COVID-19 AS A MEDIA-CUM-LANGUAGE EVENT: COGNITIVE, COMMUNICATIVE, AND CROSS-CULTURAL ASPECTS

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Abstract: The authors study the ways the COVID-19 pandemic is represented in the media in seven languages (Russian, Ukrainian, Slovak, Polish, German, English, and Italian) with the aim of throwing light on its universal and culturally specific features. The media part of the article considers the COVID-19 pandemic as hard news, while its linguistic section focuses on the literal and metaphoric representation of this phenomenon and its instantiation in the Internet memes.

Key words: coronavirus, COVID-19, pandemic, infodemic, online media, fake news, concept, conceptual metaphor, humour, Internet meme.

"The coronavirus epidemic is a kind of 'Five Point Palm Exploding Heart Technique' attack on the global capitalist system – a signal that we cannot go on the way we were up until now, that a radical change is needed"
Slavoj Zizek
"The main way of spreading coronavirus is Facebook"
(from the Internet)

1. Introduction

Though COVID-19 came as an abrupt shock to millions of people, experts refuse to grant it the "black swan" status, which is given only to events characterized by low likelihood and disastrous consequences. The pandemic that has been rocking the planet for almost a year certainly meets the second requirement. The first condition, however, is not satisfied: the pandemic is a quite predictable result of globalization, which has created conditions both for the emergence of the pandemic, which is of a zoonotic origin and was caused by a change of the habitat of certain species, and for its spread, enabled by intensive contacts between people of different countries.

A powerful agent of the globalized society, which ensures information supply and enables public debate, is news media. They have responded to the pandemic with a flood of information, alongside disinformation and misinformation. This powerful flow, among other things, is a rich source of linguistic data on how COVID-19 is perceived, evaluated, and conceptualized by speakers of different languages. In this paper, we attempt to throw light on two interconnected issues – COVID-19 from the media and linguistic perspectives – by considering the data of the Russian, Ukrainian, Slovak, Polish, German, English, and Italian languages.

1.1 Pandemic through infodemic

During historical pandemics (e.g., Justinian Plague, Antonine Plague, Black Death, Spanish Flu) the spread of information was much more limited than it is today, when practically nothing impedes information flows, which, as it happens, is potentially dangerous, as it can result in an excess of information, mis-/ disinformation, fake news and the like. Effectively, as Andreoni and Nardone (2020: 88) contend, "on a social level, the contagion of fake news is no less epidemic than a virus".

In this communicative reality, we have to face the current COVID-19 pandemic, accompanied by a relative type of self-developed "infodemic", i.e., "the dissemination of a huge amount of information from different sources and from the often unverifiable basis" (Grandi & Piovan 2020), or in other terms, "information bulimia on social networks and in quasi journalism" (Andreoni & Nardone 2020: 25). The infodemic, in its turn, does not serve to inform, warn, or influence; instead, it develops a kind of pandemic subconscious in people that sharpens their perception of pandemic phenomena, stimulates the creation of new linguistic labels, definitions, and conceptualizations.

Most of these effects are achieved through language and other semiotic systems used in media communication. Television is probably the most influential of them (in terms of the size of the audience across all age groups); then comes Internet hypertextual and multimodal communication (a universal medium that could theoretically absorb television and other video and speech transmission channels), followed by social networks (which do not actually exist without the Internet). To a lesser extent, this also applies to the radio and traditional press, which should not be overlooked as they continue to be popular, even in times of plague, among the older or more "demanding" part of the population. Besides, it should be remembered that the press in particular, but also the radio, are doing well on the Internet. Ergo, the Internet, and, especially, various kinds of newspapers published online are certainly the media that should be given due attention in the analysis undertaken here.

1.2 The linguistic side of the infodemic

Ever since the outbreak of the worldwide pandemic caused by coronavirus disease 2019, commonly referred to as coronavirus or COVID-19 (in our paper we use these terms interchangeably), the media all over the world have been flooded with news releases concerning the health situation of populations in countries in all corners of the world. The news has presented facts and figures concerning the number of infections, the death toll, as well as the number of people who have been cured. These coverages are awash with medical terminology. However, to relay the messages in a more engaging way, the mass media have started to form a specific type of discourse characterised by "user-friendly" designations of the COVID-19-related phenomena, in particular, metaphors and neologisms as well as a significant dose of humorous interpretations of the issue in different languages and socio-cultures.

One of the objectives of this research is to explore the commonalities and differences of metaphorical conceptualizations of COVID-19 across the Slovak, Polish, Ukrainian, Russian, English, Italian, and German languages. As more neologisms are coined, medical terms become popular and the number of metaphors grows, the linguistic aspect of the issue has gained in importance for linguists of all creeds (see Sections 3 and 4 for more detail).

Another aspect of our research is connected with humour, because, as we have noticed, the mass media treat the pandemic not only seriously, but in a humorous tonality as well. One of the genres in which COVID-19 has obtained a humorous interpretation is that of the Internet memes. The humour of the Internet memes has both universal and nationally specific features, which are brought to light here by considering Russian, Ukrainian, Slovak, Polish, German, English, Italian, and French memes.

1.3 The structure of the paper

Structurally, this paper consists of two parts, which consider the perceptions of the coronavirus pandemic by the people of seven cultures speaking different languages from two perspectives: first, as a media event (Section 2), second, as a linguistic phenomenon (Sections 3, 4, and 5). The second line of inquiry presupposes studying linguistic units that designate COVID-19 and related phenomena from cognitive, communicative, and cross-cultural viewpoints.

2. COVID-19 as a natural vs. media phenomenon

Our analysis of the information about COVID-19, which is presented in all kinds of media, shows that this phenomenon has three aspects. As far as it is a disease, it has a **physical aspect**. There appeared several definitions of this disease, its symptoms, descriptions of its waves and, consequently, medical terms known mainly to specialists in different branches of medicine: infectiologists, microbiologists, epidemiologists, and the like; here also belong names of specific equipment which became known to the general public (cf. Kacprzak 2000; Serianni 2005; 2007; Turley 2020).

Being very often a breaking news item, COVID-19 can definitely be treated from the viewpoint of **communication**; thus, it has a **social** aspect. Pieces of news presented in the media of any kind can be attributed to analytical or emotive journalism. Some journalistic messages belong to hard news as a typical genre of emotive journalism. However, the information found in the media, especially digital ones, can sometimes be distorted and later turns out to be fake.

2.1 Physical aspect

2.1.1 COVID-19: a fact file

When certain disease names are established or conventionally absorbed into a language, neutrality cannot be maintained. This is borne out by the names of historical viral pandemics, such as Spanish Flu, numerous eponymous names associated even with the name of the doctor or scientist who discovered and classified the disease, or

the names of other entities, including those created by mythology and human imagination (e.g., such names as *Donohue syndrome*, discovered in 1948 by Canadian doctor William L. Donohue, also called *leprechaunism* from the Irish word *leprechaun* – kind of a gnome, dwarf). It is not a form that leads to an origin and territorial link, as is the case with the etiologically close MERS.

The elements of the COVID-19 definition can be multiplied and developed, proceeding from objective to more subjective elements and being modified by new circumstances and discoveries. In this way, COVID-19 becomes a collection of contents that forms a chain of encyclopaedic links based on the principle of cognitive purport (see Croft & Cruse 2004: 100-101) or, in other words, a list of sequences that are readable to specialists, but only selectively understandable and known to the average language user. Anyway, the latter pays more attention to all kinds of subjective information, often culture specific and scientifically unsubstantiated (cf. accumulation of references to this phenomenon within the *charge culturelle partagée* – the shared cultural burden, as formulated by (Galisson 1998).

The least developed version of the COVID-19 definition states that it is 'a condition caused by SARS-CoV-2'. According to the WHO study (Origin of SARS-CoV-2, 2020), this definition can be extended to various other specifications such as:
- SARS-CoV-2 belonging to the beta-CoV coronavirus group (a member of the *Coronaviridae* family);
- a probable zoonotic origin (in this case hypothetically linked to bats from the *Rhinolophus* genus or scales, but according to the popular-science news, these may also be "young wolves, camels, koalas, golden cicadas, bamboo rats, squirrels, foxes, civets, hedgehogs, turtles, scorpions, salamanders, and crocodiles" (Lipiec 2020);
- a time frame for the first big numbers of infected people between December 2019 and January 2020 at the Huananan Wholesale Seafood Market in Wuhan City in China;

- appearance of the symptoms of the disease in up to 14 days after contracting the virus;
- presence of such symptoms as fever, dry cough, loss of smell or taste (anosmia and dysgeusia), in more severe cases, pneumonia and respiratory problems, in extreme cases leading to serious complications and death (for more information see Symptoms of coronavirus, 2020);
- the outbreak of a pandemic, which has taken a heavy death toll and shocked social and economic life worldwide.

In principle, no alternative names to COVID-19 have been recorded, apart from the metonym "coronavirus". Outside the realm of metaphors, spontaneity and colloquiality of the language have no bearing on such a widespread acronym.

In many communicative situations, a metonymic transfer is used, as in the opposite case of SARS and MERS, specifically when talking about COVID-19, the name of the cause is used, i.e. *coronavirus*, often shortened to *corona*; in the English language, the shortening process went even further producing the clipping *rona* in common language usage.

It is also worth noting that the blend COVID-19 is very often reduced to COVID, also being the basis of derivatives (e.g., Pl. adj. *covidowy*; see, e.g., Pl. *covidowe palce* – COVID fingers, *post-covidowa rzeczywistość* – post-COVID reality, *ustawa covidowa* – COVID law (https://portal.abczdrowie.pl/covidowe-palce-nietypowy-objaw-zakazenia-koronawirusem; https://crido.pl/blog-taxes/zatrudnianie-pracownikow-w-post-covidowej-rzeczywistosci-pytania-i-odpowiedzi-z-webinarium-crido/; https://everethnews.pl/newsy/nowa-ustawa-covidowa-w-sejmie-jakie-zmiany-sie-w-niej-znalazly/).

From a purely linguistic point of view, COVID is a noun in the form of an acronym with the attributes of a proper name; it designates an extra-linguistic object in an

individualized way; however, it functions as a common noun, especially because it is based on the lexical meaning presenting a comprehensive definition of a concept (to be considered in more detail in Section 3).

As much news in the world reports, the name COVID-19 is constructed in such a technical and neutral way (see above) that it is not associated with any geographical location or cultural circles, let alone any social group or individual.

On February 11, 2020 the WHO Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus announced in Geneva, "We had to find a name that did not refer to a geographical location, an animal, an individual or group of people, and which is also pronounceable and related to the disease." Ghebreyesus added, "Having a name matters to prevent the use of other names that can be inaccurate or stigmatizing. It also gives us a standard format to use for any future coronavirus outbreaks". The World Health Organization, under a set of guidelines, advises against using place names such as Ebola, Zika, or Spanish flu – where diseases were first identified – as they can stigmatize regions or ethnic groups" (Tucker 2020).

2.1.2 COVID-19 waves

We can define the time frames of different surreal eras that have become real (cf. Andreoni & Nardone 2020: 127): the pre-coronavirus era, the pandemic era, inter-phase pandemic era, and we can already predict a post-coronavirus era, despite some views expressed primarily by the World Health Organization (WHO). Each of them is shaped by a certain media message. As a result, Italians, as well as people from other European countries, realized how much the virus mocked them. At the beginning of the pandemic, they mocked it, leading public and private lives defying limitations. Through media messages, they learned about the effects of COVID-19 spread. The media have elucidated the role of doctors, hospitals, and various services in the pandemic era. Alas, it is also due to an easy form of communication and dissemination of information that they are exposed to scientifically unproven data, which are

medically dangerous and riddled with superstitions, etc., e.g., a recommendation to drink lemon juice with soda to protect against infection and other absurd tips that came out of weeks of "viral psychosis" (ibid., 49).

A specific kind of communication can be observed in the case of the evolving COVID-19 pandemic, entering into successive phases of its reign practically on the whole Earth, with the intensity changing in space and time because virus carriers appear within individuals and social gatherings. When it was expected not to return, as a result of the quarantine measures, i.e., the global lockdown between March and May 2020, the pandemic hit again, with consequences similar to those observed during its first phase.

The second wave of the COVID-19 pandemic set in in the autumn of 2020 amidst persistent dynamics and uncertainty about the present and the past, but at the same time, it is the phase, in which hope for a medical defeat of the coronavirus increases. In fact, scientific and industrial processes started towards the production of drugs that inhibit disease development, as well as vaccines to prevent the virus that causes the infection.

What is important, however, is what the WHO stresses that in reality we should not talk about phases or waves of COVID-19 but about the growing pandemic that is claiming more and more victims and affecting different social and age groups – the statistics are inexorable and change from one day to the next; there are also some trends that we would like to see as permanent, but they are not, e.g., the alleged lower susceptibility to the disease among 60-70-year-olds, as well as ambiguous perception of the disease symptoms and risk assessment.

The WHO briefing on August 18, 2020 showed that "the coronavirus pandemic is now being driven by people in their 20s, 30s, and 40s who don't know they are infected. […] The coronavirus has infected nearly 22 million people worldwide and killed at

least 774,600 […]. Earlier this [sic.] month [August 2020], the WHO published the analysis of 6 million infections between February 24 and July 12 and found that the share of people between ages 15 and 24 rose to 15% from 4.5%" (Lovelace 2020).

COVID-19 is one of the most dynamic pandemics affecting mankind, of which as much is known as not, and the accompanying infodemic is a clear *signum temporis* in the world that immediately transmits and absorbs information.

2.1.3 "Patient zero"

In our opinion, "Patient zero" includes the definition of this disease, its waves, the information about the so-called "zero patient", who a pandemic usually starts with, different and common features of COVID-19 and other serious diseases.

The question of priority in the emergence of a new virus among the Chinese is not clear enough. If only truthful information had reached the rest of the world, another case considered the initial one in raising the alarm about the spread of COVID-19 was Dr. Li Wenliang, who was devoted to patients and died because of the virus (Santevecchi 2020).

In Poland, according to the official findings, Mieczysław Pałka remains "patient zero"; he was diagnosed on 4 March 2020 after his return trip by bus from Germany to Poland (Zielona Góra: "pacjent 0"… 2020). In Italy, the hypotheses for "patient zero" included a German citizen and a couple of the Chinese who arrived in Italy in January 2020 (Funaro 2020).

There is no clear indication of a "patient zero" in Italy. Some social circles and individuals are even contesting this status. Among the patients of Italian origin, there is a 38-year-old patient from Codogno (one of the "red zones" in Italy) who, after being admitted to hospital, infected nearly 30 other patients in the same ward (Centini 2020). However, the problem of identifying Italy's "patient zero" has not been solved. There

is speculation that it was somebody within the reach of some towns and therefore they could be from Codogno, Vo' Euganeo, Albettone, Lodi, etc. (Coronavirus, svolta paziente zero… 2020).

2.1.4 COVID-19 vs. other diseases

For the sake of accuracy, it may be noted that the HIV / AIDS discourse is currently relatively regulated and, thanks to many years of social campaigns, now it conveys a fairly clear message, which effectively eliminates false information about viruses and diseases, even among average users of a language.

Both types of discourse (HIV / AIDS and coronavirus / COVID) still have to be confronted with many stereotypes and prejudices that also translate into language. For instance, being "positive" in both cases is completely the opposite of the usual understanding of positivity because it indicates being infected with the virus. Also problematic are certain phobias directed towards social groups, in the case of COVID-19 equally towards national groups, mainly Chinese ("sinophobia"), but also Italian ("italophobia"), which from a historical perspective is something unusual, because so far there was talk of "italomania" (cf. Longo 2020).

As a matter of fact, the coronavirus / COVID-19 discourse is getting out of control and presents many facets, behind which there is mainly journalistic, but also scientific and pseudo-scientific information, which even institutional bodies, such as the WHO at the international level or health ministries at the national level have failed to keep in check so far. Furthermore, the problem is that COVID-19 is moving from phase to phase, and its future is unpredictable, as well as people's reactions to its social and individual impacts. Similar unpredictability is characteristic of the information layer under which COVID-19 is described and presented to the public, which needs reliable data but readily absorbs any kind of information, primarily for its security (see 2.2.3 about fake news).

2.2 Social aspect

The current info-/pandemic situation can be modelled as the following schema. The senders of the message on coronavirus are primarily representatives of governments, basing their data and recommendations, orders, decrees, laws on the opinions of official health services in a given country and international health organizations, especially the WHO; then the medical service, scientists, and specialists of various categories in institutional communication; politicians and journalists in committed and professional communication; and finally, a relatively average and smart (inter)locutor who is the author of various videos, pictures, commentaries, slogans, memos, and messages in public and private communication. The receivers are societies on the whole, viewers, listeners, and citizens sensitive to the information; often they are simply the authors of messages taking on a different communication role. The communication channel and the code remain as defined above. Its centre is still the message, its content and extended reference, which shows repercussions in many spheres of life, i.e., contexts, temporarily assuming other cognitive values, as well as creating prospects for similar dimensions in the near future.

It is also worth noting that COVID-19 has had a significant impact on already ossified or missing intentions in such everyday communication situations as the conventional question of well-being in Romance languages: Fr. *Comment ça va?*, It. *Come stai? / Come va?*, Sp. *¿Cómo estás?*, Port. *Como está?*, etc. Due to the pandemic shock, such a neutral and *bona fide* welcome can be an expression of concern to both the sender and recipient. Especially during the lockdown, it sounded as if other questions were lurking behind: *Are you (still) healthy?*, *You don't you have symptoms of coronavirus, do you?*, *How do you deal with it all?*. All of a sudden, it turned out that the expression of politeness took on a completely different pragmatic charge, becoming, in a way, a protection tool in anticipation of an honest answer. The pre-virus communication did not take anything similar into account.

2.2.1 COVID-19 as hard news in media texts

Discussing the COVID-19 phenomenon in the communication aspect inevitably leads us to journalism and its types. Traditionally it is divided into the journalism of analytical and emotive character, with each type having a specific set of journalistic messages (see publications, which have now become classical: Kadnár 1988; Tušer & Follríchová 2001; Veľas 2000, and recent publications: Panasenko 2016; Pravdová & Ungerová 2018; Višňovský 2014).

Hard news mainly belongs to the journalism of emotional type and has, as Turow claims (2011: 88), such features as **timeliness** (a hard news event is supposed to have happened recently – typically within the past day or so); **unusualness**; **conflict** (conflicts – struggles between opposing forces – often lie at the centre of hard news stories), and **the proximity of the incident**. As for the topics of hard news, they are very often connected with different disasters, war conflicts, terrorism, etc. (Panasenko et al. 2018). Hard news is very often opposed to soft news. In making a comparative analysis of hard news and soft news, Mills-Brown (2014) states that the difference is based on the topics the respective type of news covers. Soft news usually centers on the lives of individuals and has little, if any, perceived urgency. Hard news generally concerns politics, economy, international relations, welfare, and scientific developments. Soft news is often believed to be presented by female journalists and is addressed to women.

Thus, we see that information on COVID-19 presented in the mass media has all the features of hard news and, therefore, of emotive journalism. This leads us to an overview of the topic of COVID-19 and ways of its presentation in different sources.

2.2.2 COVID-19 and its presentation in some of the world media

Sources of COVID-19 information. Since the first days of February 2020, the media, including the press, have disseminated news about coronavirus via the Internet and traditional media, reported on the progressive development of the epidemic affecting

individual countries of the world, followed by the outbreak of the pandemic, which, on the rolling ball principle, has engulfed the whole world. The years 2019 and 2020 have been marked by a particular sign named COVID-19 (about the evolution of the phenomenon from the point of view of a medical journalist, see MacKenzie 2020). We have learned a great deal about the disease over the past months, but at the same time, we do not know everything because it surprises us both at the level of etiology, conditions of infection, symptoms and their deficiencies, the treatment and effects it leaves behind, not only of a purely physical nature. The reliability of information the public is getting about the epidemic and the pandemic situation depends on many factors.

The scientific press should be the hardest and most authoritative source of information, but it is also subject to the law of hypothesis and changing perspectives on the state of the phenomenon. Such knowledge is then processed and disseminated by the press and other forms of media discourse, which is of popular-scientific or simply informative nature, but which ranges from neutral to committed, often highly superficial and even scandalous. The quality of the message and its further processing depends on the type of the press and communication forum. Information passes through channels and in forms that reproduce announced, proven or untested knowledge, and then becomes a source of further information exchange and disinformation; thus "in the long run, it's only science that keeps us out of fake news. Unfortunately, however, in the short term – i.e. in the time it takes to do experiments, evaluate data, and draw certainties from them – news that anticipates dangerous theories and suppositions often wins out, because it is more suggestive, until science comes to prove otherwise" (Andreoni & Nardone 2020: 87).

The USA and the UK. The American and British media show several similar trends in presenting COVID-19 news; they do not just help people go through the hard times staying informed but reflect who they are as a nation. Apart from most trusted official health bodies and the WHO sites (Most trusted sources… 2020), official media such

as CNN in the USA and BBC in Britain tend to present mere facts about the coronavirus while the yellow press and social networks mostly offer a mix of fakes and reliable news (Social media firms… 2020). There is evidence that as of May 8, 2020 "nearly half of U.S. adults (49%) say the media's COVID-19 coverage has been largely accurate" (Americans' views… 2020) and "most Americans (59%) say the news media are providing them with the information they need about the coronavirus" (ibid.). It is worth noting that "nearly three-quarters (72%) of those who rely on the White House for COVID-19 news say journalists have been exaggerating the risks of the virus and the crisis has been overblown" (Americans who rely… 2020). In addition, President Trump endorsed the unproven anti-malaria drug hydroxychloroquine on Fox News and Twitter and "this misinformation appeared eventually harmful" (Tracking hydroxychloroquine… 2020).

Meanwhile in Britain, the most common kind of false claims was about how public authorities were responding to the pandemic-related crisis. The second most frequent kind concerned the spread of the disease among communities, including posts that blamed certain ethnic groups (Coronavirus: Call for apps… 2020). Besides, "most (59%) of the misinformation involved various forms of reconfiguration, where existing and often true information is spun, twisted, recontextualised, or reworked. Less misinformation (38%) was completely fabricated" (Types, sources, and claims… 2020). At the same time, in comparison to the USA, the government bodies in Britain are still seen as reliable sources of accurate information on the pandemic. However, according to the research (Public trust… 2020) "levels of trust in individual politicians have fallen, providing increased space for conspiracy theories". Both countries (Coronavirus: Fact vs fiction, *s.a.*; UK aid… 2020) are trying "to tackle fakes on coronavirus". Thus, the pandemic in question has made the media create new ways of reaching people and gaining their trust. Meanwhile, the public is trying to learn how to identify the blurring line between facts and fakes to stave off fears and stress.

Ukraine. As the COVID-19 pandemic is raging around the globe and the value of news is growing, the Ukrainian media sector is facing both challenges and opportunities. On the one hand, the print media share is reaching its minimum point while going digital is the only, though not unprofitable, way to thrive during the quarantine period. Government-run and official Internet, TV, and radio sources tend to succeed in regaining popularity. The survey conducted by the Institute of Mass Information held in Ukraine in March 2020 (25% of news… 2020) showed that official authorities' and state elected officials' websites as well as press service were most frequently used in searching and quoting COVID-related news. President Zelensky delivered "messages oriented towards every community member and every doctor with the appeal to show readiness to act together and support each other" (Stashko et al. 2020). It is noteworthy that "4% of news about the coronavirus contained signs of being paid stories promoting businessmen, politicians, and public figures" (39% of speakers… 2020). Additionally, the Ukrainian media seem to have successfully adopted new ways of reaching people via social networks and messengers that not only duplicate official sites but also allow censorship-free information and allegations. On the other hand, the mass media got a chance to be exonerated.

Aiming at informing and developing safety and media hygiene propaganda, there appeared specialised sites (e.g., По той бік пандемії, *s.a.*) that provide fact checking of coronavirus news. According to the monitoring results (25% of news… 2020), "every fourth news item in regional online media addresses the topic of the COVID-19 pandemic". Compared to March, "the amount of news items on coronavirus in May almost doubled – from 25% to 43%" (39% of speakers… 2020). At the same time, "4% of coronavirus news in March contained manipulative headlines or emotions and evaluative judgments" (25% of news… 2020). Already in May, there could be "10 to 20 fakes for refutation within one news text" (What fakes… 2020). Since mid-March, five main types of false information about the coronavirus have been disseminated in Ukraine: conspiracy theories, fakes about drugs and medicines, fakes about treatment, fakes against Ukraine, and fake jokes (ibid.). Specialists say fakes are cyclical and

repeatedly occur in a modified form. Fakes are also evolving and becoming more complex, because what people believed in January or March is now perceived as a joke. That is, Ukrainians develop a certain immunity to the simplest fakes (ibid.). Conspicuous is the fact that humour in the media is actually friendly, informative, and based on self-criticism, which can even help Ukrainians "communicate".

Slovakia. The topic of coronavirus resonated significantly in the local media. In addition to news programs, the topic was also covered by the media in specialized journalistic and special programs featuring experts in epidemiology, virology, as well as in the diagnosis and prevention of COVID-19. Later, politicians, economists, and sociologists joined them. Together, they discussed the effects of the coronavirus on Slovakia (especially on the economy), as well as the necessary measures and steps taken to eliminate the spread of the new disease. Great attention was also paid to this topic by the online media, especially news portals.

The Ministry of Health of the Slovak Republic and the Public Health Office of the Slovak Republic also regularly published official reports. There were press conferences of the Slovak Republic Government Office and the Prime Minister of the Slovak Republic. There appeared official web sites, see, e.g., Slovak Republic Government Office Website (www.korona.gov.sk), which informed about the current state and development of the pandemic, measures taken, planned steps and performed tests of COVID-19.

As far as the volume of information in the languages under discussion in this article is extremely large, we have chosen Slovak as a typical example, and now we will make a detailed analysis of the media output in Slovakia.

Analysis of media outputs. During the period from March 1 to May 31, 2020, a total of 200,504 media outputs were published in the Slovak media on the topic of coronavirus / COVID-19. Most articles were published in the online media (174,222

media outputs), followed by the print media (15,032 media outputs), television (5,165 media outputs), and the radio (1,234 media outputs). News agencies issued 4,851 reports on this subject. The largest number of media outputs was recorded in the week from March 16 to March 22, 2020, namely 23,073. The first case of COVID-19 in our territory was confirmed on March 6, 2020 (see Fig. 1).
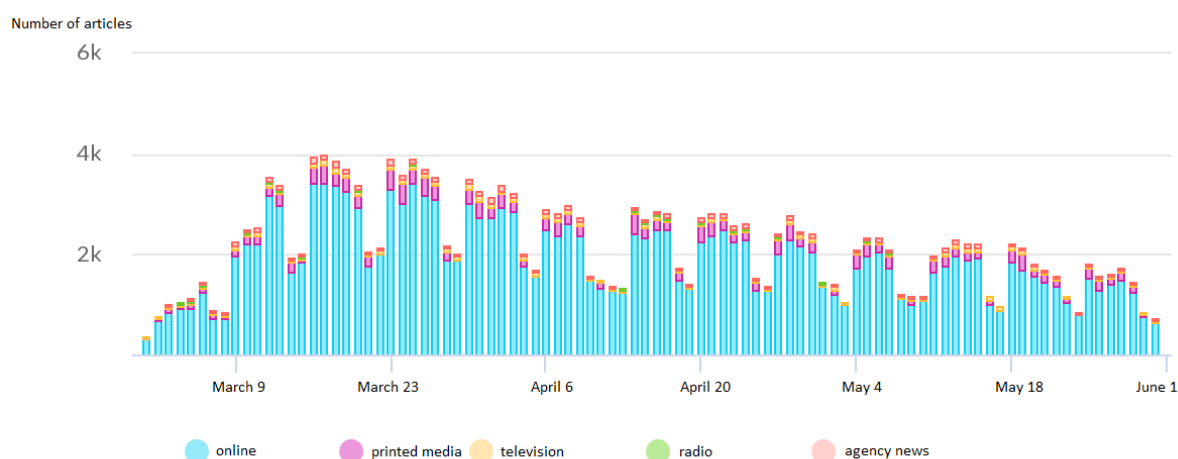

Figure 1. Number of articles on COVID-19 and coronavirus in the period March 1 – May 31, 2020 (MONITORA[2] 2020)

Among the publishers, most articles were printed by the Petit Press publishing house, whose portfolio includes the daily news SME, the news portal sme.sk and several regional dailies and weekly magazines. The news portal sme.sk was also the most frequent source of information about coronavirus / COVID-19 (see Fig. 2 and Fig. 3).
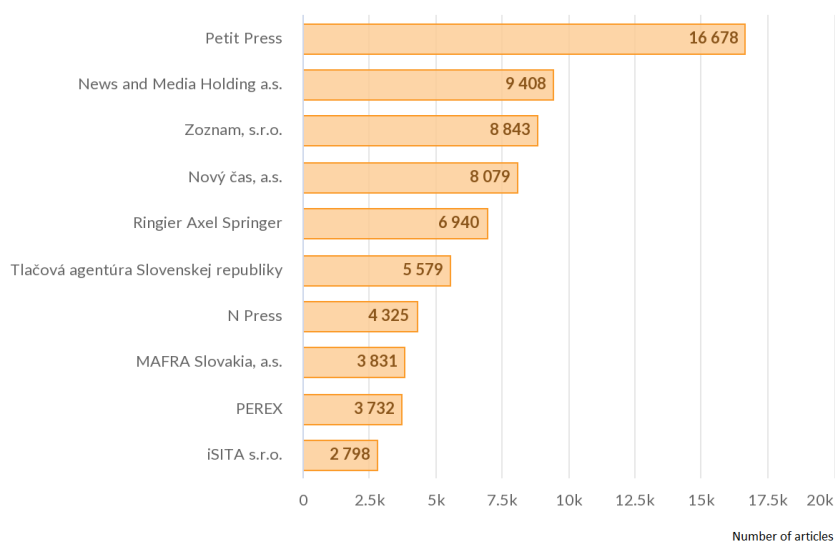
Figure 2. The most frequent publishers of articles on the topic of COVID-19 or coronavirus in the period March 1 – May 31, 2020 (MONITORA 2020)
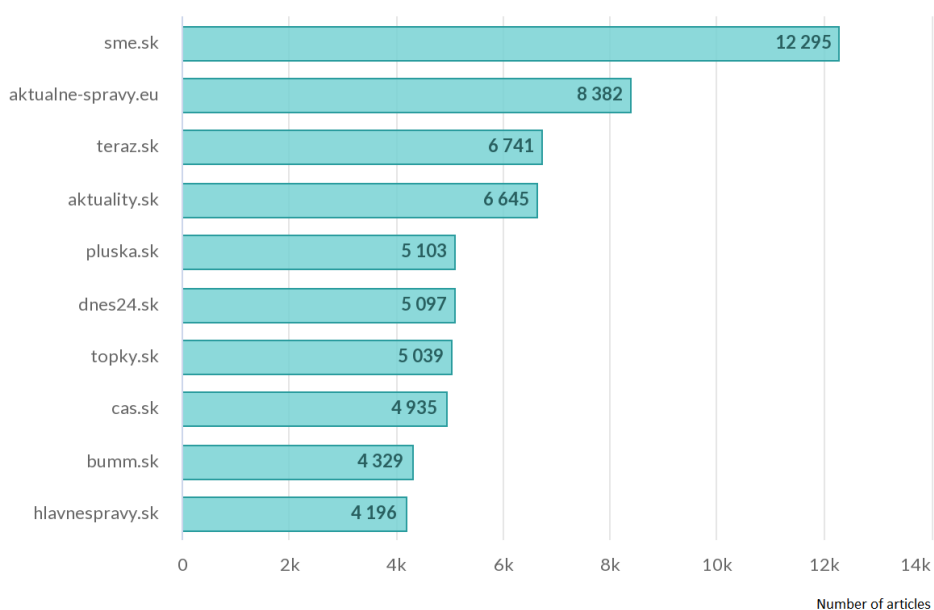

Figure 3. The most frequent sources of contributions on the topic of COVID-19 or coronavirus in the period March 1 – May 31, 2020 (MONITORA 2020)

Most articles were published on Tuesday, Thursday, and Wednesday. On the contrary, the smallest number of articles was published over the weekend, Saturday and Sunday (see Fig. 4).
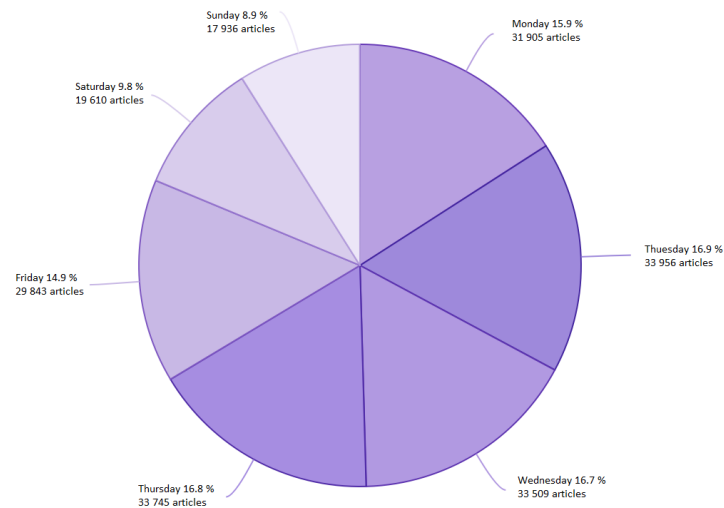
Figure 4. An overview of the number of articles on the topic of COVID-19 or coronavirus in the period March 1 – May 31, 2020 (MONITORA 2020)

Contributions published in the media on the topic of coronavirus / COVID-19 in the period from March 16 to March 22, 2020 were also the most shared on social networks. A total of 3,844,660 shares were recorded at this time (see Fig. 5).
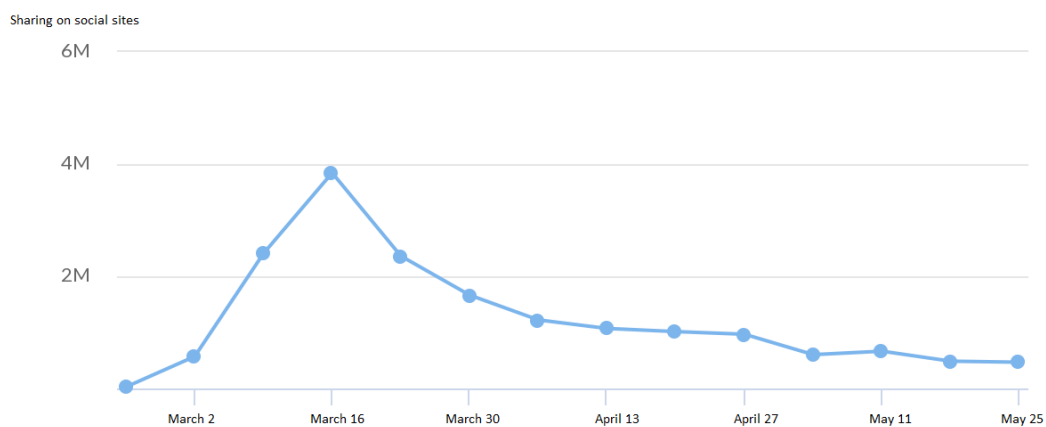

Figure 5. Sharing contributions on the topic of coronavirus on social networks in the period from March 1 to May 31, 2020 (MONITORA 2020)

Coronavirus / COVID-19 and media monitoring. The increased media interest in the topic of coronavirus was related to the effort to inform the public about the current situation, but it was also related to the interest of the viewers (readers and listeners alike) themselves in the up-to-date information.

According to the MEDIAN SK agency, which is engaged in research of the media market and media viewing, the media behaviour of the population also changed in the period after the outbreak of the pandemic caused by the new coronavirus. In the week of March 16 – 22, 2020, viewers spent an average of 7 hours and 15 minutes watching television, listening to the radio, and using the Internet and Web applications. It reached almost 8 hours at the weekend. They spent most of their time watching television, almost 3 hours and 15 minutes on average (MEDIAN SK 2020).

The results of the research also show that during the monitored period, the viewership of all TV channels increased. At the same time, TV stations also increased the daily reach, which means that more viewers watched television broadcasts in real time-mode. The largest increase was recorded in the case of public television, around noon and four to seven o'clock in the afternoon, when news programs were broadcast.

An interesting situation played out in radio broadcasting, which recorded an increase of approximately 25% ATS (average time spent watching media) relative. Though radio broadcasts did not attract new listeners, people spent more time listening to radio news.

In the case of the Internet, there was a growth in the number of people visiting various Internet sources in the period under review, especially news portals, as well as social networks and the social media. In the case of news portals, according to the MEDIAN SK agency, it is not only the intervention, or the number of visitors, that increased, but also the time spent on reading the news (MEDIAN SK 2020).

A notable interesting finding is that the coronavirus pandemic has stimulated readers' interest in serious news. In the first days since the confirmation of the first positive case of COVID-19 in Slovakia, readers searched for information mainly in the serious news and tabloid media. The conspiracy media significantly lagged behind.

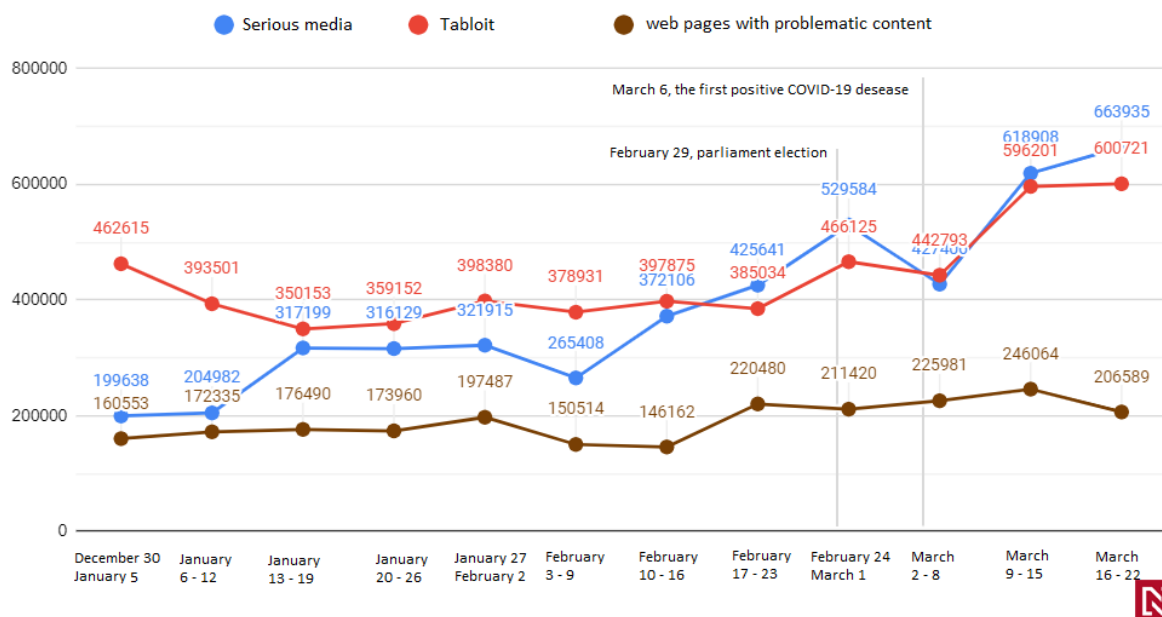The results are shown in the analysis of Daily news N in Fig. 6.

Figure 6. Number of interactions (shares, comments, and shares) for 10 Facebook pages from the category of trustworthy media, tabloid and lifestyle, and web pages with problematic content. Available at: www.dennikn.sk

2.2.3 COVID-19 as fake news

The data presented above vividly show that any piece of news connected with COVID-19 was read and followed carefully all over the world, not only in Slovakia. But how reliable was this information? Fig. 6 shows reliability of information presented in the trustworthy media, tabloids, and some dubious sources.

Disinformation on the life-threatening disease created and reproduced in the mass media, e.g., in the form of fake news, affects humanity and is harmful both on the intellectual and physical levels. In making analysis of news values in Slovak television news, Greguš and Mináriková (2016: 81) write that "[a] professional journalist is supposed to bring truthful information; to be honest, to respect other people's freedom of expression; to respect human dignity; to be responsible for their own actions and the consequences, and to serve the public interest". In the examples presented below, we will demonstrate how all these professional features are ignored and human dignity is violated.

Contesting reliable information. It is rightly stressed that the most reliable news on COVID-19 should come from the WHO, but this source is often undermined or discredited, sometimes from political and rhetorical perspectives that can serve socio-manipulatory, economic, and strategic purposes. This kind of contestation of the most legitimate source of medical knowledge is used by some world decision-makers, e.g., Donald Trump, who has repeatedly referred to the findings of the WHO, and even drawn COVID-related arguments into his electoral game and manipulated facts by seemingly mindless expression of his thoughts. Without sufficient restraint, Trump attacked the WHO but did not fully anticipate the ricochet effect of public opinion, which generally trusts global organizations, and this is the case with COVID-19. These are the reports of the data-processing press on this issue: "The president unloaded on the WHO on April 7, first on Twitter and then in his daily coronavirus briefing"; "The WHO really blew it," Trump tweeted, blasting the 'China centric' agency for offering 'faulty recommendations' early in the crisis. "Fortunately, I rejected their advice on keeping our borders open to China early on," he claimed. He expanded his critique, falsely alleging that the WHO had called the initial Wuhan outbreak "no big deal". "They called it wrong… they missed the call," he continued. "And we're going to put a hold on money sent to the WHO" (Stewart 2020). Trump has committed what we would call "institutional defamation" in this case, as is often the case with personal defamation in the news media (see Wesley 2013). Unfortunately, it was an untold attempt to apply the technique of charisma to his manipulative political rhetoric (Beck 2005).

The research on war conflicts (Panasenko et al. 2018) confirms the opinion of Dobronichenko that there are three types of media narrative: media reflection, media transformation, and media myth (Доброниченко 2014). Readers expect the truth from public sources and hope that honest journalists give valid information (media reflection). Some publishers do not check the sources of information and share dubious materials. In the case of war conflicts, specific techniques (media transformation) are used, which justify military action and victims it claims (Panasenko et al. 2017). Some

pieces of information are false: they are called fake news (media myth). The problem is that at first it may not be clear if this information is false, and it is only later that it becomes obvious (Brennen et al. 2020). In order to 'sell' false information various techniques are used. Kushnirov (2019) describes linguistic and discursive means used with a view to distorting facts and influencing the addressee's point of view. Among linguistic means of falsifying information, he enumerates phonological, morphological, lexical, syntactic, and textual ones; the most common are, to his mind, euphemisms and dysphemisms, hyperboles, litotes, etc. (ibid., 211-212).

The situation with fake news became so serious that the European Commission created the High Level Group on fake news and online disinformation; the Group's 44-page report analyzes disinformation as a phenomenon that goes well beyond the term "fake news". Disinformation, as defined in this report, includes all forms of false, inaccurate, or misleading information designed, presented and promoted to intentionally cause public harm or for profit (A multi-dimensional approach to disinformation… 2018: 5).

The research of Bakić Tomić et al. (2019) highlights the situation with fabricated news in Croatia and compares the reliability of news in the media and social networks. They offered their respondents three criteria to evaluate the truthfulness of news: the news cannot be checked online; the news has a sensational title and the news is not logical (ibid., 29). They came to the conclusion that "various sorts of fake news definitely affect people's emotions" (ibid., 30); the purpose of fake news is harassment and intimidation of the individuals as well as deceit, propaganda, and manipulation of the general public" (ibid., 31).

Below we present a short overview on fake news, which appeared in Slovakia and illustrate its key points with examples. There were false reports about coronavirus in the media. They appeared mainly on the Internet and in the social media, which spread false news among their users. Such reports most commonly contained information related to the use of drugs and the origin of coronavirus, announcements of the closure

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of the Slovak capital, tips on various preventive measures and options to protect against the virus, notifications of early school opening, etc. (Krajčovič 2020).

The police of the Slovak Republic, which monitor the occurrence of false reports in Slovakia, state that they identified 65 statuses of disinformation published in connection with the coronavirus / COVID-19 in the period from March to May 2020 (https://www.facebook.com/hoaxPZ).

According to the survey conducted in Slovakia (ibid.), almost 80% of the respondents encountered fake news or false reports related to COVID-19. Only 52% of respondents were able to immediately identify fake news. Almost 38% did not know it was a hoax, though the information was suspicious. The rest of the respondents (10%) could not identify it was a false report and learned about it only later. Almost half of the respondents (47%) who encountered fake news about the coronavirus and COVID-19 expressed concern about these reports. One-fifth of the respondents (20.6%) even began to doubt the correctness of the steps taken by the competent authorities in the fight against the coronavirus because of hoaxes.

The following examples illustrate fake news that appeared on the Internet and in the social media. The first example is an extract from the text, whose author offers breathing exercise designed to fight this disease.
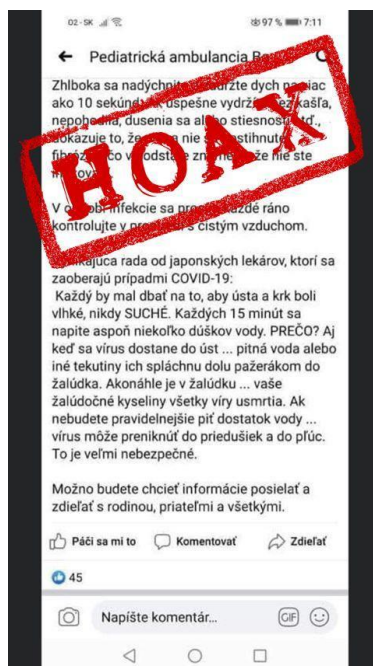
Figure 7. An example of fake news spread through the social media.
Available at: https://www.facebook.com/hoaxPZ/photos/a.317666309061243/
656426055185265/?type=3&theater

(1) Sk. *Zhlboka sa nadýchnite a zadržte dych na viac ako 10 sekúnd. Ak úspešne vydržíte bez kašľa, nepohodlia, dusenia sa alebo stiesnenosti, atď., dokazuje to, že pľúca nie sú postihnuté fibrózou, čo v podstate znamená, že nie ste infikovaný.* – Eng. Take a deep breath and hold your breath for more than 10 seconds. If you successfully survive without coughing, discomfort, suffocation, or tightness, etc., it proves that your lungs are not affected by fibrosis, which basically means that you are not infected.

This fake news looks naïve and humorous, but the problem is that some people took it seriously and instead of visiting a doctor and taking medicine followed these instructions.

The second example looks like a joke because in this case the author mentions pesticides which will be sprayed by military helicopters. We present a translation of its fragment. In fact, it belongs to the so-called unprofessional journalism and some sentences can hardly be translated properly.

Figure 8. An example of fake news spread through the social media. Available at:
https://www.facebook.com/hoaxPZ/photos/a.317666309061243/665254867635717/?type=3&theater

(2) Sk. *Dnes budú špeciálne vojenské vrtuľníky striekať pesticídy proti vírusu koruny na oblohe po celej krajine, takže musíte zostať vo vnútri po dvanástej hodine v noci. A odstráňte všetky šaty, ktoré sú vonku, keď počujete zvuky lietadiel v noci, je pre vás vedieť, že to súvisí s touto záležitosťou (COVID-19).* – Eng. Today, special military helicopters will spray pesticides against coronavirus in the sky all over the country, so you have to stay inside after twelve o'clock at night. And remove all the clothes that are outside when you hear airplanes at night; it is for you to know that it is related to this matter (COVID-19).

This piece of fake news, alongside others, is now blocked by the Slovak police. Though the link provided in the caption is valid, one can see and read it only within 3-5 seconds. We find it wise because it stops spreading fake news on the Internet and saves some naïve people from reckless actions.

We can also mention a false report about COVID-19 that says that the virus was artificially created and that is a biological weapon. This fake news was circulated in the so-called "conspiracy media". It also spread through the Internet and the social media. There are different techniques of creating fake news. Very often, various

stylistic means, including graphical ones, are employed making this piece of news a fake. Thus, considering COVID-19 from the communicative perspective is an interesting and promising area of research.

3. Designating coronavirus: Semantic and conceptual aspects

Capturing the designative aspect of COVID-19 is undoubtedly a very interesting task, which attracts the attention of scholars all over the world. One can see that there is a wide range of medical terms in different languages accompanied by newly coined topic-related words. Thus, Zhabotynska (2020) considers COVID-19 as a narrative multimedia concept instantiated in discourse. Škvareninová (2020) divides the 'coronavirus lexis' in media texts into six thematic areas: medical environment, struggle and war, cooperation, work and education, social contacts and easing restrictions, creative play on words.

A linguistic exploration of COVID-19, quite naturally, starts with its denomination. We have already discussed the medical aspect of this phenomenon hereinabove. However, it is obvious that all the three aspects – physical, social and linguistic – are interconnected. With the spread of COVID-19, respective medical terms flooded the media; there also appeared many neologisms and metaphors (see Section 4), jokes and memes (see Section 5) on the Internet.

Naming COVID-19. In response to the words of the President of the United States, who tried to stigmatize the origin of the disease by referring to it as a "Chinese virus", the WHO gave the disease a technical name 'COVID-19'. It takes on all the denotational and connotational meanings, including those previously carried by such terms as "Wuhan virus", "foreign virus" or "mysterious lung disease" (de Paula da Silva Martins 2020: 26-27). Such names clung like labels to coronavirus after its discovery with the subsequent coverage in the world media in December 2019. The important thing is that the virus that causes COVID-19 is one in a line of coronaviruses, and probably not the last of those to be dealt with, among others, by the language of medicine. Some of them

bear special names, especially those that recently caused more serious epidemic effects, such as SARS-CoV-1 (2002–2003) and MERS-CoV (2012–2013). In their use, such denominations are also metonymically treated as the names of the viruses themselves and the health consequences they generate. This becomes clearer when the acronyms are developed: SARS stands for Severe Acute Respiratory Coronavirus Syndrome; MERS – Middle East Respiratory Coronavirus Syndrome (Katella 2020).

The virus, allegedly discovered only at the end of 2019, was initially described simply as a "novel coronavirus" and was given the code 2019-nCoV on the basis of two extended versions of SARS-CoV and MERS-CoV. Due to its similarity to SARS, it is ranked as SARS-CoV-2. The need for terminology internationalization and, at the same time, introduction of a more practical term has resulted in the reorganization of the morphological components of the code 2019nCoV, resulting in COVID-19, where the elements "CO" and "VI" invariably point to the first syllables of "corona" (Lat. *corōna* 'crown, chaplet') and "virus" (Lat. *virus*), while the letter D is the initial of "disease". The new code is to be read as "coronavirus disease nineteen", thus providing nothing more than a general indication of the biological agent causing the disease and not suggesting its pathogenic potential. Etymologically and neologically neutral, the name COVID-19 seems no less technical than the previous 2019-nCoV, in any case, it is no longer a multi-stage composition that could function well in the written and specialized language, but would be difficult and uneconomical to implement in speech (de Paula da Silva Martins 2020: 17-20). The COVID-19 construction is an alphanumeric neologism that is simple to pronounce and use as a conceptualized expression (for a classification of contemporary neologisms, see, e.g., Adamo & Della Valle 2017; Kerremans 2015; Levchenko 2010; Neology in specialized communication 2012).

3.1 The spread of medical terms related to COVID-19

Information and linguistic sources try to remedy the lack of understanding of the language used by the authors of the COVID-19 discourse. On the one hand, these are more or less advanced attempts to collect a corpus of relevant material, on the other

hand, terminology dictionaries and compendia that provide comprehensive definitions of terms, their contexts and formal specificity.

For instance, the Coronavirus Corpus of English is currently a huge reservoir of cognitive and communicative data that comes from different media sources: online media, scientific and popular, institutional and authorial discourse. This corpus shows what people say about COVID-19 in 20 English-speaking countries. The corpus resource includes more than 530 million words and is being expanded within the English-Corpora.org project. As one can read on the project site (https://www.english-corpora.org/), the Coronavirus Corpus is "[d]esigned to be the definitive record of the social, cultural, and economic impact of the coronavirus (COVID-19) in 2020 and beyond."

The corpus can be a starting point for many linguistic and interdisciplinary studies of a very spontaneous and ad hoc vocabulary resource. We would consider this resource to be a linguistic collection, which, on a cognitive level, has to and shows great similarities between different languages, and formally uses various tools, mainly terminology (see, e.g., Cabré Castellví 1999; Des fondements théoriques de la terminologie… 2004; Superanskaya et al. 2012; Zanola 2018) to create and describe the new phenomenon of the COVID-19 pandemic with all its circumstances and consequences.

Research in this area of new knowledge about the world around us can be interlingual. Taking into account different languages, it is possible to establish a model of cognitive description of phenomena, entities, and events caused by the COVID-19 pandemic (see, e.g., French COVID dictionary *Le Dictionnaire du Covid-19* by Henri Gourseau, *Le DiCovid-19* (2020), with a list of professionally described 242 terms in the form of single words or nominal groups, e.g., Fr. *quarantaine* 'quarantine', *quatorzaine* 'a 14-day virus incubation period', *effets secondaires* 'side effects', *distanciation sociale* 'social distancing', *désinformation* 'disinformation', etc. as well as the Italian

compendium *Le parole del Coronavirus* coordinated by Vera Gheno on the Treccani Enciclopaedia, the section of the project *#leparolevalgono*, with the "pandemic words" as *contagio* 'contagion', *letalità* 'lethality', *mascherina* 'mask', *curva epidemica* 'epidemic curve', etc. ([http://www.treccani.it/magazine/parolevalgono /Le_parole_del_Coronavirus/ index.html?page=1#listing-grid](http://www.treccani.it/magazine/parolevalgono/Le_parole_del_Coronavirus/index.html?page=1#listing-grid)).

A telling example is the use of the term "dyspnea" in official information from the Italian Ministry of Health to describe one of the main symptoms of COVID-19, namely "difficulty breathing", or "suffocation". The language of the media message was only simplified in this respect around mid-March 2020. Looking at how this language evolved may prove valuable in determining general communication trends, which are important in the fight against the coronavirus, mainly, the negative effects of the infodemic. As Grandi & Piovan (2020) assert in their study, "there is a direct causal link between the poor 'readability' of institutional communication and the infodemia, i.e. the proliferation and dissemination of news that often alter reality and give it a partial or distorted image. This infodemia predominantly affects those who find it difficult to access official channels of communication (institutional and scientific, primarily), which serve as an instrument to verify the truthfulness of the news".

3.2 Appearance of neologisms

With the spread of COVID-19, there appeared many newly coined words. Some of them are nonce words formed by blending or compounding with the situational context, typical of the journalistic language (see, e.g., Adamo & Della Valle 2003; 2005), but also for the hypertextual Internet reality (see, e.g., Kerremans 2015; about the production and role of neologisms in contemporary languages, see, e.g., Gałkowski 2009; 2014; 2015; Guilbert 1975; Sablayrolles 2000; 2017; 2019; cfr.).

This is true of the Italian neologism *coglionavirus*, which served as a keyword for a compilation and newspaper interpretation by a very controversial Italian author Antonio Giangrande, a sociologist suspicious of conspiracy in many aspects of Italian

reality. The term *coglionavirus* is a mocking contraction that blends the vulgar Italian *coglione* (lit. 'testicle'; slang 'fool') and the internationalism *virus*. Under this title, the Italian protester published from March to August 2020 ten parts of a truly "infodemic" paper (over 5000 pages in total!). Its subtitles express the subject matter under consideration, e.g., *Il Virus nel Mondo* 'The virus over the world', *Le Vittime* 'The victims', *La Cura* 'The treatment', *Gli Untori* 'Plague-spreaders', *Gli Esperti* 'The experts', *Gli Improvvisatori* 'The improvisers', *Senza Speranza* 'Hopeless'. The publication was driven into clandestine existence; around mid-August 2020, it was withdrawn from sale on amazon.com. Despite that, it is still available on books.google.

This is only one of the spectacular examples of infodemic activity and irresponsible play on words that eloquently resounds through the otherwise interesting neologism *coglionavirus*. It seems that no one and nothing is pointed out in this way, but the mockery in the face of a serious problem is obvious and relatively harmful, such as talking about COVID-19 in war terms (Cassandro 2020; Dotti 2020; Henderson 2020).

However, the coronavirus / COVID-19 discourse, especially as disseminated by the press, is not exempt from disclosing information that marks places, institutions, events, and people. It includes, among others:
- the towns particularly affected by the COVID-19 outbreak and its tragic consequences (e.g., Wuhan in China, Bergamo in Italy and Lleda in Spain);
- single hospitals receiving seriously infected with COVID-19;
- wedding ceremonies and other gatherings, during which numerous cases of infection transmission were recorded; in Polish the term *koronawesele* 'coronawedding' was coined for wedding receptions, at which sick guests were present (cf. Eng. *corona party / lockdown party* and Pl. *koronapogrzeb* 'coronafuneral', such as the funeral of the famous inhabitant of Zakopane in the Tatras Mountains Zofia Karpiel-Bułecka at the beginning of July 2020, during which one of the infected participants led to the quarantine of 460 other event attendees (see Koronawesela – już ponad… 2020);

- persons whose personalities are disclosed, e.g., the names of so-called "patients zero" (see *2.1.3*) and – for a more understandable purpose – the names of researchers working on various biological and medical aspects of the virus and the disease; it is not difficult to find the name and surname of Chinese "patient zero" – Wei Guixian, a 57-year-old female shrimp vendor at the Wuhan fish market (Ważna 2020).

The German database, for instance, helps analyze the frequency and meaning of the so-called *coronacoinages* (cf. the German part of this study), such as *coronababies* (6 occurrences), i.e. children born during the COVID-19 pandemic (cf. the cases of It. *coglionavirus,* Pl. *koronawesele*, and similar forms mentioned above). The mentioned Coronavirus Corpus allows finding information about the token *generation coronababy*, as well as the perspective of the so-called *quaranteens* in 2033, i.e. young people started their life during the COVID-19 quarantine in 2020. The blending *covidiot* is popular as well (Ro 2020). The term refers to people who do not follow the rules of conduct during the COVID-19 pandemic, e.g., violating the ban on leaving home during the lockdown. The frequency of *covidiot* in the news according to The Coronavirus Corpus is 166 occurrences.

3.3 Pandemic of concepts and a new COVID-19 language

Alongside the coronavirus pandemic, one can observe a pandemic of ideas and concepts that within a fairly short span of time have stemmed from the COVID-19 shock experienced by societies and economies. The pandemic has shown that it is important for humanity to look for a new language to describe new phenomena. For successful communication, humanity needs not only new terms to understand the changing reality, but also new concepts to cope with global problems and build a joint future. It should be admitted that under the circumstances, the coronavirus pandemic did not lead to radical transformations in language but rather established a certain discursive dominant influencing ethical, social, religious forms of communication (Kröll et al. 2020), collective empathy (Mierzwa 2020), verbal and non-verbal rituals of interaction, etc. (Katila et al. 2020: 3).

The concept CORONAVIRUS, which captures our knowledge of the disease, has penetrated deeply into many areas of social and personal communication, and we are directly involved in generating new meanings around it (Zhabotynska 2020). With its verbalizations, the concept began penetrating into various spheres of human communication, which is indicative both of its dynamism and gradual adaptation in different cultures and of its impact as an abstract idea or conceptual trigger, which launched radical changes in public consciousness, social systems (Прощай, COVID? 2020; Horton 2020; Zizek 2020: 40-41), and encourages reflection, understanding and consideration of its role in our lives.

According to Zizek, the coronavirus epidemic has triggered an epidemic of ideological concepts: FAKE NEWS, CONSPIRACY THEORIES, RACISM. However, there is also a positive effect of the pandemic, namely, thinking about an alternative society outside the nation-state, a society of global cooperation (2020: 39).

In this section, we focus on the specifics of conceptualizing the concept CORONA, which is the form of conceptualizing CORONAVIRUS – COVID-19 by the speakers of German. We consider the types of adaptation of new CORONA-related concepts instantiated in the German media during the pandemic. The study is based on the "New Vocabulary of the Corona Pandemic" (Ger. "Neuer Wortschatz rund um die Coronapandemie") of the Leibniz Institute for the German Language consisting of a total of 660 units available on the open platform Online-Wortschatz-Informationssystem Deutsch (hereinafter – OWID) (OWID 2020).

In our approach to the study of instantiations of the concept CORONAVIRUS in the media, we consider CORONAVIRUS as a concept, using a well-developed methodology of concept studies (Карасик 2004; Петлюченко et al. 2017; Степанов 2004). The term "coronavirus" has indeed been conceptualized quite quickly and can be reconstructed quite successfully by motivational, notional, figurative, value-based and other characteristics in respective linguistic cultures / communities. The objective is to reveal

the universal and nationally specific features of this fast-born "corona" + "virus" + "disease" concept, and its interpretation in media discourse as hard news would allow developing the cognitive and linguistic mechanisms of its adaptation in media discourse.

3.4 How COVID-19 affects the German language

Every crisis gives birth to its vocabulary, for example, the man-made disaster at the Chernobyl power plant caused by improper interaction between humans and nuclear technology led to the need for rapid interstate interaction and prompted the International Atomic Energy Agency (hereinafter – IAEA) to develop a glossary, which included basic terms on radiation protection and their definitions in English, French, Russian, and Spanish (IAEA radiation protection glossary 1986). There appeared new glossaries on COVID-19 in many languages; now we will give some examples from German.

Since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, which supposedly occurred due to the improper interaction of man and nature, German vocabulary researchers have identified many typical terms – from *Abstrichzentrum* 'testing center' through *Immunitätsausweis* 'immunity card' to *Öffnungsdiskussionsorgien* 'opening discussion orgies'. In pre-COVID times, only a few medical laymen knew what *Triage* 'triage' or *Übersterblichkeit* 'excess mortality' meant while today the terms *Spuckschutzscheibe*" 'face shield' or *Distanzschlange* 'distance line' are rather widespread in everyday German (Wie Corona unsere Sprache beeinflusst, *s.a.*).

3.4.1 Corona as a term-forming element

According to the Leibniz Institute for the German Language (IDS), the word "corona" alone in a short time brought about 180 new compound nouns with the element "corona" to the German language and with them new concepts, such as (1) CORONA-HYSTERIE = "general (nervous) excitement triggered by the fear of being infected with the COVID-19 virus and the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic"; (2) CORONA-BABY

= 1. "child conceived during isolation restrictions in home quarantine; 2. "child of a COVID-19 patient"; (3) CORONA-ABITUR = 1. "university entrance qualification issued without final exams due to the school closings caused by the COVID-19 pandemic"; 2. "final exams at grammar schools taken under special conditions and possibly with a delay due to the ban on contacts" (Neuer Wortschatz rund um die Coronapandemie, *s.a.*).

According to IDS, the concept CORONA instantiated in German is enriched by short-lived concepts, for example, the concept CORONA-PARTY ("celebrating together, mostly young people, despite and possibly as a kind of protest against the extensive contact and exit restrictions during the COVID-19 pandemic") was used for only a few days, and *Gabenzaun* ("fence on which bags with (food) donations for the needy are hung") will hardly be used after the acute exit restrictions are lifted. Some, like the hotly debated *Immunitätsausweis* 'immunity card' appeared on the list of coronavirus-related terms just recently in the form *digitaler Immunitätsausweis* ("official electronic document confirming a person's immunity to the SARS-CoV-19 virus").

3.4.2 Corona & Denglish

Coronavirus endangers not only the health of people and their economic well-being, but also the German language. The pandemic has enhanced the expansion of English vocabulary and strengthened the position of Denglish champions in the fight against German purists led by the *Verein Deutsche Sprache* (Eng. The German Language Association), which is responsible for the regulation of the types and proportions of Anglicisms in the German language (Петлюченко 2018).

Many of the newly-formed CORONA-concepts are borrowed from the English language, as it was pointed out by Walter Krämer with the reference to German television channels ARD and ZDF which "rolled out a verbal carpet of Anglicisms and pseudo-anglicisms" (Stoldt 2020), for example, (1) *social distancing* ("deliberately created spatial or physical distance between people to prevent the spread of infectious

diseases"); (2) *lockdown* ("period when almost all economic and social activities are shut down by political order, e.g., "to protect against infection"); (3) *hotspot* ("acute center of a spreading disease, point with the highest number of sick people"); (4) *face shield* ("a visor-like, curved, rectangular disk made of clear plastic, which is attached to the head and worn in front of the face to protect against infection").

One of the most prominent of them is the pseudo-anglicism HOME OFFICE concept and its sub-concepts HOMEWORKER ("person who works in a home office"), HOMEWORKING ("professional activity carried out from home using modern media and telecommunications"), HOME-WORK-OUT ("fitness training conducted at home"), etc. This term also exists in the United Kingdom, where it refers to both a desk at home and the Home Office (Ger. *das Innenministerium*). "These pseudo-anglicisms are not just bad English, explains Henning Lobin. On the contrary, they give a very differentiated designation to something that obviously needs *to be named*" (Wie Corona unsere Sprache beeinflusst, *s.a.*).

3.5 Classification of CORONA-concepts in German according to the type of their appearance

We distinguish between the following types of appearance of CORONA-concepts in German during the pandemic: (1) new German CORONA-concepts, which appeared during the pandemic, (2) old German concepts that have been adapted to new COVID conditions, (3) German CORONA-concepts that will disappear after the COVID-19 crisis is over, (4) German CORONA-concepts that will remain after the COVID-19.

Such CORONA-concepts as *Balkonmusik* ("public and partly collaborative music-making (at a fixed time) from open spaces in buildings"), *Coronaer* ("person who has been infected with COVID-19"), *Gabenzaun* ("fence on which bags with (food) donations for the needy are hung"), and *Infodemie* ("worldwide, rapid spread of fake news") clearly rated by German researchers as new concepts of the decade.

The concept SOCIAL DISTANCING certainly belongs among the key ones: it is instantiated particularly frequently in reports on the COVID-19 pandemic in the German media. Although the term "social distancing" is currently regularly used in the media in German, the expression is not included as a keyword in the neologism dictionary but researchers continue to observe its further development. Klosa-Kückelhaus (2020b) believes that the decisive factor for possible inclusion of neologisms into the dictionary of corona-related terms will be whether the term is also used after the end of the coronavirus crisis, not only with historical reference to the 2020 crisis but also separately from it.

Some new concepts appear spontaneously, for example, in political discourse, such as Angela Merkel's divisive word *Öffnungsdiskussionsorgien* 'opening discussion orgies' ([by Chancellor Angela Merkel] as an overly and disproportionately assessed dispute on the easing of the exit and contact restrictions imposed during the COVID-19 pandemic) (Neuer Wortschatz rund um die Coronapandemie, *s.a.*). The Chancellor sharpened her position on the issue sparking a debate about her choice of words. The remark came in a non-public discussion about *Exit-Strategie* 'exit strategy', an issue that is existential for many Germans.

While BALKONMUSIK 'balcony music', CORONAER 'corona-infected', and INFODEMIE 'infodemic' are clearly new concepts of the decade, the GABENZAUN 'gift fence' has only been documented for three years and almost exclusively with reference to Hamburg where such a fence is actively used at the main railway station. Against the backdrop of the coronavirus crisis, this social support model seems to have expanded to other cities in Germany, which is why the word can still be observed (Klosa-Kückelhaus 2020a).

It is interesting to trace how old German concepts have adapted to the new COVID-19 conditions, e.g., GEISTERSPIEL ("game of football, basketball or ice hockey which takes place without spectators") is an example of a concept that has been used in the

context of sport for a long time, but is now blossoming in the German media in the context of the coronavirus crisis (ibid.).

According to IDS, only a few weeks after the first recording of the word *coronaer* in the dictionary of corona-related terms, it can already be assumed that it has no linguistic future; it is no longer used in the German-speaking media to designate people infected with the coronavirus, except perhaps as an historicism. Such people are referred to in the media as *Corona-Infizierte* 'corona infected', *Corona-Kranke* 'corona sick', *COVID-19-Patienten* 'COVID-19 patients, etc. In the case of the INFODEMIE-concept, however, IDS researchers assume that the concept for designating the rapid global spread of fake news may develop further.

4. Metaphoric instantiations of coronavirus

4.1 Transcultural conceptual metaphors: War against COVID-19

COVID-19 has unexpectedly affected the lives of thousands of people worldwide. The need to undergo quarantine and follow stay-at-home orders has changed the perception of national and personal safety. The invisible enemy has triggered defence mechanisms on an unprecedented scale. Obviously, it has also influenced the way we talk about the harsh living conditions. The language used by politicians and the media has a military bias. The analysis presented below focuses on the selected news reports including reports by politicians (Prime Minister, Minister of Health, etc.). It intends to find out how the war waged against COVID-19 is put into words. It seems that the metaphorical extensions applied in discourse are metaphors recognised in the conceptual domains of WAR and COMBAT.

The language data to be presented and discussed have been gathered from a number of languages, including examples from English (derived from the British and American media), German, Italian, Polish, and Ukrainian.

By far the most prevalent metaphor utilised to describe the reality marked by the spreading pandemic appears to be the WAR and COMBAT domain and related metaphors. They stress the significance and gravity of the crisis situation. To illustrate the universality of this association, the following examples can be quoted from diverse media.

The most recurrent battlefield and combat imagery is represented in Polish by exemplars such as the following:

Pl. *walka z koronawirusem* – lit. fight against/battle against coronavirus.

Pl. *połączony atak grypy i koronawirusa* – a joint attack of flu and coronavirus.

Pl. *koronawirus dobija transport* – coronavirus finishes off/kills transportation.

However, the Polish Prime Minister prematurely "called off the pandemic" before presidential elections in July 2020 saying the virus is retreating, comparing it to defeated troops of the opponent's army.

Pl. *Wirus jest w odwrocie, już nie trzeba się go bać. Idźmy tłumnie na wybory* – The virus is retreating; we do not need to fear it anymore. Let us all go vote.

(https://tvn24.pl/wybory-prezydenckie-2020/wybory-prezydenckie-2020-premier-mateusz-morawiecki-zacheca-do-udzialu-w-2-turze-wyborow-4626728)

In Italian, metaphors that are used in the pandemic context before and after the spread as well as when becoming aware of the threat are of the war-type character (It. *la metafora bellica*): silent war, world war III, invisible enemy, fight, front, incarceration, surround, doctors on the front line, victims, resist, etc.

The battleground and military action are evoked in the examples given below. Let us consider the following instances (it has to be noted that they come from various sources and are repeated in them; full statements are accompanied by specific sources in brackets):

It. *il linguaggio marziale* – martial language.

It. *la retorica bellica* – war rhetoric.

It. *la guerra/la lotta/la battaglia (con il coronavirus)* – the war/fight/battle (with coronavirus). (cf. Fr. *Nous sommes en guerre* – We are at war, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N5lcM0qA1XY).

Specific references are primarily made to World War I: It. *la Grande Guerra*, which literally means 'The Great War'.

The examples listed below are repeatedly employed in the following sources https://www.istitutobandini.it/newSite/guerra-contro-nemico-invisibile-serena; https://www.treccani.it/magazine/lingua_italiana/articoli/parole/cura_parole_2.html; https://www.recentiprogressi.it/archivio/3347/articoli/33187/; https://www.stamptoscana.it/covid-19-medici-al-fronte-la-lista-caduti-sul-sito-fnomceo/; https://www.agi.it/cronaca/news/2020-03-30/coronavirus-sud-7984805/; https://www.auxologico.it/approfondimenti/psicologia-coronavirus

It. *le metafore dell'invasione* – the metaphors of the invasion.

It. *la guerra al nemico invisibile* – war on the invisible enemy.

It. *il nemico straniero/esterno* – the foreign/external enemy.

It. *lottare col nemico invisibile* – battle (with) the invisible enemy.

It. *la battaglia al virus* – the battle against the virus.

It. *i medici = soldati eroi* – the doctors = hero soldiers.

It. *i medici caduti al fronte* – doctors fallen at the front.

It. *i caduti* – the fallen/the dead.

It. *il fronte (del virus)* – the (virus) front.

It. *la trincea (in ospedali)* – the trench in hospitals.

It. *in trincea contro il virus* – in the trenches against the virus.

It. *uno stato di allarme/allerta* – an alarm/alert state.

It. *È la Terza guerra mondiale; un Piano Marshall europeo* – It's the Third World War; A European Marshall Plan. (Giuseppe Pasini,

https://www.ilgiorno.it/economia/coronavirus-industrie-1.5066423).

It. *Il Corona virus è una guerra che durerà ancora diversi mesi* – The coronavirus is a war that will continue for several months. (Walter Ricciardi, https://www.ilgiornale.it/news/cronache/coronavirus-ricciardi-guerra-e-durer-fino-allestate-1839736.html).

The following instances have been noted, among others, after the following sources: ttps://www.treccani.it/magazine/atlante/speciali/coronavirus/index.html;

https://www.radioradio.it/2020/02/italia-cina-virus-fusaro/;

http://www.regioni.it/sanita/2020/07/14/coronavirus-speranza-non-conosce-confini-regionali-615823/;

https://www.ilgazzettino.it/nordest/belluno/coronavirus_medici_di_famiglia_belluno-5132385.html:

It. *il virus ha colpito prima la Cina* – the virus struck China first.

It. *il virus ha ferito poi l'Europa* – virus then injured Europe.

It. *in alcune regioni sta mietendo molte vittime* – in some regions it is reaping many victims.

It. *il Covid non conosce confini* – Covid does not know boundaries.

It. *la carne da cannone* – cannon fodder (= elderly patients).

War and combat metaphorical examples are also noted in the Anglophone media. The deadly spread of the virus is accentuated in the New Yorker coverage (https://www.newyorker.com/culture/annals-of-inquiry/the-coronavirus-and-our-future):

Eng. *Now comes this disease that can kill anyone on the planet* –

Grocery store workers are compared to soldiers:

Eng. *My younger son works in a grocery store and is now one of the front-line workers who keep civilization running*.

A straightforward reference to war is illustrated in the following Ukrainian examples:

Ukr. *Війна з коронавірусом ще не завершена* – The war on the coronavirus is not over. (https://www.president.gov.ua/news/zvernennya-prezidenta-ukrayini-shodo-poslablennya-karantinu-61141)

Ukr. *Наша зброя з коронавірусом – терпіння, дисципліна та відповідальність. Кожен з нас має бути невід'ємною частиною єдиного війська – і тільки тоді ми переможемо хворобу* – Patience, discipline and responsibility are our weapon against the coronovirus. Each of us must be an integral part of a consolidated army – and only then will we defeat the disease. (https://www.president.gov.ua/news/zvernennya-prezidenta-ukrayini-shodo-poslablennya-karantinu-61141)

Ukr. *Пандемія – це війна. Лікарі та науковці – солдати на передовій* – The pandemic is a war. Doctors and scientists are soldiers on the front lines. (https://tyzhden.ua/Science/242530)

Ukr. *Коронавірус Covid-19 спалахнув на ринку морепродуктів в китайському Ухані* – The Covid-19 coronavirus broke out (lit. exploded or flashed out) at the seafood market in Wuhan, China. (https://tyzhden.ua/News/240737)

However, owing to the turbulent history and responsibility for the war atrocities of World War II, the German discourse avoids war imagery. Examples registered in German that directly mention the process of killing are quite rare:

Ger. *Ein hochansteckendes Virus, das binnen weniger Wochen die ganze Welt in Angst und Schrecken versetzt und immer mehr Todesopfer fordert* – A highly contagious virus that has scared the whole world over a few weeks and is killing more and more people. (https://www.amazon.de/dp/B089NY2NJW/ref=dp-kindle-redirect?_encoding=UTF8&btkr=1). Such instances, however, are very few in the German media; and only one is noted here.

As pointed out by Paulus (2020) in his online contribution to *The Conversation* titled "How politicians talk about coronavirus in Germany", war metaphors are avoided in Germany, unlike other countries where the imagery of conflict is employed to discuss the coronavirus pandemic. As further noted by Paulus (ibid.):

"*The virus is not an 'enemy', and the process of containing it is not a war. Perhaps there's a tendency among German politicians to avoid war metaphors for historical reasons. There may be a feeling that it does not go down well nationally and internationally if German political leaders speak about war, even metaphorically*."

He also adds that the German chancellor avoids war imagery when referring to coronavirus. Instead, she has used words that are simple and straightforward, i.e. "this situation", "a historical task", and a "great challenge" ahead.

"*In a speech to the German parliament on April 23, Merkel again used few metaphors. She called the current situation a "real test", "serious times", a "dramatic crisis", a "gigantic challenge". The only figurative expressions she used were "thin ice" and "long-distance run". These metaphors evoke challenge, but not combat*" (ibid.)

Other German politicians seem to have employed the same strategy, i.e. the virus is described by means of expressions such as "an exponential development", "a crisis", "a task", "the situation", and "the event".

It is important to note that new cognitive associations of some proper names have been created as metonymic extensions: such as Codogno – a town in Italy, which was the first to become a red zone, was referred to as Italian Wuhan.

It. *Codogno = Wuhan d'Italia* – Italian Wuhan; similarly: *la Lombardia = Hubei d'Italia* – Italian Hubei.

It. *il virus cinese* – the Chinese virus (cfr., *l'asiatica*, *la spagnola*, *il morbo gallico* – the Asian disease, the Spanish, the Gallic disease); It. *il virus di Wuhan* – the virus of Wuhan.

It. *la Caporetto del sistema sanitario* – the Caporetto of the health system (reference to the battle of Caporetto, 1917, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battle_of_Caporetto).

4.2 Nationally specific metaphors in media discourse on COVID-19

The metaphor COVID-19 IS A PLAGUE can be directly interpreted from the instances of language use presented below (consulted sources: https://www.corriere.it/dataroom-milena-gabanelli/dalla-peste-coronavirus-come-pandemie-hanno-cambiato-storia-

dell-uomo/d71a9986-6dfd-11ea-9b88-27b94f5268fe-va.shtml;

https://www.cronacadiverona.com/coronavirus-e-peste-che-analogie/;

https://www.cesenatoday.it/cronaca/1coronavirus-peste-studentessa-cesenate-analogie-promessi-sposi.html; https://www.sportlegnano.it/2020/07/la-lombardia-non-e-piu-il-lazzaretto-ditalia/269904/; https://www.lastampa.it/rubriche/lato-boralevi/2020/04/11/news/il-tabu-dell-untore-e-i-malati-segreti-1.38707538):

It. *la peste* – the plague.

It. *il lazzaretto* – a kind of hospital.

It. sing. *untore*, plur. *untori* – "were called *untori* anointers those who in the plague of Milan in 1630 were suspected of spreading the contagion by anointing people and things (e.g., house doors, church benches) with evil ointments" (Treccani, https://www.treccani.it/vocabolario/untore/).

It. sing. *appestato,* plur. *appestati* – the plagued (the infected).

Coronavirus is presented as a serious threat to national and global economy. COVID-19 IS AN ECONOMIC CRISIS is exemplified by the news headlines in the various languages:

Pl. *Druga fala koronawirusa. Ponad 40 procent Polaków oszczędza na gorsze czasy* – The second wave of coronavirus. Over 40% of Poles are saving money for harder times. (https://www.money.pl/gospodarka/koronawirus-dobija-transport-firmy-tona-w-dlugach-6530495674177153a.html)

Pl. *Wakacje 2020. Polacy oszczędzają pieniądze na czarną godzinę* – Holidays 2020. Poles are saving money for a rainy day (Saving money in the event of an economic crisis caused by another attack of the coronavirus). (https://turystyka.wp.pl/wakacje-2020-polacy-oszczedzaja-pieniadze-na-czarna-godzine-6530202616367808a)

Pl. *Powtórne zamrożenie gospodarki to katastrofa* – Freezing economy/markets again is a catastrophe.

(https://wideo.wp.pl/rzecznik-msp-przestrzega-powtorne-zamrozenie-gospodarki-to-katastrofa-6529860860381313v)

Pl. *Koronakryzys nie odstrasza stewardess.* – Corona crisis does not scare off stewardesses. (https://kobieta.wp.pl/koronakryzys-nie-odstrasza-stewardess-nie-

wyobrazaja-sobie-ze-moglyby-zmienic-zawod-6529920241703648a). (Note the use of the blend *koronakryzys*, i.e. *corona + crisis*: the crisis evoked by the spread of the pandemic; also corona pandemic as reported by OED, *s.a.*).

It. *la paralisi* – paralysis (the social system in general during the COVID-19 era).

Eng. *The coronavirus took her job; The coronavirus was shutting down states and infecting thousands of people.* (https://www.nbcnews.com)

Eng. *COVID-19 is going to be a huge burden on health systems.* (https://www.ted.com/talks/alanna_shaikh_coronavirus_is_our_future/transcript)

Ger. *COVID-19 RUINIERT MEIN GESCHÄFT!* – COVID-19 IS RUINING MY BUSINESS! (https://www.aphropean.com/coronavirus-krise-was-ist-mein-recht/)

Some phenomena metaphors can be considered as reflecting the metaphor CORONAVIRUS IS A NATURAL DISASTER. Unstoppable and unharnessed forces of nature are evoked in various expressions, as evidenced by the following cases:

Eng. *It's not that the coronavirus is a dress rehearsal. It's too deadly for that. But it is the first of many calamities that will likely unfold throughout this century.* (https://www.newyorker.com/culture/annals-of-inquiry/the-coronavirus-and-our-future)

It. *il terremoto* – the earthquake.

It. *l'epicentro* – the epicenter.

(Sources: https://www.sulpanaro.net/2020/08/coronavirus-e-terremoto-uguali-ma-diversi-incontro-al-parco-ferrari-il-17-agosto/;

https://www.ilmattino.it/primopiano/sanita/covid_come_si_muove_il_virus_da_milano_a_roma_ultime_notizie_oggi-5480726.html)

It. *le tenebre e la tempesta che hanno invaso il mondo* – the darkness and the storm that invaded the world (Pope Francis, 27.03.2020, Urbi et Orbi, Vatican, Https://Www.Ilsole24ore.Com/Art/Francesco-San-Pietro-Fitte-Tenebre-Si-Sono-Addensate-Non-Lasciarci-Soli-Tempesta-Advgowg?Refresh_Ce=1)

The virus is also compared to a raging fire or floodwater:

Pl. *pożar, który cały czas się pali i który przenosi się na inne tereny* – fire, which is constantly burning and spreading to other areas.

(https://www.o2.pl/informacje/drugiej-fali-koronawirusa-nie-bedzie-ekspert-pokazal-inny-scenariusz-6540055042280384a)

Pl. *druga fala koronavirusa* – the second wave of coronavirus.

Pl. *Koronawirus dobija transport. Firmy toną w długach* – Coronavirus finishes off transportation. Companies are drowning in debt.

(https://www.money.pl/gospodarka/koronawirus-dobija-transport-firmy-tona-w-dlugach-6530495674177153a.html)

Pl. *Koronawirus: Reaktywacja. Dlaczego już teraz mamy drugą falę pandemii?* – Coronavirus: Reactivation. Why are we going through the second wave of the pandemic? (https://wyborcza.pl/7,75400,26162946,koronawirus-reaktywacja-dlaczego-juz-teraz-mamy-druga-fale.html?utm_source=facebook.com&utm_medium=SM&utm_campaign=FB_Gazeta_Wyborcza&fbclid=IwAR2x7lk5RltLH7Zu1juMYL8cdXDcbATN2h7vbHESMmh4SkrDWouB3h4WM7A)

COVID-19 is A CATASTROPHE appears to be a metaphor embedded in the examples listed below:

Eng. as noted by NBC (https://www.nbcnews.com): *The pandemic is a curse for most, a blessing for some.*

Italian sources (https://www.saluteinternazionale.info/2020/09/covid-19-la-catastrofe/; https://www.open.online/2020/03/27/coronavirus-il-nyt-racconta-la-tragedia-di-bergamo-il-cuore-straziato-della-pandemia/; https://www.corriere.it/esteri/20_maggio_17/coronavirus-collasso-sanitario-dell-africa-fino-3-milioni-potrebbero-morire-76620f2c-986c-11ea-ba09-20ae073bed63.shtml; https://www.lindro.it/coronavirus-dopo-lapocalisse-ci-sara-la-rinascita/; https://www.lagazzettadilucca.it/cronaca/2020/08/covid-19-lapocalisse-ad-un-passo/). Note the instances provided below:

It. *la catastrophe* – the catastrophe.

It. *la tragedia* – the tragedy.

It. *il collasso* – the collapse (related to hospitals and the health care system).

It. *l'apocalisse* – the apocalypse (this association can also be considered as Bible-related).

Eng. *For insurers, coronavirus is a curious catastrophe.* (https://www.wsj.com/articles/for-insurers-coronavirus-is-a-curious-catastrophe-11587575822)

Ger. *Das Coronavirus sorgt für eine globale Katastrophe: Hunderttausende sind infiziert; Tausende bereits gestorben* – The coronavirus causes a global catastrophe: hundreds of thousands are infected; thousands have already died. (https://www.idea.de/glaube/detail/ist-die-corona-pandemie-eine-strafe-gottes-112446.html)

The COVID-19 virus is also portrayed as a destructive force affecting young people, as exemplified by the following German sources:

Ger. *Das Coronavirus ruiniert den Abi-Spaß. In normalen Jahren feiern Regensburger Gymnasiasten die Hochschulreife mit einem rauschenden Ball. 2020 ist alles anders* – The coronavirus is ruining high school fun. In normal years, Regensburg high school students celebrate their university entrance qualification with a rushing ball. In 2020, everything is different.

(https://www.mittelbayerische.de/region/regensburg-stadt-nachrichten/das-coronavirus-ruiniert-den-abi-spass-21179-art1908416.html)

Ger. *Kommentar: Corona zerstört alle Vorurteile über die Millenials* – Comment: Corona is destroying all prejudices about millennials.

(https://www.dw.com/de/kommentar-corona-zerst%C3%B6rt-alle-vorurteile-%C3%BCber-die-millenials/a-52846373)

One more destruction-related association can be quoted:

Ger. *Die Coronakrise bedroht die Existenz von Unternehmen, dennoch war die Zahl der Pleiten im April rückgängig. Viele Insolvenzen dürften aber lediglich aufgeschoben sein* – The corona crisis threatens the existence of companies but in April, the number of bankruptcies declined. Many bankruptcies should only be postponed.

(https://www.spiegel.de/wirtschaft/unternehmen/trotz-corona-krise-weniger-firmen-melden-im-april-insolvenz-an-a-ccf130ac-ba8c-4942-a17e-e500f7107a72)

Hence, the conceptual metaphor CORONAVIRUS is DESTRUCTION OF OLD PATTERNS (ruins, destroys, punishment) is opposed to another conceptual metaphor CORONAVIRUS is CREATION OF NEW PATTERNS (advantage, reward). The latter is also exemplified by the following:

Eng. *The coronavirus is rewriting our imaginations. What felt impossible has become thinkable.* (https://www.newyorker.com/culture/annals-of-inquiry/the-coronavirus-and-our-future)

Eng. *The coronavirus crisis is reshaping the world.*

[…] For those who work on planning our future cities and public spaces, the pandemic is both a daunting threat requiring immediate measures – and an opportunity to rethink how we live, move, and get together. (https://www.bbc.com/future/article/20200527-coronavirus-how-covid-19-could-redesign-our-world)

Owing to its massive outreach and the speed of spreading, COVID-19 is likened to a wild animal roaming vast stretches of the planet while hunting for prey: CORONAVIRUS is A FEROCIOUS ANIMAL:

Ukr. *Коронавірус лютує.* – The coronavirus is raging.

(https://life.pravda.com.ua/health/2020/05/21/241056/)

Pl. *Epidemia to jest dzikie zwierzę* – Epidemic is a wild/fierce animal. (https://www.money.pl/gospodarka/szumowski-dla-money-pl-epidemia-to-jest-dzikie-zwierze-minister-zdrowia-zapowiada-kontrole-i-regionalizacje-6538065646856928a.html)

The statistics showing the numbers of infected people as well as those who died are steadily rising, and they have reached peak after peak in various countries in the so-called second wave of pandemic. However unwelcome, the sporting metaphor

CORONAVIRUS is REACHING / SETTING A RECORD has also been universally employed in media coverages:

Pl. *Koronawirus w Polsce. W czwartek padł rekord dzienny, w piątek padnie miesięczny* – Coronavirus in Poland. On Thursday, a daily record has been reached; a monthly record will be reached on Friday.

(https://www.money.pl/gospodarka/koronawirus-w-polsce-w-czwartek-padl-rekord-dzienny-w-piatek-padnie-miesieczny-6537632002075328a.html)

Pl. *Rekord zakażeń koronawirusem. Morwiecki zabiera głos* – Record of coronavirus infections. Morawiecki speaks up.

(https://www.money.pl/gospodarka/rekord-zakazen-koronawirusem-morawiecki-zabiera-glos-6537638338365057a.html)

One can venture considering the metaphor CORONAVIRUS is A SUPERNATURAL POWER resulting from its ability to stop people from moving around and putting businesses all over the world on hold. To illustrate this concept, the following instances can be given:

Ukr. *Наразі коронавірус поставив усю планету на паузу* – So far, the coronavirus has put the entire planet on hold. (https://www.ukrinform.ua/rubric-society/3009739-oleg-pokalcuk-socialnij-psiholog.html)

Ukr. *Пандемія – це виклик* – The pandemic is a challenge.

(https://www.unian.ua/health/country/koronavirus-v-ukrajini-problema-i-nebezpeka-kovid-19-novini-ukrajini-11063402.html)

Eng. *If we underestimate the virus, it will find us*.

(https://www.nytimes.com/2020/04/18/health/coronavirus-america-future.html)

Ger. *Die Corona-Krise hält die Welt in Atem* – The corona crisis keeps the world in suspense. (https://www.hallo-augsburg.de/corona-augsburg-mut-in-der-corona-krise-10-zitate-gegen-die-sorgen_yPo.)

Surprisingly, travelling metaphors, which usually evoke positive connotations of holiday and rest, can also be found in the worldwide news reports. They are, however, negatively-loaded, as illustrated by the examples below:

Eng. *COVID-19 travels fast*. (Context: Some coronaviruses, like COVID-19, also transmit person to person. The person-to-person ones travel faster and travel farther, just like COVID-19).

(https://www.ted.com/talks/alanna_shaikh_coronavirus_is_our_future/transcript)

Ukr. *"Чорний Лебідь-2020": коронавірус крокує планетою* – "Black Swan-2020": the coronavirus is cruising the planet. (https://www.5.ua/svit/chornyi-lebid-2020-koronavirus-krokuie-planetoiu-210473.html)

Ukr. *Коронавірус – валіза, яку тягне людина, розповсюджуючи хворобу скрізь по світу* – The coronavirus is a suitcase that a person pulls, spreading the disease all over the world. (Context: *Тепер ми стали переносниками, які поширили хворобу по всьому світу, тягнучи її за собою, наче валізу, на круїзних кораблях і літаках.* – We have now become carriers, spreading the disease around the world, dragging (or pulling) it along like a suitcase on cruise ships and planes).

(https://nash.live/news/society/jak-koronavirus-zminit-svit.html)

Ukr. *Пандемія трохи розгладила згорнуту мапу світу* – The pandemic has slightly flattened (smoothed out) the curled up map of the world. (Context: *Подорожувати стало так легко. До COVID-19, особливо за останнє десятиліття, мапа Землі наче згорнулася всередину, зближуючи найвіддаленіші куточки. Кордони майже стерлися* – It became so easy to travel. Prior to COVID-19, especially in the last decade, the map of the Earth seemed to have curled inward, bringing the farthest corners closer. The borders were almost blurred). (https://nash.live/news/society/jak-koronavirus-zminit-svit.html)

CORONAVIRUS is THE ULTIMATE JUDGEMENT / PUNISHMENT (FROM GOD) as well as CRONAVIRUS is A DEATH SENTENCE appear to be the metaphorical readings of many news reports.

As noted by the article published in the Guardian, becoming infected with coronavirus is potentially lethal: *We need to prevent Covid-19 being a death sentence for so many.* (https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2020/jun/26/rashida-tlaib-prisons-coronavirus-covid-19)

An example from a German source refers to hell:

Ger. *Es ist die Rede von "Corona-Hölle" oder "Corona-Knast"* – There is talk of "Corona Hell" or "Corona Prison". (https://www.zdf.de/nachrichten/panorama/coronavirus-sprache-angst-kommunikation-100.html)

Punishment is quite often evoked in German sources:

Ger. *Kurzum: Das Coronavirus als metaphorische Strafe für Globalisierung des Kapitalismus führt tatsächlich zu einer Regression (womöglich hier und dort auch zu einer Rezession).* – In short: the coronavirus as a metaphorical punishment for globalization of capitalism actually leads to a regression (possibly somewhere also to a recession) (https://www.zeit.de/kultur/2020-03/krankheiten-epidemie-coronavirus-psychologie-soziologie/seite-4).

Ger. *Decken wir den Mantel der humanistischen Vernunft über ein sich nach und nach herausbildendes Narrativ, in dem das alles zusammenkommt: die Seuche als Strafe Gottes (an den Regimes der "Ungläubigen" und Unbotmäßigen und an den kosmopolitischen Wandernden und den "Unordentlichen"), die Seuche als Strafe für die Offenheit der Grenzen (und den Verrat an der Konstruktion völkischer und nationaler Identitäten als Abbild eines "gesunden" und "wehrhaften" Körpers) und die Seuche als Wettbewerbsvorteil im Wirtschaftskrieg, als Bestrafung und Belohnung für zivilisatorische Effizienz.* – Let us throw the cloak of humanistic reason on a gradually developing narrative, in which all this comes together: the plague as a punishment from God (on the regimes of the "infidels" and the insubordinate and on the cosmopolitan migrants and the "unorderly"), the plague as a punishment for open borders (and the betrayal of the construction of ethnic and national identities as an image of a "healthy" and "defensive" body) and the plague as a competitive advantage in the economic war, as a punishment and reward for civilizational efficiency.

(https://www.zeit.de/kultur/2020-03/krankheiten-epidemie-coronavirus-psychologie-soziologie/seite-4)

Ger. *Ist die Corona-Pandemie eine Strafe Gottes?* – Is the corona pandemic a punishment from God? (https://www.idea.de/glaube/detail/ist-die-corona-pandemie-eine-strafe-gottes-112446.html)

Eng. *Is the coronavirus a judgement from God?* (https://www.churchtimes.co.uk/articles/2020/1-may/comment/opinion/is-the-coronavirus-a-judgement-from-god)

To sum up, the prevalent metaphors registered in the languages under study with reference to the present pandemic situation are those involving the concepts WAR and COMBAT as a source. They imply that the medical staff and governments are engaged in an ongoing battle; the hospitals and patient care are compared to a battlefield activity; the virus is lethal and the medical staff are heroes.

5. COVID-19 as represented in comic Internet memes

The media space embraces all spheres of human life. The Internet gives people of different cultures an opportunity of quick contact. Exchanging humorous messages is an important part of their communication. Thanks to the Internet, humorous messages have broadened their thematic scope, instantly responding to different events. Understanding Internet humour demands a great amount of knowledge from its users – encyclopedic, linguistic, cultural, etc.

The COVID-19 pandemic has shaken the whole world, the Internet responding to these developments immediately. For example, on September 25, 2020, the Google search for the hashtag "#coronavirus" produced 72,300,000 hits. The Internet has been swept by a powerful tide of memes, a great number of which (though certainly not all) are humorous.

A meme is defined as "an amusing or interesting item (such as a captioned picture or video) or genre of items that is spread widely online especially through social media"

(Merriam-Webster online dictionary, *s.a.*), "an image, video, piece of text, etc. typically humorous by nature, that is copied and spread rapidly by Internet users, often with slight variations" (OED, *s.a.*). The meaning of a meme is constructed through various semiotic resources. They include comic elements, which inform and entertain the target addressee by demonstrating visual images characteristic of a certain sociocultural group. However, they are not necessarily underpinned by ideology: as Morozova rightfully remarks, "the Internet memes might be humorously charged without any serious political implications" (2017: 262).

Memes are characterized by the following features: they are not big in size, pursue a certain aim, are emotionally coloured, combine textual and visual elements, which makes them easily understandable by representatives of various cultures. The semiotic process of creating a meme quite often involves hyperbole, paradox or absurdity as "laughter-evoking" techniques integrated into particular interpretation and its specific way of manifestation (Zhabotynska 2020: 93). Being a new form of contemporary media, Internet memes are highly specific: functionally, they are dialogic, thus the interactive Internet environment gives rise to certain thematic types of discourses in the informal comic style.

The theme of coronavirus is common for all linguocultures, the most popular topics being a craze for pasta, toilet paper, working remotely, lockdown and its consequences. Here lies the secret of a successful joke: to feel the pulse of time, the urgency of the problem for people.

Comic Internet memes reflect people's culture and the specificity of their emotional perception of real-life events. Understanding the national features of this or that 'laughing ethnoculture' plays an important role in this process. Each nationality has its own specific traits alongside the features they share with other nationalities. Balina considers that the comic content is also connected with subcultures of different nations; for each of them their laughing worlds are specific (Балина 2005: 3). The comic

component of the Internet memes is characterized by national specificity; it is accompanied by the manifestation of national identity and characteristic world outlook at a certain historical stage.

5.1 Display of national specificity in Internet memes

A national character has a sustainable linguistic, historical, religious, and value identity. Manifestations of national identity are of contextual nature, i.e. they reveal themselves only **a) in a particular situation**. Each nation is characterized by its customs and precedent phenomena.

The meme in Fig. 9 is focused on a precedent situation. One of Ukrainian politicians openly advised an old woman, who had no money to pay for utilities, to sell her dog and thus to solve the problem. She did not agree. This meme interprets this situation in the following way: the dog says (the left-hand part of the meme): "I told you not to exchange me for the gas", the right-hand part of the meme says: "Now you may go for a walk" during the coronavirus lockdown.

Figure 9. #broisnotonsale. Available at:
https://ye.ua/syspilstvo/48288_Zharti_pro_karantin__pidbirka_kartinok_dlya_garnogo_nastroyi.html

Any culture brings in the emotional component into interpretation of important events, which is reflected in the Internet memes as well.

Another example is connected with the German national culture which is traditionally associated with such characteristics as **b) a typical feeling of fear**, the roots of which are connected with Luther, who firmly believed in the inevitability of Judgment Day, and that is why passed the German people the culture of fright, guiltiness and uncertainty (Анолли 2016: 268).

Figure 10. Rescue from coronavirus. Available at:
https://www.instagram.com/p/B9qa_FlIuxo/?igshid=18u106awiz0wg

The meme in Fig. 10 illustrates the comic situation of wearing a face mask on eyes: the fear of coronavirus made a young German woman hide her fear of people during the quarantine under a mask. The text above the photo says, "When you hate people more than you hate the virus". This meme satirically portrays a frightened woman who is taking risks to catch the coronavirus, as her nose and mouth are not covered.

In British linguoculture, **c) prohibitive tonality** is almost absent. Prohibition, as a rule, manifests itself indirectly (Ларина 2013: 223). However, in the meme presented in Fig. 11, prohibition is expressed directly: "Don't be like Boris!"

Figure 11. The Prime Minister's error. Available at:
https://www.nilnews.com/internet-users-share-hilarious-memes-as-boris-johnson-tests-positive-for-coronavirus/

The comic effect is connected with reframing the situation: Boris Johnson, the Prime Minister of Great Britain, caught coronavirus. This event was used as a moral admonition to children: "This is Boris. Boris didn't wash his hands. Don't be like Boris". Such remarks are not welcome in British society and can only be used to create a humorous tonality. The comic colouring of the situation is intensified by the three-time repetition of the proper name *Boris*, which is an instance of a deliberate deviation from the language norm (cf. Grice's maxim of quantity). The inference the addressee draws from this meme is as follows: Boris Johnson did not wash his hands and was infected with coronavirus.

A typical trait of Russians is **d) gloominess**. As Larina observes, "emotional Russians are often gloomy and unsmiling" (Ларина 2013: 127). As Zhelvis states with humour, "a Russian who feels bad, won't start smiling; he wants the whole world to know about his trouble; well, if not the whole world, then only the whole microdistrict" (Жельвис 2002: 37).

The meme in Fig. 12 illustrates a scene from the comedy *The Diamond Arm*, which is well-known to the Soviet and ex-Soviet audiences (Rus. "Бриллиантовая рука", 1969).

In connection with the epidemic of coronavirus, the word *любовница* (mistress) is replaced by the word *работа* (work); the text of the meme reads, "And you know, I won't be surprised if it turns out tomorrow that your husband visits WORK in an underhand way!" Here the inference is based on contrast: when life is normal, a man secretly goes to see his mistress; in the times of coronavirus, he secretly goes to the office, while he is supposed to stay locked down.

No doubt, **e) language** also has an impact on displaying cultural differences in the coronavirus perception. In such situations, play on words is quite frequent.

In the meme presented in Fig. 13, the comic effect is based on the shift of word-stress in the Russian word *передохнуть*. Depending on the shift of stress in this word, the meaning changes. Thus, *передохну́ть* means 'to take a short rest'; *передо́хнуть* – 'to die out'. The commentary below runs like this: "It was a short test to find out whether you are an optimist or pessimist". The stress in the "right" place creates a comic effect. Thus, in certain situations, an expression may specify different cognitive, emotional or social conditions which acquire special significance when they are combined with a particular cultural context.

5.1 Display of universal features in the Internet memes

Memes about coronavirus in various linguocultures are intertextual: they "reverberate" in their form and content with other memes, thus creating a comic effect. The content of comic memes connected with the topic of coronavirus rests on the premise that their features are ingrained in human cognition: COVID-19 has united different nations, cultures, and people. Thus, respective memes display a tendency for universality.

a) Common topics about the deficit of face masks, toilet paper, bactericidal gel, etc. Universality of this topic is supported by memes from German, Italian, Slovak, and Polish cultures.

The text of the German meme (Fig. 14) reads: "The police do not recommend leaving valuable things in the public eye in your automobile".

Figure 14. What is a valuable thing? Available at:
https://twitter.com/h__allo/status/1239872971633831939

Ironically, "the valuable thing" in the time of COVID-19 turns out to be a roll of toilet paper. At the first stage of the COVID19 pandemic, toilet paper was one of the items at a premium in other countries, too, as the Polish meme in Fig. 15 demonstrates:

Figure 15. Toilet paper as a valuable product. Available at:
https://gdynia.naszemiasto.pl/memy-o-koronawirusie-kot-kaczynskiego-w-masce-czy/ga/c1-7954209/zd/57201379

The phrase *Giełda Papierów Wartościwych* is the official name of the Warsaw Stock Exchange. The meme is based on the word play: Pl. *papiery wartościowe* 'securities' vs. *papier toaletowy* 'toilet paper'.

Other household goods, such as antiseptics, have become a deficit, too.

Figure 16. In search of amuchina gel. Available at: https://www.facciabuco.com/post/1079889rip/che-voi-hashish-o-cocaina-amuchina-gel-no-voglio-il-patentino-di-facciabuco.html

The dialogue between two Italians (Fig. 16) runs like this: "What do you need? Hashish? Or cocaine?" – "Amuchina gel!" This meme describes another popular theme during the epidemic of coronavirus: it is more difficult to obtain a bottle of antiseptic gel than drugs.

By and large, memes about coronavirus are often based on hyperbole, irony, alogism, absurdity and other entities of a paradoxical nature.

Modern reality is very dynamic and is characterized by the interpenetration of cultures. In the situation of coronavirus, nationally specific values are not in contrast but more often than not stand in mutually complementary relations, which testifies to the ongoing process of revaluation of stereotypes, aims, norms, and standards. The precedent texts in the Internet memes under consideration are a valid proof to that.

b) Values of collectivism and individualism

Universality is closely connected with the values of collectivism and individualism. Collectivism is understood as social harmony, coordination between the members of a group, tendency to cooperation, close attention to other people's needs. Individualism, respectively, is uniqueness, awareness of one's own independence, self-realization, and leadership (Анолли 2016: 311).

Figure 17. Social "harmony". Available at:
https://fr.memedroid.com/memes/detail/2911543/L1-KFC?refGallery=tags&page=5&tag=coronavirus

The textual part of the French meme presented in Fig. 17 says, "When championships are held after two months of lockdown." Collectivism is represented here derisively: the visual image shows that all the players of a football team, without any exception, have gained weight.

Figure 18. A good custom? Available at:
https://cdn-img-p.facciabuco.com/285/w6bnes3j8r-io-lo-proporrei-che-dite-satira_b.jpg

The text of the Italian meme (Fig. 18) runs as follows: "In order to get rid of epidemics, some ancient peoples had a custom to sacrifice their rulers to gods. I am simply saying this, just to have an idea…". This meme is an instance of black humour since it suggests killing the government incapable of stopping the epidemic, which, in its turn, is indicative of people's unity in the time of the coronavirus epidemic.

The title of the humorous Italian meme in Fig. 19 is "Meanwhile in the fridge".

Figure 19. Meanwhile in the fridge. Available at:
https://www.today.it/foto/media/coronavirus-i-meme-sui-social/

The visual image shows the solidarity of bottles protected by a mask, which are grouped together in a corner of a fridge. They oppose one single bottle that is not wearing a mask; it is a bottle of popular Corona beer, which brings up associations with coronavirus. This meme is based on conceptual metonymy realized visually (the mask stands for preventative measures against coronavirus) and the homophonic naming of the brand of beer and the disease. It can be interpreted as a united effort of people who take preventative measures (the "second order" metonymy) in their battle against the pandemic.

Individualism is associated with uniqueness and increased attention to one's own image. As for display of individualism, every culture will understand the French meme in Fig. 20, which comprises the following words: "This mask won't protect you from coronavirus infection… but, undoubtedly will help you stay socially apart".

Figure 20. A lifesaver. Available at: https://fr.memedroid.com/memes/detail/2918629

This meme is based on the principle of violated expectancy: in the times of coronavirus, people tend to buy medical masks, not carnival ones; the latter will not protect one from the virus but will scare people off (or keep the person's face hidden).

Representatives of the post-Soviet cultures are familiar with the musical film about the three musketeers; the name of d'Artagnan's beloved *Constantia* is in consonance with the Russian word *дистанция* 'distance': this play on words is connected both with the intertextual relation of the meme to the film and imparts an additional comic sense to the meme. (See fig. 21).
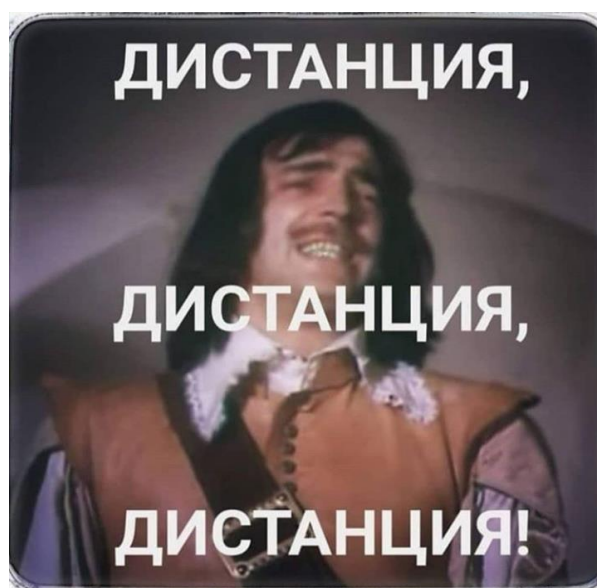
Figure 21. Distance is a priority. Available at:
https://pikabu.ru/story/dalnovidnyiy_politik_7309398

c) Men's and women's values

Culture is a constellation of values, i.e. people living together should appreciate what they do and feel. Manliness manifests itself in the values of power, self-reliance, arrogance, independence, and rivalry. The vital feminine values are beauty, harmony, comfort, peace of mind, and health – their own as well as that of their family members, children in particular.

Comic memes about coronavirus present men in a completely different light.

Figure 22. Ring-barking. Available at:
https://cdn-img-p.facciabuco.com/73/fz1h4xkg62-vaccata_b.jpg

Comic memes about coronavirus present men in a completely different light. The Italian meme in Fig. 22 says, "When you are afraid of the virus, but you are afraid of your wife more than the virus" (the meme caricatures a man wearing his engagement ring over the protective glove as he is afraid of his wife as much as her fears to get the virus).

Internet memes about coronavirus show women as trying to remain beautiful at any cost, in spite of the lockdown (Fig. 23).

Figure 23. Femininity in full. Available at:
 https://cdn-img-p.facciabuco.com/135/b24vgj7wi2-mistavirus-vaccata_b.jpg

The situation is humorously depicted in the Italian meme presented in Fig. 23: "Open hairdressing salons! Before somebody gets hurt!" Due to the virus, many public places have closed their doors to customers. As everybody knows, part of a woman's life is to be beautiful, but how to maintain one's good looks if hairdressing salons are closed? This meme presents a jocular picture of how women try to care about their hair at home; such procedures will not always have the desired result and can even turn out to be rather dangerous.

The Slovak meme in Fig. 24 is a response to the relaxation of the lockdown restrictions, in particular, the opening of shops and hairdressing salons.

Figure 24. The lockdown is over. Available at:
https://nazory.pravda.sk/kresba/clanok/552127-gasparec-21-5-2020/

It shows disheveled women, who have joined the crowd of people running to the shopping centre that has opened after the lockdown.

In the meme in Fig. 25, the comic mechanism is based on the incongruity of the frames, which are blended: a man proposing to a woman asks her if she wants to wash her hands instead of asking her to become his wife.

Figure 25. Accepting the proposal. Available at:

Here we deal with a play on words: in this familiar situation, the French phrase *laver les mains* 'to wash one's hands' sounds ambiguous: it can be interpreted literally or figuratively as "to refuse to have any further involvement with somebody".

d) Cross-cultural language means

Certain linguistic phenomena connected with the coronavirus / COVID-19 theme are characteristic of different cultures. The memes considered below combine innovative elements of another culture with familiar language elements.

In the Russian meme given in Fig. 26, we again deal with a play of words: *Twentin Tarantino* vs *Kwentin Carantino*. The latter "last name" (*Carantino*) refers to the mayor of Ukraine's capital, Kyiv, who is known to all Ukraine for his radical quarantine

measures (such as stopping the work of the metro, forbidding swimming in the river Dnieper and walking in parks).

Figure 26. Carantino. Available at:
https://xsport.ua/others_s/news/klichko-grechka-i-tualetnaya-bumaga-samye-smeshnye-memy-pro-karantin-iz-seti_2250522/

The French meme in Fig. 27 is based on the violated expectancy. The fortune cookie predicts some "positive" happenings this week (*Positive things will happen to you this week*). However, the word *positive* that refers to the results of a test on coronavirus means that the result is in fact upsetting since the person is infected with the virus.

Figure 27. "Positive" happenings. Available at:
https://fr.memedroid.com/memes/detail/2914246/positive-attitude?refGallery=tags&page=4&tag=coronavirus

The comic element is brought out by the contextual variation of the word *positive*, which is made obvious by the person's face expression (joy vs. distress).

The Ukrainian meme in Fig. 28 is based on blending parts of foreign place names (*Santa*, *Porto*, *Costa*, *sheikh*, *St.*, *Puerto*) and affixes (*las*, *los*, *del*, *el*, *de la)* with Ukrainian nouns denoting living and utility rooms (*кухня*, *балкон*, *спальня*, *туалет*, *гараж*). The meme reminds of a standard advertisement from a tourist agency, only during the lockdown. This is a parody on proposals to travel within the confines of one's home.

Figure 28. A 'travel agency' offer. Available at:
https://kalynivka.city/read/experiance/72814/yakkalinivchani-nevtrachayut-optimizmu-zhartuyut-tamriyut-pro-zhittya-bez-koronavirusu

The analysis shows that nationally specific comic memes presuppose their recognizability by representatives of other cultures. In the memes considered above, extralinguistic knowledge of different origin comes to the fore. Most of the memes are grounded on play on words and precedent phenomena.

To sum up, our analysis of comic Internet memes about coronavirus has identified nationally specific and universal features of coronavirus perception by representatives of different cultures: Russian, Ukrainian, Slovak, Polish, German, English, French, and Italian languages.

The national specificity of the memes under consideration manifests itself in such national traits as the feeling of fear characteristic of the Germans, the prohibitive tonality not characteristic of the British, the sulkiness of the Russians as well as in precedent phenomena.

Universality is achieved by intertextual relations, which are represented by play on words, stress shift, and meaning variation as well as by common topics (e.g., the deficit of facemasks or toilet paper). Universality is also connected with the values of collectivism and individualism, men's and women's values, which manifest themselves in the use of cross-cultural linguistic means.

A higher expressiveness of verbal and non-verbal elements is a distinctive feature of comic memes about coronavirus. It is based on the presupposition that the addresser and the addressee possess a certain body of shared knowledge, the latter generating allusions, which create no serious communicative obstacles, but, on the contrary, brighten up this unique Internet genre.

6. Conclusions

The discussion presented above shows that our knowledge of COVID-19 comes from many sources, the most reliable of them being regular WHO publications. These texts provide a guiding strategy for the media coverage of the COVID-19 pandemic, which, however, does not protect readers from media tilt and disinformation. News writers' stance in various countries manifests itself in the way facts about the disease are selected and presented. It demonstrates more common features than differences; this suggests that in times of adversity, there is a tendency for unification of ideas and approaches in different countries. This tendency is also traced in the way fakes and misrepresentations, which flood online media, are exposed.

Media messages on COVID-19 belong to the so-called "hard news", or emotive type of journalism, which is characterized by the following features: timeliness, tellability,

conflict nature of events reported, and their relevance for people. The array of hard news messages constitute the discourse environment in which one can find numerous instances of linguistic phenomena that relate to the COVID-19 pandemic. In particular, they are literal (terms, neologisms and nonce words) and metaphoric designations of COVID-19 and related phenomena, which are presented both in a serious and humorous tonality.

It has been established that the duration and severity of the pandemic influence the stability of the newly formed concepts. One may presume that after the pandemic, specialized concepts characteristic of the present-day epidemiological discourse will go out of everyday use. We cannot rule out, however, that people who suffered a severe form of the disease or whose loved ones died from it will remember it and keep reviving it in their narratives. Thus, it is hard to say now which words will disappear and which ones will remain (e.g., *7-Tage-R* – "the number of reproductions based on a period of one week", *Coronaer* – "a person who has been infected with the SARS-CoV-2 virus", etc.).

There are grounds to believe that concepts that can gain a foothold in everyday life would reflect specific changes in the post-COVID life as compared to pre-COVID, which are mainly associated with the phenomenon of freedom – the loss or gain by a person of the opportunity to manifest their will in the context of awareness of the nature and society laws of development. These changes will be reflected in conceptual pairs, such as FREEDOM vs. LOCKDOWN, FREEDOM vs. HEALTH PROTECTION, INTERACTION vs. ISOLATION, etc. Thus, it could happen that at the end of the coronavirus pandemic the widespread concept MASK will never be the same.

Humour is a powerful factor contributing to mutual understanding among nations in the time of coronavirus. Aspiration for unity manifests itself in the strive of nations for dialogue, ability to understand each other with the help of humour, wit, and laughter. Due to their communicative potential and enhanced information capacity, humorous

Internet memes about COVID-19 exert influence on people of different nationalities, charging them with positive emotions, overcoming all kinds of language barriers, fostering understanding between people of different cultures. However, even neighboring nations, let alone those whose languages do not belong to the same language family, demonstrate specificity of humour, develop their own dominant styles of humour, which influence cultural and sociological aspects of humorous discourse.

Thus, mediatization of the COVID-19 pandemic in various national editions has exerted substantial influence on the collective mentality of people of different nations and brought into the language a plethora of novel vocabulary items and metaphoric expressions underpinned by conceptual metaphors. They demonstrate both common general tendencies and national specificity, which is indicative not only of the serious tonality, but of humorous as well.

Notes

1. All the examples in the text as well as the quotations from non-English-language publications are translated by the authors:

German – Nataliya Petlyuchenko

Italian and French – Artur Gałkowski

Polish – Agnieszka Uberman

Russian – Victoria Samokhina

Slovak – Peter Krajčovič

Ukrainian – Victoria Samokhina and Halyna Stashko

2. MONITORA – a web application for monitoring media outputs (using this application, one can monitor outputs (articles, news, etc.) in the Slovak media by key words and topics)

List of abbreviations

ATS relative – average time spent watching media (TV, radio or Internet)

Fr. – French

Germ. – German

IAEA – International atomic energy agency

IDS – Leibniz-Institut für Deutsche Sprache

It. – Italian

Lat. – Latin

MERS – Middle East Respiratory Coronavirus Syndrome

OED – Oxford English dictionary

OWID – Online-Wortschatz-Informationssystem Deutsch

Pl. – Polish

Port. – Portuguese

Russ. – Russian

SARS – Severe Acute Respiratory Coronavirus Syndrome

Sk. – Slovak

Ukr. – Ukrainian

WHO – World Health Organization

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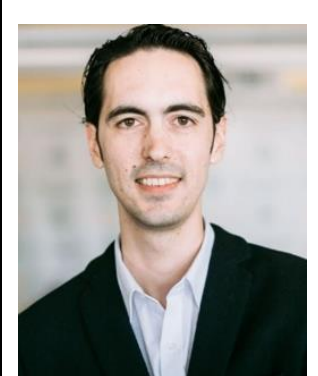
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Résumé

This article explores how the COVID-19 pandemic is represented in the media in seven languages (Russian, Ukrainian, Slovak, Polish, German, English, and Italian) with the aim of throwing light on its universal and culturally specific features. The media part of the article considers the COVID-19 pandemic as hard news, while its linguistic section focuses on the literal and metaphoric representation of this phenomenon and its instantiation in the Internet memes. Media messages on COVID-19 belong to the 'hard news' type, which is characterized by the following features: a particular timeline, which starts in early February 2020 is still going on; tellability, which is accounted for by the universal significance of the news about the COVID-19 pandemic; the controversial nature of events taking place during the pandemic; their relevance for people of different nationalities. The multi-language array of hard news constitutes the discourse environment in which numerous linguistic phenomena (terms, neologisms, nonce words and metaphors) that relate to the COVID-19 pandemic are instantiated both in a serious and humorous tonality. Mediatization of the COVID-19 pandemic in various national editions exerts substantial influence on the collective mentality of people of different nations. It has brought into the language novel vocabulary items and metaphoric expressions underpinned by conceptual metaphors. They demonstrate both common general tendencies and national specificity, which is indicative not only of the serious tonality, but of humorous as well.