

**FROM A SILLY VIRUS TO AN AVALANCHE: THE COVID-
19 DISCOURSES IN THE GUARDIAN'S ONLINE NEWS
ARTICLES DURING THE EARLY EPIDEMIC**

Sara Saariniemi
Bachelor's thesis
English
Department of Language
and Communication Studies
University of Jyväskylä
Spring 2020

UNIVERSITY OF JYVÄSKYLÄ

Tiedekunta - Faculty Humanistinen tiedekunta	Laitos - Department Kieli- ja viestintätieteiden laitos
Tekijä - Author Sara Saariniemi	
Työn nimi - Title From a silly virus to an avalanche: the Covid-19 discourses in The Guardian's online news articles during the early epidemic	
Oppiaine - Subject Englannin kieli	Työn laji - Level Kandidaatintutkielma
Aika - Month and year Kesäkuu 2021	Sivumäärä - Number of pages 28
Tiivistelmä - Abstract <p>The Guardian -lehden www-sivusto (theguardian.com) on yksi maailman seuratuimmista uutissivustoista. Koska sivusto on kansainvälinen ja saavuttaa laajan yleisön, sen julkaisemat artikkelit voivat vaikuttaa laajan ihmisjoukon käsitykseen ajankohtaisista tapahtumista ja ilmiöistä. Medioissa käytetyillä diskursseilla on vaikutusta oikeaan maailmaan, ja siksi on erityisen tärkeää kiinnittää siihen huomiota, miten koronavirusepidemian kaltaisia ilmiöitä käsitellään valtavirtamediassa.</p> <p>Tutkimuksen tarkoituksena on tutkia koronavirusdiskurssia valtavirtamediassa epidemian alussa. Valitsin kuusi koronavirukseen keskittyvää uutisartikkeliä sekä kaksi pääkuvaa. Metodina käytin multimodaalista diskurssianalyysiä. Analyysi paljasti Covid-19 diskurssien noudattaneen aiempien epidemiadiskurssien tyypillisiä piirteitä epidemian alussa, uutisoinnissa käytettiin muun muassa katastrofi-, alien- sekä väkivaltametaphoria. Haavoittuvaisuus epidemiassa sekä tartunnan vaarallisuus nousivat usein esille ja ilmenivät myös artikkeleiden kuvavalinnoissa. Uutisartikkelit kuitenkin myös välttelivät sensaationhakuisuutta esimerkiksi käyttämällä myös neutraaleja lääketieteen termejä, sekä hyödynsivät paljon asiantuntijoiden arvioita ja mielipiteitä. Epävarmuus epidemian kehityksestä esitettiin useimmiten neutraalisti.</p> <p>Jatkotutkimusta voitaisiin tehdä esimerkiksi epidemiadiskurssin piirteistä valtavirtamedian ulkopuolella, tai mahdollisesti epidemian loppuvaiheen diskurssia voisi tutkia. Lisäksi myös kuvien ja videoiden roolia epidemiadiskursseissa olisi mielenkiintoista tutkia laajemmin.</p>	

Asiasanat - Key words

discourse, news, epidemic discourse, Covid-19, coronavirus

Säilytyspaikka Jyväskylän yliopisto

Muita tietoja

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1	INTRODUCTION.....	1
2	BACKGROUND	2
	2.1 Previous epidemic studies	2
	2.2 Covid-19 linguistic studies	3
	2.3 News media as a genre.....	4
3	THE PRESENT STUDY.....	6
	3.1 Aim and research questions	6
	3.2 Data and method.....	7
4	ANALYSIS.....	8
	4.1 Text analysis.....	8
	4.1.1.1 “Researchers make strides in race to create coronavirus vaccine” by Beaumont, (2020, February 1)	8
	4.1.2 “‘Outlier’ victim profiles raise questions over the impact of coronavirus” by Graham-Harrison (2020, February 1)	9
	4.1.3 “Coronavirus: first death outside China recorded as total fatalities pass 300” by McCurry and Kuo (2020, February 2).....	10
	4.1.4 “Travel bans plunge China into deepening isolation over coronavirus” by Graham-Harrison (2020, February 1)	11
	4.1.5 “New coronavirus cases jump sharply in Europe, with Italy worst hit” by Beaumont, Kuo, Willsher and Giuffrida (2020, March 1) ...	12
	4.1.6 “Coronavirus: UK fears of undetected cases grow as 13 more test positive” by Sample and Kuo (2020, March 1)	13
	4.2 Image analysis	15
	4.2.1 “Beijing’s streets and malls are deserted in a country paralysed by the spread of the coronavirus.”	15
	4.2.2 “Medical staff with the coffin containing the body of Assunta Pastore, 87, who died at the Garden hotel in Laigueglia, north-west Italy, on Sunday.”	16
5	CONCLUSION	18
	REFERENCES.....	20

1 INTRODUCTION

Due to the development of technology and the increase in access to internet, online news sources have become more important than before (Busà, 2013). Most of the traditional newspapers now have their own websites which can reach a wide and international audience (Busà, 2013: 17). A good example of a popular online news source is The Guardian's own website, theguardian.com. As a popular news website with an international readership, its news reporting can influence a wide audience's perceptions of certain events and phenomena.

As noted by Jørgensen and Phillips (2002), discourses reflect attitudes towards certain phenomena, and with issues as pressing and important as global health and epidemics, it is important to pay attention to how we discuss them. Examining the emerging epidemic discourses retrospectively may help identify possibly harmful discourses and, hopefully, in the future that understanding can be used to alleviate potential long-term issues caused by such discourses and the actions these discourses might encourage.

At the time of writing, there have only been few published studies on the current Covid-19 epidemic. Previous epidemic discourse studies have mostly focused on analysing texts, with few considering how images can contribute to ongoing discourses. In this paper, I will analyse the Covid-19 epidemic discourses present both in six news articles and two lead photos from them.

2 BACKGROUND

In this section, I will present prior studies that have focused on previous epidemic discourses such as SARS discourses as well as studies that have investigated ongoing Covid-19 discourses. Additionally, I will describe news media as a genre.

2.1 Previous epidemic studies

There have been several studies analysing discourses during previous epidemics such as avian influenza (Abeysinghe and White, 2011), Ebola (Wong et al., 2015; Trčkova, 2015; Balteiro, 2016; Tshiswaka, Whembolua and Conserve, 2017; Mondragon et al., 2017), SARS (Wallis and Nerlich, 2005; Joye, 2010; Chung, 2011). These studies include corpus and critical discourse analyses, and their results point to several shared characteristics between different epidemic discourses.

One of these shared traits of epidemic discourses is the emergence of othering and xenophobic narratives during the epidemics. Mondragon et al. (2017) noted that the Ebola epidemic was perceived as “inherently African” and “a threat to global health”, while a similar narrative of “other countries causing a global health crisis” was noticed by Chung (2011) and Abeysinghe and White (2011).

War metaphors have also been noted to be prevalent in epidemic discourses. Viruses and diseases caused by them are described as aggressive enemies and killers, and countries and individuals taking preventative action are “struggling”, “shielding” themselves and making “battle plans”, cures and preventative measures become “weapons” against the epidemic. People are encouraged to “fight” the epidemic in an attempt to unite the nation (Chung, 2011). Tshiswaka, Whembolua and Conserve (2017) noticed in their study that the general population was depicted as potential victims, which further illustrates the bleak metaphors and discourses. McCormick (2020) in turn noticed how major UK news media had brought up the Second World

War in epidemic discourses, creating a symbolic link or likeness between the epidemic and the war.

A theme of danger has also been noticed to be present in epidemic discourses. Joye (2010) found that epidemic discourses also portrayed the world as having either danger or safety zones. The sense of danger of the epidemics often comes from their portrayal as rapidly spreading, mysterious and “hidden” – Sontag (1989) names alien and invader metaphors as one of commonly used illness and disease metaphors. Viruses and epidemics may also be personified and portrayed as animate beings. They may also be compared to storms, fires and natural disasters (Trčkova, 2015) or portrayed as animate beings (Katermina and Yachenko, 2020; Trčkova, 2015).

2.2 Covid-19 linguistic studies

Considering that Covid-19 epidemic was first reported in late 2019, there have not yet been many linguistic studies conducted about the Covid-19.

Discourse and corpus studies such as ones by Chaiuk and Dunaievskaja (2020) and Katermina and Yachenko (2020) have pointed out the similarities between current coronavirus epidemic discourse and previous epidemic discourses. Chaiuk and Dunaievskaja (2020) noted the prevalence of war and violence metaphors in the UK news media, while Katermina and Yachenko (2020) found that in addition to the war discourses, the virus was presented also as a disruptive and destructive creature or being. Katermina and Yachenko (2020) also point out that when the coronavirus was depicted as an animate being, its actions were always aggressive or otherwise harmful and negative.

In addition to the previously mentioned prevalence of war metaphors, McCormick (2020) noticed that the UK news media repeatedly symbolically aligned the epidemic to the Second World War and depicted frontline workers as heroes. Interestingly, McCormick also points out the change in the coronavirus discourse in relation to the UK government’s approach to the epidemic: when WHO had declared the Covid-19 epidemic a global emergency, the battle and war metaphors were absent as the government had not considered the epidemic a serious threat. However, these war metaphors had returned when the UK government had changed their approach to the epidemic.

Azizan, Qaiwer and Ismail (2020) in their corpus study found an emerging discourse of solidarity, expressed through the collective pronouns “we” and “us”. A similar finding was also made by McCormick (2020), who had also identified the solidarity discourse from the images of grief-struck government officials.

In corpus studies by Yejin (2020) and Nor and Zulcafi (2020), war-related language was found to be commonly used in relation to the coronavirus. Yejin (2020) pointed out that “coronavirus” and “virus” had different collocations, with former having collocations such as “crisis” while the latter had more neutral, clinical collocations. Nor and Zulcafi (2020), in turn, stated that in addition to war-like depictions of the epidemic, the epidemic’s impact on economy and politics was a major theme as well.

2.3 News media as a genre

The purpose of news media is to report and deliver information on events that are either recent or ongoing. As Busà (2014: 25) states, news refer to “relaying of events that are both recent and relevant”.

News follow certain characteristics. They are presented in a coherent, impersonal manner and often use the present tense to underline their timeliness. They also tend to follow the Inverted Pyramid structure in which the most crucial information gets delivered first in a way that sparks interest and then further information on the topic is presented. As an example, in news articles, the headline attracts the readers with the main information and its presentation, the lead expands on the topic and provides a simple summary of the news story, and the following paragraphs provide details, descriptions or more context (Bednarek, 2012: 62-64).

Although news generally aim to be neutral and objective, their aim is also to “create an impact on the reader” as was noted by Busà (2014: 31). As Busà (2014: 33) points out, “language cannot be neutral” and the author’s own ideologies, opinions and beliefs may be transferred to the text through their use of language. Additionally, as news stories need to attract readers, writers may enhance the dramatic appeal of the news stories by using evaluative and intensifying language (Bednarek, 2012: 46-47) or metaphors (Busà, 2014: 32).

News media also uses images for various purposes: they serve as illustrations and proof and can enhance the news story’s dramatic appeal. Images receive attention, as eye-tracking studies have found that readers’ attention tends to go to the biggest headline and the image with its possible caption before the article itself (Quinn and Stark Adam, 2008, as was cited in Bednarek, 2012). As Busà (2014) claims, the images can make the reader determine whether they should read the story - when images support news values such as superlativeness or impact, the story becomes more attractive and ‘newsworthy’. Another function of images, as Machin and Mayr (2012)

note, is to implicitly express an idea or guide the reader towards a certain interpretation, and therefore impact and influence perception of an event, phenomena or a group of people.

To summarize, the purpose of news media is to provide relevant information in a manner which its audience finds interesting or impactful. Images used in news media have multiple purposes, as they can enhance the news story, create an emotional impact on the reader and provide further information.

3 THE PRESENT STUDY

In this section, I will first present the research questions and the aim of this study, and will then describe the data and method used for the analysis.

3.1 Aim and research questions

The aim of the study is to investigate epidemic discourses in the mainstream news media. Mainstream news media have large audiences and can affect the values and attitudes of their readers. These values and attitudes then have an effect in the real, physical world, and in an ongoing pandemic, this power and responsibility are highlighted.

My research questions are following:

1. What are the features of the coronavirus discourses in The Guardian UK's online news articles?
2. Have the coronavirus discourses changed over time, and if so, how have they changed?
3. How do the images from the articles contribute to the coronavirus discourses?

3.2 Data and method

The data for this study consists of six online news articles published on The Guardian's website in early February and early March of 2020. The Guardian was chosen due to its large global readership and its ensuing power and influence. Additionally, I have chosen two images from the articles to further investigate how images contribute to these discourses. The pictures chosen for the image analysis are lead pictures below the headlines. As lead pictures, they have the power to create and mould any perceptions the readers might have of the topic, and therefore have been included in this study.

The method of this study is multimodal discourse analysis, as it allows to not only examine the written language but also to take pictures into consideration. While epidemic discourses have been studied before, many of the previous studies have not considered how pictures can contribute to epidemic discourses. With this multimodal discourse analysis, I hope to fill this particular research gap.

This study follows the frameworks of Fairclough (2003), Machin and Mayr (2012) and Jørgensen and Phillips (2002). Discourse, as Jørgensen and Phillips (2002) describe, both reflects reality as well as builds and creates it. Additionally, Jørgensen and Phillips (2002: 1) see discourse as a "particular way of talking about and understanding the world". As Machin and Mayr (2012) point out, images can be used to subtly express or communicate ideas without stating them explicitly, and they can be used to emphasize and underline certain meanings and ideas. Busà (2013: 56) also notes that the images in news articles serve two purposes: they attract readers and to make the news story better.

I will first present the articles and then identify the emerging Covid-19 epidemic discourses. In the first part of the analysis, I will focus on how the discourses emerge in the language use. I will then continue with image analysis of two images and will investigate how the images and their captions contribute to the Covid-19 epidemic discourses.

4 ANALYSIS

I will now present the analysis of the six news articles and the two lead images from them. The analysis begins with the articles and the emerging epidemic discourses and their language use and will then continue to the image analysis.

4.1 Text analysis

4.1.1.1 “Researchers make strides in race to create coronavirus vaccine” by Beaumont, (2020, February 1)

The first article, “Researchers make strides in race to create coronavirus vaccine” by Beaumont was published on February 1, 2020. In comparison to typical pandemic or epidemic discourses, the discourses in the article are more neutral and more positive as the epidemic had not yet evolved into a pandemic.

The language in the article gives a calming effect with some word choices. The verb “allows” is a calm and neutral one, which also adds to the calming tone. Another more neutral word choice can be found in the headline – “accelerate” does not imply the same despair or urgency as “hurry” would. “Effective immunisation method” is neutral in its formality. The virus itself and how it acts are described in a calming and even slightly humorous tones, as is illustrated by Example 1. However, the virus’ visual description and the active role it is given, also portray the virus as an alien-like being.

“(1) The virus looks like a knobbly ball covered in protrusions that widen at the tip. These are spike proteins, which are able to dock to a receptor found in the lung membrane known as ACE-2, which allows the virus to enter the body.”

“(2) One of the problems, said Corbett, is that the corona spike protein is the largest of its kind to infect humans. ‘One of the reasons it’s so hard to look at is because it is so big and floppy,’ she said.”

Beaumont’s article offers hope by focusing on the vaccine and has expert statements and opinions. It is also specified that one of these experts, a professor, had previously been involved in making a SARS vaccine, which gives more credibility to his expert opinion. The researchers and other experts assure that the virus is nothing new and that creating a vaccine against it is easy, implying that the problem is easily solved, and the concern is overblown. Example 3 and Example 4 illustrate the reassuring and carefree tone.

“(3) ‘It should not be that difficult to make a vaccine against coronavirus. We know a lot about the pathogenesis [the biological mechanism] and the receptors that are the path for the virus.’”

“(4) ‘We’ve been doing these sequences for the last three years now so we can basically plug and play and are now able to look at any coronavirus spike sequence.’”

However, the hopeful solution-focused discourse is also made less strong, as the realities of safety-testing and the commercial side of vaccine-making are mentioned, as well as the past mistake of discontinuing interest in the SARS vaccine, and how it affects the current situation.

The seriousness of the virus comes up only in comparisons to the previous SARS epidemic and in descriptions by an expert. As is typical for epidemic discourses, the lack of knowledge about the virus is mentioned – the virus is presented as an enigma. However, the use of “entirely” in the sentence lessens the impact, as it suggests that there is at least some understanding.

“(5) People who are sick get severe viral pneumonia and for reasons we don’t entirely understand, those who are more vulnerable are older individuals including those with diabetes and hypertension.”

4.1.2 “‘Outlier’ victim profiles raise questions over the impact of coronavirus” by Graham-Harrison (2020, February 1)

The second article, “‘Outlier’ victim profiles raise questions over the impact of coronavirus” by Graham-Harrison (February 1, 2020), has several ongoing epidemic discourses. The most prominent discourse found in the article is the mystery and uncertainty discourse, apparent already in the headline.

Epidemic discourses often frame viruses and epidemics as mysterious, invisible, and undetectable or enigmatic. In the article, this type of discourse becomes apparent in multiple ways. First, the expert opinions featured emphasize the uncertainty regarding the virus, the epidemic and its possible severity.

“(6) These potential “outliers” – aged 36, 50, 53, 55 and 58 – are a reminder that scientists are still racing to understand the nature and impact of the new disease as it spreads in China and around the world.”

“(7) The youngest victim, aged 36, was of particular concern, experts said, because it was unclear what made him susceptible, and if it was something that could affect others.”

“(8) ‘I don’t think we know enough at the moment to say how it’s going to pan out,’ said Paul Hunter, professor of health protection at the University of East Anglia.”

Secondly, one of the victims is called ‘an enigma’ due to his young age, which lends the sense of mystery to the virus itself as it had been previously thought to be dangerous only to the elderly or those with pre-existing conditions. The mysteriousness of the virus and its nature become more heightened as medical experts themselves are presented as puzzled by it, which adds to the sense of uncertainty.

“(9) ‘This 36-year-old is an enigma,’ David Heymann, professor of infectious disease epidemiology at the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, told Time magazine.”

Thirdly, part of the mystery and danger of the virus lies in its undetectability. This undetectability and invisibility of the virus is directly named as a “concern” among others in Example 10.

“(10) Adding to the concerns is data showing that the disease spreads more easily than Sars, with some of those infected able to pass it on before they show symptoms.”

Expert opinions are also used for calming some fear regarding the lethality of the virus itself and the possible spread of the epidemic. While some of the fears are directly addressed and validated, it is also implied that they are somewhat exaggerated.

“(11) A recent paper suggests that it takes an average of eight days from symptoms first appearing to the onset of breathing difficulties, according to Ho. ‘It can seem OK at first, then get much more serious, though only in a small proportion of people.’”

4.1.3 “Coronavirus: first death outside China recorded as total fatalities pass 300” by McCurry and Kuo (2020, February 2)

The third article, “Coronavirus: first death outside China recorded as total fatalities pass 300” by McCurry, reports on the spread of the virus as well as the measures taken by several different countries for containing the outbreak.

The tone of the article is a concerned one, and it begins by updating the amount of coronavirus cases in China and reporting the first Covid-19 death outside of China. The respiratory illness caused by the virus is given an active voice, stating that the illness itself has killed hundreds in China. By giving it an active voice through personification, the respiratory illness and the virus itself are portrayed as active and mali-

cious beings. The patient's condition is described as stable and improving before suddenly deteriorating in a span of a day, which stresses the unpredictability and lethality of the virus.

Additionally, the article reports that one of the infected evacuees from Wuhan had tested negative for the coronavirus – the virus gets a portrayal of a dangerous, infectious enigma, and the false negative test result underlines that even with tests, there is no guarantee for safety.

Another emerging discourse is a crisis discourse. The article states that the epidemic is a global health crisis and uses the term “evacuee” which highlights the urgency and the danger of the epidemic. Cities and villages in China are described as having become “ghost towns”, showcasing the devastation caused by the epidemic. In addition to the epidemic being a health crisis, it is also described as financially draining. This is mostly present in the quotes from the medical experts and government officials, as is illustrated by Example 11 and Example 12.

“(11) It cited the mayor as saying the city's ability to treat patients remained inadequate and that there was a severe shortage of medical supplies such as protective suits and medical masks.”

“(12) The situation across Hubei province remains “severe and complicated” and medical resources at county level are relatively weak, vice governor Xiao Juhua told a news conference on Sunday.”

The article paints a vivid picture of the seriousness of the epidemic by also describing drastic action that different countries have taken: militaries are evacuating citizens, a plane with French and Russian citizens lands on a military base, new lockdown restrictions are described as “more extreme”.

The worsening epidemic is also presented as unifying. Repeated descriptions of the amount of medical workers – descriptions such as “Thousands of Hong Kong medical workers”, “More than 3,000” and “including doctors and nurses” - bring attention to the vast amount of the staff. This, in turn makes their unity in agreeing to go on a strike stand out and gives it more gravity.

“(14) More than 3,000 public hospital staff, including doctors and nurses, agreed to a week of phased strike action starting on Monday if the government failed to meet their demands.”

4.1.4 “Travel bans plunge China into deepening isolation over coronavirus” by Graham-Harrison (2020, February 1)

The fourth article reports mostly on the new stricter measures and their effect on every-day life.

While the fear of the coronavirus spreading further is addressed in a calm tone and most of the reassurance is based on the small number coronavirus cases, the article also gives a sense of strong fear of the virus. For example, the hotel room in which two infected British citizens had stayed was disinfected, “close proximity” to the infected is two meters, and the bodies of those who died from the coronavirus are “to be cremated as soon as possible”. This also emphasizes the dangerousness of the virus.

The epidemic is also speculated to be significantly more widespread, which further fuels the concerns and fears about it. The situation in China is used to describe a worst-case scenario. The descriptions of strict restrictions in the Hubei province, and the effects of the new measures on the lives of the citizens serve as subtle visualization of how lives of the readers might be affected if the epidemic spreads.

“(15) Modelling published in the Lancet suggested more than 75,000 people could have been infected in Wuhan a week ago, about 50 times higher than the official worldwide total of cases at the time. If the transmissibility of the disease was “similar everywhere”, the paper said, epidemics could already be “growing exponentially in multiple major cities of China with a lag time behind the Wuhan outbreak of about one to two weeks””

The remarkability and unusualness discourses become evident when the article describes new changes made in attempts to contain the epidemic. The epidemic thus becomes something that affects not only health, but it also restricts and changes everyday lives of individuals in several domains.

“(16) Huanggang, the second-worst-affected city, with over 700 infections and 14 deaths, has effectively confined almost everyone to their homes.”

“(17) Dozens of commercial carriers have cut back or halted flights to China, and several hotel chains have said they will allow cancellations by Chinese travellers.”

“(18) People have been urged to delay weddings, particularly the large numbers planned for today, 2 February – a popular date because, written as a sequence of numbers, it is a palindrome: ‘02 02 2020’.”

“(19) Even funerals are under pressure, with families asked to keep mourning “simple and expeditious” to avoid gatherings.”

4.1.5 “New coronavirus cases jump sharply in Europe, with Italy worst hit” by Beaumont, Kuo, Willsher and Giuffrida (2020, March 1)

The article mainly reports the spread of the coronavirus and the consequences of the virus spreading. These consequences include the action taken by officials, such as bans on big gatherings, travel, and declaring states of emergency. The article also mentions caution against la bise greetings – the cheek kisses – which illustrates how the epidemic affects social life in France and Switzerland. The examples of the action taken to prevent the virus from spreading draw attention to both the remarkability of the situation as well as drastic nature of the measures. Catholic masses are halted nationwide for

the first time in 236 years, the large staff of Louvre has almost no disagreement regarding closing the museum, and a state of emergency is declared in Washington.

“(20) And among a growing number of sites and events to fall victim to coronavirus fears was the Louvre museum in Paris, which shut on Sunday afternoon, reportedly after about 300 staff met in the morning and voted “almost unanimously” not to open.”

“(21) That coincided with the decision by South Korea’s Catholic church to halt masses at more than 1,700 locations nationwide for the first time in its 236-year history.”

“(22) Fears were mounting in the US, where the governor of Washington declared a state of emergency after a man died there, the country’s first reported death. More than 50 people in a nursing facility in the state are ill and being tested for the virus. Governor Jay Inslee directed state agencies to use all resources necessary to prepare for and respond to the outbreak. The declaration also allows the use of the Washington national guard if necessary.”

The fifth article also features several traits of a typical pandemic discourse, such as comparisons to previous pandemics (SARS), natural disaster metaphors and comparisons, such as “an avalanche of worsening indicators” and “tsunami effect on [Italy’s] hospital system” as well as violence and fight metaphors: countries are “hit” by the virus, they “struggle” with containing it, the virus needs to be “tackled”. The natural disaster metaphors and comparisons create a powerful image that illustrates the severity of the epidemic as well as create a sense of helplessness of man before nature, a theme common in pandemic discourses.

4.1.6 “Coronavirus: UK fears of undetected cases grow as 13 more test positive” by Sample and Kuo (2020, March 1)

In the article, the epidemic becomes an enemy that needs to be actively fought against. As containing and preventing the epidemic from spreading further becomes less likely, more war and battle metaphors emerged. As an example, the virus has to be “fought” fiercely and a battle plan is made.

“(23) Johnson will chair a Cobra meeting on Monday to review the next steps aimed at containing the virus, and he will tell those signing off the strategy that the government will ‘stop at nothing’ to fight the disease.”

“(24) ‘But we are well prepared, and the government and the NHS will stop at nothing to fight this virus. This battle plan lays out in detail the measures we could use – if and when they are needed.’”

In Example 24, the tone is more hopeful and reassuring. This tone conveyed by word choices, such as when UK is described as “well-prepared”, “battle plan” implying that the government and the NHS know what to do to contain the spread of the virus and how to protect the citizens from it. Describing a plan of action as a detailed

battle plan reassures that any problems the epidemic may cause have been thought of in advance and that there is a plan to either tackle or prevent them. Additionally, the use of “if and when” in the Example 24, imply a possibility that there might not be a need for any measures to treat the epidemic and thus the epidemic may not pose a threat great enough.

“(25) Among measures announced by the Department of Health and Social Care on Sunday were a ministerial lead on the virus in every department and a cross-Whitehall ‘war room’ to coordinate a beefed-up public information campaign.”

The word choice “war room” in the Example 25 highlights the threat of the Covid-19 epidemic to UK and illustrates that the epidemic is taken seriously. Additionally, the word choice implies that the epidemic is treated as an enemy.

4.2 Image analysis

4.2.1 Mask-wearing woman with a child in empty-looking Beijing



"Beijing's streets and malls are deserted in a country paralysed by the spread of the coronavirus."

The image is from the article "'Outlier' victim profiles raise questions over the impact of coronavirus" (1 February 2020) by Graham-Harrison. It is in the beginning of the article below the headline and the subheading. In the picture, there is a mask-wearing woman standing outside, holding a toddler by the child's hands, with both looking away from the camera. They are framed off-centre on the right side.

The framing of the photograph illustrates the caption: "Beijing's streets and malls are deserted in a country paralysed by the spread of the coronavirus." As the woman and the child are on the right side of the image rather than at the centre of it, the vast empty background becomes more prominent and emphasized. The highly populated city of Beijing is presented as a ghost town, which is reminiscent of horror movies and evokes fear. The caption which describes China as "paralysed" by the virus creates an intense image of wide suffering and adds severity.

The headline brings up the uncertainty regarding the virus and its perceived danger. The virus is mysterious as there are enough outlier victims to question whether the virus and the epidemic are safely predictable. As Chaiuk and Dunayevska (2020) noted, this uncertainty is used to create fear.

The woman and the child, while not framed in the middle of the photo, still draw the viewer's attention. Since both of them are looking away, there is no visual demand

- but the semi-personal distance of the shot and the bright red outfit of the toddler, as well as the woman's mask, are eye-catching. The image is from an article published in early February 2020 when the coronavirus had not yet spread widely in Europe, so the mask would likely have caught the attention of The Guardian's Western readers. This precaution underlines the potential danger of the respiratory illness caused by the virus.

In addition to illustrating how the virus is affecting life in Beijing, the picture is used to evoke concern. The image amplifies the headline and the subheading, and it also features a mother with her child, members of society that are often seen as vulnerable or in need of protection, which evokes feelings of concern, empathy and fear. Additionally, the words "victim" and "impact" from the headline highlight their vulnerability.

4.2.2 Medical workers carrying a coffin



"Medical staff with the coffin containing the body of Assunta Pastore, 87, who died at the Garden hotel in Laigueglia, north-west Italy, on Sunday."

The second image that I have chosen for analysis is from "New coronavirus cases jump sharply in Europe, with Italy worst hit" (1 March 2020) by Beaumont, Kuo, Willsher and Giuffrida. As the lead picture, it sets a grim tone for the news article.

The image shows medical personnel moving a wooden coffin. The medical staff is wearing masks and protective suits with gloves. The photo is a full body shot, and its framing puts the two men from the medical staff on the sides of the photo and the coffin right in the centre of it. Due to the framing, the viewer's attention is directed to the coffin, and thus creates a link between the virus and death. However, this focus on death and the deadliness of the virus is also assisted by the subheading, which counts the number of deaths in Italy. The protective suits of the medical staff cover them almost completely, which also further emphasizes the potential danger of an infection.

Considering the headline, subheading and the caption, the photo illustrates not only the fatality of the virus, but it is also used to create a picture of a possible future for the UK. As the number of cases grows and countries have difficulties with containing the epidemic, the spread of the virus becomes more likely, and the reality presented in the photo becomes a possible scenario. The image has dramatic appeal with its subject but together with the implication, its dramatic appeal grows.

5 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The Covid-19 discourses in The Guardian's online news articles developed over time several of the characteristics previously found in epidemic discourses. The most notable coronavirus discourses in the articles I had chosen were war and disaster discourses as well as the solidarity discourses that McCormick (2020) and Azizan, Qaiwer and Ismail (2020) had also recognized.

The alarming and calming tones that took turns in the articles are somewhat reminiscent of a finding made by Wong et al. (2015) – in the midst of fearmongering and misinformation, the risk of getting infected was repeatedly described as very small in order to calm the public. The language used when reporting and describing the then-recent events was somewhat dramatic: word choices often underlined human vulnerability or drew attention to the impact of the virus and several violence metaphors were used. However, the language use also contained more neutral medical terms and the expert opinions were often utilized to stress the fact that the epidemic may not be as deadly as it may seem. In the articles, however, the uncertainty of how the epidemic may develop was brought up several times, likely in an attempt to neither dismiss the health threat nor create more public panic in the early stages of the epidemic.

The results offer some insight into the early Covid-19 discourse in the mainstream news media. Considering that the analysis was made a year after the articles were published, some connections between the coronavirus discourses and their effects could be made.

This study only analysed a small amount of news articles, all of which were published online on The Guardian's website. A more thorough understanding of the Covid-19 epidemic discourses would require more diverse sources, more articles to gather data from as well as a longer timeline.

Possible future research might be done in order to examine how the epidemic discourse changed over a longer time period. As lockdowns, and what The Guardian dubbed as "quarantine life", have become a new normal over time, it is likely that the

discourses present now in the mainstream news media have changed and perhaps have even produced a new type of a pandemic discourse. Additionally, considering the increasing reliance on online news sources, it might be worthwhile to analyse the discourses present in online spaces that are not news sites, but do discuss prevalent topics in the media.

REFERENCES

- Abeysinghe, S. & White, K. (2011) The avian influenza pandemic: Discourses of risk, contagion and preparation in Australia, *Health, Risk & Society*, 13:4, 311-326, DOI: 10.1080/13698575.2011.575457
- Beaumont, P. (2020). "Researchers make strides in race to create coronavirus vaccine"
<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/feb/01/researchers-make-strides-in-race-to-create-coronavirus-vaccine>
- Beaumont, P., Kuo, L. Willsher, K., Giuffrida, A. (2020). " New coronavirus cases jump sharply in Europe, with Italy worst hit"
<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/mar/01/coronavirus-deaths-iran-rise-global-outbreak-worsens>
- Chaiuk, T. A., & Dunaievska, O. V. (2020). Producing the Fear Culture in Media: An Examination on Coronavirus Discourse. *Journal of History Culture and Art Research*, 9(2), 184-194. doi:http://dx.doi.org/10.7596/taksad.v9i2.2636
- Chung, Siaw-Fung. (2011). A Corpus-Based Study of SARS in English News Reporting in Malaysia and in the United Kingdom. *International Review of Pragmatics*. 3, 270-293.
- Graham-Harrison, E. (2020). "'Outlier' victim profiles raise questions over the impact of coronavirus"
<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/feb/01/coronavirus-victims-profile-outlier-impact-cases>
- Graham-Harrison, E. (2020). "Travel bans plunge China into deepening isolation over coronavirus"
<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/feb/01/coronavirus-travel-bans-plunge-china-into-deepening-isolation>
- Fairclough, N. (2003). *Analysing discourse: Textual analysis for social research*. Routledge.
- Jørgensen, M. & Phillips, L. (2002). *Discourse analysis: As theory and method*. SAGE.
- Joye, S. (2010). News discourses on distant suffering: a Critical Discourse Analysis of the 2003 SARS outbreak. *Discourse and Society*. 21(5), 586-601.
doi:10.1177/0957926510373988

- Katermina, V. & Yachenko, E. (2020). Axiology of COVID-19 as a Linguistic Phenomenon in English Mass Media Discourse. *Advances in Journalism and Communication*. 8, 59-67.
<https://www.scirp.org/journal/ajc>
- Machin, D., & Mayr, A. (2012). *How to do critical discourse analysis : A multimodal introduction*.
- Mazlin Azizan, Hanita Hanim Ismail & Shatha Naiyf Qaiwer. (2020). Power and Solidarity in Positive Facebook Postings Amidst Covid-19 in Malaysia. *Journal of Nusantara Studies*. 5(2) 329-364.
<http://dx.doi.org/10.24200/jonus.vol5iss2pp329-364>
- McCormick, L. Marking time in lockdown: heroization and ritualization in the UK during the coronavirus pandemic. *Am J Cult Sociol* 8, 324–351 (2020).
<https://doi.org/10.1057/s41290-020-00117-8>
- McCurry, J. & Kuo, L. (2020). "Coronavirus: first death outside China recorded as total fatalities pass 300"
<https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2020/feb/02/coronavirus-deaths-hong-kong-health-workers-to-strike-china-border->
- Mondragon, N.I., Gil de Montes, L. & Valencia, J. (2017). Ebola in the Public Sphere: A Comparison Between Mass Media and Social Networks. *Science Communication*. 3(1), 101-124.
- Nor, F. & Zulcalfi, A. (2020). Corpus Driven Analysis of News Reports about Covid-19 in a Malaysian Online Newspaper, GEMA Online® *Journal of Language Studies* Volume 20(3), August 2020 <http://doi.org/10.17576/gema-2020-2003-12>
- Sontag, S. (1989). *Illness as Metaphor: AIDS and Its Metaphors*. New York: Picador/Farrar, Straus and Giroux.
- Sample, I. & Kuo, L. (2020). "Coronavirus: UK fears of undetected cases grow as 13 more test positive"
<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/mar/01/twelve-more-people-test-positive-coronavirus-in-uk>
- Trčková, D. (2015). Representations of Ebola and its victims in liberal American newspapers. *Topics in Linguistics*. 16. doi:10.2478/topling-2015-0009

- Tshiswaka, Daudet, L., Whembolua, Guy-Lucien, S. & Conserve, Donaldson, F. (2017). A Qualitative Analysis of Newspaper Response to the Ebola Outbreak in Central Africa. *Africology: The Journal of Pan African Studies*. 10(1), 224-239
- Wallis , P. & Nerlich, B. (2005). Disease metaphors in new epidemics: the UK media framing of the 2003 SARS epidemic . *Social Science & Medicine*. 60, 2629 - 2639.
- Wong, R., MPH, MSW; Harris, Jenine. K., Staub, M., MPH, MSW, Bernhardt, Jay. M. (2015). Local Health Departments Tweeting About Ebola. *Journal of Public Health Management Practice*. 1-9.

IMAGE SOURCES

[Mask-wearing woman with a child in empty-looking Beijing]. The Guardian UK.
<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/feb/01/coronavirus-victims-profile-outlier-impact-cases>

[Medical workers carrying a coffin]. The Guardian.
https://www.theguardian.com/uk?INTCMP=CE_UK