

TIGER, LOUSE, COW, AND SO ON: ABOUT THE ANIMALISATION OF COVID-19

Evija LIPARTE

MA, independent researcher, freelancer

(Latvia)

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Abstract

In spring 2020, the world was engulfed by the novel coronavirus (SARS-CoV-2) and its aroused disease COVID-19 pandemic, bringing in a variety of changes (including new realities and hitherto unprecedented restrictions) and initially causing a scare in people with how unexpected, wide-spread, unpredictable, and threatening it was.

Different languages use a lot of similar metaphors for COVID-19, WAR being the most popular, and war, by definition, also implies an enemy. The conceptual metaphor of an ENEMY is often made more specific through the use of ANIMAL metaphors – in other words, through animalisation. COVID-19 is portrayed as a formidable enemy by comparing it to dry-land, aquatic, aerial predators (predator, tiger, lion, wolf, snake, eagle, shark, and so on), also by accentuating its claws, bite, devouring, or running wild; it is also often described by a pesky, omnipresent enemy that is hard to beat but is not necessarily so dangerous by using metaphors of insects (mosquito, louse, tick, wasp, cockroach, and so on). In turn, the fact that COVID-19 as an enemy has been beaten, subdued is evident in the use of metaphors of various domestic animals (dog, horse, cow, goldfish), as well as rabbit.

Many of the conceptual metaphors of ANIMALS reviewed here are similar across most of the languages; however, some of them are ambivalent (in European languages, tiger signifies COVID-19 as an enemy, while in Indian comic books show a tigress as the Superwoman's sidekick in her fight against the coronavirus; in many languages, the snake stands for COVID-19 as such, while a graphic example from memes to depict COVID-19 in Jordanian social media websites shows a snake (the symbol of medicine; a vaccine) defeating a bat – the symbol of the coronavirus).

Keywords: *conceptual metaphors, animalisation, corona-words or corona-lexicon, COVID-19, semantics*

Résumé

Au printemps 2020, le monde a été englouti par le nouveau coronavirus (SRAS-CoV-2) et sa maladie provoquée par la pandémie de COVID-19, entraînant

une variété de changements (y compris de nouvelles réalités et des restrictions jusqu'ici sans précédent) et provoquant initialement une peur chez les gens à quel point c'était inattendu, répandu, imprévisible et menaçant.

Différentes langues utilisent de nombreuses métaphores similaires pour COVID-19, WAR étant la plus populaire, et la guerre, par définition, implique également un ennemi. La métaphore conceptuelle d'un ENNEMI est souvent rendue plus spécifique par l'utilisation de métaphores ANIMALES - en d'autres termes, par l'animalisation. Le COVID-19 est dépeint comme un ennemi redoutable en le comparant aux prédateurs terrestres, aquatiques, aériens (prédateur, tigre, lion, loup, serpent, aigle, requin, etc.), en accentuant également ses griffes, mordant, dévorant, ou se déchaîner ; il est aussi souvent décrit par un ennemi embêtant, omniprésent, difficile à battre mais pas forcément si dangereux en utilisant des métaphores d'insectes (moustique, pou, tique, guêpe, cafard, etc.). À son tour, le fait que COVID-19 en tant qu'ennemi a été vaincu, maîtrisé est évident dans l'utilisation de métaphores de divers animaux domestiques (chien, cheval, vache, poisson rouge), ainsi que de lapin.

De nombreuses métaphores conceptuelles des ANIMAUX examinées ici sont similaires dans la plupart des langues; cependant, certains d'entre eux sont ambivalents (dans les langues européennes, le tigre signifie COVID-19 comme un ennemi, tandis que dans les bandes dessinées indiennes, une tigresse est l'acolyte de Superwoman dans sa lutte contre le coronavirus ; dans de nombreuses langues, le serpent signifie COVID-19 en tant que tel, tandis qu'un exemple graphique de mêmes pour dépeindre COVID-19 sur les sites Web de médias sociaux jordaniens montre un serpent (le symbole de la médecine ; un vaccin) battant une chauve-souris - le symbole du coronavirus).

Mots-clés: *métaphores conceptuelles, animalisation, corona-words ou corona-lexicon, COVID-19, sémantique*

Introduction

In spring 2020, the world was engulfed by the novel coronavirus (SARS-CoV-2) and its aroused disease COVID-19¹ pandemic, bringing in a variety of changes (including new realities and hitherto unprecedented restrictions) and initially causing a scare in people with how unexpected, wide-spread, unpredictable, and threatening

¹ For the purposes of this article, no distinction will be made between the novel coronavirus and the disease that it causes, as no such distinction can be made in most of the cases. For the sake of brevity and simplicity, the subject of the study will simply be called COVID-19 or COVID.

it was. At the same time, there was a surge in linguistic creativity that saw the forging of new language units or giving new meanings to the existing words and phrases, either as a way of giving official names to the new realities or as a witticism based on the phonetic similarities of words, associations, and puns. Such language units are called corona words or corona lexicon. As the Latvian linguist Dite Liepa puts it: Language is a living organism, it reacts to everything that takes place around us and this so-called corona lexicon is basically a purely outward expression of the processes that are and have always been happening on many levels of language (Liepa, 2021: 147). One of those processes is forging metaphors – figures of speech in which a word or phrase that ordinarily designates one thing is used to designate another, thus making an implicit comparison (FDF). According to the Latvian sociolinguist Ina Druviete, the ability to create and use metaphoric language is indicative of the linguistic capacity of language (Druviete, 1992: 110). To be able to create metaphors, society must have a background of shared experience, and during the pandemic it was just brimming with information. In her analysis of metaphors in the COVID-19 discourse based on two essays on disease-related metaphors by the American writer and philosopher Susan Sontag, Henriette Krug, MD and certified theologian from Germany points out that for as long as a disease is incomprehensible and is considered to be incurable, it is mystified as scary and mysterious (Krug, 2021); in other words, it is entwined with various metaphors. The author of this article, who has been collecting and describing, in various aspects, the corona lexicon since the outbreak of the pandemic, has also noted the abundance of metaphors that define COVID-19 and other realities of the pandemic².

US researchers George Lakoff & Mark Johnson, who devised and in 1980 published the theory of conceptual metaphors, believe that as a transposition of meaning based on similarity, metaphors are not an instrument of poetic licence and rhetorical surplus but rather a part of the daily language, one that pervades our daily life, thoughts, and actions (Lakoff & Johnson, 2004: 25; this is evident in the very title of their monographs: *Metaphors We Live By*). Other linguists, too, emphasise the fact that in modern linguistics metaphor is defined as an interactive tool of human physiological, emotional, and social experience that people use to create new concepts without abandoning the old ones and without ignoring experience previously attained (Lukienė & Čiučiulkienė, 2019: 254–255).

² For COVID-19 metaphors in general and their specific groups, see Liparte 2020; Liparte, 2021a; Liparte, 2021b, Liparte, 2022. Future plans include analysis of metaphors relating to sports, religion, and literary works in the COVID-19 discourse.

This article reviews the various metaphors of ANIMALS³ that have been found in online texts and covered in scientific tracts by researchers of other languages, which reveal the animalisation of COVID-19, depicting or representing it in the form of an animal (FDF). The metaphors of ANIMALS that are used in the COVID-19 discourse to describe people in their own right during the pandemic (such as obedient or stupid like sheep, muzzled like dogs, and so on) have been left out of the scope of this study. In turn, the study did not concern animal names for COVID-19 that bore a connection with the coronavirus solely by virtue of similarity of pronunciation resp. witty phonetical substitutions – puns (e.g. Russian *корона – ворона* ‘crow’, Lithuanian *korona virusas – vorona kirusas* < Russian *ворона* ‘crow’ + Lithuanian **kirusas* < *kiras* ‘gull’).

Some of the examples covered in this article are considered to be specific iterations of the conceptual metaphor of COVID IS AN ENEMY, which is related to WAR, the most popular metaphor for the COVID-19 pandemic, while the rest of them have occurred and are applied on other grounds.

Classifying, summarising, and sampling specific examples for the purposes of this article focused only on metaphors and tools of semantic artistic expression (such as comparisons⁴) containing the names of real animals and the realisation of the intrinsic body parts and acts of the animals. Examples containing words such as *monster*, *boogiemán*, *dragon*, *demon*, *devil*, *imp*, and such have been omitted from the empiric material of the article. Due to polysemy and frequent associations with biblical creatures, metaphors containing the lexeme *beast* and its equivalents in other languages are not addressed in the article. Neither is the article concerned with acts, body parts, and other aspects that are typical of both humans and animals, such as: walk, sneak up, wait, run, hide, fear; legs, back, heart, teeth, stomach; quick, dangerous, vicious, and so on (for more on those, see Liparte, 2022).

1. The Goal, Empiric Material, and Methodology of the Study

The goal of the study is to determine the aspects of the COVID-19 pandemic that are expressed and highlighted with the names of specific animals and through

³ For the purposes of this article, ‘animal’ is considered to be any member of the kingdom Animalia, comprising multicellular organisms that have a well-defined shape and usu. limited growth, can move voluntarily, actively acquire food and digest it internally, and have sensory and nervous systems that allow them to respond rapidly to stimuli. (FDF). Ergo, animals also include birds, fish, insects, and so on.

⁴ Comparisons were included in the empirical database of this article based on the opinion that phase one of zoomorphism (metaphors referring to a human being with an animal’s name) constitutes a comparison in which the name of the animal is used as the comparative word (see Jansone, 1991: 162).

other metaphors that bring the intrinsic body parts or acts of the animals into focus by comparing and contrasting examples from different languages (including those featured in tracts by other linguists) available online.

The empiric material of the Latvian language has been excerpted from various websites: articles and comments published on news and opinion portals, social media, forums, the websites of the governmental bodies and individual municipalities. The collection of this material cannot be perceived as an all-inclusive, representative, and complete, but as a dynamic and continuously updated database, because the sampling process was limited to the physical capabilities to register all of the material found on the world wide web, rather than to some particular source or period (the earliest excerpts date back to January 2020, the latest, to August 2022, meaning that they were captured in parallel with the writing of this article; besides, as this article was being written, cases of corona-lexicon that predated the earliest examples were found online). As a result, the scope of the database of Latvian examples used can be described as containing just several dozens of thousands of different lexical units chosen at random. The same can be said about the examples from other languages that have a concrete source specified: they, too, have been discovered by the author of this article in online texts or social media posts and included in the ever-expanding database.

Several examples from various languages that are covered in this study have been excerpted from the publicly available international database **#ReframeCovid collection** (RCC), which contains metaphors for COVID-19 other than war. With the exclusion of examples containing the lexemes *beast*, *monster*, these are 10 units from 7 or 8 languages: English, Danish, Croatian/Bosnian⁵, Dutch, Polish, Spanish, German. Some of the RCC examples featured in this article are accompanied by their English translation, also available in the said database. The RCC should also be regarded as a dynamic source, which is being updated on a continuous basis.⁶

⁵ This language reference is given with one of the RCC examples.

⁶ One of the authors of the RCC project, Elena Semino, a linguistics professor from Lancaster University, in an article published online on 10/11/2020, writes: ‘At the time of writing, the collection includes over 550 examples in 30 languages’, without, however, specifying the exact time (Semino, 2020). The publication by the team of the project’s authors gives an overview of the RCC structure, indicating that as of 29/11/2020, the database contained 564 entries, with 40 of them depicting the metaphorical source domain ‘PEOPLE and ANIMALS (virus animation)’ (Olza et al., 2021). The author of this article excerpted examples from the RCC for her study in 28–29/09/2021, when the total number of eligible entries stood at 611, of which 69 were connected to the realisation of the conceptual metaphor COVID IS A LIVING THING (a human being or an animal). In the process of writing this article, the RCC database was revisited at 30/08/2022 – at that time, 624 examples were found. There are plans to expand the said database with Latvian corona-lexicon metaphors

The study also made use of realisations of the conceptual metaphor COVID IS AN ANIMAL that are present in tracts by other language researchers. Besides, real examples from various languages that were found in online sources have made it possible to make a contrast with COVID-19 metaphors created by social media users during an experiment, as described by Figen Unal Colak (Colak, 2022).

As this article does not contrast specific languages, examples from various languages have been employed mainly for the purposes of representing the realisations of the specific aspects of the metaphor of COVID IS AN ANIMAL as universalities by showcasing their comparable portrayal in different languages. This is in line with what has been specified in a study, done by way of survey, on the polarity of the public and the role of the media in Germany: a lot of metaphorical sayings are the same or similar across most of the languages (Analyse, 2020/2021: 43).

For the purposes of this synchronous qualitative study, the descriptive, the analytical, and the comparative methods have been used. Such contrasting of material from several languages reveals both the universal nature of the language phenomena in question and the similarity of trends of linguistic creativity.

2. Specific Iterations of the Conceptual Metaphor COVID IS AN ENEMY using the Metaphors of ANIMALS

One of the most prevalent models of conceptual metaphors in various discourses is X IS WAR. Lakoff & Johnson (2004) analyse the realisations of the conceptual metaphor DISPUTE IS WAR, while other researchers have analysed the rendition of metaphors for other concepts (such as politics, diseases, and so on) with wartime lexicon (e.g., Arcimavičienė, 2010: 18; Lukienė & Čiučiulkienė, 2019: 255, 259; Marron et al., 2020). Specialists from different nations and fields (both linguists and sociologists, journalists, philosophers, and so on) have noted the vast application of military lexicon in the discourse of the COVID-19 pandemic (such as *strife, war, fight, frontline, defence, attack, casualties, rescuers, heroes, COVID assaults, attacks, kills*, and so on) and have pointed to the dangers this kind of behaviour poses to society (Zabarskaitė, 2020; Krug, 2021; Nerlich, 2020; Semino, 2020, and so on).

One of the meanings of the lexeme *war* presented in the FDF implies a necessary enemy: war – the waging of armed conflict against an enemy. COVID-19 often is not only referred to as ‘an invisible enemy’: it is imagined and depicted as a person through personification, a figure of speech in which inanimate objects or abstractions are endowed with human qualities or are represented as possessing human form (FDF). Sometimes the conceptual metaphor that represents

that have been written up by the author of this article (see Liparte, 2020; Liparte, 2021a; Liparte, 2021b; Liparte 2022).

personification is given a very broad meaning: X IS A LIVING THING; however, it is often defined more specifically by distinguishing between a human being and an animal. For instance, that is the case with the Lithuanian linguist Silvija Papaurėlytė (2003: 58–59) in her study of the conceptual metaphors of sadness in the Lithuanian and the Russian languages. And the author of this article, in reliance of the empirical material collected by herself and on publications by other researchers, has also written about the conceptual metaphor COVID IS A PERSON as universality in different languages (see Liparte, 2022).

Another image that is often bestowed upon an enemy is that of a charging or otherwise threatening animal (as a case in point, the realisation of the structural metaphor RATIONAL ARGUMENT IS WAR through concepts of a physical conflict from the animal kingdom is a subject that has been covered by Lakoff & Johnson, 2004: 97–98).

2.1. COVID IS A DANGEROUS/CHARGING ANIMAL

In her analysis of the discourse about COVID-19 on German online websites, the Polish researcher Hanna Kaczmarek (2021: 115) indicates that the central metaphor of CORONAVIRUS IS WAR involves a further metaphor of CORONAVIRUS IS AN (FIGHTING) ANIMAL, and mentions the **chameleon**⁷ as an example of its expressions. The metaphor CORONAVIRUS IS A FIERCE ANIMAL as one of the 10 kinds of conceptual metaphors in 30 headlines of online mass media or newspapers has been identified by the Indonesian linguists Raden Indrajid Lukman Sarjono & Barli Bram (2021).

This article offers a slightly different definition of the above conceptual metaphor: COVID IS A DANGEROUS/CHARGING ANIMAL, accentuating the aspects of threat and the need to defend from it. Of all the ANIMAL metaphors for COVID-19 that are covered in this article, this one is defined both by a plenitude of examples found and the variety of animals it refers to. Besides, the animals chosen most probably indicate the stereotypical understanding that a particular nation has of which animal is considered to be dangerous (both in terms of the indigenous fauna and exotic species that do not live in that country). Mainly, these are predacious dry-land, aerial, or aquatic creatures. In one example from the Polish language found in the RCC, COVID-19 is simply likened to a **predator** without specifying its kind: *Siedzimy w domach jak w jaskiniach, chronimy się przed **drapieżnikiem, jakim jest koronawirus**.. (We're stuck at homes as if in caves in order to protect ourselves from the **predator that is Covid-19**.)* (RCC).

⁷ Here and elsewhere, all highlights of the text and of the examples in bold are made by myself – E. L.

However, most of the examples from various languages that have been found by the author of this article or described by other researchers or included in the RCC are metaphors with the names of specific predacious animals, such as: “...*man war auf einem Safari und man hat dem Löwen ins Auge geschaut und voller Angst und jetzt sitzt man auf dem heimischen Sofa...*” (*One has been on safari and seen eye-to-eye with a lion and been full of fear and now one sits at home on the sofa*) (RCC, German); /.../ *se han convertido en héroes y heroínas durante estos días de confinamiento dándolo todo contra el zorro del Covid-19. /.../ people and collectives which in one way or another have become heroes during these lockdown days, doing everything they could against the Covid-19 Fox.* (RCC, Spanish).

Afakh Said Younes & Abdel Rahman Mitib Altakhaineh, researchers from the Jordan University, in their analysis of metaphors and metonymies used in memes to depict COVID-19 in Jordanian social media websites, refer to an example where COVID is compared to one of the country’s indigenous predators, a **hyena**: *The representative Jordanian official proposed that the lockdown was useless since the virus was there. To provide an easier explanation, he created a theory that compares Corona with an animal, namely, a hyena. According to this theory, imagine that you are in a house then suddenly a hyena comes in.* (Younes & Altakhaineh, 2022: 8).

Another animal that many nations consider to be dangerous (especially to livestock) is the **wolf**, which is commonplace in many pieces of folklore and literature and phraseological units. Some metaphors depicting COVID-19 as a wolf show various paraphrases and altered semantics in the discourse of the pandemic. An allusion to the international fable about the shepherd who cried about a wolf attacking the sheep only no one believed him, because he had cried about it earlier as a prank⁸, is evident in a post on a Latvian internet forum: *pavasārī daudzi ļoti nobijās, bet nekas tāds Latvijā nenotika, tāpēc ir tāda ‘vilks aitās’ sajūta.* [in springtime, many people got very scared, only nothing that bad happened in Latvia, hence this feeling of a “**wolf going after the sheep**”]. In turn, one Spanish example in the RCC also demonstrates another widely known phraseological unit that has been adapted to the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, which is to *run into the wolf’s maw* in the sense of ‘giving oneself in to danger, putting oneself in unavoidable danger’ (LFV: 1366): *Los ángeles de alas verdes de los quirófanos, los ángeles de alas blancas del hospital [the green winged angels at the operating room / the white-winged angels at the hospital] /.../ Se meten contigo en la boca del lobo [They go with you into the wolf’s mouth]* (RCC). There are several cartoons portraying COVID-19 as a wolf as well (see also Pic. 2).

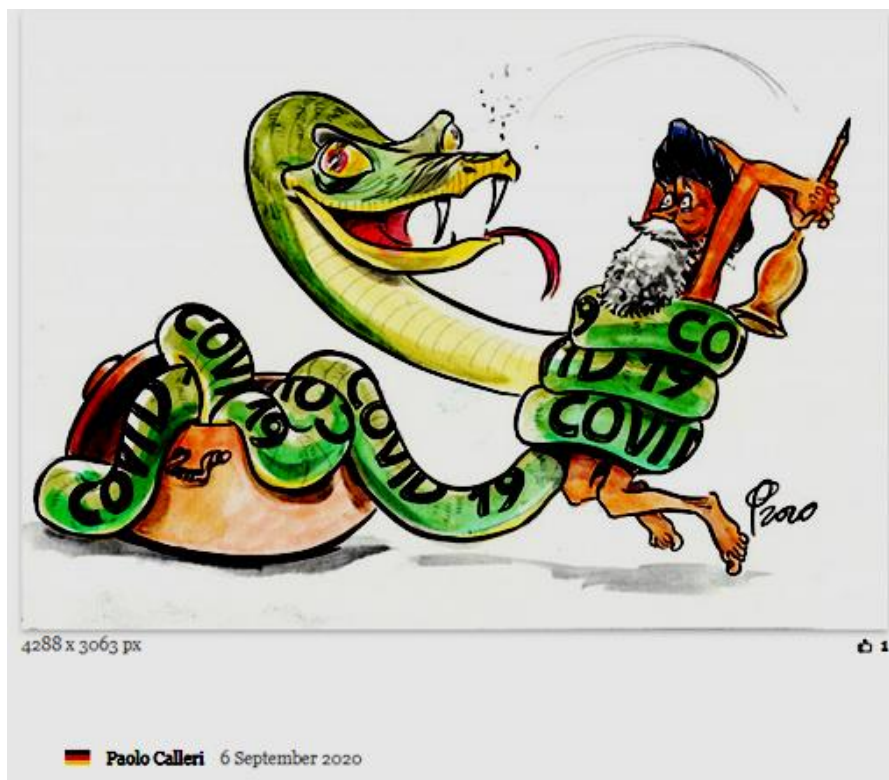
⁸ FDF contains the idiom *the boy who cried wolf* with etymological reference to one of Aesop’s fables.

In some of the European countries where you can only see a **tiger** at a zoo, this animal has been chosen as an expression of the realisation of the metaphor COVID IS A DANGEROUS/CHARGING ANIMAL; for instance, in Latvian: *Covid tīģeris kas lec divus metrus tuvojas klanckarinam un drīz leks :):* (com.⁹) [the **COVID tiger** that can leap two meters into the air is encroaching on the Latvian Prime Minister K. Kariņš and is ready to pounce]; in Danish: *En vild tiger ramte Danmark. Nu er den spærret ind i bur.* (A wild **tiger** hit Denmark. Now it is trapped in a cage.) (RCC); and the German portal *Der Freitag* postulates: *Früher Sinnbild für Energie und Potenz dienen Tiger heute auch als Metapher für Corona.* [Once a symbol of energy and potency, today **tigers also serve as a metaphor for corona**]. Meanwhile, in India, where the tiger is traditionally regarded as ‘transportation’ of and a sidekick to certain deities, comic strips were made during the pandemic that showed a female superhero with her sidekick, a flying tigress, fighting the disease¹⁰.

Another ambivalent animal in the discourse of the COVID-19 pandemic is the **snake**. The RCC contains this metaphor from the English language: *Prof Reicher/Social Psychology “Venomous snake, and we have our foot on the neck of this snake.”* (RCC). By the same simile, a cartoon by the German cartoonist Paolo Calleri shows COVID-19 as a snake threatening a person (Pic. 1). Russian linguists also mention metaphors of **REPTILES** (**snakes** or **lizards**) used to describe the COVID-19 disease (see Selina, Marina, 2021). While a meme that appeared in Jordan in the discourse of the COVID-19 pandemic shows a snake engaging in battle with a bat. The way Younes & Altakhaineh, who used this picture in their article, explain it, the bat is metonymically used because it possibly stands for the original source of the coronavirus, and the **snake**, the traditional symbol of health, medicine and immortality, signifies a victory over it by building the metaphor of **VACCINE IS A SNAKE** (Younes & Altakhaineh, 2022: 5). The **SNAKE** metaphor (without however specifying its meaning) was also referred to in the study on the polarisation of society and the role of the media in Germany (Analyse, 2020/2021: 44, 45).

⁹ This is the tag for the comment by an unidentified person to an article on a news portal.

¹⁰ <https://www.hindustantimes.com/books/india-s-female-superhero-returns-to-fight-the-pandemic-with-mask/story-8iCIAUavTKvIteSXiFLjCI.html>



Pic. 1. COVID like a snake strangling a person. © P. Calleri, 06/09/2020
(source: <https://cartoonmovement.com/cartoon/india-coronavirus-cases>)

The dangers of COVID are evident in its comparison to a bird of prey – the **eagle**: /.../ *ziema tuvojas un vēl covid kā ērglis uzglūn*. (a post on a Latvian internet forum) [/.../ winter is coming and then there is COVID lurking like an **eagle**], to predacious aquatic creatures, such as the **COVID-19 Shark attack analogy** (Susan Tatsui-D’Arcy), **octopus** (Colak, 2022).

The kind of animal used in coining metaphors for COVID-19 as a dangerous enemy has to do with the fact that people sometimes tend to imagine themselves as weaker creatures, prey to another specific animal; as a case in point, a **cat with birds**: Dutch: *Zijn we vogels voor de kat?* (Are we **birds** for the **cat**?) (RCC); a **wolf with little pigs**: Latvian: *Viņķele ir nif nifs ar salmu būdu, bet koronavīruss ir vilks*.

(com.) [I. Viņķele (the Latvian minister of health) is a **little pig** named Nif Nifs who lives in a house of straw, but the **coronavirus is the wolf**.]¹¹.

**COVID CORONA VIRUS DELTA WARIANT WOLF
UNVACCINATED PIGS GOOD LUCK**



Pic. 2. Covid Corona Virus Delta Wariant Wolf Unvaccinated Pigs Good Luck

(author unidentified; source: *Mississippi Today*, 2021, Creators.com, <https://starecat.com/covid-corona-virus-delta-wariant-wolf-unvaccinated-pigs-good-luck/>)

An animal can also be dangerous because it needs to but cannot always be subdued. One such stereotypical animal that appears in metaphors can be the **horse**, such as to the Chinese: *China /.../ strangling the “breeding wild horse”* (RCC, translation) and the Turks (see Colak, 2022). Subduing COVID-19 like a horse is portrayed in a cartoon by the Turkish artist Birol Çün (Pic. 3):

¹¹ In this example and in Pic. 2 we can see reference to Walt Disney’s tale of the wolf and the three little pigs.



Pic. 3. A medic uses a vaccine to subdue COVID like a horse. © B. Çün (source: <https://yandex.ua/images/search?text=koronavirus+kak+zverj+karikatury&from=tabbar&p=8&pos=ETgOzhXsAU2Bnz.jpg>, accessed 19/09/2021)

2.2. COVID IS A PESKY/UNBEATABLE ANIMAL

Other unsavoury aspects of COVID-19 that are highlighted using a comparison to animals by making a specific iteration of the conceptual metaphor COVID IS AN ENEMY have to do with the fact that it is omnipresent, only potentially dangerous, and difficult to beat. As often as not, these are the stereotypical names of small animals (insects) that were used in forging metaphors in a Turkish study: **mosquito, tick, louse, leech** (Colak, 2021).

The metaphor of **lice** can be found in the broad account of the situation on a Latvian internet forum: *Esam sasnieguši šā brīža situāciju, pateicoties covididiotiem un turismam. Labā ziņa tā, ka pilnīgs lockdauns efektīgi iznīcina šo meri. Tiesa, tas līdzīgi kā ar **ušu nīdešanu**. Ja viens izdzen utis, 3 dienas skalojot matus 50s ūdenos,*

bet otrs turpina staigāt utains, tad atkal viss process no jauna sāksies. Varēja jau tās kaimiņutainās Līzītes atstāt savā pagalmā spēleties, bet nē IKP un tūrisma idejas vardā jāčūpojas ar utainajām Līzītēm. Nu un mūsmājās atkal utis klāt. Un to kļūst arvien vairāk un vairāk... [We are where we are today thanks to covidiot and tourism. The good news is that the complete lockdown effectively puts a stop to this plague. Of course, it is much like **getting rid of lice**. If one person **gets rid of lice** by rinsing their hair in 5 kinds of water for 3 days, and another one continues to walk around all **lousy**, the whole process will begin anew. They could have left those next-door **lousy** little Lisas to play in their own yard, but no, they have to make bedfellows with the **lousy** little Lisas for the sake of GDP and the idea of tourism. And our home, again, is full of **lice**, and their numbers are growing...]

In turn, Russian researchers indicate that the infection metaphorically takes the shape of **insects – wasps, mosquitoes, bugs, and cockroaches** – thus emphasizing that they appear out of nowhere, bite for no reason, invade people’s personal space and freedom; besides, they are difficult to get rid of (see Selina, 2021). Metaphors of **SMALL PARASITES, A DISGUSTING TINY ANIMAL, INSECTS, WORMS** (without however specifying their meanings) were also mentioned in the study on the polarisation of society and the role of the media in Germany (Analyse, 2020/2021: 44, 45).

2.3. COVID IS AN ANIMAL THAT CAN BE BEATEN/CONTROLLED

As an animal that can be beaten/controlled, COVID-19 is portrayed using metaphors that involve the names of various **pets**, such as **dog** in Latvian: *Tāpēc ministre “Covid-1984” sunim cērt asti, ka šņakst, - pa mazam gabaliņam*. [That is why the minister is slap-cropping the **tail of the Covid-1984 dog** bit by bit (politician Dz. Zaļūksnis on the imposition of restrictions)]; **goldfish** in German: *Man fischt mit einem Eimer danach und einmal hat man keinen Goldfisch herausgefischt, sondern nur Wasser, obwohl welche im Becken drin sind. You fish for it [virus] with a bucket and sometimes you **have not fished out a goldfish**, but only water, although there are some in the tank*. (RCC, Germany’s chief virologist Christian Drosten on COVID-19 testing). In this context, the metaphor of the **HORSE** (see Article 2.1 above) needs to be mentioned as well.

The metaphor of **MILKING COW**¹² mirrors both the aspects of controllability and even usefulness of COVID-19: *Kāds smuku naudiņu noslauc no*

¹² Truth be told, in some languages calling COVID a cow // cow virus is based on wordplay. In Russian, the difference between the word *корова* ‘cow’ and the unofficial name of the virus, *корона*, is just one sound (letter), e.g.: *Новый Корона Вирус Стал Коровой Смотреть Всем, Корова Вирус Атакует, Новый Вирус* (youtube.com) [the new

šīs kovidā govš... (Facebook in Latvian) [Someone is **milking good money out of this covid cow...**]. We can see a similar image (albeit this one involving a non-specific ‘animal’) in a cartoon by the Iranian author Mana Neyestani (see Pic. 4):



Pic. 4. Milking money out of COVID-19. © M. Neyestani, IranWire.com, 05/04/2020

(source: <https://twitter.com/IranWireEnglish/status/1246792240061652992>)

coronavirus has become a cow, must watch, **the cow virus** attacks, a new virus]; *Корововирус* влияет на нас именно вот так (youtube.com) [this is how **the cow-virus** affects us]. Occasionally, this name occurs in its original form in comments of Latvian and Lithuanian online commentators, such as *Urrah!!! Tawarischi!! Mus tagad aru ir corova virus, ejam lidzi laikam un Eiropai.* (Latvian, com., 03/03/2020) [Hurrah!!! Tawarischi!! We now also have the **corova virus**, we’re keeping up with the times and with Europe.]; *Mums draud bada Nave, nevus tur kads Carova – Virus!!!* (Latvian, com., same author) [We are facing death from starvation, not some **Carova-Virus!!!**]; */.../ nėra nei židinių, nei sergančiųjų, o yra melas apie korova-virusą* (Lithuanian, com.) [*/.../* there are no hotspots, no sick people, only lies about the **korova-virus**]. Besides, some individuals in Latvia also use the Latvian lexeme *govš* ‘cow’ in their COVID metaphors, for instance, one family with many children speak of COVID-19 as *trakā govš plosās* [a mad **cow** on a rampage]; *kad tā trakā govš aizvāksies* [when will that mad **cow** go away], explaining that it is a translation of a word into another language.

Other non-dangerous, controllable animals – **rabbits** (a symbol of COVID-19 and the flu) – appear in the ad campaign by the Latvian Centre for Disease Control and Prevention in November 2020: *Divi zaķi ar vienu distanci* [Two **rabbits**, one distance]; *Divi zaķi ar vienu masku* [Two **rabbits**, one mask] (also see Pic. 5); *Divi zaķi ar vienu atvērtu logu* [Two **rabbits**, one open window]; *Divi zaķi ar vienām ziepēm* [Two **rabbits**, one bar of soap]. All of these examples evidence a Latvian phraseological unit, which has been reworked in the discourse of COVID-19, that says *Nošaut divus zaķus ar vienu šāvienu* = *Vienlaikus ar vienām un tām pašām pūlēm gūt divējādus labumus*. (LFV: 1380) [(Verbatim) To kill two **rabbits** with one shot = To obtain double gain at the same time and with the same amount of effort].

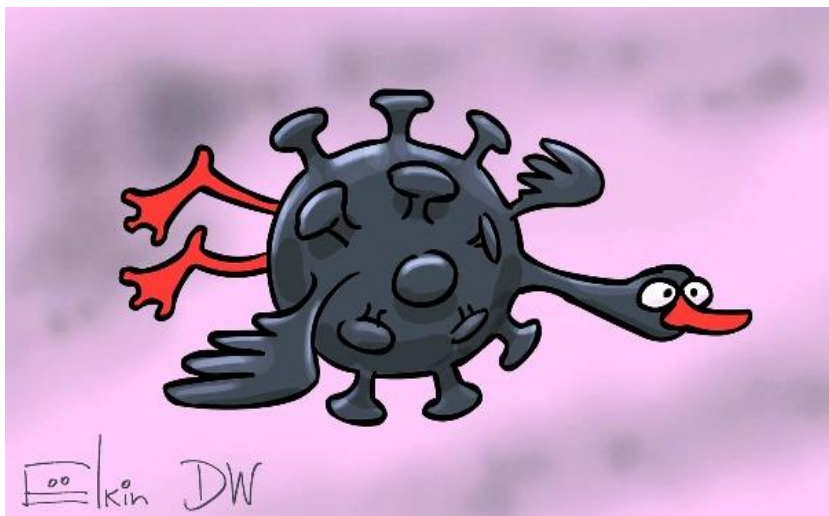


Pic. 5. Ad: Two rabbits, one mask. © Latvian Centre for Disease Control and Prevention, spkc.gov.lv, 10/11/2020 (source: <https://esparveselibu.lv/kampana/nelauj-slimibam-sevi-nokert>)

3. COVID – BLACK SWAN or GREY RHINO?

Once the COVID-19 pandemic took hold of the world, many countries started calling it as the *black swan*, with reference to the metaphor by the American financial expert and thinker Nassim Nicholas Taleb that signifies unpredictable events, which have grievous far-reaching consequences.

Here is one example from an article on economy in a Latvian online daily newspaper: *Droši vien grūti iedomāties kaut ko, kas vēl vairāk atbilstu “melnā gulbja” definīcijai kā koronavīrusa “Covid-19” epidēmija. /.../ Tagad atlidojis jauns “gulbis”*. [One would most likely be pressed hard to think of something else that would fit into the definition of a black swan better than the Covid-19 pandemic. /.../ A new ‘swan’ has arrived.]. COVID-19 takes the shape of a black swan in the cartoon by Sergey Elkin on the German news portal *Deutsche Welle* as well (see Pic. 6):



Pic. 6. The black swan is coming. © S. Elkin, DW (source: <https://charter97.org/en/news/2022/2/2/453193/>)

However, the author of the metaphor himself, as well as some of the other financial and economic analysts do not agree that the COVID-19 pandemic should be treated as a *black swan*. In the words of Taleb, that was a white swan – wholly predictable. While other authors remembered another animalistic metaphor used in the field of economy – that of a “*grey rhino*, coined by risk expert Michele Wucker to describe ‘highly obvious, highly probable, but still neglected’ dangers” (Nerlich, 2020). While some use it in a question, such as: *Was the pandemic a grey rhino or a black swan? It was more predictable than people realise* (Wucker M., *The*

Economist, 17/11/2020), others postulate why the COVID-19 pandemic satisfies the criteria of a **grey rhino** rather than of a **black swan**. A post on the website of ARISCO, the Swiss risk advisory company reads: *./.../ plötzlich stand das **graue Nashorn in Form von Covid-19** bei vielen Unternehmen nicht nur vor der Tür, sondern mitten in der Organisation. Denn das mögliche Eintreten einer weltweiten pandemischen Situation war beispielsweise anhand politischer und versicherungswirtschaftlicher Risikoanalysen bekannt und galt bei Experten als wahrscheinlich.* [./.../all of a sudden, **a grey rhino appeared in the shape of Covid-19** in a lot of companies – and not only at the doorstep, but inside the organisation as well, because the potential outbreak of a global pandemic was a known fact based on, say, political and actuarial analysis of corporate risks, and experts gave it a high degree of probability.]

Instead of highlighting the aspects of COVID-19 as an enemy, the two metaphors mentioned above contrast the surprise factor (unpredictability) of this pandemic with its predictability.

4. Metaphors that Portray the Exclusive Traits of Animals

Some metaphors do not refer to a particular animal but only mention something that is the exclusive property of animals (or a particular animal). With metaphors, COVID-19 as an animal can only be identified in languages where the respective parts of animal and human body and the respective actions of animals and human beings are designated with different lexemes (such as *Klaue*, *Kralle* vs. *Nagel* ‘claw vs. nail’, *fressen* vs. *essen* ‘devour vs. eat’ in German).

4.1. Metaphors containing ANIMAL BODY PARTS

As already mentioned before, sometimes metaphors from different languages refer to specific body parts that COVID-19 allegedly ‘has’, although many of such body parts can be found in most of the living creatures, human beings included, and are therefore a subject of a different article (Liparte, 2022). The empirical material collected contains only one case involving the exclusive body parts of animals as a realisation of the conceptual metaphor. Kaczmarek provides the following example of the conceptual metaphor of CORONAVIRUS IS AN (FIGHTING) ANIMAL in German: *Corona kann auch **Kralle**n hervorbringen* (Kaczmarek, 2021: 115) [Corona can grow **claws**, too].

4.2. Metaphors containing ANIMAL ACTIONS

When writing up ANIMAL metaphors that describe COVID-19, researchers of different languages scrutinise sentences that include just individual lexemes

denoting actions of a particular animal, which alone are often not enough to pinpoint the particular animal or class of animal.

That is how Sarjono & Bram analyse the cases of *.../ Covid impact bites; .../ Covid is 'running wild' in the US* found in online media and newspaper headlines, explaining that here, the source domain is 'Fierce Animal' (Sarjono & Bram, 2021: 114), while Kaczmarek presents a German metaphor: *Corona frisst die deutsche Wirtschaft* [Corona **devours** the German economy], pointing that it is also an expression of the conceptual metaphor of CORONAVIRUS IS AN (FIGHTING) ANIMAL (Kaczmarek, 2021: 115). In both cases, the biting and devouring animal can indeed be either an aggressive predator or a reptile, or an insect or a pet, yet the aspect that those presenting these examples emphasize the most is the wildness and fierceness of COVID.

Whereas in his analysis of metaphors of automobility in the discourse about COVID-19 in the Austrian media, the Austrian linguist Martin Reisigl refers to a number of metaphors that 'give the pandemic the character of an **animal that can hardly be tamed**, resp. **a horse**': *ausbrechendes Auto* [a runaway car], *erneutes Galoppieren der Pandemie* [the resumed galloping of the pandemic] (Reisigl, 2021: 17).

Conclusion

The principal semantic groups of the metaphors for COVID-19 and other instances of animalisation of the virus using specific animals that are covered in this article are summarised in the table below (Tab. 1). The table represents the aspects of the COVID-19 pandemic that are expressed and highlighted through those animals. In addition to the specific iterations of the conceptual metaphor COVID IS A WAR that showcase COVID-19 as a dangerous or otherwise unsavoury animal (i.e., an enemy) or an animal that can be controlled (i.e. an enemy overcome), these also include other metaphors that illustrate predictability compared a lack thereof (*grey rhino* vs. *black swan*).

Tab. 1. The aspects of COVID-19 that are highlighted through metaphors involving specific animals

Animal	Threat	Omnipresent, difficult to get rid of (bites without reason, invades personal space and freedom; a pest)	Uncertainty (only potentially dangerous); treacherous nature (appears out of nowhere, strange, unpredictable)	Victory, control (predictable)	Gain
Predators	Tiger	x			
	Snake	x			
	Wolf	x			
	Fox	x		x	
	Lion	x			
	Cat	x			
	Hyena	x			
	Eagle	x			
	Octopus	x			
Reptiles	Snake	x		x	
	Chameleon	x		x	
	Lizard			x	
	Leech		x		
Insects	Mosquito		x	x	
	Tick		x	x	
	Louse		x		
	Wasp		x	x	
	Bug		x	x	
	Cockroach		x	x	
Pets and domestic animals	Horse	x		x	
	Cow				x
	Goldfish			x	
	Dog			x	
	Rabbit			x	
	Black swan			x	
	Grey rhino			x	

Metaphors that are not related to specific animals but rather mention a particular inherent body part or action of an animal also highlight the threat of COVID-19 (*bite, claws*) or how unpredictable or difficult to control it is (*running wild, runaway, galloping*).

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