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THE POWER OF BELLICOSE RHETORIC: METAPHORS IN THE CROATIAN PUBLIC DISCOURSE

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The use of metaphors often characterizes contemporary public discourses on various issues. By the same token, metaphors have been used extensively in the discourse on the COVID-19 pandemic. This paper examines the WAR metaphor as a framing and rhetorical device with distinct persuasive potency within the Croatian sociocultural context. The analysis shows that militaristic metaphors were omnipresent in the Croatian public discourse at the beginning of the pandemic. Their dual role, explanatory and persuasive, was instrumental in convincing the public to understand the pandemic and accept the restrictive mandates put in place.

Key words: *conceptual metaphor; COVID-19 pandemic; military rhetoric; public discourse; Croatia*

1. Introduction

Research in the Croatian and international context has shown the widespread use of metaphors in discourses on the COVID-19 pandemic (Semino 2021, Štrkalj Despot and Ostroški Anić 2021, Wicke and Bologne-

si 2020). The question arises: Why are metaphors used to talk about the pandemic? It is well established that using metaphors helps clarify complicated topics, communicate more efficiently, and persuade others (Thibodeau et al. 2019). In persuasive communication, metaphor is multifunctional, and it affects attitudes about the topic of communication (see Ottati and Renstrom 2010 for an overview). In other words, metaphor operates on the rational and emotional levels as a valuable and efficient tool of explication and persuasion.

According to the cognitive linguistic approach to the study of metaphors, the nature of metaphor is both linguistic and cognitive; it involves the relationship between language and thought. Within the cognitive framework, *Conceptual Metaphor Theory* (CMT) (Lakoff and Johnson 1980) proposes that metaphors are not just poetic and stylistic devices but principal tools of thought. Conceptual metaphors structure our world knowledge by linking one abstract and complex idea (e.g., the pandemic), the *target domain*, to another more concrete or physical (e.g., war), the *source domain*. The characteristics of the source domain project onto the target domain via the mapping mechanism, linking the war and the pandemic. That way, the metaphor allows us to explain and simplify some very complex aspects of human reality and experience, activating, at the same time, some of the most profound human emotions.

Finally, as described within the *Critical Metaphor Analysis* (CMA) approach to *Critical Discourse Analysis* (CDA), metaphors may have a persuasive function in discourse. They can be employed to present and impose specific ideas and views of the world (Charteris-Black 2004). As Eubanks (2000) explains, accentuating the rhetorical character of conceptual metaphor, metaphors cannot be separated from the discourse, as they attain their full power and meaning within the specific discourse setting. He further expounds on the rhetorical making of metaphor by stating that it is “fundamental to public and private rhetoric” (Eubanks 2000: 167). Similarly, Charteris-Black (2011: 50) examines metaphor as “matters of speaker choice”, a powerful rhetorical means for framing a speaker’s point of view. Additionally, he explains that the framing role of the metaphor refers to its potential to develop a perspective on a particular public issue. In summary, we could say that metaphors can be used to talk about the world and, at the same time, to construct the public’s worldviews and, consequently, influence their behaviors.

At the very beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, Croatian prime minister Andrej Plenković stated the following, “We are at war against coronavirus and panic and the socio-economic consequences of this epidemic”¹ (Cro. U ratu smo protiv koronavirusa i panike i društveno gospodarskih posljedica ove epidemije) (*Večernji list*, March 14, 2020). A few weeks later, the minister of health, Vili Beroš, proclaimed, “I am only a soldier in this battle” (Cro. Ja sam samo vojnik u ovoj bitki.) (*Večernji list*, April 1, 2020). These statements demonstrate the metaphorical framing of the pandemic as war. Wars are generally large-scale, intense conflicts characterized by excessive aggression, destruction, and suffering. Drawing parallels between the COVID-19 pandemic and war shows us how metaphor is used in the public discourse for rhetorical purposes. Facing the unpredictable virus (SARS-CoV-2), the world halted. Lockdowns, stay-at-home orders, social distancing, wearing masks, curfews, quarantines, and daily numbers of new cases and deaths became the “New Normal.” World leaders and politicians positioned themselves as military commanders, declaring war against an invisible enemy and using bellicose rhetoric to promote their goals and solutions to the problem. The public felt attacked and seriously endangered. In describing the pandemic and its complexities, the words related to the military domain, such as *battle*, *victory*, *invisible enemy*, *casualty*, and *front* were used by politicians, the media, and consequently the public, triggering strong emotions of fear and anxiety, shaping the negative conceptualization of the pandemic, and emphasizing the urgency of action. It appears that military rhetoric and, more specifically, the WAR metaphor has been very effective and productive in describing the issues around this critical (and frequently controversial) topic. As the global social, economic, and psychological impact of the pandemic has been severe, journalists, politicians, and decision-makers worldwide have used the language of warfare to communicate about it. Thus, the WAR metaphor has become an essential framing and persuasive device that affects our reasoning and emotion.

In a study on conceptual metaphors in the Croatian (social) media discourse on the pandemic, Štrkalj Despot and Ostroški Anić (2021) conducted a quantitative and qualitative analysis aimed to examine the predominance of war framing of the pandemic over other alternative figurative framings and to discuss the structure, function and (in)aptness of the WAR metaphor. The authors explain that the pandemic was primarily

¹ English translation provided by the authors.

framed as war and that the WAR metaphor, used in a variety of ways, represents “a rich, dynamic and potentially creative source for talking and thinking about Covid-19” (Štrkalj Despot and Ostroški Anić 2021: 199). Furthermore, they discuss how the (in)aptness of a metaphor does not depend on its type but on the context and way in which a metaphor is used.

This study explores linguistic realizations and the role of the WAR metaphor in the Croatian public discourse on the COVID-19 pandemic in newspaper articles published at the beginning of the pandemic in Croatia. The focus is on the WAR metaphor as a framing and rhetorical device with distinct persuasive potency within the Croatian sociocultural context. Building on the research by Štrkalj and Ostroški Anić (2021), the aim is to explore the context in which the linguistic realizations of the WAR metaphor were used to talk about the pandemic and to interpret the explanatory and persuasive significance of the metaphor. In the study, we address the following questions: What is the role of militaristic metaphors in the discourse on the COVID-19 pandemic? How does the use of the source domain of war influence the perception of the pandemic? What is the rhetorical effect of the WAR metaphor?

2. The strengths and weaknesses of the war metaphor

Contemporary public discourses on various issues abound with metaphors, from political (e.g., Charteris-Black 2009, 2018; Musolff 2004) to medical (e.g., Nie et al. 2016) and religious discourse (e.g., Dorst 2021). In the same way, metaphors have been ubiquitous in the discourse on the COVID-19 pandemic (Semino 2021, Štrkalj Despot and Ostroški Anić 2021, Wicke and Bolognesi 2020). Although various metaphors have been used to talk about the pandemic, the WAR metaphor has been prevalent in the public discourse and social media (Bates 2020, Semino 2021, Wicke and Bolognesi 2020). This use was especially evident at the beginning of the pandemic (Musolff 2020).

In fact, as Flusberg et al. (2018: 2) show, the WAR metaphor is present in almost every aspect of our life as we are frequently talking about “gluten wars”, “plastic bag wars” and even “war on sunshine”. Flusberg et al. (2018) explain that war metaphors are ubiquitous because they are a part of our fundamental knowledge and experience of war and conflict in general. They are readily available and easy to understand. Research shows that the

source domain of war has often been used to frame discourses on struggle and resistance unrelated to the military domain, from climate change (Flusberg et al. 2017) to AIDS, SARS, and other diseases and plagues (Chiang and Duann 2007, Sontag 1989). Reisfield and Wilson (2004: 4025) hold that one of the reasons militaristic metaphors are omnipresent in cancer discourse is “a seemingly perfect metaphoric correspondence” between the two domains, the source domain of war and the target domain of cancer. For instance, when we talk about “the war on cancer”, cancer cells become “enemies” and “invaders,” and medicines and treatments are “weapons”. Therefore, a complex and sensitive issue (cancer) is presented as a straightforward one (war). Generally, metaphor allows for clarification, simplification, and filtering. Thus, some aspects of the issue are spotlighted in the “cancer equals war” equation, but others are obscured.

Another critical property of the WAR metaphor is its emotional charge. The metaphor evokes strong, primarily negative emotions associated with physical combat, such as fear, anxiety, anger, and distress. Consequently, it promotes the predominately negative conceptualization of the target domain. Although one may expect words associated with combat only to be negative, the lexicon of war activates both negative and positive feelings: anger toward an enemy and affection toward heroes (Charteris-Black 2011). Therefore, the WAR metaphor can also have positive connotations of survival, resilience, and victory, evoking positive emotions such as hope, admiration, optimism, and pride.

The use of militaristic metaphors in various discourses has received a lot of attention and criticism. For instance, the metaphorical framing of illness as war has been extensively criticized (Nie et al. 2016, Reisfield and Wilson 2004, Sontag 1989) for its violence and reinforcement of stigma and fatalism. Reisfield and Wilson (2004) believe that metaphors can be helpful to physicians in communicating about complex issues and to patients in helping them understand their illnesses. However, as militaristic language in medicine has many limitations and is unnecessary, the authors suggest replacing the WAR metaphor with the JOURNEY or other non-combative metaphors.

Some researchers address the dangers related to the metaphorical framing of the COVID-19 pandemic as war, emphasizing the harm in the negative conceptualization that can limit civil liberties and damage human rights (see Panzeri et al. 2021 for an overview). Bates (2020) calls on the wider community not to use the WAR metaphor but to adopt other metaphors that

conceptualize struggle and recovery rhetorically more appropriately. In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, Semino (2021) proposes replacing the WAR metaphor with the FIRE metaphor, which is equally effective but without the faults associated with the WAR metaphor. In contrast, Castro Seixas (2021) argues that militaristic metaphors played an essential role in effective crisis communication and management of the pandemic.

3. Research data and methodology

The articles from the online edition of the Croatian daily newspaper *Večernji list*, published between February 25, 2020, when the first case of COVID-19 was confirmed in Croatia, and May 23, 2020, the first date with no new COVID-19 cases recorded, have been examined. The articles belonged to different newspaper sections (news, politics, sports, and opinions) and were of varying lengths. The analysis consisted of a three-stage approach proposed by Charteris-Black (2011): metaphor identification, interpretation, and explanation. We have used both the manual and keyword search methods to identify and extract metaphorically used words. In the first step, we carefully read through articles detecting and registering linguistic expressions related to the source domain of war. In the second step, we used keyword search relevant to the source domain of war *bitka, borba, front, heroj, neprijatelj, obrana, pobjeda, rat, žrtva* (*battle/fight/combat, front, hero, enemy, defense, victory, war, victim*) to finalize the data collection.

The metaphorically used words have been identified using the *metaphor identification procedure* (MIP) proposed by Pragglejaz Group (2007). This method adopts a maximal approach to metaphor identification to establish whether a word conveys a metaphorical meaning when used in a particular context (Pragglejaz Group 2007: 2). The method involves several steps, from reading the text and defining lexical units to examining different levels of meaning of each unit in context and deciding whether it was used metaphorically. As we have presumed the existence of the WAR conceptual metaphor and then searched for its linguistic realizations in text, this approach to metaphor identification and analysis is labeled as a top-down approach. It is distinguished from a bottom-down approach in which linguistic metaphors are identified first, and the underlying conceptual metaphor is formulated later (Kövecses 2011, Krennmayr 2013). The most representative examples of metaphorically used expressions were selected to be presented in the paper.

The metaphor interpretation is based on the *Conceptual Metaphor Theory* (CMT) (Lakoff and Johnson 1980). CMT asserts that language structures reflect cognitive processes in the human brain and that cognitive processes are structured using concepts. In other words, they are primarily metaphorical (Lakoff and Johnson 1980). Thus, according to the CMT, metaphor is a figure of speech and a cognitive tool for conceptualizing human experience that essentially determines how we think. The metaphor explanation draws on the *Critical Metaphor Analysis* (CMA), aiming to establish which metaphors are used and why they are used and how they shape our perception (Charteris-Black 2004, 2011). Charteris-Black (2004) emphasizes the three-dimensionality of metaphor. In addition to the cognitive and semantic dimensions, the metaphor has a communicative dimension, where the pragmatic role of metaphor or its persuasive potential comes to light. The vital feature of metaphor is its purposefulness or the effect achieved by employing a particular metaphor in discourse (Charteris-Black 2011).

4. Analysis and discussion

In the spring of 2020, the world faced an unknown and unpredictable infectious disease causing severe respiratory symptoms whose outcomes could be fatal. The military rhetoric, largely present in the Croatian media discourse on COVID-19 in 2020 (Štrkalj Despot and Ostroški Anić 2021), contributed to the reinforcement of the idea that the Croats are in danger and at war together with the rest of the world and that cooperation, sacrifice and solidarity are of crucial importance. In February 2020, in response to a looming pandemic, the Croatian government established the Civil Protection Headquarters headed by Minister of the Interior Davor Božinović. The Headquarters held daily press conferences informing the public about the epidemiological situation and action steps taken to prevent the spread of the virus. At the beginning of the pandemic, the Headquarters Chief, Davor Božinović, usually appeared in jackets bearing the emblems of the Ministry of the Interior and Civil Protection Directorate. The imagery further heightened the perception of the situation as very serious and uncertain, paralleling it to the Croatian War of Independence² imagery.

² Known as the Homeland War, started in 1991 and was fought between the Croatian armed forces and Serb forces led by the Yugoslav People's Army. The war ended victoriously in 1995.

Later, at the end of March, the minister wrote an op-ed for *Večernji list* titled *Croatian police is once again defending the homeland* (Cro. *Hrvatska policija danas je opet na braniku domovine*) in which the explicit links between the current and previous struggles were evident:

„Kao i pred 29 godina, suočeni smo s nepoznatim i nelagodnim scenarijem širokih razmjera te nam samo mogu poželjeti da budemo odgovorni, solidarni i ujedinjeni u empatiji, čuvanju jedni drugih, onako kako su to naši branitelji u ratu bili...“
(*Večernji list*, March 31, 2020)

“As 29 years ago, we are faced with an unknown and uncomfortable large-scale scenario and I can only wish us to be responsible, in solidarity, and united in empathy, guarding each other, as our war veterans were...”

The Homeland War is remembered as the nation’s honest and fair fight against an oppressive invader that ended victoriously. In recalling the public memory of the Homeland War and, specifically, the nation’s unity in those challenging times, powerful imagery is activated. By comparing the role of the police in those times to their role in the present crisis, the public is encouraged to accept the government’s leadership. Overall, the constant use of the WAR metaphor allows the decision-makers to promote specific policy goals, that is, various restrictions and prevention measures taken to contain the spreading virus and manage the public’s response. In the same vein, the Minister of Defence and Deputy Prime Minister Damir Krstičević, a prominent army commander during the Croatian War of Independence, speaking about the challenges of the pandemic, invoked a sure *victory* alluding to the nation’s past triumphs and unity:

„Uvjeren sam da ćemo i u vremenu koje je pred nama i koje je prepuno izazova, pobijediti kao i u svemu dosada te zajednički nastaviti raditi na boljitku Hrvatske i njenih građana“ zaključio je na kraju ministar Krstičević. (*Večernji list*, May 5, 2020)

“I am convinced that in the time ahead and which is full of challenges, we will win as in everything so far and continue to work together for the betterment of Croatia and its citizens,” concluded Minister Krstičević.)

In the warfare scenario of the first months of the pandemic, the Headquarters members were often depicted as the country's heroes. Alemka Markotić, director of the University Hospital for Infectious Diseases Dr. Fran Mihaljević in Zagreb and one of the most experienced infectious disease specialists in Croatia, was viewed as the most prepared and reliable. The positive and trustworthy image of Alemka Markotić, primarily based on her calmness, experience, and scientifically grounded argumentation, was reinforced by evoking her personal experience of war in Sarajevo. Her role as a doctor during the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina was mapped onto her leading role in *the coronavirus defense*:

Tko je Alemka Markotić: Od opkoljenog Sarajeva do šefice obrane od koronavirusa. Zagrebačka infektologinja 24 sata u borbi s novim virusom. Smirena, argumentirana, karijeru je započela u opkoljenom Sarajevu, sad je u međunarodnom projektu procjene biorizika. (*Večernji list*, February 26, 2020)

(Who is Alemka Markotić: From besieged Sarajevo to the head of the coronavirus defense. Zagreb infectious disease specialist 24 hours in the fight against the new virus. Calm and informed, she started her career in besieged Sarajevo, and now, she is a part of an international biorisk assessment project.)

Trying to address the public health crisis in Croatia, the Headquarters, which also included the Minister of Health Vili Beroš, repeatedly emphasized the crucial next weeks in *fighting against the epidemic* and the importance of respecting the restrictions presented as *the weapons in the battle*:

„Ušli smo u najkritičniju fazu borbe protiv epidemije, nemamo lijeka, nemamo cjepiva, moramo dosljedno poštovati mjere“, kazao je ministar zdravstva Vili Beroš. (*Večernji list*, April 10, 2020)

(“We have entered the most critical phase of the fight against the epidemic; we have no cure, we have no vaccines, we must consistently respect the measures,” said Health Minister Vili Beroš.)

Beroš's crisis rhetoric aimed to convince the public that it was worth being cooperative and respecting the measures that were very restrictive

during the first wave of the pandemic and were not unanimously accepted. Simultaneously, his statement about *the most decisive moment of the fight against the epidemic* seemed very promising as it implied an imminent victory over the virus and the near end of the pandemic.

To highlight the severity of the situation and the importance of respecting social distancing and stay-at-home orders, the Croatian Medical Chamber adopted particularly militaristic language in their address to the public, denying *the defeat in the war with the epidemic*, evoking *community* and counting on *humanity*:

Čvrsto vjerujemo u znanja, vještine i kliničko iskustvo naših kolegica i kolega. Poraz nije opcija! Poštovani sugrađani, ostanite kod kuće, izbjegavajte socijalni kontakt te pazite na sebe i svoje bližnje. Rat s epidemijom kao društvo možemo dobiti samo svi zajedno. Pred svima nama je test naše ljudskosti. Nemojmo na njemu zakazati, dodaju iz HLK. (*Večernji list*, March 20, 2020)

“We firmly believe in our colleagues’ knowledge, skills, and clinical experience. Defeat is not an option! Dear fellow citizens, stay at home, avoid social contact and care for yourself and your loved ones. We can only win the war with the epidemic as a society together. Before all of us is the test of our humanity. Let’s not fail to pass it”, CMC added.)

The war metaphors calling on a sense of community, discipline, and solidarity are also present in the discourse of the country’s leading epidemiologists, having the same strong persuasive effect as the military rhetoric used in the Croatian Medical Chamber’s address. One of the most influential epidemiologists, Igor Rudan, called for *responsibility, seriousness, togetherness, discipline, and communion*, advocated *keeping the number of possible victims to a minimum* and pointed to Croatia’s success *in the fight against COVID-19*:

Ulazimo u ključnih mjesec dana borbe s koronavirusom za Hrvatsku, te je sada potrebna odgovornost i ozbiljnost svakog od nas. Protiv epidemija se možemo boriti samo zajednički. (...) Predstoje nam dani discipline, ali i zajedništva. Ovo je prvi put u našim životima da se susrećemo s ovakvom situacijom. Moramo sada dati sve od sebe da olakšamo posao zdravstvenim

djelatnicima i da broj mogućih žrtava bude što manji, a Hrvatska ostane primjer dobre organizacije u borbi s COVID-19. (*Večernji list*, March 15, 2020)

(We are entering a crucial month of fighting coronavirus for Croatia, and now we need the responsibility and seriousness of each of us. We can only fight epidemics together. (...) We are facing days of discipline but also of communion. This is the first time in our lives that we have encountered a situation like this. We must now do our best to make work easier for health professionals and keep the number of possible victims to a minimum while Croatia remains an example of a good organization in the fight against COVID-19.)

In all the examples presented, the emphasis is on joint action, a collaboration of all people, the entire nation. The pronoun *we* is often used to indicate solidarity and a sense of belonging and urge the public to act in unison and hold together while facing the threatening virus. In this situation, the virus is an invisible *them* invoking the well-known *Us/Them* binary (van Dijk 1998, Reisigl and Wodak 2001).

Alongside the Headquarters members, journalists, and medical professionals, the politicians were particularly prone to the military rhetoric. Politicians promoted their ideas and values to persuade the public and influence their stance on the pandemic by fostering a sense of urgency for joint action. The persuasiveness of the communication was achieved by appealing to the public's emotions. Thus, on the occasion of the International Workers' Day celebration, the Speaker of the Croatian Parliament, Goran Jandroković, drew parallels between *the fight for human health* and *the fight for jobs* calling for the nation's responsibility in supporting health and economic measures:

To posebno dobiva na važnosti u trenutku kada je čitav svijet duboko pogođen pandemijom koja ne prijeti samo javnom zdravlju, već i gospodarskoj i socijalnoj sigurnosti i održivosti – ističe Jandroković dodajući da borbi za zdravstvenu sigurnost ljudi i postojanost radnih mjesta možemo pridonijeti i mi u Hrvatskoj, i to zajedno, solidarno, u dijalogu, kao i potporom odgovornim zdravstvenim i gospodarskim mjerama koje će pružiti podršku radnicima, zaštititi njihovo zdravlje,

omogućiti nastavak poslovanja, a time i sigurnost prihoda za život. (*Večernji list*, April 4, 2020)

(This is especially important at a time when the whole world is deeply affected by a pandemic that threatens not only public health but also economic and social security and sustainability – Jandrovković said, adding that we in Croatia can contribute to the fight for human health and jobs together, in solidarity, in dialogue, as well as in support of responsible health and economic measures that will support workers, protect their health, enable them to continue their business, and thus the security of their livelihood.)

In Jandrovković's statement, the metaphorically used word *fight* was mapped onto two different conceptual target domains: health and economy. Linking *fight* with *health* and *economy* strengthened the persuasive effect of his statement significantly, contributing to the construction of the crisis discourse framed by the expressions *deeply affected*, *threatens*, *economic and social security and sustainability*, *solidarity*, *dialogue*, *support*, *measures*, and *security of their livelihood*.

The public's negative conceptualization of the epidemic was mainly activated by the corpus's most numerous words, near-synonyms *borba* 'fight/combat' and *bitka* 'battle', metaphorically used in various constructions and contexts. In contrast, the word *rat* 'war' was rarely used. In the constructions *fight/combat/battle with/against*, the virus was presented as an aggressive, dangerous, invisible enemy that must be stopped and defeated. The fight was fought in various ways: by raising money, using medical equipment, medicines, vitamins, music, drones, the digital assistant called Andrija, and prayer. In those constructions, the "invisible enemy" was referred to as *coronavirus*, *coronavirus epidemic*, *epidemic*, *pandemic*, *pandemic COVID-19*, *COVID-19*, *disease COVID-19*, *virus*, *health crisis*, *contagion*.

The nation's health became one of the most critical arguments in the political arena. Health Minister Vili Beroš was repeatedly accused of spending all the resources on *fighting the coronavirus* and neglecting other healthcare aspects. The accusations came from political opponents who used the bellicose metaphorical language as effective means of criticism, speaking about *the victims* of the malfunctioning healthcare system and warning about the *lives* endangered by the healthcare crisis:

„Stoga predlažemo ministru zdravstva da se hitno posveti rješavanju kaosa koji je proizvelo preusmjerenje svih zdravstvenih kapaciteta da ne bismo uskoro zbrajali žrtve posljedica borbe protiv koronavirusa. Pravo na zdravstvenu zaštitu ne staje na liječenju bolesti Covid-19 i ne možemo spašavati živote tako što ih istovremeno ugrožavamo“, poručuju iz Glas-a. (*Večernji list*, April 15, 2020)

(We, therefore, suggest that the Minister of Health urgently address the chaos caused by the diversion of all health facilities so that we do not soon add up the victims of the fight against coronavirus. The right to health care does not stop at treating Covid-19 disease; we cannot save lives by endangering them at the same time”, they say from Glas³.)

In the metaphorical war against the virus, a number of military terms and expressions evoking warfare were used, such as *headquarters*, *the first line of defense*, *the first line of battle*, *the front line*, *casualties*, *heroes*, *victory*, *defense*, *strategy*, *threat*, *measures*, *mobilization*, *suppression*, *enemy*, *to suppress*, *to endanger*, *to protect*. Most of these expressions evoke negative emotions such as fear and distress, shaping the predominately negative conceptualization of the pandemic. However, the terms like *heroes*, *victory*, and *win* have positive connotations of survival, resilience, heroism, and triumph. The Headquarters members were often represented as the heroes in control of the ongoing crisis. Nevertheless, the word *heroes* was primarily associated with healthcare workers portrayed as the greatest heroes of the epidemic, as fighters on the first line of defense who risk their own lives to protect ours and help us defeat the virus. Additionally, one journalist, speaking about various heroes of the pandemic, wrote about priests as heroes on the spiritual front.

Heroji splitskog KBC-a, specijalizanti, borci protiv koronavirusa.
(*Večernji list*, March 20, 2020)

(Heroes of the Split University Hospital, residents, fighters
against coronavirus.)

³ A Croatian liberal political party named *Građansko-liberalni savez (GLAS) (Civic Liberal Alliance)*.

Zdravstveni djelatnici pravi heroji ovih dana i ove situacije. (*Večernji list*, March 23, 2020)

(Healthcare professionals are real heroes these days and in this situation.)

No, upravo molitva mnogih svećenika-heroja u ovome trenutku iza zatvorenih crkvenih vrata daje onu nevidljivu snagu u borbi s pandemijom... (*Večernji list*, March 23, 2020)

(But it is precisely the prayer of many priest-heroes, at this moment, behind closed church doors, that gives that invisible strength in the fight against the pandemic...)

Politicians were presented as military leaders who command their armies bravely and decisively, with healthcare workers as soldiers and self-discipline as the most crucial weapon.

U situaciji kada se država bori da sačuva što je više moguće ljudskih života izloženih pandemiji, hrvatski premijer proglasio je rat virusu... Plenković u taj rat ne može krenuti sam, a i ne treba. Taj rat tiče se svih nas. (*Večernji list*, March 23, 2020)

(In a situation when the state is fighting to save as many human lives exposed to the pandemic as possible, the Croatian Prime Minister has declared war on the virus... Plenković cannot go to that war alone, and he should not. That war concerns us all.)

In the context of winning, the winners were primarily individuals who had successfully recovered from the disease or the countries with no new cases recorded. They represent positive examples of a possible victory and a potential future triumph. The fight against the virus became a measure of the success of single countries, while, on the other hand, the fight was seen as global. The sense of community and solidarity was present primarily in the political discourse in which governments and politicians often evoked the importance of the common goal of humanity at war with the virus: to defeat it and win.

Ovo je bitka sviju nas i u njoj trebamo ustrajati. (*Večernji list*, April 7, 2020)

(This is a battle for all of us, and we must persevere.)

...jedino zajedničkim djelovanjem i ljudskim odlikama poput znanja, odgovornosti, suradnje i solidarnosti možemo uspjeti u ovoj borbi. (*Večernji list*, March 28, 2020)

(...only through joint action and human qualities such as knowledge, responsibility, cooperation, and solidarity can we succeed in this battle.)

Protiv epidemija se možemo boriti samo zajednički. (*Večernji list*, March 15, 2020)

(We can only fight epidemics together.)

5. Conclusion

The WAR metaphor has been widely used in various contexts as it is familiar and readily available. In times of crisis, the WAR metaphor promotes a sense of unity and calls for action – we are in this together, the threat is real, and something needs to be done. During the first wave of the pandemic in 2020, the Croatian public felt seriously endangered and threatened by an unknown disease and the stringent and restrictive anti-COVID-19 measures that significantly contributed to the construction of the warfare scenario. Hence, it is unsurprising that the analyzed articles, published during the first wave of the pandemic in Croatia, abound with war-related metaphorical words and expressions. The most numerous are linguistic expressions with the words *battle*, *fight*, and *combat* used in the discourse on metaphorical war against the mysterious virus that must be stopped and defeated. The crisis discourse is also framed by many other metaphorically used military terms and expressions, such as *the first line of defense*, *the front line*, *casualties*, *heroes*, *victory*, *defense*, *strategy*, *threat*, *enemy*, *measures*, *mobilization*, *suppression*, etc.

As the results of our study and previous ones suggest, militaristic metaphors are used in the crisis discourse to control the public's beliefs about the pandemic and to influence their response to it. The WAR metaphor used to frame the pandemic in the Croatian public discourse activates the public's pre-existing war-related experience. It arouses profound, mainly negative feelings, such as fear and anxiety, that become the key to interpreting an abstract target domain. On the other hand, some linguistic realizations of the WAR metaphor evoke positive emotions such as hope,

admiration, optimism, and pride. The pandemic becomes a war fought on different fronts: from everyday life to politics, economy, and medicine. Through the potent bellicose rhetoric, the Headquarters members, politicians, journalists, and medical professionals attempt to convince the Croatian public of the right intentions related to the management and solution of the COVID-19 crisis. Associations with the Homeland War, a recent Croatian struggle of national importance, are particularly noteworthy. These associations significantly contribute to the further intensification of the persuasive effect, with the same powerful message: we will win together as we always do. It could be assumed that the warlike atmosphere of the first wave of the pandemic also contributed to the use of the WAR metaphor in the Croatian public discourse. Linguistic realizations and the role of the WAR metaphor have changed since then. Therefore, future research, preferably on a larger sample, should explore the relationship between the use of the bellicose metaphorical language and the curve of the pandemic in Croatia and alternative source domains activated to frame various aspects of living with the pandemic.

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SAŽETAK

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SNAGA RATNE RETORIKE: METAFORE U HRVATSKOM JAVNOM DISKURSU

Metafore se često upotrebljavaju u suvremenim javnim diskursima o različitim temama, pa tako i u diskursu o pandemiji virusa COVID-19. Prema rezultatima dosadašnjih istraživanja (Bates 2020, Semino 2021, Wicke and Bolognesi 2020), u javnom diskursu o pandemiji koronavirusa najbrojnije su ratne metafore, koje su tema ovog rada. U radu su prikupljeni metaforički jezični izrazi iz izvorišne domene rata korišteni u dnevnim novinama za vrijeme prvog vala pandemije te je analiziran njihov retorički persuazivni potencijal u hrvatskom sociokulturnom kontekstu. Kvalitativna analiza korpusa temelji se na Charteris-Blackovom (2011) trodijelnom pristupu koji obuhvaća identifikaciju, interpretaciju i objašnjenje metafora. Cilj je utvrditi koji su se metaforički jezični izričaji iz domene rata koristili u hrvatskom javnom diskursu o pandemiji te objasniti zašto su se koristili i na koji način su oblikovali percepciju javnosti. Rezultati analize potvrdili su sveprisutnost ratnih metafora u hrvatskom javnom diskursu na početku pandemije koronavirusa. Njihova dvostruka uloga, kao sredstva za tumačenje i uvjeravanje, bila je ključna u oblikovanju mišljenja javnosti o pandemiji i prihvaćanju nametnutih restriktivnih mjera.

Ključne riječi: *konceptualna metafora; pandemija virusa COVID-19; ratna retorika; javni diskurs; Hrvatska*