

Från bekämpning till brobygging
– metaforer omkring Covid-19 inom Tysk
politik

From Battling to Bridge Building
– Metaphors around Covid-19 in German
Politics

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From Battling to Bridge Building – Metaphors around Covid-19 in German Politics

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The present study examines metaphor activity in German politics. It focuses on the question how metaphors contribute to a conceptualisation of the Covid-19 pandemic. The research question is answered with the help of a corpus-based analysis that qualitatively investigates debates in the German parliament between March and June 2020. The study combines frameworks from cognitive-linguistics and discourse studies with practice-oriented reflections.

The results show that metaphors are used to either make the emerging, new situation more accessible or the reactions to it. Metaphors describing the situation furnish Covid-19 with physical features such as speed, weight or force. Metaphors referring to political action highlight the feature of policies to follow a certain strategy and be performed collaboratively. In general, there are several metaphors that treat Covid-19 as an opponent or at least as a distinct entity. The fact that a virus needs a host to survive and spread is clashing with such a rhetorical emphasis on the dichotomy of “us vs. the other”.

This paper contributes to the critical reflection on metaphor use in connection with the decade-defining Covid-19 pandemic. How certain metaphors influence political decision making and public action is hereby open for further research.

1 Introduction

Today we have sharp swords for handling infectious diseases.

Heute haben wir im Umgang mit Infektionskrankheiten scharfe Schwerter. - The Greens, 04.03.2020

And thereby our public health service is the central key for monitoring the rate of new infections.

Und da ist [...] unser Öffentlicher Gesundheitsdienst der zentrale Schlüssel, um das Infektionsgeschehen zu überwachen. - Christian Democratic Union, 14.05.2020

What difference does it make to talk about something in terms of a key or in terms of a sword? How do such metaphorical expressions reflect the way politicians conceptualise action towards the Covid-19 pandemic? What implicit messages do they communicate with the choice of their words? As several scholars highlight, it is often more important *how* one speaks about something than the actual factual content (Lakoff & Wehling, 2012; Wehling, 2018). Keeping all these questions in mind, this paper focuses on the use of metaphors around Covid-19.

From Language and Thought to Covid-Metaphors in Politics

Language and thought are closely intertwined. On one hand language reflects the way we think, it provides a window to our mind. On the other hand, we acquire language, and so do we acquire the meaning of a concept a language tries to grasp with a single word. Those concepts are mouldable to some extent. The concept of a birch probably was the same 150 years ago, but what about more abstract concepts that cannot be described by shape or colour? What impact does it have on our concept of marriage when matrimony between woman and man is no longer the only accepted practice of wedlock? Does the concept of marriage change or does it evolve? (ARCHÉ Philosophical Research Centre [ARCHÉ Conceptual Engineering], 2020)

Although those particular questions are still to be answered exhaustively, scholars acknowledge the dynamic nature of language (e.g. Cameron et al., 2009). These dynamics can for example be studied by investigating the written and spoken communication about a topic, the so-called discourse.

This paper investigates the political discourse in Germany about Covid-19. A global pandemic displays a multilayered phenomenon that especially in the beginning of its occurrence shows the dynamics behind several processes in a very dense form. When it comes to studying the interconnectedness of language and thought, Covid-19 displays a particularly interesting concept, since it is new, massive, and urgent to describe due to its omnipresent consequences. From a cognitive linguistics and discourse dynamics point of view one can investigate the pandemic in terms of its discourse vitality and reflect on the conceptual representation we might establish due to the way it is communicated. The corpus-based analysis that is applied in this paper specifically focuses on the use of metaphors around Covid-19.

Metaphors are a powerful tool of language. They select and highlight specific features of a concept, a process called *framing* (Entman, 1993). Research indicates that metaphors are processed in a particular manner (e.g. Boulenger et al., 2012; Desai et al., 2013), that they can specifically affect our emotions by either being more engaging compared to literal language (e.g. Citron & Goldberg, 2014) or influencing people's self-perception (e.g. Hendricks et al., 2018). Moreover, the type of metaphorical framing is suggestive of even having an impact on human behaviour (e.g. Hauser & Schwarz, 2015).

Especially in politics metaphors are an inevitable rhetorical device, since they do not just evoke emotions, but also maintain ideology, have the power to determine the discourse around a certain topic and thus might influence political decision making as well (Charteris-Black, 2014; Sontag, 1989/2006; Wehling, 2018). As such a multifunctional tool metaphors need a multidisciplinary account; this study approaches the phenomenon of metaphor activity by means of a combination of different frameworks: It joins a cognitive-linguistic perspective, a discourse perspective and a practice perspective. The cognitive-linguistic perspective induces the theoretical approach, outlining the central role that metaphor plays in the mental representation of our surroundings. The perspective of discourse analysis mostly accounts for the methodological procedure. The practice-oriented perspective is covered in the result and discussion chapter, integrating how metaphors both can support and impede communication around Covid-19 and its consequences. Just as language and thought are intertwined phenomena, so are the described approaches eventually enlaced and have an impact on the structure of every section of this paper.

The central aim of this study is to stimulate awareness about metaphor activity and its constant occurrence in everyday life. Becoming aware of metaphors is actually an act of intellectual empowerment – if you recognise them, you can also challenge them. To go even one step further and change them provides a way of regaining power over language, reshaping discourse and eventually achieving agency over the way we feel and think about ourselves and our environment (Charteris-Black, 2004).

2 Theoretical Background

Metaphor by itself is a long known phenomenon, already Aristotle in ancient Greece has reflected on its use (Charteris-Black, 2014). However, metaphor as a cognitive phenomenon got more and more scientific attention during the last decades. A milestone in metaphor studies from a cognitive perspective is the so-called Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT) that was established by George Lakoff and Mark Johnson's book "Metaphors we live by" (1980/2003). This section focuses on CMT as a central cognitive linguistic theory for understanding metaphor activity, although there are other accounts to metaphor as well. In order to highlight the embedded and vibrant use of metaphors, discourse studies approaches to metaphor are presented as well.

Conceptual Metaphor Theory

The central function of metaphor is to describe one thing in terms of another. While people often think of metaphors in terms of a poetic tool to decorate language (Mundwiler, 2010), Lakoff and Johnson (1980/2003) emphasise that metaphors strongly account for mentally structuring our everyday life experiences. They claim that written and spoken language provides a window to our basic mental

conceptualisation of the world. Metaphorical expressions, also called linguistic metaphors, are thus the utterances that reflect the underlying conceptual metaphors of our minds. Conceptual metaphors emerge via cognitive mappings that connect structural features of two different domains. A famous example for such a mapping is ARGUMENT → WAR. The domains that are linked are named target domain and source domain. The target domain is usually abstract and less structured, while the source domain is more concrete and already structured by either personal or cultural experience. The notation of a conceptual metaphor was established by Lakoff and Johnson (1980/2003) as follows: TARGET DOMAIN X IS SOURCE DOMAIN Y. The above mentioned mapping would therefore lead to the conceptual metaphor ARGUMENT IS WAR. Linguistic metaphors that maintain this conceptual metaphor are for example "His criticisms were *right on target*." or "He *shot down* all of my arguments." (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980/2003, p. 4). Since a conceptual metaphor is inferred from the linguistic metaphors in use, it is less a fact than rather a mouldable working hypothesis based on the thitherto linguistic evidence (Charteris-Black, 2014).

The showcased metaphorical expressions additionally outline a crucial feature of metaphors: When connecting target and source domain via conceptual mappings, certain attributes of the target domain get emphasized while other qualities of it are eclipsed (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980/2003). In the case of ARGUMENT IS WAR the source domain of WAR highlights the aggressive components of a verbal conflict, while the constructive character of an argument is disregarded. This partial conformance might be seen as a disadvantage, since it contains the risk of oversimplifying the conceptual attributes of the target domain. According to Lakoff and Johnson this partial concordance is inevitable: "If it were total, one concept would actually *be* the other, not merely be understood in terms of it" (1980/2003, p. 13). Moreover, the process of highlighting and disregarding conceptual features of the target domain makes conceptual metaphors a powerful tool for framing. Framing can be defined as involving "selection and salience. To frame is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text" (Entman, 1993, p. 52, without italics).

Just as embodiment determines the structure of an abundance of mental processes, so does the embodied mind have an impact on our language and metaphors as well (Johnson, 1987). A lot of the metaphorical expressions we use arise from the fact that we have a body that interacts with its surroundings. The utterance *to grasp an idea* does for example reflect the conceptual metaphor UNDERSTANDING IS GRASPING (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980/2003). This metaphor might originate from the embodied experience of grasping an object in order to take a closer look at it and comprehend it.

Although CMT provides an exciting account of how language and thought are intertwined, it also comes with limitations. It does for example downplay the mutual impact

of linguistic and conceptual metaphor and seems not to cover the very spontaneous occurrence of metaphor activity in everyday interaction. The following sections will augment CMT, especially with the embedded use of metaphor in discourse in mind.

Extended Conceptual Metaphor Theory

In his book “Extended Conceptual Metaphor Theory” (2020), Kövecses outlines how the limitations of CMT can be overcome. The two extensions that are most relevant for this paper are the contextual component that has an impact on the occurrence and understanding of metaphors and acknowledging online metaphorical activity. The former highlights that the creation and comprehension of metaphor is much dependent on the context where it is used. Both psychological and psycholinguistic research has shown how understanding of metaphor is impacted by the circumstances of usage (for overviews, see e.g. Gibbs & Colston, 2012). Kövecses (2020) names four different categories of contextual factors: situational context, discourse context, bodily context and conceptual-cognitive context. All of these factors impact creating and understanding metaphors on different levels. The situational context refers to factors that determine the physical, social or cultural embeddedness of the speaker. Those factors might arise in the form of a particular landscape (Kövecses, 2000), gender (Kolodny, 1984) or a locally spread spiritual culture (Yu, 1998). The discourse context refers to the immediate discourse the metaphor is embedded in, general knowledge being the base of a particular discourse and former discourse about the same topic that needs to be known in order to understand the metaphor (Kövecses, 2020).

Moreover, Kövecses (2020) also sees the individual body as a context providing factor. On top of metaphors that arise from the aforementioned general connection of language and sensori-motor experience, research suggests that personal bodily experience has an influence on metaphor activity as well (e.g. Casasanto, 2009). The conceptual-cognitive context can include conventionalised conceptual mappings, ideology, general knowledge about the past and personal interests (Kövecses, 2020). While that lastly named contextual factor basically covers what Lakoff and Johnson (1980/2003) describe as being the core of our metaphorical activity, the other three contextual factors broaden the view in which circumstances metaphors arise and what might be necessary in order to understand them.

The second relevant extension focuses on online creation of metaphor. Producing and comprehending metaphors online specifically occurs in natural discourse. At that stage the conceptual structure of metaphor is utilised, for example by creating novel metaphors or elaborating present frames. Online metaphorical activity can occur e.g. through contextual priming, either on the situational, conceptual-cognitive, discourse or bodily level. (Kövecses, 2020)

Discourse Approach to Metaphor

The term *discourse* can be defined as “naturally occurring language use: real instances of writing or speech which are produced and interpreted in particular circumstances and for particular purposes” (Semino, 2008, p. 1). The *particular purposes* are especially taken into account in the discipline of Critical Discourse Studies (CDS), where discourse is always approached as a tool for establishing/maintaining power. Additionally, CDS highlights the context in which discourse happens, on the cultural, social and political level (Willis, 2017). Cameron and Maslen connect metaphor and discourse in the way that they define metaphor as “a multi-dimensional discourse phenomenon that involves language, thinking, physicality and social interaction” (2010, p. 1).

In addition to Kövecses (2020), Cameron et al. (2009) emphasise the contextual component around metaphor use as well. Moreover, they put the mutual connection between language and thought into focus. They criticise that an exclusively “cognitive theory seriously downplays the influence of language on metaphor and the importance of the specifics of the language-using situation in which metaphor occurs. It is more concerned with metaphor at the conceptual level [...], than with the complex dynamics of real-world language use in social situations” (Cameron et al., 2009, pp. 63-64). They specifically highlight the connection of cognitive and social systems that also manifests itself in the creation and understanding of metaphor. This connection is in constant flux, Cameron et al. (2009) consider cognitive and linguistic phenomena to be dynamic and therefore mouldable processes instead of fixed states. According to their Discourse Dynamics Approach metaphor is thus “no longer a static, fixed mapping, but a temporary stability emerging from the activity of interconnecting systems of socially-situated language use and cognitive activity” (Cameron et al., 2009, p. 64).

Metaphor in Politics

Metaphors are considered to be of particular importance in the multilayered field of politics, since they “can provide ways of simplifying complexities and making abstractions accessible” (Semino, 2008, p. 90). However, the world of politics is hard to define – it involves the individual in the form of a certain politician to the same extent as whole institutions or activities such as demonstrations (Semino, 2008). The central process of politics might be described as involving the management of power on the local, national as well as the international level. Management of power can be defined as “the acquisition, maintenance, negotiation, exercise and loss of power” (Semino, 2008, p. 85). And power in these circumstances can be understood “in terms of capability and resources, which include the discursive power to promote and impose concepts as the basis of preferred policies” (Chilton, 1996, p. 6).

In this process of power management, rhetorical persuasion has an important role and metaphors can be seen

as one particularly strong conceptual and linguistic tool for such persuasion. Since a metaphor frames a concept by foregrounding specific attributes and eclipsing others, it is a welcome support for any ideology. Following a sociocognitive approach, van Dijk (1998) describes ideology as the foundation of the social representations that are employed by a certain group of people. Social representations are defined as “organized clusters of socially shared beliefs” (van Dijk, 1998, p. 46). Connecting those social representations back to CMT, one can say that a lot of them get structured by the conventional conceptual metaphors we use (Semino, 2008).

According to Charteris-Black (2014), the persuasive power of metaphor is mostly due to humans’ unconscious response on both the intellectual and emotional level, which can be exploited strategically. From an angle of Critical Discourse Studies, the power aspect behind the use of metaphor needs therefore to be highlighted, since specific metaphors may lead to marginalization of certain societal groups (Charteris-Black, 2006; Koller, 2004; Nguyen & McCallum, 2016). Moreover, Charteris-Black emphasizes the active role a political actor plays in implementing metaphors: “[H]ow a metaphor frames an issue is not predetermined by metaphor but by the orator’s skill in finding a metaphor that constructs reality in a way that is plausible, resonates with the popular view and complies with his or her own political objectives and world view“ (2014, p. 161). Since most political actors make use of metaphors, the central question in analysing political discourse is not *if* metaphors are used, but *which* are used (Wehling, 2018).

In this paper I want to refer to Semino’s (2008) account on discourse and ideology: she treats discourse as a linguistic and ideology as a cognitive phenomenon and describes the connection between those two as dynamic: “discourses reflect particular ideologies, but also contribute to shape them and change them; ideologies result from discursal and social practices but also determine and constrain these practices” (p. 90). This interconnectedness of discourse and ideology can be understood as a prime example for the interdependence of language and thought.

3 Research Questions and Hypothesis

As discourse in academia and media is concerned with the language around Covid-19 (e.g. Semino, 2021; Smiljanic, 2020), I consider it to be relevant to investigate the language of German politicians around that topic as well. Since metaphor is understood as a powerful tool in political rhetoric, I want to focus on metaphor activity in the German parliament (Bundestag). The specific aim of this paper is to present and analyse metaphors used in debates of the Bundestag during the first wave of the pandemic. The analysis follows a multidisciplinary framework that combines perspectives from cognitive linguistics and discourse studies. The general research question of this paper is as follows:

How do metaphors contribute to the conceptualisation of Covid-19 in German politics?

Hypothesis: Current research in metaphor studies has outlined the central role of metaphor in communication around the Covid-19 pandemic (Chapman & Miller, 2020; Craig, 2020; Semino, 2021). I expect metaphors being used in order to motivate political action and convey the urgency and extent of the situation.

The general research question leads to a more specific one :

Which metaphors around Covid-19 do German politicians use and what do those metaphors imply?

In order to answer this research question, I apply an inductive research approach, analysing the material in a manner of exploratory data analysis (Jebb et al., 2017) and presenting the results qualitatively.

However, there are some conceptual metaphors which are likely to be found in the present study. Recent research has shown that political leaders from several countries use the conceptual metaphor DISEASE TREATMENT IS WAR to refer to the Covid-19 pandemic, especially in the beginning of the pandemic (Isentyeva, 2020; Martinez-Brawley & Gualda, 2020; Semino, 2020). Also metaphors that map the pandemic onto the source domains SPORT, JOURNEY, WATER and FIRE were found in previous studies examining the communication around Covid-19 (Semino, 2021; Wicke & Bolognesi, 2020).

4 Method

This section introduces the methodological part of the paper. After outlining how the corpus was created, the data analysis is explained in more detail. The method in this paper is geared to Charteris-Black’s (2014) *Critical Metaphor Analysis* (CMA) approach to political speeches. The aim of this approach is to identify, interpret and explain metaphors that are applied “in persuasive genres such as political speeches” (Charteris-Black, 2014, p. 174). The three central interrogative pronouns in CMA are *which*, *how* and *why*: which metaphors are used, how are they used and why are they used (Charteris-Black, 2014). Table 1 presents the questions to be answered when following that approach. The first six questions are answered in this section, while the questions from the interpretation and explanation stage are covered in the results and discussion section.

Table 1. Methodological Guidelines for CMA of Political Speeches, based on Charteris-Black, 2014, Chapter 7 & 8.

	Questions to be Answered at Each Stage
Contextual Analysis + Selection of Speeches	1. Over what time period are metaphors looked for? 2. In what settings are metaphors looked for? 3. Which political actors use metaphor? 4. How many data sources are used for metaphor research?
Metaphor Identification Stage	5. What counts as a metaphor? 6. What types of metaphors are identified?
Metaphor Interpretation Stage	7. How are metaphors classified? (by target/source domain) 8. What representations are implied?
Metaphor Explanation Stage	9. Why are these metaphors used? (impact) 10. How are these metaphors used? (spread and discourse range)

Corpus

The aim with the study is to investigate metaphors around COVID-19 used by German politicians. Table 2 compiles the name of each party, their acronym, position in parliament and political position.

Table 2. Overview of current parties in the Bundestag.

Acronym/ German Name	Full English Name	Position in Parliament	Political Position
SPD	Social Democratic Party of Germany	Government	Centre-left
CDU/CSU	Christian Democratic Union/Chris tian Social Union	Government	Centre-right
DIE GRÜNEN	Alliance 90/The Greens	Opposition	Centre-left
DIE LINKE	The Left Party	Opposition	Left-wing to Far-left
FDP	Free Democratic Party	Opposition	Centre to Centre-right
AfD	Alternative for Germany	Opposition	Far-right

The analysis focuses on debates during the first wave of infections. The time span of the first infection wave in Germany can be drawn from the beginning of March 2020 until mid of June 2020 (Schilling et al., 2021). In order to create the corpus which should be based on debates held in the Bundestag, protocols were downloaded from the website of the Parliamentary Material Information System (dip.bundestag.de). The relevant protocols were chosen by using the website's keyword search function for searching specific documents. The quest was conducted with the following criteria:

- type of document: plenary protocols
- publisher: Bundestag
- election period: 19
- search term: Corona

The quest revealed 56 protocols between the period of 04.03.2020 and 14.01.2021. In order to analyse debates just from the first wave, the protocols between 04.03.2020 and 19.06.2020 were downloaded. The protocol from 05.03.2020 was excluded later in the process, since it did not contain whole debates on Covid-19. In the end there were protocols from 18 joint sessions of the parliament. The next step was to extract debates about relevant items of the agenda. An item of the agenda was considered to be relevant if the title could be connected to the situation caused by Covid, for example when containing words such as *epidemic*, *crisis*, *pandemic*, *opening strategy* or *Corona*. Additionally, interrogations of the federal government were also included in the corpus. A list of all 81 included debates is compiled in Appendix A. Since the aim with this paper is to investigate the given speeches in the Bundestag, written questions and their answers, which are always gathered as an appendix to every protocol, were not included, even if they touched the topic of Covid-19. However, in two cases speeches that could not be given due to time limitations and were therefore added to the protocols' appendix, were included in the analysis.

Due to time limitations, a sample of the created corpus was read. The sample included 43 debates, at least two from each joint session of the parliament. Choosing agenda items from a joint session was done in regard to representing a diversity of fields, e.g. economics, family politics or education. Following the procedure suggested by Semino (2008) and Charteris-Black (2004; 2014), the sample was used to identify keywords used in metaphoric contexts. As done in the study of Semino et al. (2016), those keywords were clustered into different semantic fields. Thereafter, the whole corpus was searched through for the metaphor keywords and semantically related keywords. A table with the gathered keywords is available under Appendix B.

Analysis

The original protocols were split and the parts with Covid-connected debates were annotated and coded within the programme NVivo.

In order to identify linguistic metaphors, the *Metaphor Identification Procedure* (MIP) by the Pragglejaz Group (2007) and Cameron's (2003) *Metaphor Identification through Vehicle terms procedure* (MIV) were used as guidelines. According to MIP a lexical unit is considered to be metaphorical when its basic meaning is different from the meaning it has in the respective context. However, MIP identifies metaphors word by word, while MIV also takes chunks of language as units of analysis.

The material was coded with compositional coding, meaning that target and source domain were annotated separately (Kimmel, 2012). The focus during the analysis were source domains though. When in doubt about the basic meaning respectively the source domain, lexical units were looked up in the German online-dictionary Duden, following the *Multiple Source Domain Identification Procedure* by Reijnierse and Burgers (The Hong Kong Polytechnic University, Department of English [ENGL PolyU], 2021). Clustering the identified linguistic metaphors was the next step in order to approach the underlying conceptual metaphors. The clustering of both target and source domains was broadened step by step, so that in the end the coding was grouped into basic categories like policies, water, economy or fight.

5 Results

The following section presents the results of the corpus analysis in a qualitative manner. The findings are divided depending on whether the metaphors rather target the current situation or the reaction to it, in that case the planned/executed policies of the parliament. For both of those parts interesting conceptual metaphors are presented. Every section about a certain conceptual metaphor starts with an exemplary metaphorical utterance from the corpus.

Since conceptual metaphors can be understood as working hypotheses (Charteris-Black, 2014), the following conceptual metaphors shall meet the claim to be plausible, not irrevocable. The same claim counts for applied metaphorical inferences and their interpretation. Moreover, the structure of the result presentation is only one version of how to organise the data. Since the situation and the reactions to it are interwoven, some conceptual metaphors could be assigned to the respective other category as well.

5.1 Current Situation

THE PANDEMIC IS A THREE-DIMENSIONAL ENTITY

We want to get back out of this crisis.

Wir wollen aus dieser Krise wieder herauskommen.
- 27.05.20

There are several metaphors describing the emerging situation as having spatial features. *Extent, dimension, order of magnitude, depth, peak* are words that are uttered in relation to the pandemic. Mapping spatial characteristics onto the pandemic raises the impression that it is a

three-dimensional entity. Utterances like *entering* and *exiting the crisis* imply that the situation takes up space. Another spatially related metaphor occurs when an MP talks about the rate of new infections *being pushed down*. This metaphor may be interconnected with graphs picturing cases of infections in a coordinate system; the conventional conceptual metaphor LESS IS DOWN (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980/2003) might also influence this linguistic metaphor.

Spatially associated metaphors provide an insight into what Lakoff and Johnson (1980/2003) call orientational metaphors. Those metaphors occur for example in the conceptual mappings of MORE IS UP (LESS IS DOWN) or GOOD IS UP (BAD IS DOWN). The latter is reflected in the following metaphorical utterance:

It is about interrupting or reversing a downward spiral.
Es geht darum, eine Abwärtsspirale zu unterbrechen oder umzukehren. - 28.05.2020

THE PANDEMIC IS A BURDEN

That is an extreme burden for the families.
Das ist eine extreme Belastung für die Familien. - 06.05.20

Talking about the situation caused by Covid-19 in terms of a BURDEN implies on one hand that one has to be strong and also that the whole situation might be less *heavy* if there are several people or groups taking the responsibility to carry. However, it also means that it is easy to return to the pre-pandemic state, because one just needs to remove the burden and everything will be like before (provided that nobody collapses under the weight of the burden). There still is a rather clear distinction between the pandemic as an entity that needs to be carried and society as bearing this entity.

INFECTION IS A CHAIN

Especially while fighting the pandemic it is about interrupting the chains of infection.
Es geht gerade in der Pandemiebekämpfung um die Unterbrechung der Infektionsketten. - 23.04.20

A frequently used expression in relation to the spreading of Covid-19 is *chain of infection*. This linguistic metaphor highlights the connectedness of individual infections. It foregrounds that people do not get sick from close to scratch, but infect themselves when being in contact with a contaminous entity.

However, speaking of infection in terms of a chain implies a linearity during the process that is actually not the case. If one sick person is participating in a group meeting, they can infect several people at once. When tracing back how the virus spread, it is reasonable to speak of a *chain of infection*. However, politicians in the Bundestag also use it referring to the forward process, talking about *interrupting the chains of infection*. Since the exponential characteristic of the contagion is one reason why the virus could spread so widely, it is important to indicate that in the way the process

of infection is talked about as well. Taking into account that many people struggle with understanding exponential growth (Ellis et al., 2016), it seems particularly relevant to also see language as a possible starting point for displaying exponential processes like the spreading of a disease.

THE PANDEMIC IS A TEST

The corona pandemic is stress testing our economy and our society.

Die Coronapandemie ist [...] ein Stresstest für unsere Wirtschaft und unsere Gesellschaft. - 25.03.20

The current situation is described as a *test*, for both society, economy, the health care system and politics. The concept of being at school is emphasised by politicians talking about the parliament being in the need of *doing their homework*. The opposition addresses the government as performing a rather flat than steep *learning curve* and that they are in need of *tutoring*. The conceptual metaphor THE PANDEMIC IS A TEST provides a certain aspect of agency. It implies that one can succeed with intelligence, structure, and discipline.

COVID-19 IS A BULLET

The crisis hits the weakest and poorest with full force.

Die Krise trifft mit voller Wucht die Schwächsten und Ärmsten. - 15.05.20

There are several occasions when politicians establish the conceptual metaphor COVID-19 IS A BULLET. They refer a lot to either society, economy or the country as being hit hard. Once, the term *virus catapult* is also used. Referring to Covid-19 as a BULLET emphasizes the speed of its occurrence and also the threat that emanates from it. Moreover, it implies that there is the possibility to sidestep it.

THE PANDEMIC IS A FORCE OF NATURE

You are leaving families out in the rain.

Sie lassen Familien im Regen stehen. - 23.04.20

The pandemic is also referred to as a weather situation. One should not *wait until the storm is over*; respectively the parliament should not *leave people out in the rain*. In addition to the rain metaphor, a bailout is called *Rettungsschirm* or *Schutzschirm* in German. The former is referring to an emergency parachute while the latter can be interpreted as a protective umbrella. The image of an umbrella is enhanced by politicians using the verb *open* both in combination with *Rettungsschirm* and *Schutzschirm*.

The following example illustrates how a person who started using a specific metaphor has the power over it. When a member of the government is talking about the pandemic as a storm surge, two people from the opposition augment the metaphor by talking about policies in terms of safety precautions against the surge. The opposition seems to be primed by the situation, one of the contextual factors described by Kövecses (2020).

During a storm surge, you can't tell people that they can stay put in their living rooms without getting wet. We, the CDU are being honest about that and telling the people: Yes, all our feet will get wet ...

– You could buy some pumps for those who can't afford them, though!

– We want to build a dike!

... but our short- and medium-term measures will ensure that we won't be up to our necks in water at least.

Wenn es eine Sturmflut gibt, dann kann man den Menschen nicht erzählen, dass sie trocken in ihren Wohnzimmern sitzen bleiben können. Wir als CDU sind da ehrlich und sagen den Bürgern: Ja, wir bekommen alle nasse Füße, ...

– Aber man könnte denen ein paar Pumpen kaufen, die nicht das Geld dafür haben!

– Wir wollen einen Deich bauen!

... aber mit unseren kurz- und mittelfristigen Maßnahmen sorgen wir dafür, dass das Wasser uns wenigstens nicht bis zum Hals steht. - 28.05.2020

While the last utterance *be up to our necks in water* is an idiom in German, the other water related expressions can be counted as linguistic metaphors revealing the power and threat that lies in the pandemic. Another water related metaphor is speaking about the spreading in terms of a *wave*. This metaphor covers the ups and downs of the infection rate, like falling and rising tides, “multi-factored to account for changes in seasons, medical treatments and ineffectual government policy” (Craig, 2020, p. 1029). Those tides are also visually supported by graphs tracking the numbers of confirmed Covid cases. The flood-related language is complemented by talking about the necessity of *embanking* the spreading of the virus. Conceptual mappings such as PANDEMIC → FLOOD, CONTAGION → WAVE and ACTION → EMBANKING not only communicate the vehemence of the pandemic, but also its area-wide consequences. A problematic aspect with the metaphor THE PANDEMIC IS A FLOOD is that it uncouples the development of the pandemic from human behaviour. Since humans as a host of the virus play a crucial role in the progress of the pandemic, talking about *waves* and *storm surges* might be delusive. THE PANDEMIC IS A FLOOD may imply agency when it comes to getting prepared for the flood to arrive, but it does not imply any precautionary capacity to act.

THE PANDEMIC IS A BURNING GLASS

Covid-19 has intensified the conditions as if under a burning glass.

Covid-19 hat die Zustände wie mit einem Brennglas verschärft. - 13.05.20

A metaphor emphasizing that the current situation is actually stressing circumstances that already existed before is the one of a burning glass. Social inequalities, unreasonable labour conditions and other flaws in society become more salient. As Craig points out, “[w]ith COVID-19, race, place and class are cause factors that have exposed the structural inequality

and fault lines in a society driven by late and global capitalism” (2020, p. 1029). He therefore suggests the metaphor of a *social mirror flu*. However, the concept of a BURNING GLASS includes the factor of enlargement instead of only reflection, which might be more suitable since the Covid-19 pandemic is worsening current social problems all around the world. Moreover, THE PANDEMIC IS A BURNING GLASS also implicates the possible danger of an emerging fire, which leads to the next conceptual metaphor.

THE PANDEMIC IS A FIRE

The shed is on fire!
Die Hütte brennt! - 13.05.20

Politicians establish the conceptual metaphor THE PANDEMIC IS A FIRE when referring to a house or a street that is *on fire* and that there is the urgent need of *dousing*.

As Semino (2020; 2021) outlines, framing the pandemic as a fire comes with several advantages: This metaphor covers the aspect of danger and urgency, it includes a destructive characteristic and conveys that the current situation is difficult to control. The concept of fire can also help illustrate a post-pandemic future which will look different in the same way that an area exposed to a fire changes its appearance (Semino, 2021). THE PANDEMIC IS A FIRE is a perfect example for what Lakoff and Johnson (1980/2003) call a structural metaphor. FIRE as the source domain is a well structured concept with a lot of concrete attributes that might be used for augmenting the conceptual mappings: In addition to the aforementioned attributes, spreading the disease could be mapped onto flying sparks (Semino, 2021); when applying the fire to a forest one could not only see the destructive feature of a fire but also how the ecology of the region gets revived, with new nutrients on basis of the old ones, a metaphor that could be mapped onto societal change. Since the presence of a fire causes urgency of action, fire metaphors also occur in connection with debates about policies.

5.2 Policies

POLITICIANS ARE FIRE FIGHTERS

When the house is on fire, you have to extinguish it.
Wenn das Haus brennt, muss man löschen. - 19.06.20

The conceptual metaphor THE PANDEMIC IS A FIRE also includes the mapping of policies as putting the fire out. Politicians in the Bundestag use metaphors implying they are doing the job of fire fighters or at least providing *fire extinguishers* and *fire water*. Interestingly, policies themselves are described as a fire several times as well, when MPs want to emphasise that policies should not just have a short term effect as a *Strohfeuer* (literal translation: straw fire, figurative translation: flash in the pan).

The dynamic of metaphor activity becomes salient in two situations when an MP uses the metaphor of a burning house

and MPs from the opposition are jumping on this metaphor with their hecklings:

When the house is on fire, you don't think about refurbishing your living room, you extinguish the fire first. That is the challenge we are facing.

– But the smart woman buys the fire drencher in advance!

Wenn das Haus brennt, dann denkt man nicht darüber nach, wie man das Wohnzimmer neu einrichtet, sondern man löscht erst das Feuer. Das ist die Aufgabe, vor der wir stehen.

– Die kluge Frau kauft den Feuerlöscher aber vorher!
- 29.05.2020

I think we have to extinguish the fire today and think about how to fix the roof truss afterwards. [...]

– We are just already calling the carpenter!

Ich finde, wir müssen das Feuer heute löschen und dann darüber nachdenken, wie wir den Dachstuhl wieder aufbauen können. [...]

– Wir rufen halt den Zimmermann jetzt schon! - 28.05.2020

Speaking about *extinguishing the fire* as well as *fixing the roof truss* emphasizes that the pandemic needs to be answered with policies both at short notice and in the long run. The *roof truss* and *carpenter* that are mentioned in this situation each lead to the next conceptual metaphor, whereupon the target domain of POLITICS is mapped onto the source domain of CONSTRUCTION WORK.

POLITICS IS CONSTRUCTION WORK

We are building bridges across and beyond the corona crisis.

Wir bauen Brücken über die Coronakrise hinweg. - 07.05.20

The conceptual metaphor POLITICS IS CONSTRUCTION WORK manifests itself in several linguistic metaphors. When deciding on certain policies, MPs refer to their decision as having laid a *headstone* or a *foundation*. Mapping POLICIES as a target domain onto FOUNDATION as a source domain implicates political action being “well-founded, solid, permanent and stable” (Charteris-Black, 2004, p. 71). Additionally, policies are described in terms of *pillars*, societal institutions as well. The public health service is for example described as *an important pillar during this crisis*. Companies need to be protected from being faced with *ruin*, the economy and the health care system are in danger of *collapsing*. Institutions, companies, Europe are referred to as either being *stable* or being in need of *stabilisation*. Bills and actions are *building blocks*, the country needs to be *rebuilt* again. Those linguistic metaphors also indicate the conceptual metaphor THE COUNTRY IS A BUILDING. This mapping can be augmented by the mapping CITIZENS and POLITICAL LEADERS → BUILDERS (Lu & Ahrens, 2008). The latter mapping highlights the necessity of “social co-operation between government and the people”

(Charteris-Black, 2004, p. 71) and also indicates a focus on long-term goals, since building needs time and effort. In general, building metaphors are associated with positive values, since they convey an attempt to accomplish social goals (Charteris-Black, 2004).

An interesting metaphor in connection to Covid-driven action is the one of building a bridge. In the following example the conceptual mappings are POLICIES → BRIDGE and CRISIS → RIVER.

Nobody knows how wide the bridge has to be in order to carry across the river of this crisis.

Wir wissen alle nicht, wie breit diese Brücke sein muss, damit sie über den Strom dieser Krise trägt. - 13.03.20

An advantage of this conceptual metaphor is that a bridge implicates reaching another bank. Thus the metaphor allows for future scenarios differing from everyday life before the pandemic, the mapping could be described as PRE-COVID-TIME → ONE BANK and POST-COVID-TIME → OTHER BANK. Since the MP in the example speaks about the width of the bridge, its measure can be connected to the dimension of the policies. However, a disadvantage of this conceptual metaphor is that it does not picture the entanglement of pandemic and everyday life, the bridge of policies across the river of the crisis implies it is possible to not get in touch with the pandemic. Moreover, the bridge metaphor does not cover the process of potential adjustments, since building a bridge follows a set plan rather than the dynamics of the circumstances.

POLITICS IS EQUILIBRATING

Everyone of us is trying to re-establish the balance.

[W]ir alle versuchen, das Gleichgewicht wieder hinzukriegen. - 15.05.20

This metaphor arises from expressions using words like *weighing up*, *balance*, *equalisation of burdens*, *outweigh* and *well-balanced*. Businesses are described as *wobbly* or getting into a *tilt*. Mapping POLITICS onto EQUILIBRATING implies a positively connotated position since being at equilibrium seems to be a common-sense achievement. It also puts politics in a powerful position with a lot of responsibility, since *throwing something into the scale pan* triggers an image of politicians taking care of the balance of a whole country.

DISEASE TREATMENT IS WAR

Everyone working for our health stands at the very front in the battle against corona.

Alle, die für unsere Gesundheit im Einsatz sind, stehen im Kampf gegen Corona an vorderster Front. - 04.03.20

Talking about actions against Covid-19 in terms of a fight implies a high-stakes environment. Although German politicians do not explicitly use the term *war*, there are some utterances indicating the concept of WAR as a source domain,

like people from the health care system *being at the front* or the politicians having *sharp swords* to fight the virus. Moreover, political actions are framed with the terms *fight* and *battle*, the virus comes as a *threat*, and Germany is described as *being armed*. Covid-19 is also described as a *real enemy*, but actually in the context of debating the arms industry of Germany. When wanting to emphasise that the government should not invest a lot of money in the arms industry, an MP from the opposition highlights her point of view by expressing that there are *real enemies* as Covid-19. According to Kövecses (2020) the occurrence of this metaphorical expression can be explained by contextual priming of the discourse context.

WAR as a source domain seems to come with several advantages, it builds up on “basic and widely shared schematic knowledge [...] and [...] reliably express an urgent, negatively valenced emotional tone that captures attention and motivates action” (Flusberg et al., 2018, p. 1). In addition to that, it clearly distinguishes between a good in-group and an evil out-group. The mobilising power of this metaphor and that it conveys some form of agency seem to be more reasons for its frequent use in politics (Flusberg et al., 2018). However, several researchers actually criticise the war frame in connection with the Covid-19 pandemic (e.g. Brencio, 2020; Semino, 2021; Chapman & Miller, 2020). Semino emphasises that this conceptual metaphor “may legitimize authoritarian measures that could in fact be disproportionate, and that could go well beyond the specific response to the pandemic” (2021, p. 52).

Interestingly, while discussions of the necessity to fight against the virus are present in lots of debates, the AfD at a certain point starts to use the term *fight* in relation to getting back to a pre-pandemic state. Instead of framing the intended policies as a fight against the virus, they want to fight against those policies.

POLITICS IS GAMING

International politics is not a play area.

Internationale Politik ist doch keine Spielwiese. - 28.05.20

MPs mostly talk about *gambling*. Jobs are *at stake*, the economic future should not be *gambled away*, companies or societal groups are either *winners* or *losers* of the crisis. The insecurity about the usefulness of a certain policy is described as a *bet* by the opposition. When criticising intended policies of the government, the source domain of GAMING might highlight that the government is not taking their job seriously. On the other hand, talking about a game in connection with the crisis comes with agency and the possibility to win. Just like the source domain of a WAR it defines an opponent, but compared to metaphors around the concept of WAR the GAMING frame comes with a rather low-stakes environment.

However, the source domain GAME implies set and therefore predictable rules. A question to answer would be on which source domain Covid-19 should be mapped. Is it the

rival or is it rather setting the rules? The metaphorical expression *sticking to the rules of the game that is protection against infection* implies that the pandemic rather sets the frame of the game. When an MP utters it is important to *not gamble away this running start*, Covid-19 is rather in the position of the rival. Moreover, the latter utterance joins the two source domains GAMING and SPORT which leads over to a section reflecting metaphorical expressions gathering around the concept of SPORT.

POLITICS IS SPORT

We will need a fitness programme, an economic stimulus package.

Wir werden ein Fitnessprogramm, ein Konjunkturpaket brauchen. - 22.04.20

According to Charteris-Black (2014), POLITICS IS SPORT is a common conceptual metaphor in politics, since it implicates politicians having successful features, such as “fitness, strength, health [...] and as being equipped with the ability to plan strategy and defeat opponents through superior tactics and teamwork” (p. 193). Talking about policies as a fitness programme implies that one might outplay the opponent (in this case the virus) by preparing oneself with exercise. While fitness is a way to stay healthy, the next conceptual metaphor is also mapping political action as a form of establishing health, but from a point of view where sickness has already occurred.

POLITICS IS DISEASE TREATMENT

Instead of rhetorical sedatives, concrete, immediate action is necessary.

Statt rhetorischer Beruhigungspillen sind jetzt konkrete Sofortmaßnahmen nötig. - 04.03.20

Although a lot of the analysed debates are about disease treatment as the target domain, MPs also use several metaphors with health, disease and its treatment as the source domain. The economy is *infected* and has to be protected from financial *collapse*, the job market needs a proper *immune system*, financial support from the government comes as *injections*. Mapping POLITICS onto DISEASE TREATMENT has the advantage of quite a flexible source domain. There are both short term and long term treatments, they might be adjusted during the process of curing and the outcome allows both for a scenario of total recovery as well as showing long-term damages. In addition to that, critique towards policies can be framed in terms of applying inappropriate treatment. One MP expresses their criticism on governmental policies by describing it as being *homeopathic*, far too little to make a difference. Another form of critique is uttered when an MP compares rash financial support with *rashly administered medicine* and adds that both are *toxic* in the same way. Describing political actions in terms of medication also occurs in the following metaphorical expression:

The Bundestag needs to position itself so it can at any time check the effects of the Shutdown morphine - long-term use of which will cause severe harm to the patient - as well as adjust and even cancel the prescription as needed.

Der Bundestag muss sich in die Lage versetzen, die Wirkung des Morphiummittels Shutdown, das bei längerer Anwendung den Patienten schwer schädigen wird, jederzeit zu überprüfen, gegebenenfalls die Dosis zu verändern und die Mittel auch wieder abzusetzen.

This metaphor is actually mixing two source domains. The linguistic metaphor *morphine* can be connected to the source domain DISEASE TREATMENT, while the term *shutdown* rather comes from the source domain MACHINE which leads to the conceptual metaphor of the next section.

A COUNTRY IS A MACHINE

We shut down our country.

Wir haben unser Land heruntergefahren. - 23.04.20

The already mentioned word *shutdown* is actually a central term in connection with the conceptual metaphor A COUNTRY IS A MACHINE. It is used as the anglicism itself, but also occurs as a verb in the form of the German equivalent to *shut down*. As a complement to the linguistic metaphor *to shut down*, politicians also talk about *powering up* the economy and public life. The mapping COUNTRY → MACHINE is supported by talking about a *restart* in the areas of economics, culture, and schools.

There are several other metaphorical expressions that occur when discussing policies and reflect the country being a specific machine, namely a motorised vehicle. *Start running the motor, speed up, steer, accelerate and decelerate, hit the ground running* are a collection of verbs that reflect a conceptualisation of Germany as a *car*. Whether politicians are piloting this vehicle/machine or are more in the position of taking care of it like a mechanic is both possible due to the abundance of metaphorical expressions connected to that conceptual metaphor. When talking about *providing opportunities for industry sectors to accelerate* it seems more as if politicians are in the position of ensuring that the metaphorical *machine* is working. That impression also arises when using expressions like *turning important set screws* or *finely adjusting, readjusting and evening out* political decisions. On the other hand, MPs also use phrases like *we urgently need to countersteer* when talking about the consequences of the pandemic. The conceptual mapping POLITICAL ACTION → MOVING IN ROAD TRAFFIC is also reflected by expressing that certain policies will *lead to a dead end*.

The last metaphorical expression exemplifies quite well how closely interwoven the semantic fields of conceptual metaphors can be. Coming from the source domain of MACHINE to CAR to TRAFFIC directly leads to the next section of conceptual mappings, which are grouped around the concept of a journey.

POLITICS IS A JOURNEY

There will still be stumbling blocks.

Es wird weiterhin Stolpersteine geben. - 04.03.20

This conceptual metaphor comes with a variety of linguistic metaphors. Some of them are connected to being on a journey in a vehicle, like the metaphorical expressions mentioned in the section above. In addition to *car/traffic*-related utterances there are also expressions reflecting other vehicles, such as a train or a ship. The former is implied by talking about policies in terms of *working the switches* or providing a *timetable*. Railway transportation as a metaphor for policies can communicate stability since a train usually keeps in line with the rails. *Working the switches* can be interpreted as having made a crucial decision that determines the upcoming route. However, it also implies a certain degree of inflexibility because it is difficult to shift directions when moving on rails. On the contrary, the metaphor of a ship allows for a more flexible form of navigation. There are a variety of linguistic metaphors that appear around the conceptual mapping POLITICS → SAILING. The government is referring to their type of political actions as a *heading*, the opposition formulates critique on policies as a *zigzag course*. When emphasising that the parliament needs to handle financial support in a reasonable way, one MP comes up with the following metaphorical expression:

It is like we are on a boat with provisions; but we do not see the coast yet.

Es ist wie ein Boot mit Proviant, in dem wir sitzen; wir sehen aber heute noch nicht das Ufer. - 27.05.20

Another MP also stresses *we are all in the same boat* in order to foreground that the pandemic has consequences for people all over the world. In order to show the willingness of taking responsibility in the act of political navigation, one politician utters *we are aboard*. Furthermore, implementing policies is described as *anchoring* them.

There is an outstanding example for another form of contextual priming, when a couple of politicians use several sailing related metaphors in one debate. They talk about *being in heavy waters*, *having a hand's width of water under the keel*, *overcoming the calm*, *hoisting the sails towards the future* and *being an anchor in the storm*. Interestingly, the whole debate was about how to support the shipbuilding industry during the pandemic. According to Kövecses (2020), the metaphor activity at that juncture can be seen as being tightly connected to the specific discourse context.

The vehicle-connected metaphors are also supported by expressions reflecting the conceptual metaphor POLITICS IS NAVIGATION. The formerly mentioned *course*-metaphors correspond to that metaphor as well as talking about a *compass in the crisis*. Moreover, policies are described as *heading in the right direction* or it is expressed that the citizens demand a *direction* and a *plan* from the politicians. That consecutive political action is often connected to

onward directed movement might reflect the conventional metaphorical understanding of moving through time in a forward manner (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980/2003).

Besides utterances like *it has to go forward* there are also expressions like *returning to a normal living situation step by step* that imply a backwards directed movement. In connection with the conceptual metaphor POLITICS IS A JOURNEY, talking about *going back to normal* is suggestive of the pandemic leading everyday life astray. Communicating politics as *walking a path* is extended by a bunch of metaphorical expressions as well. It is about *keeping up with the progression*, *utilising the head start*, implementing policies *step by step*, having a *long stretch of way*, a *long-haul route* or a *lean period to walk*.

While several of the former conceptual metaphors cover action that is directed against Covid-19, the source domain JOURNEY also allows for a conceptualisation of the pandemic that is rather accepting than ill-disposed towards the virus. The conventional metaphor LIFE IS A JOURNEY gets augmented by Covid-19 becoming the new fellow-traveller of life on earth. Such an acknowledging attitude might be mentally more sustainable, facing the fact that the constant occurring variations of the virus will keep humanity on the go.

5.3 Summary of Results Section

The former section outlines the great variety of Covid-19-connected conceptual metaphors that is reflected in an abundance of linguistic metaphors. Metaphors referring to the current situation are reflected by target domains such as the virus itself, the process of infection or the pandemic. As source domains serve entities whose physical attributes structure the target domains. Such physical features are for example spatial volume, weight, speed, or optical enlargement. Table 3 provides an overview of the physical attributes that are explicitly structuring the source domains and thus implicitly structure the target domains as well. Since a pandemic is a complex and abstract phenomenon, tangible features from the different source domains might make the diffuse circumstances more accessible.

Table 3. Overview of Physical Features of Source Domains that Structure the Corresponding Target Domains.

Target Domain	Source Domain	Physical Features that Structure the Target Domain
Pandemic	3-Dimensional Entity	Spatial Volume
Pandemic	Burden	Weight
Infection	Chain	Length, Connectedness
Covid-19	Bullet	Speed, Force
Pandemic	Force of Nature	Area, Force, Destructiveness

Target Domain	Source Domain	Physical Features that Structure the Target Domain
Pandemic	Fire	Heat, Destructiveness
Pandemic	Test	Time, (mental) Pressure
Pandemic	Burning Glass	Optical Enlargement

The second part of the result section assembles metaphors around the reaction towards the emerging situation. As target domains serve mainly politics; politicians and disease treatment also occur in the conceptual mappings. The utilised source domains aim for providing some conceptual structure to political *actions*. Thus, they all refer to an activity, compared to the situation-related source domains that were rather constituted by entities. Moreover, nearly all source domains have in common that they stress the need of a strategy or a plan. Whether doing construction work, fighting a battle or being on a purposeful journey – all those concepts highlight that one needs to know what they are doing or where they are going. In addition to that, several source domains foreground the collaborative aspect in political action. Fighting a fire or a battle, maintaining a building or a machine, playing a game or a match: Those activities promise a better outcome when you are doing them in a team.

However, a similarity between some politics-related and situation-related source domains can be found in the fact that they hardly stress the incorporation of a virus in a body. When talking about Covid-19 as if it was a *wave* or a *bullet* the embodiedness of contagion is disregarded. Likewise do the source domains WAR, SPORT and GAME put Covid-19 in the position of an opponent and hereby eclipse that a virus is not a perceivable entity that unfolds its power just by itself.

6 Discussion

The purpose of this study is to qualitatively analyse metaphors around Covid-19 that had been used in debates of the Bundestag between March and June 2020. The analysis specifically reflects on the possible cognitive-linguistic implications of the found metaphors and approaches their occurrence with the help of a multi-disciplinary framework, taking Dynamic Discourse Studies, Critical Metaphor Analysis and Conceptual Metaphor Theory into account.

Referring to Charteris-Black's (2014) approach to conceptual metaphor, I would like to note that the presented results are neither extensive nor set in stone in their arrangement but rather a plausible suggestion. Although methodological approaches as the *Metaphor Identification Procedure* (Pragglejaz Group, 2007) or Cameron's (2003) procedure of *Metaphor Identification through Vehicle terms* provide a systematic approach towards metaphor identification, there still is inter- and even intrapersonal variability when it comes to coding metaphors (Charteris-Black, 2014). In order to avoid a subjective bias in

coding, scholars in metaphor studies usually work with a team of coders (e.g. Dada et al., 2021). Due to the limitations of a master's thesis, such a standard is not met by this paper. In addition to the metaphor identification stage, the process of metaphor interpretation is intertwined with the subjectivity of the interpreter as well. As Ritchie (2003) outlines, assigning source domains is no clear-cut process. The linguistic utterance *beating something/ somebody* might for example be related to the source domain of WAR, SPORT, or GAMING. The discourse's context often provides indication for identifying the appropriate source domain, but in the end one can just make a plausible assumption. Thus, the presented conceptual metaphors can be understood as suggestive input to the dynamic and multidisciplinary discussion around how metaphors both reflect and shape the mental representation of our surroundings. However, this study still provides a qualitative insight into metaphor activity in German politics.

On the basis of an explorative analytical approach I coded a variety of metaphors that can be broadly divided into two categories: They were either referring to the current situation, in this case e.g. the virus, the pandemic or the situation itself was used as the target domain. In the other category metaphors were used to describe the reaction towards the new situation, resulting in having policies, politicians or politics in general as target domains.

When it comes to the source domains, a broad variety of concepts was used in order to structure the target domains. The amount of source domains might be explained as follows: A global pandemic causes a hard-to grasp situation; it is complex and difficult to predict, constantly changing, affecting all levels of society. Since the source domain of a metaphor is always just covering a certain part of the assigned target domain, it is reasonable that such a dynamic and multidimensional phenomenon as a global pandemic needs a whole spectrum of metaphors in order to provide access to the different aspects of its extent and possible impact. Moreover, the analysis focuses on debates in the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic, a particularly dynamic phase in discourse around a newly emerged phenomenon. The variety of source domains might therefore also be explained by a non-established framing and some insecurity among politicians as well; they might not know how to best describe the new circumstances. Vagueness or inconsequence in statements may also be interpreted as a strategic move, since it leaves space for individual interpretation and might lead to a broader acceptance in the audience.

When focussing on the source domains, there are several examples framing Covid-19 as an opponent, equipping it with negative features. It is reasonable to go this way, since framing Covid-19 as *the other* – an explicit opponent that needs to be overcome – can motivate policies and persuade the public to support political action. However, in the specific case of a virus, the popular division between *us* and *the other* becomes critical, since a virus always needs a host – for example us – in order to survive and spread. Policies like a shutdown of the economy and public life might target

the virus as the opponent, but in the short run such political actions are affecting people and their everyday life as well. This might cause a dissonance in people's perception and therefore lower their willingness to support political decisions. Moreover, when *the other* should be battled, outplayed or fought, but is carried by a human body, *us vs. the other* metaphors can foster suspiciousness among people. Racialised frames like Trump's *Chinese virus* (Shafer, 2020) can foster xenophobia. Nationalistic framing of diseases is a well-known and problematic phenomenon, therefore the World Health Organization published guidelines for disease entitling specifically "with the aim to [...] avoid causing offence to any cultural, social, national, regional, professional or ethnic groups" (World Health Organization, 2015, p. 1). Several scholars discuss the occurrence of xenophobia especially towards people of Asian descent in connection with the Covid-19 pandemic, outlining how racist stigmatisation reproduces inequality (Gover et al., 2020; Li & Nicholson, 2021; Viladrich, 2021). However, the occurring variations of Covid-19 are currently nationalistically framed (Roberts, 2021), which might depict that public discourse is often faster establishing than the ethical sensitisation around it.

The challenge of highlighting an urgency to take action without raising the dichotomy of *us–the other* is excellently covered by the conceptual metaphor THE PANDEMIC IS A FIRE. A fire is not able to burn by itself. It gets more and more powerful the more substance you add. Mapping the SOCIETY as a target domain onto FUEL as the source domain, stresses the interconnectedness of host and virus (Semino, 2021).

Analysing political debates comes with a special dynamic in the borderlands between written and spoken language. Since the speeches are not spontaneously held but formulated in advance, the discourse might change on a scale of days, weeks, months or even years. However, a joint session of the parliament is still an interactive setting. This becomes salient when MPs refer to their previous speakers in the beginning of their speeches or when a speech gets interrupted by hecklings. When a specific metaphor is uttered in a speech and MPs in the audience jump on that metaphor with their hecklings, metaphor activity can be studied in its most dynamic form: emerging interactively and online. The metaphor activity of the hecklers is triggered by contextual priming and due to the conceptual structure of the source domain it is possible to extend the mapping with a so-called metaphorical inference (Kövecses, 2020).

When focussing on contextual priming one can argue that it emphasizes the power a metaphor has to shape a discourse. In addition to that, making use of metaphorical inference also gives a lot of agency to the people reacting to a metaphor. Extending the structural mapping might result in backfiring on the person who started a certain metaphorical mapping. A perfect example for such a dynamic emergence of metaphor is the situation, when a CDU-politician uses the metaphor of a burning house and highlights the urgency of immediate action by saying one needs to extinguish the fire before

fixing the roof truss. With this metaphor he probably also wants to emphasize that policies need to be implemented step by step. When an MP from the opposition heckles "We are just already calling the carpenter!", the metaphor of the CDU member backfires on him, since the opposition member succeeds in stressing her standard of taking action in a long-sighted manner.

As mentioned in the theoretical background, metaphor activity can be influenced by a range of contextual factors. Besides the situational context that becomes salient in the carpenter-example, there are also other moments of metaphor activity in the analysed corpus that may be connected to the influence of contextual factors. When having a debate about the shipbuilding industry, several MPs come up with a lot of ship- and water-related metaphorical expressions for describing the current situation and the economy. Those linguistic metaphors seem to be primed by the topic of the speeches. Contextual factors might on the one hand have an impact on how metaphor is used, on the other hand they may also influence how metaphor is *not* used. That German politicians talk about politics in terms of a fight, but do very seldom utilise a language that is explicitly making use of metaphors in connection to the concept of WAR, might not be a coincidence but a conscious choice. Being raised in a country that started two world wars within a century might lead to a certain caution among the politicians when it comes to explicit WAR-related metaphors (Paulus, 2020). In comparison to German political leaders, Macron and Trump for example used explicit war-related language in connection to Covid-19 (Brencio, 2020; Isentyeva, 2020). Setting the results of this paper in relation to other recent studies around Covid-connected metaphor use leads to the next section, the possible future research.

Future Prospects

There are several research questions that could be investigated through comparative studies setting the results of this paper in relation to other corpus material. How did the German media and the public talk about the Covid-19 pandemic in comparison to the parliament? Which metaphors were used in other crises? Also a long-term study of metaphor activity within the German parliament might provide some insight into how Covid metaphors change over time.

Dada et al. (2021) found out in their study on political speeches about Covid-19 that male political leaders seem to use WAR-related language more frequently. Thus, the aforementioned historical background of the speaker might not be the only factor impacting metaphor activity. The results of Dada et al. (2021) suggest that a fine meshed analysis of the corpus I investigated could provide more nuanced insights as well. Further research could include the questions whether there is a difference in metaphor activity depending on gender, position in parliament (opposition/government) or party affiliation.

Another aspect that could be investigated in upcoming research projects within the field of metaphor studies is the actual psycholinguistic implication of political rhetoric. Qualitatively analysing metaphors in political rhetorics can lead to a critical awareness and sensitivity towards metaphors, but it does not predict in any way the actual impact this language tool might have on individual and collective perception and action. To what extent metaphors might affect political decision making could also provide valuable insights. However, one has to acknowledge that metaphor is just a part of language which is just a part of politics which is just a part of the intricate world we are living in. Metaphors are indeed a powerful tool in politics, but that field is still highly complex and interlaced (both in time and space). Thus one has to treat any evaluations on the effectiveness of political leadership with caution that do not take the whole dynamic picture into account.

7 Conclusion

This paper joins the critical reflection on Covid-19 metaphors and aims to contribute to an aware approach to the communication around that decade-defining phenomenon.

With the help of a multidisciplinary framework an explorative corpus analysis of debates in the German parliament is applied. The first research question is how metaphors contribute to the conceptualisation of the Covid-19 pandemic. It can be broadly answered as follows: Analysing the occurrence of metaphors suggests that the metaphorical expressions help to make both the emerging situation and the reactions to it more cognitively accessible. The second, more specific research question focuses on which metaphors are used and what they imply. The corpus analysis revealed an abundance of conceptual metaphors that can be summarised as follows:

The target domains connected to the emerging situation are VIRUS or PANDEMIC. The source domains that are applied in connection to the circumstances highlight physical features; the abstract pandemic might be easier to grasp when it is described with tangible attributes.

In case of the reactions to the pandemic, POLITICS or POLITICIANS serve as target domains. As source domains serve activities that foreground the necessity of acting collaboratively and within a strategy. Those features communicate political action being reliable.

In both categories, the range of applied source domains is wide. This might be due to the following: Since metaphors are always just partially mapping features of source and target domain, it seems inevitable for such a multidimensional and complex phenomenon as the Covid-19 pandemic to be structured with the help of a large assortment of conceptual metaphors. Moreover, the wide spectrum of source domains may reflect the particularly dynamic nature of discourse which is emerging around a situation that is new to the world in its extent and intricacy.

When interpreting the utilised source domains it becomes salient that Covid-19 in several cases is explicitly or

implicitly put in the position of an opponent. Those metaphors might convey the need for urgent and collective action, but they downplay the fact that the virus is actually living *in* and spreading *through* us humans. When aiming for long-term public support for political actions this challenging interconnectedness needs to be taken into account. Moreover, the dichotomy of *us vs. the other* fosters xenophobia and should therefore be obviated.

The conclusion of this paper shall not be to avoid metaphors, even though they can be misleading sometimes. As metaphors are heavily anchored in both language and thought, there is firstly no way of abolishing them and secondly, they are of too high value to structuring our experience (Semino, 2021). Moreover, metaphors “greatly expand our conceptual and communicative abilities, as we can draw from the knowledge and language associated with a rich source domain to reason and communicate about a target domain for which we may otherwise have little vocabulary and conceptual structure” (Semino, 2021, p. 52).

Becoming aware of metaphors’ usefulness as a rhetorical resource can in the specific case of political discourse help politicians to communicate in a more successful way. However, strategic communication is not immune to misuse. Just like nearly every auxiliary means can be used for either good or bad, so do metaphors for example also provide the possibility of manipulation. Therefore, a mindfulness around the power of metaphor is not just necessary to be stimulated among speakers, but among the audience as well.

As mentioned in the introduction, an awareness about the use of metaphor entails intellectual empowerment. Language is not for nothing understood as a tool, and one of tools’ functional core is to support processes of change. Understanding the application of a tool case can be empowering since you might question a current course of action and challenge why pipe tongs are used instead of a crosspoint screwdriver. And while reflecting on the mechanic skills of the people you are watching, you realise that you actually have a well equipped toolbox yourself.

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Appendix A

Overview of the items of the agenda that were included in the corpus. Each joint session of the parliament contains several debates. One debate usually covers one agenda item. However, in multiple cases one debate includes more than one agenda item, that is why there are several items in one row sometimes. In the official protocols, the agenda items are either referred to as “Tagesordnungspunkt” (item of the agenda) or “Zusatzpunkt” (additional point).

Explanation: TOP – Tagesordnungspunkt (item of the agenda)

ZP – Zusatzpunkt (additional point)

Bold font – included in the corpus sample

b

	Official Protocol Number	Date	Items of the Agenda that were included in the Corpus
1	19148	2020-03-04	- ZP1
2	19151	2020-03-11	- TOP 1
3	19152	2020-03-12	- TOP 17
4	19153	2020-03-13	- ZP19, ZP 10, ZP 18 - ZP 11 - TOP 18d
5	19154	2020-03-25	- TOP 2 - TOP 3 - TOP 4 a)-i) - TOP 5 - TOP 6 a)-h)
6	19155	2020-04-22	- TOP 1 - TOP 2 - TOP 12 a)-d), ZP 1-2 - TOP4, ZP 3 - TOP 3 a)-e), ZP 4-6, ZP 17 - TOP 6 a)-c) - TOP 5 a)-e), ZP 7
7	19156	2020-04-23	- TOP 7 - TOP 8, ZP 8, ZP 20 - TOP 9, ZP 9, ZP 18 - TOP 10. ZP 10, ZP 19 - TOP 13 - ZP 13 a)-b) - TOP 16 - TOP 18 - ZP 14-16
8	19157	2020-05-06	- TOP 1 - TOP 2 - TOP 4 - ZP 2
9	19158	2020-05-07	- TOP 13a)-b) - TOP 14a)-c) - TOP 15a)-b) - TOP 16a)-c), ZP 5-12 - TOP 21a)-b) - TOP 22a)-c), ZP 15, TOP 17 - TOP 25 - TOP 26, ZP 22, ZP 18, ZP 19

10	19159	2020-05-13	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - TOP 1 - TOP 2 - ZP 1 - TOP 4 a)-b) - TOP 6
11	19160	2020-05-14	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - TOP 8 a)-b) - TOP 9 a)-b) - TOP 11, ZP 13 - TOP 12 a)-b) - TOP 15 a)-e) - TOP 17, ZP 8 - TOP 21 (+ speech from protocol's appendix 8) - TOP 24 (+ speech from protocol's appendix 13)
12	19161	2020-05-15	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - TOP 25 - TOP 28 a)-b) - TOP 29, ZP 10, ZP 16 - ZP 11 - ZP 17
13	19162	2020-05-27	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - TOP 2 - TOP 3 - ZP 1 - TOP 5
14	19163	2020-05-28	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - TOP 10 a)-c), ZP 2 - TOP 14 a)-b), ZP 3 - ZP 7 - TOP 18
15	19164	2020-05-29	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - TOP 27, ZP 15 - TOP 28 - TOP 30 a)-c) - TOP 32, ZP 16
16	19165	2020-06-17	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - TOP 2 - TOP 8 a)-c), ZP 1-2 - TOP 9, ZP 3
17	19166	2020-06-18	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - ZP 5, ZP 6 - TOP 14 a)-b) - TOP 20 - TOP 23 a)-d), ZP 20, ZP 21 (+ speech from protocol's appendix 14)
18	19167	2020-06-19	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - TOP 26 a)-e), ZP 25-30, ZP 37 - TOP 29 - TOP 32 a)-d), ZP 31 - ZP 32 - TOP 33, ZP 33

Appendix B

This table compiles metaphor keywords that were identified in the corpus sample. Those keywords were then used for text searches in the whole corpus.

Conceptual Metaphor	Associated Keywords	English Translation of Keywords
INFECTION IS A CHAIN	Infektionskette	chain of infection
THE PANDEMIC IS A BURDEN	Last, Belastung, tragen, entlasten, schwer, Gewicht	burden, strain, to carry, to unburden, heavy, weight
THE PANDEMIC IS A THREE-DIMENSIONAL ENTITY	durchkommen, Dimension, Ausmaß, Größenordnung, Höhepunkt, hinter sich lassen, rausgehen, reingehen, herauskommen	to get through, dimension, extent, order of magnitude, peak, to leave behind, exit, enter
PANDEMIC IS A TEST	Stresstest, Bewährungsprobe, Hausaufgabe, Nachhilfe, Lehre, Lehrbuch	stress testing, practical test, homework, tutoring, teachings, schoolbook
COVID-19 IS A BULLET	treffen, Wucht	To hit, force/momentum
THE PANDEMIC IS A FORCE OF NATURE	Sturm, Sturmflut, Regen, Wasser, eindämmen	storm, storm surge, rain, water, to embank
THE PANDEMIC IS A BURNING GLASS	Brennglas	burning glass
THE PANDEMIC IS A FIRE/ POLITICIANS ARE FIRE FIGHTERS	Feuer, brennen, löschen, Brand, schüren, Feuerlöscher, Brandbeschleuniger	fire, to burn, to extinguish, blaze, to rake, fire extinguisher, fire accelerant
POLITICS IS CONSTRUCTION WORK	Grundstein, Fundament, Brücke, überbrücken, bauen, Baustein	headstone, foundations, bridge, to bridge, to build, building block
DISEASE TREATMENT IS WAR	kämpfen, Kampf, bekämpfen, Gegner, Front, wappnen, Abwehr, rüsten, Bedrohung, bedrohen, Feind	to fight, fight, to battle, opponent, front, to arm, defence, to embattle, threat, to threat, enemy
POLITICS IS GAMING	Spiel, spielen, Gewinner, gewinnen, Verlierer, verlieren	game, to play, winner, to win, loser, to loose
POLITICS IS A JOURNEY	Weg, begleiten, Schritt, Weichen, schrittweise, Kompass, Kurs, Boot, Wasser, Segel	path, accompany, step, switch point, stepwise, compass, course, boat, water, sails
POLITICS IS SPORT	Fitness, Vorsprung, aufstellen	fitness, head start, assemble
POLITICS IS DISEASE TREATMENT	Krankheit, infizieren, Pillen, Gift, Gegengift, toxisch	disease, infect, pills, poison, antidote, toxic
POLITICS IS EQUILIBRATING	Waagschale, ausgleichen, Gleichgewicht	scale pan, equilibrate, balance
A COUNTRY IS A MACHINE	Shutdown, herunterfahren, hochfahren, beschleunigen, bremsen, Motor, Neustart, Stellschraube, Katalysator	shutdown, to shut down, to power up, accelerate, decelerate, motor, restart, adjusting screw, catalysator