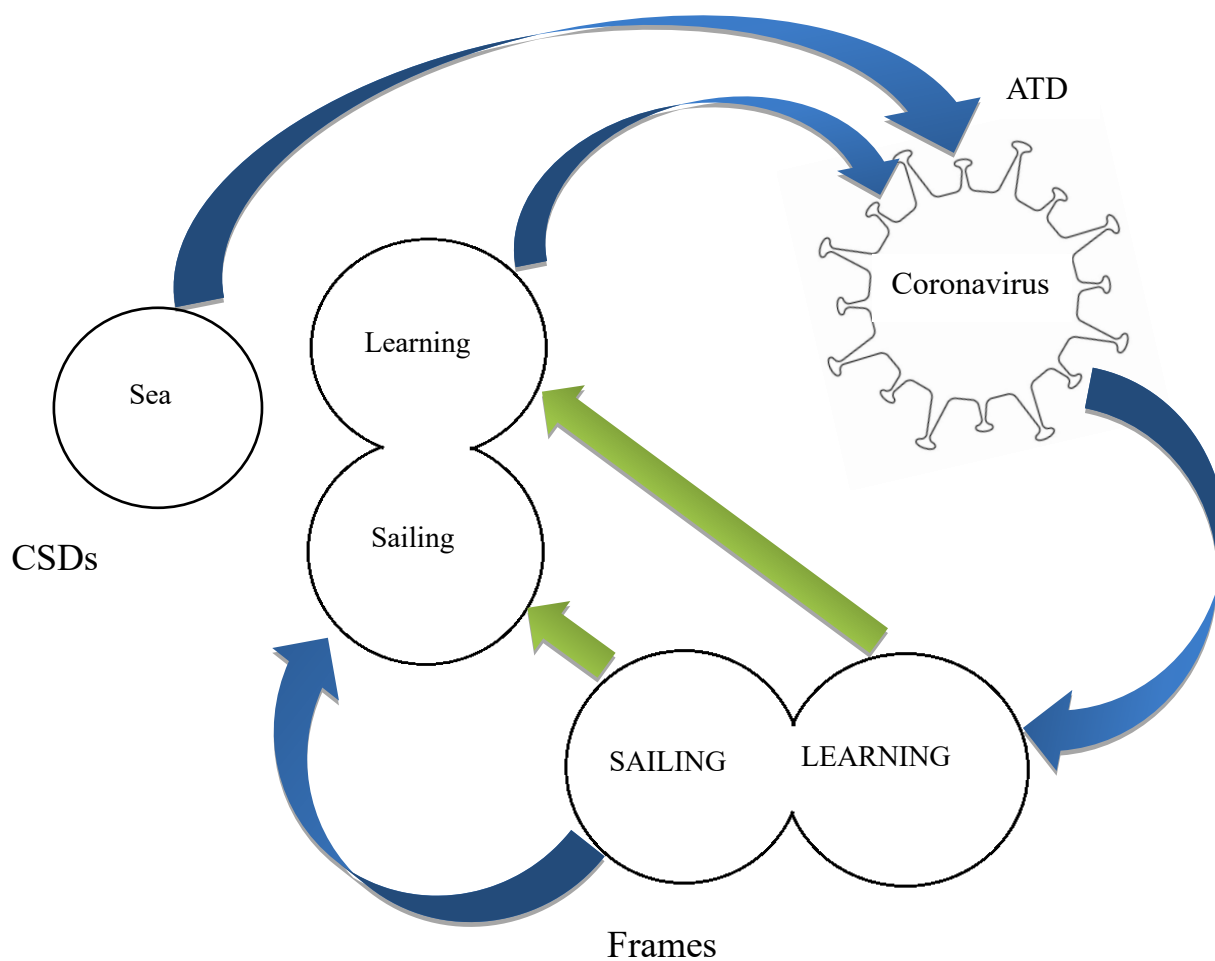

Frames
Figure (8) Analysis of text (8)

Discussion:

The text employs a metaphorical inference: CORONAVIRUS IS A LEARNING PROCESS AND SAILING, as the ATD (Coronavirus) evoked by the CSDs (Learning, Sailing).

Text (9) :

In Lebanon, lockdown is the **last line** of **defence** against **a Tsunami** of "
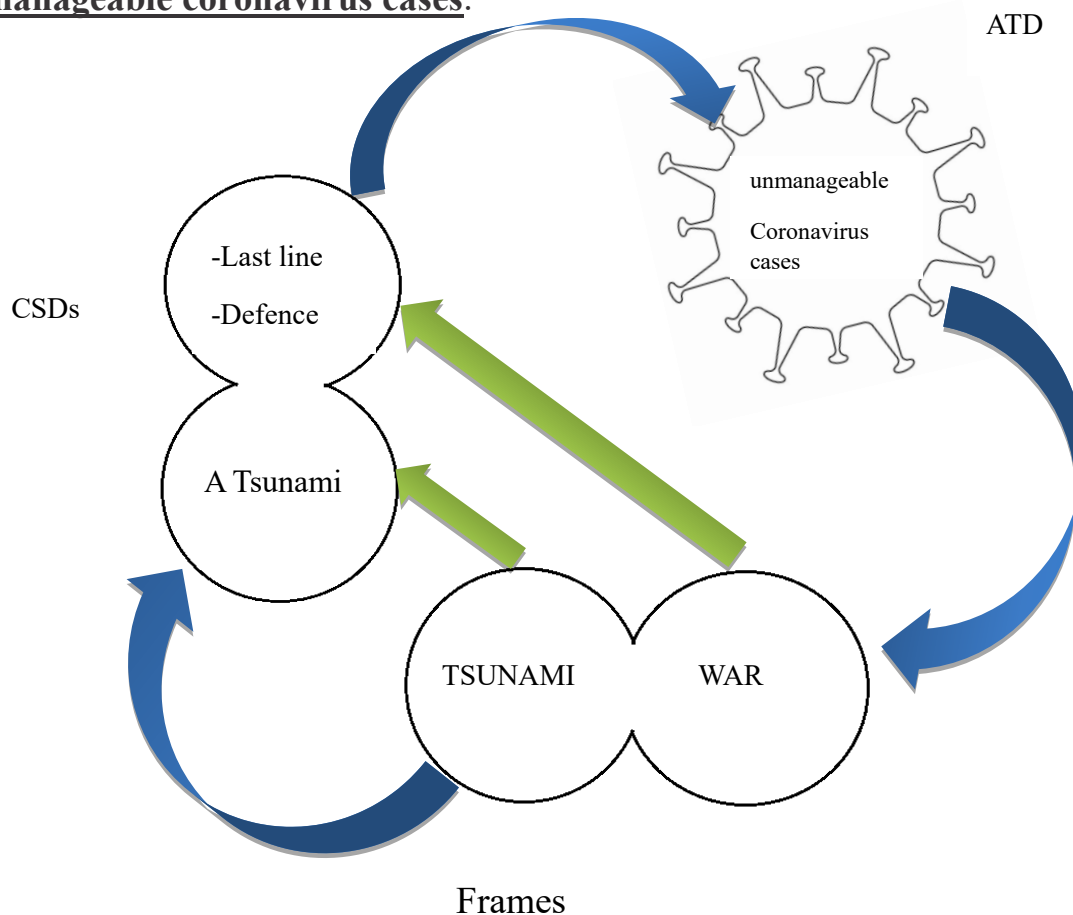
"**unmanageable coronavirus cases**.

Figure (9) Analysis of text (9)

Discussion:

In the metaphorical entailments: CORONAVIRUS CASES ARE ENEMIES AND TSUNAMI, the mappings allow us to understand the ATD (unmanageable coronavirus cases) in terms of the CSDs (War) and (Tsunami).

Text (10) : "London hospitals **facing tsunami** of **coronavirus cases**. Also heard reports comparing the preparing phase to **the ocean** is receding and we can see **all the fish flopping on the beach**."
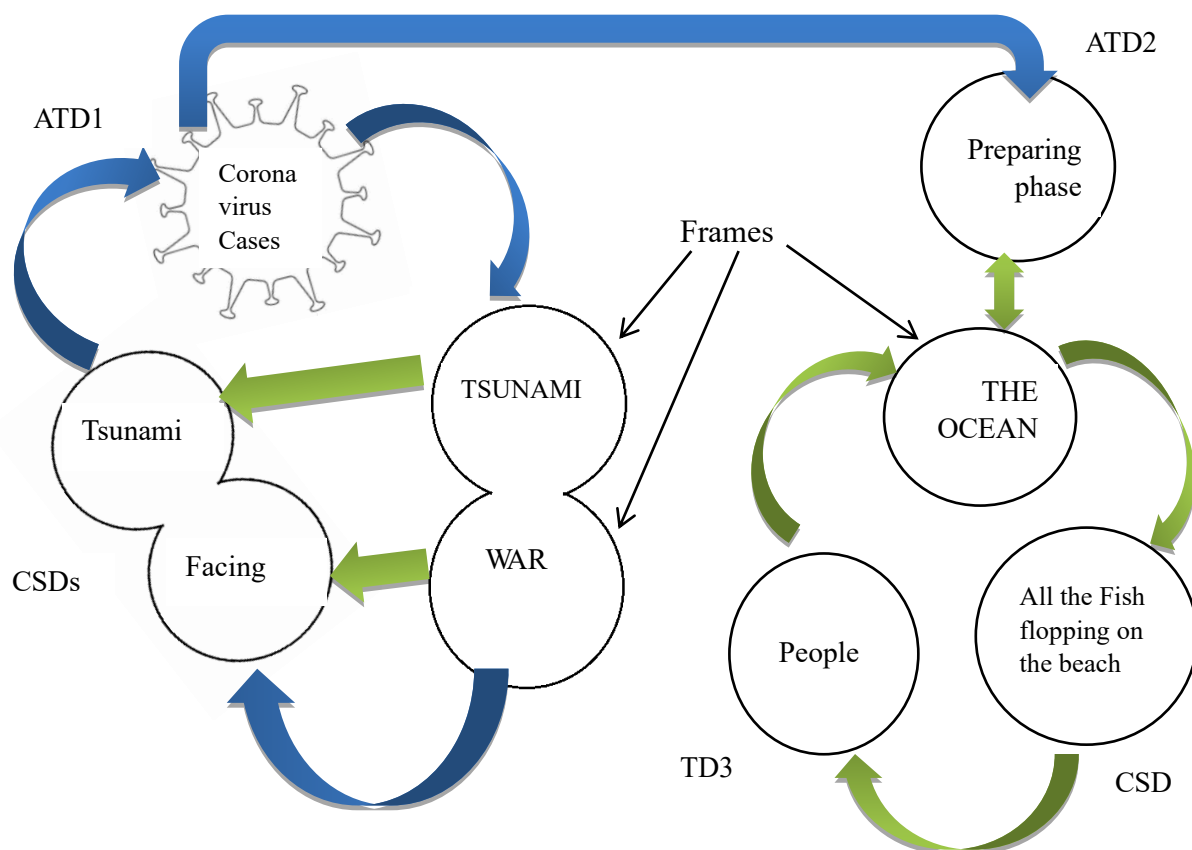

Figure (10) Analysis of text (10)

Discussion:

This is a very complicated text full of war and non-war metaphors: CORONAVIRUS CASES ARE ENEMIES AND TSUNAMI, PREPARING PHASE IS OCEAN and PEOPLE ARE FISH, where ATD (Coronavirus cases) is understood in terms of the CSDs (Facing, Tsunami), and the ATD (Preparing phase) is conceptualised in terms of (The ocean) while the last mapping structure of the ATD (People) is structured in terms of (Fish) .

6. Conclusions

The analysis has shown that samples use metaphors by making a comparison between the virus and one or more things. The Abstract Target Domain is (The virus) while the Concrete Source Domain represents the other things that the virus compares to. In addition, the results have found that the CSD and the frames (FIRE) and (WAR) are used five times separately out of the total number of the data besides other CSDs and frames. Some familiar properties of those frames are utilized to represent the virus.

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