

RESEARCH REPORT

# A wave of metaphors: image and visual metaphors in cartoons from a cognitive-discursive perspective



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## ABSTRACT

This paper aligns with a field of research that deals with the use of multi-modal metaphors from a cognitive-discursive perspective. In this context, we aim to investigate the role played by images in the instantiation of cross-domain mappings in a particular genre. Specifically, we describe and analyze the cognitive-discursive nature and functioning of visual metaphors in political and social cartoons. This paper first explores the concepts of image schemas, image metaphors, and visual metaphors, as well as the notion of metaphoricality in discourse. We then carry out the analysis of multimodal metaphors in a corpus of editorial cartoons that depict the Covid-19 pandemic, and other related issues within social and political contexts. Some of our findings suggest that cartoons often evoke multilayered off-line frames, image metaphors and conceptual metaphors in order to enhance the persuasive power of their semiotic arrangement, especially by inviting their audience to actively participate in meaning-construction processes.

## RESUMO

Este estudo se filia a um conjunto de esforços que se debruça sobre o recrutamento de metáforas multimodais a partir de uma perspectiva cognitivo-discursiva. Nesse contexto, ele se propõe a investigar o impacto de recursos imagéticos na atualização de mapeamentos metafóricos em um dado gênero discursivo. Mais especificamente, ele se lança à descrição e à análise da

natureza e do funcionamento de metáforas visuais em charges de jornal. Em um primeiro momento, este estudo introduz os conceitos de esquemas de imagem, metáforas imagéticas e metáforas visuais, além do conceito de metafóricidade (no discurso). Em um segundo momento, realiza-se a análise de metáforas multimodais em um corpus de charges de jornal que exploram a pandemia de Covid-19 em termos, sobretudo, do seu impacto nos âmbitos social e político. Por fim, alguns dos resultados alcançados aqui sugerem que charges recrutam estruturas conceituais multifacetadas – que combinam frames, metáforas imagéticas e metáforas conceituais – de modo a reforçar o poder persuasivo da sua malha semiótica, convidando os seus leitores para ativamente construir os seus significados.

KEYWORDS

Image schemata. Multimodal metaphor. Visual metaphor. Political cartoons.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE

Esquemas de imagem. Metáfora multimodal. Metáfora visual. Charge.

## Introduction

The performance and interaction of different semiotic components – both verbal and nonverbal (such as images and gestures) – within our conceptualization processes and products have been a matter of some concern within the field of Cognitive Linguistics since its earliest years. In one of his seminal works, *Women, fire, and dangerous things*, for instance, Lakoff (1987a) highlights the importance of some mental imagery in perceptual and conceptual categorization, especially with regards to basic-level categories. A few years later, Lakoff and Turner (1989, p. 90) also devoted some pages of their book to discussing a very particular type of metaphor that “maps conventional mental images onto other conventional mental images by virtue of their internal structure”, in order to organize part of our ordinary comprehension of the world. On that occasion, one of the authors’ (1989) claims was that what they had been calling “image metaphor” had been a common strategy in poetics.

A major contribution to research on multimodal metaphors can be found in Forceville’s (1996) work *Pictorial metaphor in advertising*, where he proposes to develop, in the light of the conceptual theory introduced by Lakoff and Johnson (1980), a model for the analysis of “pictorial metaphors”, i.e., images that, together with verbal metaphors, instantiate cross-domain mappings. At a later moment, Müller and Cienki (2008), and Forceville and Urios-Aparisi (2009) bring forth more encompassing books, with a further collection of papers that go beyond verbal and pictorial metaphors, in order to investigate how other nonverbal semiotic components, namely co-speech gestures and

sounds, may instantiate or even deautomatize conceptual metaphors. From that time onwards, “multimodal metaphor” became a regular concept in the field of Cognitive Linguistics.

Against this background, the present paper aims to investigate the role played by images in the instantiation of cross-domain mappings in a particular genre. Specifically, we describe and analyze the cognitive-discursive nature and functioning of visual metaphors in political cartoons. To this end, this paper first explores the concepts of image schemas, image metaphors, and visual metaphors, as well as introduces the notion of “metaphoricity”. On the basis of these initial accounts, we carry out the analysis of multimodal metaphors in a corpus of political and social cartoons that depict the Covid-19 pandemic and other related issues. Key findings of this endeavor suggest that cartoons often evoke multilayered off-line frames, image metaphors and conceptual metaphors in order to invite their audience to cognitively participate in the meaning-construction process and, by doing so, to enhance the persuasive power of their semiotic arrangement as a whole.

## 1. Images within a cognitivist perspective

Cognitive Linguistics (hereafter referred to as CL) has advanced the philosophical affiliation to an experientialist approach to the conceptualization of reality, with determinant effects on meaning construction. Experientialism is presented, by Lakoff and Johnson (1980), as an alternative approach to both objectivism and subjectivism. The element which is highlighted as being crucial to the experientialist perspective is “embodiment”, *i.e.* the way sensorimotor experiences nurture the formation of concepts. Among these experiences, “imageable primitives” are believed to be at the basis of cognitive representations, including metaphors. In this session, we discuss, briefly, a) the way image schemas are thought to be, at least partly, structured by the visual dimension of bodily experiences, and b) the more systematic approaches, within CL and in advertising, to image and visual metaphors.

### 1.1. Image schemas

One of the most fundamental theoretical commitments of Cognitive Linguistics (CL) is the notion of “embodiment”, or more specifically “embodied cognition”. This commitment focuses on the centrality of the body, or bodily, sensorimotor experiences, in the conceptualization of all aspects of life, which, according to the postulates shared by cognitive linguists (in particular, LAKOFF, 1987a; LAKOFF; JOHNSON, 1999) are organized, in the mind, as cognitive representations, such as Idealized Cognitive models (ICMs), frames, conceptual metaphors and metonymies, and image schemas (IS). The latter is defined by Hampe (2005), following Johnson’s (1987) book (whose title, *The body in the mind*, conveys the very notion of embodiment in CL), as “directly meaningful (“experiential”/“embodied”), preconceptual structures, which arise from, or are grounded in, human recurrent bodily

movements through space, perceptual interactions, and ways of manipulating objects.” (HAMPE, 2005, p. 1).

The notion of “image schema”, though, does not necessarily imply a visual element in the use of the term “image”. The IS “force”, as explored by Talmy (1988), for example, is not mentally represented by a single, even if highly schematic, image, but more likely by a whole process-oriented scene, as proposed in one of Talmy’s (1988) diagrams (Figure 1):

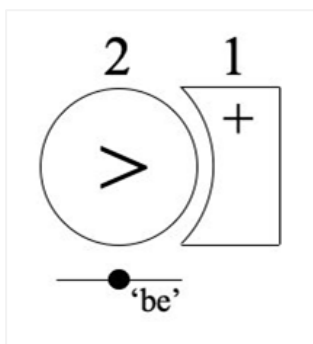


FIGURE 1 - A force-dynamic schema of forced staticity  
Source: Talmy (1988, p. 66)

As Mandler (2010, p. 36) suggests, the spatial elements of force dynamics are represented in the form of diagrams, but so is the forceful component, by the use of arrows; and “this was necessary, of course, because force cannot be represented in an image.”

It is noteworthy that this schematic representation is explained visually, as are different concepts in CL, which might suggest that schematic representations are not only frequent, but indeed crucial to the development of theory building and explanation involving highly abstract notions – which seems to be somewhat typical of CL research. Cognitive linguists often resort to diagrams in their attempts to demonstrate how our conceptual system might be structured and work. Frequent user of diagrams, Langacker (2013, p. 12) argues that these devices are aimed at allowing “certain facets of conceptual organization to be represented in a format that is both user-friendly and explicit enough to serve as a basis for semantic and grammatical analysis.”

It might be argued, though, that even if image schemas are not necessarily “visual”, in the canonical sense of the term, some of them, such as containment, front-back, trajectory, appear to be, at least partly, determined by visual experiences. This hypothesis seems to be corroborated by Mandler and Cánovas (2014, p. 4), who point to the “primacy of imageable spatial information” in preverbal conceptualizations. According to the authors, imageable spatial primitives are “the first conceptual building blocks” which play a primordial role in meaning construction, both in the form of cognitive representations and in language (MANDLER; CÁNOVAS, 2014, p.2). The authors argue, however, that although some IS are indeed “imageable”, they are not static, as the CL literature seems to imply.

This means that containment and occultation, for example, are entrenched into a “path/trajectory”, “into/out of” spatial schema.

Marden and Cánovas (2014) also claim that the imageability of spatial primitives (the list of which is shown in Figure 2 is so central in conceptualization processes, that

it is advisable to restrict the meaning of the term ‘image schema’ to imageable information, which forms the foundations of the conceptual system, and use the term ‘schematic integrations’ (or some other term) for structures that include internal feelings of force, as well as emotion and other sensory information. (MANDLER; CÁNOVAS, 2014, p. 19)

PATH; ±MOVE; START PATH; ANIMATE MOVE; END PATH; BLOCKED MOVE; PATH TO; INTO; OUT OF; LINK; THING; BEHIND; ±CONTACT;

FIGURE 2 - List of primitives used in the first image schemas  
Source: Mandler and Cánovas (2014, p. 4)

The postulate of embodied cognition, a foundation stone in CL, therefore, seems to rely, to a large extent, on “imageable primitives”, which play a central role in the cognitive production of meaning. In this respect, Johnson (1987, p. 25) claims that, though “image schemata” certainly have a kinesthetic nature, and are not tied to any single perceptual modality, mental images tend to play a central role in the formation of such structures, since our visual schemas seem to predominate. We advocate, therefore, that, from a cognitive perspective, metaphors, through their dependence on direct or indirect “bodily experienced” source domains, largely involve a visual (or at least “imageable”) dimension. When source-domains involve a complex system of interconnected elements (such as the case of structural metaphors, like ARGUMENT IS WAR (LAKOFF; JOHNSON, 1980), instead of spacial conceptualizations (such as orientational metaphors), the image evoked draws on multi-layered highly dynamic imageable scenes, such as the source domains JOURNEY and WAR. There are metaphors which are far more directly structured by explicitly visual elements. These, known as image metaphors, on the one hand, and visual or pictorial metaphors, on the other, are discussed in the following section.

## 1.2. Image metaphors

Lakoff (1987b) defines image metaphors as those “metaphors which map conventional mental images onto other conventional images.” Exploring an example taken from one of Andre’s poem (“my wife’s

waist is an hourglass”), Lakoff points out that “to map the hourglass image onto the woman image, both images must be structured in terms of a general shape of the same sort. Only then can the shape of the hourglass map onto the shape of the woman.” Two images (Figure 3) taken from the internet make the proposed mapping evident:



FIGURE 3 - Image metaphor: hourglass → women's body shape

Source: <https://www.eatthis.com/workouts-change-body-shape/> and <https://www.slideshare.net/thedenimgal/hourglass-body-shape-35675978>

The shape of an hourglass, however, is projected not upon the shape of women's bodies in general, but of a particular feminine shape characterized by a strikingly small waist, which contrasts to the broader upper and lower part of the trunk, resembling an hourglass. It may be argued, though, that the conventional character of the mental image of an hourglass – which looks as though it has been “squeezed” in the middle – as well as the equally conventional mapping upon a woman's body shape are culturally dependent. In Brazil, for example, even though “hourglass” belongs to the conceptual and lexical repertoires of most people, women with small waists are more frequently referred to as a “guitar” (“*corpo-violão*”), a “pestle waist” (“*cintura de pilão*”) or a “wasp waist” (“*cinturinha de vespa*”). The pictorial representations of these image metaphors, which are instantiated linguistically by the corresponding conventional metaphorical lexical expressions in Portuguese, are illustrated in Figure 4.

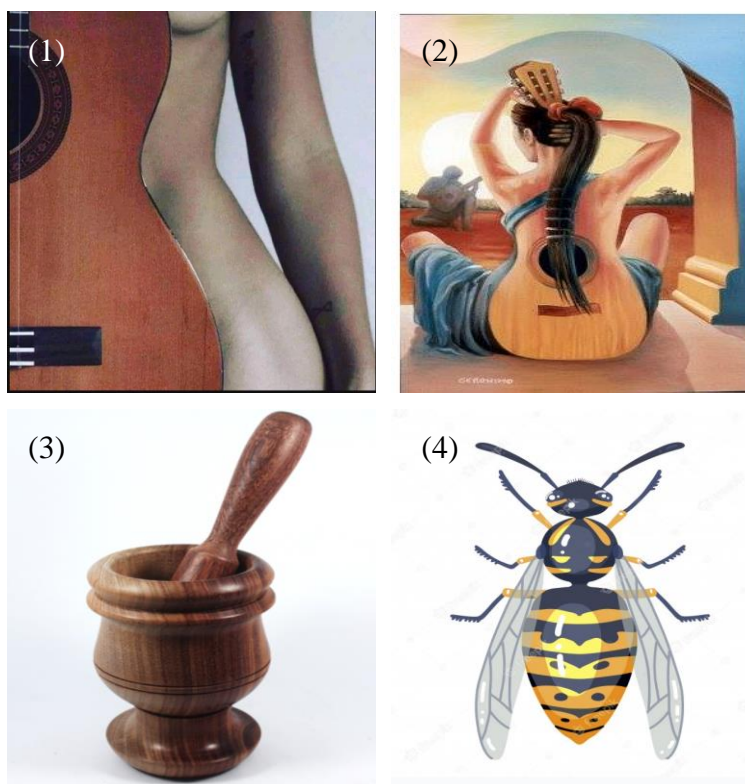


FIGURE 4 - Image metaphors: guitar, pestle, and wasp → women's body shape

Source: <https://www.pinterest.pt/pin/556757572686853279/> (1 and 2),

<https://apuiartesanatos.com.br/loja/product/conjunto-de-pilao-e-socador-indigena-em-madeira-medio/> (3), and

[https://br.freepik.com/vetores-premium/ilustracao-do-inseto-da-vespa-isolada-no-branco-vespa-colorida-erro-ilustrado-design-plano\\_7560856.htm](https://br.freepik.com/vetores-premium/ilustracao-do-inseto-da-vespa-isolada-no-branco-vespa-colorida-erro-ilustrado-design-plano_7560856.htm) (4)

On the basis of the examples discussed above, two observations can be made with regard to image metaphors in general. Firstly, what is put into perspective through the conventional mapping is not all visual elements of the source domains, but only the specific feature which highlights what is to be compared to in the target domain. In the case of the wasp-waist image metaphor, for example, the wings, the legs, or the antennae of a wasp are not relevant and do not, thus, participate in the mapping. In the same way, all the non-visual elements of a wasp are hidden, not highlighted. The process of hiding and highlighting is characteristic of all metaphors, as pointed out by Lakoff and Johnson (1980), but, in the case of image metaphors, it seems to be even more evident. Secondly, it may be suggested that some image metaphors are cognitively hyperbolic (VEREZA, 2016), since the mental images which participate in the mappings are characterized by an exacerbated, hence clearly visible, or at least imageable, presence of the visual element to be mapped upon the target: in the case of the examples in Figures 3 and 4, the intense and well demarcated narrowing of a figure in its middle region.

Finally, as again in most metaphors, the cognitive perspectivation of image metaphors may have ideological effects. The fact that there seem to be more conventional image metaphors to refer to



woman bodies than man bodies suggests a sexist ideology which imposes ideal body models. Such metaphors are coherent with the “sexual objectification” (SO) theory, which postulates that many women are sexually objectified and treated as an object to be valued by others. Sexual objectification occurs “when a woman’s body or body parts are singled out and separated from her as a person, and she is viewed primarily as a physical object of male sexual desire” (BARTKY, 1990, cited in SZYMANSKI *et al.*, 2011, p. 6). Although the ideological dimension of metaphors (GOATLY, 2007; SEMINO, 2008) is not the specific focus of this paper, it will be referred to, though not explored in detail, in our analysis of cartoons, as these are essentially political – hence ideological – in their communicative intent.

### 1.3. Visual metaphors

So far, we have discussed the role of visual or (imageable) source domains which are mapped upon visual target domains, creating, as a result, image metaphors, as suggested by Lakoff (1987). Nonetheless, the instantiations of image metaphors do not have to be visual themselves. Examples in language, as those explored earlier, evoke image metaphors, but are manifested linguistically through conventional (or sometimes novel) metaphoric linguistic expressions. Compound or semi-compound nouns, such as hammertoe, T-junction, horsetail, pipe elbow, tree diagram, moon face, hotdog etc. are conventional linguistically instantiated image metaphors. On the other hand, the poem from the Navajo Indians’ tradition, analytically explored by Lakoff (1987, p. 221), illustrates the use of novel or creative image metaphors, manifested linguistically through similes.

*My horse has a hoof of striped agate  
His fetlock is like fine eagle plume.  
His legs are like quick lightning.  
My horse has a tail like a trailing black cloud.  
His mane is made of short rainbows.  
My horse’s eyes are made of big stars.*

What is important to observe in these examples is that image metaphors are products of mental images, but they do not have to be actualized visually. Visual metaphors, on the other hand, are image metaphors which are realized semiotically as pictures of some kind, being also called “pictorial metaphors” (FORCEVILLE, 1996). As a matter of fact, different semiosis may be inhabited by metaphors. As Forceville (2008) suggests

if metaphors are essential to thinking (Lakoff & Johnson 1980, 1999), it makes sense that they should occur not only in language but also in static and moving pictures, sounds, music, gestures, even in touch and smell--and in their various permutations. Studying such non-verbal metaphors is necessary to test and refine conceptual metaphor theory (CMT), which is currently hampered by the fact that most of the evidence adduced to prove the existence of conceptual metaphors comes from language alone. (FORCEVILLE, 2008, p. 464)



Forceville (1996; 2008), a cognitive linguist, has embraced the challenge of exploring pictorial metaphors, particularly in the universe of advertising, where visual metaphors abound. One of his major contributions to research in this area lies in the categorization of visual metaphors he proposes (FORCEVILLE, 2008, p. 464-469), which is crucial for the systematization of analytical approaches.

- (1) **Contextual metaphor:** An object is metaphorized because of the visual context in which it is placed;
- (2) **Hybrid metaphor:** Two objects that are normally distinct entities are physically merged into a single “gestalt”;
- (3) **Pictorial simile:** Two objects are represented in their entirety in such a way that they are made to look similar;
- (4) **Integrated metaphor:** A phenomenon experienced as a unified object or gestalt is represented in its entirety in such a manner that it resembles another object or gestalt even without contextual cues.

From the field of advertising emerges another proposal of categorization for visual metaphors. The reason for making visual metaphors an insightful and systematic object of study in this area is elaborated by Michael Wright (2021), on his webpage<sup>1</sup>. According to the writer, visual metaphors perform better than verbal metaphors in advertising because

subjects comprehended the advertiser’s intended meaning more often for visual metaphor ads than for verbal metaphor ads” (Scott & Batra, 2004). The reason is simple. The inclusion of the visual element eases comprehension because viewers don’t need to create mental images (themselves). Visual metaphors are more common than you might think. According to the limited research on the subject, slightly more than three out of ten print ads<sup>4</sup> contain visual metaphors. (WRIGHT, 2021)

Wright’s classification of visual metaphors (Figures 6 and 7), based on Van Mulken *et al.* (2014), seems to complement, with interesting results, the one proposed by Forceville (2008) discussed earlier.

- (1) **Juxtaposition:** The visual includes the product (or target) next to what it’s being compared with (or the source);
- (2) **Fusion:** Also known as hybrid or synthesis – combines the product (target) with what it’s being compared with (source) to form a single visual element (called a gestalt);

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<sup>1</sup> Retrieved from: <https://www.mwright.com/writingsamples/an-introduction-to-visual-metaphors/>. Access: 02 oct. 2021.

(3) **Replacement:** When either the product (target) or what it is being compared to (source) is absent.

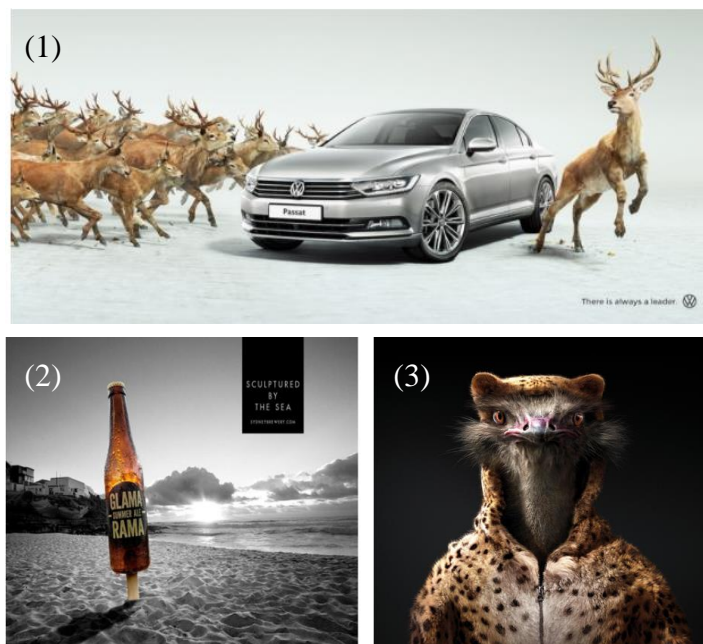


FIGURE 7 - Visual examples of Wright's categories

Source: <https://www.mwrig.com/writingsamples/an-introduction-to-visual-metaphors>

In the discourse universe of advertising, Wright (2021) argues that “visuals (photographs, illustrations, videos, etc.) are a more effective and efficient means of communication than the written word. For the cognitive linguist, on the other hand, visual metaphors in ads can be a productive source of insights as they evoke sociocognitive representations, both at the off-line (frames and conceptual metaphors; LAKOFF, 1987; 2003) and on-line (situated metaphors, metaphor niches; VEREZA, 2013, 2021) levels. The example (3) in Figure 7 illustrates such reliance on cognitive representations: the frame of an ostrich and of a cheetah both include the element of speed, which is immediately highlighted in a car ad. The “text anchor”<sup>2</sup> which accompanies the visual replacement metaphor (the car/product itself is not shown in the picture) is a clue to the metaphor: “fast, just go faster”. The understanding of the ad on the part of the reader relies on the activation of the off-line frames of OSTRICH (fast) and a CHEETAH (faster). The on-line cognitive combination of both frames and the interactive frame (FILLMORE, 1982) of the genre “ad” (more specifically, a car ad) seems to

<sup>2</sup>The concept of “anchorage”, originally explored by Barthes (1977), is used by Forceville (1996) to refer to the verbal/textual elements (“text anchors”) of a multimodal text which “serve to cue and thereby restrict possible interpretations of the visual elements” (KOLLER, 2009, p. 47)

be conducive to stimulating inquiries within Cognitive Linguistics, as Forceville (1996, 2008) research has effectively demonstrated.

By the same token, other visual or multimodal genres, which involve the articulation of different off-line frames (VEREZA, 2013) in dynamic online cognitive processes can be a rich source of insights for cognitive linguists. The genre “cartoon”, in particular, for its reliance on multilayered cognition, has attracted productive investigative initiatives. Duque (2020), for example, has proposed an analysis of the frames which cognitively sustain cartoons about the Covid-19 pandemics. The large number of frames proposed by the author for each cartoon analyzed seems to evidence the rich cognitive dimension of multimodal genres. As the aim of this paper is to propose a cognitive-discursive approach to both political and social cartoons, a brief discussion of the genre (conceived here as an interactive frame) “cartoon” is found to be necessary.

## 2. Political and social cartoons

In print media, political and social cartoons have been around since the 1840’s (ADLER; HILL, 2008). Traditionally, editorial cartoons may be described as drawings published in editorials or particular pages of newspapers – intended for satire, caricature, or humor – which establishes a “dialogue between government and society, a reflection or reaction of society to a political event, a series of events or a person” (DUGALICH, 2018, p. 158). We should reinforce here the “reactive” or “responsive” nature of political cartoons, as pointed out by Dugalich (2018): as a rule, they usually amount to a kind of commenting on previous political events or discourses (speeches, negotiations, debates, etc.), which means, in the long run, that they are primarily situated.

A further distinguishing feature of political cartoons is their multimodality, for they comprise a combination of verbal, visual and extra-linguistic components, arranged in such a way that they instantiate and highlight different aspects of the same cognitive-discursive scenario – whether for the sake of plain humor, or criticism, or both. Because of this multimodal characteristic, Dugalish (2018) regards political cartoons as ‘creolized texts’, evoking the conception of a semiotic piece derived from a mixture of several other semiotic fragments. More importantly, though, we argue that the combination of verbal, visual, and extra-linguistic components within the cartoon’s frame provide a set of argumentation strategies aimed to fulfill its communicative goal: to “satirically criticize a particular political event or action of a particular political leader” (DUGALISH, 2018, p. 166).

Metaphor in discourse, as both a product and a process involving the articulation between on-line and off-line cognition, has been investigated within the recent cognitive-discursive trend in Cognitive Linguistics (KOVECSES, 2020; CAMERON; MASLEN, 2014; SEMINO, 2008, for example). The way metaphor participates as an effective instrument in argumentation, *i.e.*, the textual (verbal or non-verbal) development of a viewpoint or worldview (UNDERHILL, 2011) is studied by Vereza (2013; 2021), who proposes two concepts for the analysis of metaphor in discourse: ‘situated metaphor’ and ‘metaphor niche’. The former consists of a metaphor which is used, often deliberate and

argumentatively, in specific discourse contexts. It differs from conceptual metaphors in that the latter are mostly unconscious (as they belong to the sociocognitively shared conceptual system), off-line, and are not circumscribed to particular contexts, as it is the case of situated metaphors. An example of a (visual) situated metaphor in a political cartoon is in Figure 8.



FIGURE 8 - Situated metaphor

Source: [https://www.tribstar.com/opinion/editorial-cartoon-lets-make-a-deal/article\\_2f1f0f58-a7ea-11e8-aa82-5b7e1567f5a1.html](https://www.tribstar.com/opinion/editorial-cartoon-lets-make-a-deal/article_2f1f0f58-a7ea-11e8-aa82-5b7e1567f5a1.html)

The situated metaphor *Cohen is a Pinocchio* puts forward the point of view defended by the cartoonist: Cohen is a liar. Though local and on-line, the situated metaphor relies on off-line representations, such as the frame of Pinocchio, and his habit of lying, which is accompanied by the growth of his nose (an image which is mapped, in the cartoon, onto Cohen's supposedly Pinocchio nose). Another frame which is evoked is the political situation involving Donald Trump's former personal lawyer, who, at the time the cartoon was published, was in jail.

A situated metaphor can be extended (verbally or visually) through local, online mappings, forming a “metaphor niche” (VEREZA, 2013). We consider these two concepts and, at the same time, units of analysis to be useful analytical instruments when one's aim is investigating metaphor in use or, more specifically, visual metaphors in cartoons.

Another important concept which is relevant to the analysis of metaphors in cartoons is that of “metaphoricity”, object of the discussion which follows

### 3. Visual metaphor in cognition and discourse: metaphoricity

Since when Conceptual Metaphor Theory was first introduced (originally LAKOFF; JOHNSON, 1980), many cognitive linguists have been engaged in verifying both the occurrence, and especially the importance of this device in as many discourse domains as we can think of – from ordinary and day-

to-day genres through technical and artistic genres. As a result of this endeavor, scholars have realized that some metaphorical expressions are more transparent than others, for they could be spotted and identified more straightforwardly than others. This led Pauwels (1995, p. 127) to eventually posit, for instance, that there seems to be “two basic kinds of metaphorical expressions: those in which the metaphor relies on specialist knowledge, versus those where the concepts are fully salient.” Upon this realization, some scholars have also committed themselves to providing methods for more systematic and more objective identification of metaphors in discourse. Examples of such methods include the “metaphor identification through vehicle terms” procedure (MIV) (CAMERON, 2006); the “metaphor candidate identifier” program (MCI) (BERBER SARDINHA, 2011, p. 352); the “metaphor identification procedure” (MIP) (PRAGGLEJAZ GROUP, 2007, p. 79); and its refined and extended version “metaphor identification procedure Vrije Universiteit” (MIPVU) (STEEN *et al.*; 2010, p. 25). Nonetheless, no matter how helpful these methods may be for their purposes, they account for metaphor identification exclusively on the part of analysts, and do not cover “spontaneous” identification of metaphorical expressions in authentic language use situations, that is, metaphor identification on the part of average speakers. As a matter of fact, speakers do not normally conceive of and thus do not identify this device the same way trained analysts can. This could be observed in sentences (1) to (3).

- (1) My financial position is somewhat precarious now.
- (2) Much of what they recorded was far from the truth.
- (3) You are on very shaky ground with that argument.

In line with Conceptual Metaphor Theory, the three underlined expressions in sentences (1) to (3) are instantiations of a single conceptual metaphor: A SITUATION IS A LOCATION (GRADY, 1997, p. 284). This metaphor derives from our understanding of the circumstances that affect us – or rather, the courses of action available to us – in terms of our locations. So they could be said to be undoubtedly metaphorical, from a technical perspective. However, at first glance, one might argue that these expressions do not seem metaphorical to the same extent: “on very shaky ground”, in (3), sounds somehow “more” metaphorical than “position”, in (1); out of the three, the transparency of “far from”, in (2), could be the least agreed. On the basis of this observation, Pauwels (1995, p. 126) then argues that it becomes important that one think of “metaphor as a matter of degree”, rather than a matter of “yes-or-no”. In order to deal with this “impression” (of metaphor gradability), many scholars have then evoked the concept of “metaphoricity” – Pauwels (1995) being one of them. A plain explanation defines metaphoricity as “the fact or quality of [something] being metaphorical”<sup>3</sup>, which seems to relate to Black’s (1993) view of this feature. Black’s (1993, p. 25) statement that “the only entrenched classification is grounded in the trite opposition – itself expressed metaphorically – between ‘dead’ and ‘live’ metaphors” implies the idea that live metaphors are sufficiently transparent

<sup>3</sup> Retrieved from: <https://www.lexico.com/definition/metaphoricity>.

to be recognized as metaphorical; whereas dead metaphors are those that go unnoticed by speakers, for they have already lost their transparency. So within this dead-or-alive theory, metaphoricity depends essentially on structural aspects – primarily semantic and etymological aspects – of metaphorical expressions themselves.

Metaphor scholars have realized, however, that only structural aspects do not suffice to explain how or even when metaphorical expressions are recognized as metaphors, whereas others are not. Instead, scholars have noticed that, depending on manifold conditions, some analysts (and speakers as well) are apt to find metaphors where other analysts (and speakers) may not. As for possible factors that could influence metaphor recognizability, Müller (2008, p. 36) concludes that “not only does the metaphoricity of a spoken or written metaphor depend on cognitive process [...], but this activity is also embedded in the flow of speech, writing, and in the flow of consciousness.” For this reason, we adopt in this paper a broad concept of metaphoricity as the possibility of a metaphorical expression being recognized as a metaphor (especially by average speakers), which does not overlook any aspects pertaining either to language or to cognition, either to the language system or to its use (STEEN, 2006).

Based on critical reading of a collection of studies that have addressed metaphoricity in discourse, and proposed methods to determine such a feature (see GOATLY, 1997; MÜLLER, 2008; DUNN, 2015; STEEN, 2017), this paper turns to the term “activation devices” (MÜLLER, 2008, p. 190) to analyze and assess this very phenomenon. Activation devices correspond to verbal and nonverbal strategies that, in context, can deautomatize a metaphor, by increasing its chances of being recognized as metaphorical. Conceptual Metaphor Theory in fact assumes that metaphors are “unavoidable, ubiquitous, and mostly *unconscious*” (LAKOFF; JOHNSON, 2003, p. 273, our emphasis) – which means that many metaphors which we use are apt to most often be automatically used, and thus go unnoticed. However, by using activation devices, metaphors “can become more metaphorically active in certain contexts, i.e., become deautomatized” (KYRATZIS apud MÜLLER, 2008, p. 190). From a list prepared by Dienstbach (2018), we will present those that are suitable for this paper. First, non-conventionalization of metaphorical expressions seems to be a consensual activation device of metaphoricity. It means that the less lexicalized or institutionalized<sup>4</sup> a metaphorical expression is, the greater its chances of being recognized as metaphorical (by speakers). This might be the case of “on very shaky ground”, in (3), if compared to “position”, in (1). A second activation device is the verbal elaboration of a metaphor, which Steen (2002) calls ‘explicitness’. This implies that the presence of source-domain terms, in the utterance, related to the metaphorical expression increases the chances of metaphor recognition. The following statement by space engineer James Oberg (SAGAN, 1997, p. 177), in (4), gives a clear example of how it works.

(4) Keeping an open mind is a virtue, but not so open that your *brains fall out*.

<sup>4</sup> Handl (2011: 57) argues that institutionalization and lexicalization are two processes of conventionalization. Related to sociopragmatic aspects, “institutionalization refers to the incorporation of new lexical material into the lexicon of language”; while lexicalization, related to structural aspects, “can be regarded as a gradual historical process which depends on the frequency of use”.



The expression “open mind” is a highly conventionalized instantiation of the MIND IS A CONTAINER metaphor (LAKOFF; JOHNSON, 1980), which conceptualizes, on the one hand, the human mind in terms of an object with a bounding surface and an in-out orientation, and on the other, ideas in terms of objects which may be stored in the mind. So the ‘more open’ our mind is, the more welcoming to new ideas you tend to be. By virtue of its conventionalization in English<sup>5</sup>, we could expect “open mind” to go unnoticed in most ordinary circumstances; although this might not be the case in (4). The phrase “brains fall out”, in the second clause, makes an obvious reference to the cross-domain mapping on the basis of “open mind”, for brains are literally physical objects stored in a container, *i.e.*, the skull. Following Steen’s (2002) claim, we may then argue that the presence of “brains fall out” in that utterance functions as an activation device, that is, it increases the chances of ‘open mind’ being recognized as a metaphor.

Finally, another powerful activation device, in the words of Müller (2008), is the visual elaboration of a metaphor – in particular, of its source-domain – via pictorial resources. In such circumstances, where pictorial resources (Figure 9) straightforwardly refer to a metaphor’s source domain, the chances of metaphor recognition are significantly increased.

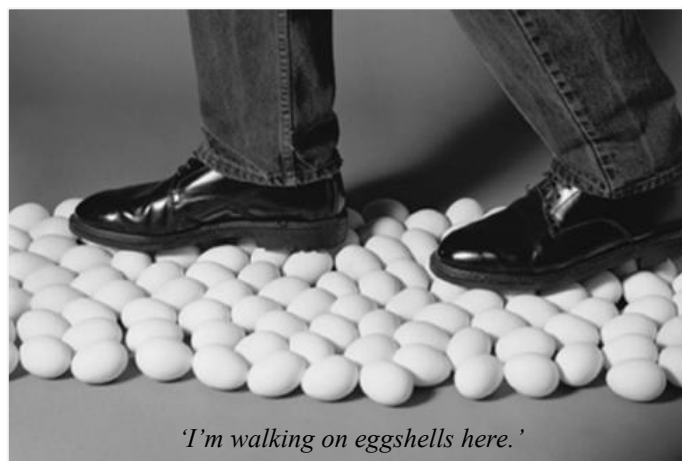


FIGURE 9 - Visual representation of the idiom “walk on eggshells”  
Source: Zocchio and Balardin (1999, p. 8)

Whenever you say that you are “walking on eggs”, it means that you have to be very careful with your words and behavior not to offend or upset someone, that is, not to hurt someone’s feelings. This expression instantiates our understanding of EMOTIONAL STATES in terms of physical ENTITIES stored in someone’s body, which in turn is understood in terms of a CONTAINER (LAKOFF; JOHNSON, 1980). By evoking eggshells – which are not really hard and yield under not much pressure

<sup>5</sup> For instance, “open mind” in *Cambridge Dictionary* (retrieved from: <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/open-mind>) and *Oxford Learner’s Dictionary* (retrieved from: [https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/us/definition/english/mind\\_1](https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/us/definition/english/mind_1)).



– to conceptualize feelings, one highlights how brittle someone’s feelings can be; so much so that their feelings could metaphorically “break into pieces” if you offend or upset them. All in all, “walk on eggs” is a very conventional idiom in English<sup>6</sup>, which means that, in ordinary circumstances, it could easily go unnoticed by speakers. In Figure 1, however, a picture of “literal” feet stepping on “literal” eggshells is likely to automatically evoke the cross-domain mapping on the basis of that expression – specifically, to concepts within its source-domain. We may then regard this visual resource as an activation device, for it could increase the chances of “walk on eggshells” being recognized as a metaphorical expression.

## 4. Metaphor recognition in cartoons

Based on the theoretical rationale discussed in the previous sections, this paper now presents an analysis of multimodal metaphors in political cartoons, with focus on the cognitive-discursive functioning of images in argumentative contexts. As claimed previously, political and social cartoons mobilize a set of argumentation strategies aimed to fulfill their ultimate communicative goal, which is to support a critical point of view regarding particular political events or actions (DUGALISH, 2018). Furthermore, we argue that such a genre provides an iconic instantiation of the cognitive-discursive functioning of multimodal metaphors and, at the same time, is conducive to the activation of metaphoricity in discourse, once it combines verbal and visual elements in order to meet the purposes of journalistic texts. The analysis presented here, therefore, is primarily intended to illustrate these points and, hopefully, to contribute to cognitive-discursive approaches to the study of metaphors in multimodal genres.

The analysis started from an active search, by using the Google platform search engine, for “political cartoons” that address political and social events related to Covid-19 pandemic in Brazil and worldwide. The pervasiveness and prominence of debates and reports on the pandemic – within both ordinary and technical or specialized domains – motivated the choice for this topic.

In order to carry out a systematic analysis of the cartoons selected, we resort to the concepts (to be used as units of analysis) of *multimodal metaphor* (FORCEVILLE, 2008), *activation device* (of metaphoricity) (MÜLLER, 2008), *metaphor niche* (VEREZA, 2013), and *situated metaphor* (VEREZA, 2021) – in the terms described in the previous sections. The analysis then unfolds as follows.

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<sup>6</sup> For instance, “walk on eggshells” in *Cambridge Dictionary* (retrieved from: <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/walk-be-on-eggshells>).

## 4.1. COVID outbreak is a wave

The use of the expressions “wave”, in English, and its rough equivalent in Portuguese, “*ondazinha*” (ironically, “small wave”), in the two cartoons below (Figure 10), are evidence of our metaphorical understanding of a striking sequence of events (usually bad events), within a short period of time, in terms of a raised line of water that moves across the surface of the sea towards a sand stripe. In the cartoons, in particular, “wave” and “*ondazinha*” serve to conceptualize the large number of infections and deaths from Covid-19 that are expected to soon come about, all at once, in particular locations. Such a metaphorical understanding of these expressions may be said to be highly conventionalized in both languages – even to talk about the sudden outbreak of a disease –, as these figurative meanings may be found in several English and Portuguese dictionaries<sup>7</sup>. In general, most instantiations of the conceptual metaphor EVENTS ARE WAVES tend to evoke and highlight the power and the impact with which those sea influxes may reach the seashore: the greater a wave is, the greater the impact it can cause – occasionally taking on very destructive proportions. So by conceptualizing an outbreak of Covid-19 in terms of a wave, the two cartoons may be expecting their consequences to be quite devastating to the locations.

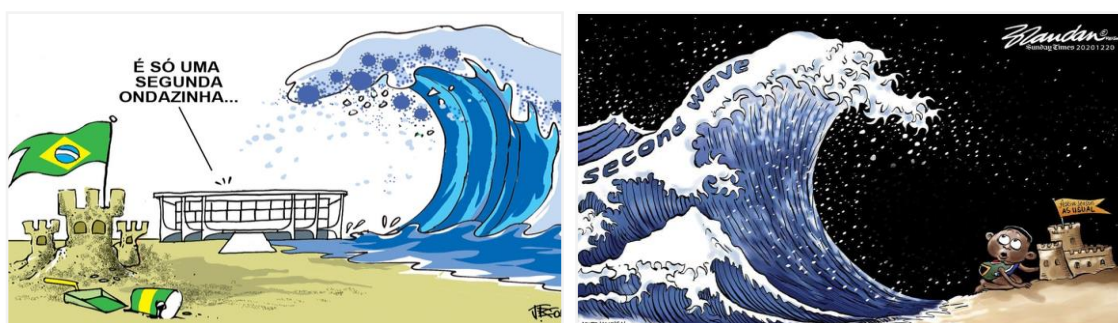


FIGURE 10 - Instantiations of COVID OUTBREAK IS A WAVE metaphor in cartoons

Source: <https://www.oliberal.com/esportes/2.898/segunda-onda-de-covid-19-e-tema-de-charge-1.327800>, and <https://www.timeslive.co.za/sunday-times/opinion-and-analysis/2020-12-20-cartoon--covid-19-second-wave-set-to-dampen-festive-season/>

Due to their high degree of conventionalization, we claim that, in ordinary circumstances, metaphorical uses of “wave” and “*ondazinha*” to conceptualize striking events would be unlikely to be promptly recognized as metaphorical by most English or Portuguese speakers. However, besides these verbal expressions, the cartoons contain drawings of a huge sea wave – about to hit a sand stripe – which also function to metaphorically represent a Covid-19 outbreak. In addition, in one of the cartoons, the wave is depicted as carrying along what seems to be a group of virus-like particles.

<sup>7</sup> For instance, “wave” in *Cambridge Dictionary* (retrieved from: <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/wave>) and *Oxford Learner’s Dictionary* (retrieved from: [https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/us/definition\\_/english/wave\\_1](https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/us/definition_/english/wave_1)); “onda” in *Aulete Digital* (retrieved from <https://aulete.com.br/onda>) and *Dicionário Michaelis* (retrieved from <https://michaelis.uol.com.br/moderno-portugues/busca/portugues-brasileiro/onda>).

Because these visual instantiations of the conceptual metaphor COVID-19 OUTBREAK IS A WAVE explicitly convey concepts from its source domain (i.e., a real wave), there are higher chances of the metaphorical nature of “wave” and “*ondazinha*” in the cartoons not going unnoticed by speakers. And not only is the metaphor itself made transparent by the drawings, but also the hiperbolic outcomes of the Covid-19 outbreaks: reaching four to five times as high as the buildings in their way, the waves could easily be described as tsunamis.

With regard to the locations (on the verge of being hit by the metaphorical waves), namely Brazil and South Africa, they can only be metonymically recognized by the colors of their national flags – which appear in a bucket, a shovel, and clothes – or by the flags themselves. The nations, in turn, are evoked to metonymically represent their populations, which are the real targets of the new coronavirus. In addition to that, it is worth mentioning that the countries are also metaphorically conceptualized as sandcastles. Unlike the conceptual metaphor COVID-19 OUTBREAK IS A WAVE, the understanding of *countries* as *sandcastles* does not seem a conventionalized one in either English or Portuguese (according to the dictionaries). We claim, rather, that it corresponds to a situated metaphor, whose mappings tend to be established online in the very text where it happens to occur, in general, for argumentative purposes (VEREZA, 2013). We might then expect that the situated nature of the *countries are sandcastles* metaphor, as well as its visual instantiations, is apt to increase the chances of it being recognized as a metaphor instantiation.

Moreover, it should be observed that sandcastles – usually made by children playing on the beach – are not very solid and stable structures, and are easily dissolved even by small sea waves. So, in contrast to the Covid-19 tsunami, the sandcastles’ vulnerability (to waves) in the cartoons primarily function to highlight the populations’ susceptibility to the disease. That is, the clear asymmetry between the size of the waves and the weakness of the sandcastles depicted in the cartoons seem to reinforce the idea that the effects of a Covid-19 outbreak both in Brazil and in South Africa are very likely to be catastrophic. In the South African cartoon, the drawing of a child making the sandcastle only helps to strengthen that idea.

Finally, the situated metaphor *sea wave is coronavirus outbreak* may be considered as being a “fusion” visual metaphor. In the first cartoon, the source domain “wave” is accompanied by the viruses themselves – which is a metonymy part-whole for the pandemic; and in the second case, the sea wave displays a text anchor (the verbal expression “second wave”) which marks the target domain. The visual metaphoric representation of highly threatening waves, which, in both cases are very close to breaking and, consequently, destroying what is before them, is likely to make the cognitive-discursive impact of the proposed argument on the reader even stronger.

## 4.2. COVID-19 is a reaper



FIGURE 11 - Instantiations of COVID-19 IS A REAPER metaphor in cartoons

Source : <https://www.cagle.com/chris-weyant/2020/09/trumps-biggest-fan>, and <https://pt.org.br/midia-estrangeira-aponta-isolamento-de-bolsonaro/>

The two cartoons above (Figure 11) depict, in their drawings, visual instantiations of the conceptual metaphor DEATH IS A (GRIM) REAPER, which implies a highly conventional form of conceptualization in English<sup>8</sup> (LAKOFF; TURNER, 1989). According to this metaphor – which derives from another cross-domain mapping, *i.e.* PEOPLE ARE PLANTS –, death is often conceptualized in terms of a human skeleton, dressed in a cloak, and clutching a scythe, who approaches a person to announce their death and to collect their soul. In the cartoons, especially due to the period of their release – during the Covid-19 pandemic –, a mention of the word “pandemic”, and the image of a virus-like creature (side by side with a robed skeleton), it became quite evident that the reapers, as land workers, have been providing their services to the new coronavirus. One point that should be made here, regarding the choice of metaphor, has to do with the fact the reaper also conceptualizes the artists’ view about the pandemic severity. Indeed, at the moment when a reaper swings his scythe, he is able to cut a considerable number of crops. So, they make clear that, at the moment when Covid-19 hits the population, it is able to metaphorically “reap” a lot of lives at once. We then claim with a certain degree of certainty that the reason why the cartoons make use of the DEATH IS A REAPER metaphor is because death rates – both in the U.S. and in Brazil – are expected not to remain as low as we would like them to. The way in which reapers are depicted also convey the very grim and dark conceptualization of the new coronavirus, or rather, death from Covid-19. Human skulls, with a scary face and an evil smile, wearing a black and dirty cloak are, at least conventionally, perceived as threatening creatures, *i.e.*, someone we would, for sure, not like to meet.

<sup>8</sup> For instance, “the Grim Reaper” in *Cambridge Dictionary* (retrieved from: <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/grim-reaper>) and *Oxford Learner’s Dictionary* (retrieved from: <https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/definition/english/the-grim-reaper>).

Furthermore, it is worth mentioning that the reapers in both cartoons look very pleased with the purported revisionist stance with which the rulers of particular countries have been dealing with the pandemic. In one piece, a robed skeleton appears applauding Brazil’s president, Jair Bolsonaro, as he delivers a speech; in the other, former U.S. president Donald Trump is being mobbed by a reaper, with complimenting words (“love your work!”), while he asks “what pandemic?”. Revisionism on the part of both rulers is made quite clear in the cartoons by the statements they utter: whereas for the Brazilian head of state, the pandemic would be overrated – nothing but “*hysterie*” (“hysteria”) and “*verschwörung*” (“conspiracy”) (in German) –, for the former U.S. president, it does not even exist, for he is portrayed holding a sign that says “what pandemic?”. The most remarkable feature in the cartoons, however, is the occurrence of visual elements that instantiate the hyperbolic inconsistency between the opinion held by both rulers and the pandemic severity in their countries. Alongside their statements that underestimate the consequences of Covid-19, we are shown images of an angry Bolsonaro being supported by a human-size coronavirus, and a sneering Trump standing on top of a pile of human skulls.

In both cartoons, the visual metaphor of a reaper, instantiating the situated metaphor *Covid-19 is a reaper*, which, in turn, can be seen as a specification of the more conventional conceptual metaphor DEATH IS A REAPER, is of the “juxtaposition” type: as the visual includes both source (the reaper) and the target (COVID-19) domains. However, the target is not represented directly in the visual metaphor, but metonymically, by means of the text anchor “pandemics” (in the first cartoon) or of a picture of the virus itself (second cartoon).

#### 4.3. COVID-19 is war

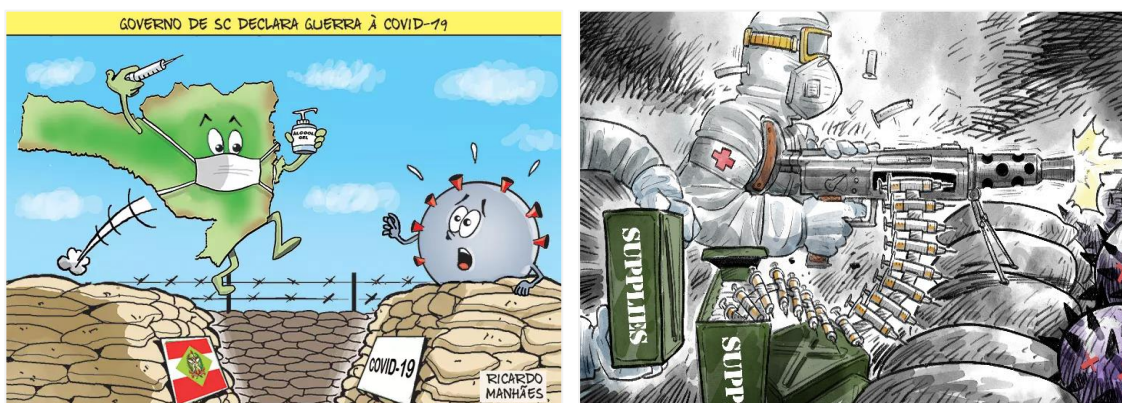


FIGURE 12 - Instantiations of COVID-19 IS WAR metaphor in cartoons  
 Source: <https://ndmais.com.br/opiniao/charges/rascunho-automatco-93/>, and  
<https://www.chinadaily.com.cn/a/202003/13/WS5e6aeb2ca31012821727ed3c.html>



The verbal phrase “*declarar guerra*” (“to declare war”), in Portuguese, and the label “supplies” used, respectively, in the cartoons above (Figure 12) instantiate our metaphorical understanding of a disease, or rather, the treatment of it in terms of a war. According to this conceptual metaphor (DISEASE IS WAR) (GOATLY, 2007, p. 49), patients, along with their immune system, are often conceptualized in terms of a soldier, the disease itself or its pathogens are the enemies, and medicines are the weapons needed to fight the disease. Nonetheless, because of the event depicted – namely, Covid-19 vaccinations –, the war scenarios that instantiate the DISEASE IS WAR metaphor present some specific features. In fact, in both drawings, the enemy conceptualizes the same pathogen, the new coronavirus, represented either by a virus-like creature or by spiked balls. In the Brazilian cartoon, there are even verbal references to the virus in a sign hanging from the enemy’s barricade. The weapons against it are seryngs, which work as a gun in the first drawing, and as bullets – hence ‘supplies’ – in the second. Unlike ordinary actualizations of this metaphor, however, the soldiers do not conceptualize any patients. In the first piece, for instance, one single soldier instantiates the government of a Brazilian state, Santa Catarina, which appears metonymically represented, on the one hand, by its flag (hanging from the combatant’s barricade), and metaphorically represented, on the other, by the personification of its map, who is then jumping out of that barricade. The soldiers in the second cartoon, in turn, instantiate the health system of an unspecified location, which is metonymically represented by health care practitioners.

The conceptual metaphor DISEASE IS WAR is neither new nor unusual (NERLICH *et al.*, 2002; GOATLY, 2007; VEREZA, 2020). Occurrence of expressions licensed by this metaphor in definitions of “disease” or “doença” both in English and in Portuguese dictionaries<sup>9</sup> proves that the understanding of an illness (as well as its treatment) in terms of a war is a very conventional one in those languages. Thus, we may expect that these expressions – such as “guerra”, in Portuguese, or (war) “supplies”, in English – would easily go unnoticed in ordinary circumstances. However, in the cartoons above, a combination of visual devices seems able to make the cross-domain mapping more transparent for speakers. In addition to drawing our attention to the DISEASE IS WAR metaphor, these visual devices serve to reinforce the idea that vaccination and, therefore, the vaccine are the most efficient and powerful resources which we possess to control the pandemic. In both drawings, the soldiers show some sort of ferocity; they make their attack on Covid-19 either by physically plunging against the virus or by standing on the front line in the battle. In the Brazilian cartoon, we could also tell, from the virus-like creature’s look (of fear), that the vaccine must be the weapon which the enemy would be least capable of tackling. In the second piece, the vaccine’s efficiency is made even clearer for it is not conceptualized in terms of a simple pistol or rifle, but in terms of a heavy machine gun, clearly with superior firepower, able to fire a lot of bullets – *i.e.*, vaccines – one after the other

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<sup>9</sup> For instance, “disease” in *Cambridge Dictionary* (retrieved from: <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/disease>) and *Oxford Learner’s Dictionary* (retrieved from: <https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/definition/english/disease>); “doença” in *Aulete Digital* (retrieved from <https://www.aulete.com.br/doença>) and *Dicionário Michaelis* (retrieved from <https://michaelis.uol.com.br/moderno-portugues/busca/portugues-brasileiro/doença>).

very quickly. What the gun model depicted in the cartoon seems to convey, indeed, is that vaccination may be the fastest and the most efficient resource we have to control the pandemic.

In both cartoons, the source domain (WAR) is represented metonymically by some of their elements (“source elements”; VEREZA, 2020): barricades, weapons, grenades, soldiers, bullets, etc.), which are profiled according to the point of view put forward: vaccines are the most effective weapon in the combat against the new coronavirus. There is an image metaphor in the second cartoon: the spiked balls (a war or a fight instrument) mapped upon the mental image of the virus, which is known to have spikes all around it. In both cases, the visual metaphor relies on a variety of frames, which have to be evoked by the audience.

## 5. Final remarks

When some Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT) scholars started following Gibbs’ (1999, p. 145) suggestion that researchers should “take metaphor out of our heads and put it into the cultural world”, inaugurating, in this way, the cognitive-discursive trend in metaphor studies, a range of new and multiple challenges arose.

The first of these challenges lies in the articulation between the cognitive and the discursive dimensions of metaphor within a systematic framework, which does not leave behind the solid theoretical gains of CMT, in particular, the notion of metaphor as a figure of thought. The introduction of notions such as ‘situated metaphors’, ‘metaphor niches’ and ‘metaphoricity’, discussed in this paper and drawn upon in the analysis of cartoons carried out, has contributed to a more systematic investigation of metaphor in use. However, in most research within the cognitive-discursive turn, the “discourse” element has been investigated, empirically, in its materialization in verbal texts. When it comes to examining metaphors in multimodal genres, such as cartoons, ads, etc. another door opens for cognitive-based inquiries. To combine, in a coherent way, discourse and cognitive oriented approaches to analyses of pictorial metaphors, anchored or not by verbal texts, has proved to be not an easy task, but a very fruitful one.

As the brief analyses presented here suggest, cartoons evoke multilayered off-line frames, image metaphors and conceptual metaphors, which, discursively articulated with situated metaphors, juxtaposition, replacement and fusion strategies, as well as metaphoricity devices, construct the object of discourse powered by argumentation.

As pictorial metaphors heavily rely on shared mental representations, including frames and mental images (LAKOFF, 1987), its “resolution” is greatly responsible for the potential *pathos* effect it may cause on the audience – who are likely to feel as co-constructors of meaning (FORCEVILLE, 2008). Whether or not readers will be convinced by the point of view advanced by the cartoon author or simply reject it is another matter, but by participating cognitively in the mental construction of the argument seems to be a solid step in the persuasion intended.



The humorous effects of cartoons, emerging, to a large extent, from their multimodality nature, the “deconstruction” of conventional metaphors (thus increasing their metaphoricity), novel and often unexpected, situated metaphors and local mappings also seem to contribute to the argumentation intended (subtle persuasion through – often acid – humor, as opposed to explicit, indoctrination-like persuasion).

The theoretical reflection and the analyses proposed in this paper have indicated the need for further investigation, proposing possible conceptual and analytical paths to be followed in this ongoing investigative journey, as well as new questions and challenges to be explored on the way.

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