“COVID-19 treatment is a war” through a conceptual metaphor

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Abstract — The Coronavirus Disease 2019 or Covid-19 outbreak is a pandemic that has affected the world. Thailand therefore established "Center for COVID-19 Situation Administration" as a channel for communication between the government and the people.

The author aims to study a metaphor about the treatment of COVID-19 in Thailand as how does such metaphor reflect the government's views on the treatment of COVID-19 by using Lakoff & Johnson's linguistic metaphor theory and collecting the information on government and government agencies communications during the period from January 2020 to April 2021. The results showed that an important metaphor [Treating COVID-19 is a war] is used, which reflects the concept or illustrates the view of the government that “COVID-19 treatment is a war” that highlights the government's intent to give people a picture of the win and lose in the battle against an unseen enemy like COVID-19.

Index Terms — COVID-19, Conceptual Metaphor

I. INTRODUCTION

The outbreak of the Coronavirus Disease 2019 or COVID-19, which stands for "coronavirus disease starting in 2019", is a pandemic started in December 2019 in Wuhan, People's Republic of China. The infection was subsequently found all over the world [1], caused fear and affected health, society and the economy of the population. In January 2020, there was a pandemic which was rapidly spreading infection around the world. According to the announcement of the World Health Organization (World Health Organization) [2] on April 1, 2021, 129,571,925 people around the world have been infected and 2,830,203 died from the disease. The outbreak is not only a threat to the lives and health of the global population but also a huge impact on tourism sector, airline sector, export sector, oil industry sector, entertainment industry as well as small retailers which are parts of mechanism driving society and the economy, including Thailand which are being affected as well.

In Thailand, a committee for the center for situation administration of the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) has been established in the name of “Center for COVID-19 Situation Administration” (CCSA) which was promoted into Special work under Section 7 of the Emergency Decree in order to responsible for controlling and resolving the emergency situation from the virus with General Prayut Chan-o-cha, Prime Minister, as chairman. The implementation of CCSA has been clarified through the Thai Task Force TV to prepare people to be prepared to deal with the arisen crisis.

From this situation, it was found that the government is aware and focuses on the use of various measures for prevention and solution to allow people to be safe from the disease. One of the
methods to support in the movement that is expected to make people understand and recognize prevention and solution approaches is “communication”. The communication between governments and people in crisis situations is of great importance which requires both science and art because it can affect the psychology of the people.

From the collection of the use of government language appearing in various media, such as social media, television, radio broadcasting, newspapers and public relations media of government agencies from January 2020 to April 2021, it was found that the government chose a metaphor of "War" to convey "COVID-19 treatment". The author therefore will present on the issue to illustrate the process of creating discourses from language grammar reflected from the government's view on "COVID-19 treatment" based on the concept of linguistic metaphor.

II. What is Cognitive Linguistic?

Metaphor is a strategy in using language to convey meaning, ideas and emotions from sender to the receiver. The study of metaphor is divided into 2 concepts as follows:

1. **Traditional theory**, which describes metaphor from interpreting forms of language that views metaphor as the use of pictorial language. That is, the meaning of the language form is used in a comparative way in order to create an image, create an image in the mind and be able to convince the audience by expanding the meaning of the word from the original meaning which creates an analogy. Metaphor is therefore a text that shows a comparison of two things that have the same properties or differ in the structure of the comparison which often contains the word like is, as if, is in the language structure. This concept of metaphor has influenced the study of metaphor in literature and literature because metaphor is a figure of speech. Most language users generally understand that metaphor is a literary tactic that can decorate words to be elegant and melodious [3].

2. **Cognitive linguistic**: The study of cognitive linguistic metaphor is a concept arose according to the concept of Lakoff & Johnson [4] stated in the book Metaphor We Live By that metaphor occurs in the common language of human communication and there is no linguistic structure that compares one thing to another but the use of language in everyday life is all metaphors which is directly related to the system of thinking, society, emotions, and feelings of human beings. Such matter is not imaginary yet something that can be explained in a systematic way.

Kövecses [5] said that the conceptual metaphor is the understanding of the connection of ideas between meaningful words from one semantic circle to another semantic domain (Conceptual Domain) by means of a semantic cross-linking of the source meaning domain of the original meaning before being compared as a regular meaning. As for the destination meaning circle, it will be a new meaning that needs to be conveyed. Language users will use comparative meanings and the use of this comparative semantic language independently.

Lakoff & Johnson [4] showed the conceptual system of people in society where English language is used as follows:

Your claims are **indefensible**.
He **attacked** every weak point in my argument.
His criticisms were **right on target**.
I **demolished** his argument.
I’ve never **won** an argument with him.
You disagree? Okay, **shoot**!

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From the above example, the use of comparative words such as like, is, alike was not found. However, the example shows that War-related terms such as indefensible, attacked, right on target, demolished, won, shoot are used to refer to ideas. These reflects the views of the language user that the argument is a war that brings out the properties of the original meaning circle of the war, which is the win-lose feature and the destructive battle to link to the properties of the destination circle, which is an argument, to explain what does an argument look like.

In addition, Lakoff & Johnson [4] classified metaphors into 2 levels as follows:

1. A metaphor at the word level is called metaphorical expressions refers to words that are comparative which language users commonly use to communicate in everyday life
2. A metaphor at the conceptual level are called conceptual expressions refers to ideas which are character- ized as the analogy in the perception system or the user's perceptual system.

Both levels of metaphor are related, that is, humans have a metaphorical thinking system. When we have such a system of thinking, our thinking, our worldview, our everyday expressions, including the use of language in our communication, are characterized as metaphorical. Therefore, the metaphors we use to communicate in our daily lives are important evidence that we can reflect on this system of thought or the concept of language users can know that how do linguists in society have a system of thinking or concepts about various issues.

Lakoff & Johnson's linguistic metaphor analysis [4] shows the relationship of language usage to the human cognitive system. Humans have a systematic mindset that can take things that are far away to compare to what is nearby or take the abstract to make a concrete comparison through the use of language communicated in daily life. Lakoff & Johnson's study of linguistic metaphors is highly regarded until more and more people are interested in expanding education that is connected to various sciences.

III. COVID-19 TREATMENT IS A "WAR"

The author analyzed the language depicting war metaphors appeared in various media, including social media, television, radio broadcasting, newspapers and government publication and government agencies in the period from January 2020 to April 2021 to describe the role of the metaphor of war in the meaning of war in the treatment of COVID-19. This will lead to an understanding of the conceptual system of how the government sees the treatment of COVID-19.

The authors analyzed the nature of war from language depicting war metaphors in the treatment of COVID-19 that make it possible to explain the government's viewpoint on the treatment of COVID-19 as the elements of war with 7 elements as follows.

1. Phenomenon of war
2. A person or participant in a war
3. Weapons used in war
4. Places of war
5. The outcomes of the war
6. Actions in war
7. The conditions of the phenomenon of war

From the analysis of the meaning of the language depicting war metaphors, the government's perceptions on the treatment of COVID-19 can be summarized as follows:
Table 1 Characteristics of the meaning of war and the treatment of COVID-19 of the language depicting war metaphors organized according to the elements of war.

According to the study, the metaphor [COVID-19 treatment is a war] is a adaptation of words related to the meaning of war as a reference of “COVID-19 treatment” with “War” as the source domain and treatment for COVID-19 as a target domain for people to understand the concept of treating COVID-19 through "war". This metaphor describes the situation of the treatment of COVID-19 through the viewpoint of war that this metaphor can represent the mapping between the analogy and the comparable as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>(source domain)</th>
<th>(target domain)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Phenomenon</td>
<td>Covid-19 treatment situation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enemy</td>
<td>Covid-19 virus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opponents</td>
<td>doctors, nurses, public health personnel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weapons or tools in war</td>
<td>vaccines, administrative orders or requirements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Places of war</td>
<td>places where COVID-19 is spreading</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fight</td>
<td>various approaches to treating COVID-19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Victory</td>
<td>success in treating COVID-19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loss</td>
<td>number of deaths from COVID-19</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figure 1 Visual metaphor [Covid-19 treatment is a war]

From the picture above, it is shown that [COVID-19 treatment is a war] is a metaphor arises from the comparison of the similar and interrelated characteristics of the two concepts in pairs. It was found that the government compared the situation of COVID-19 treatment to a war; having enemies as the COVID-19 virus; Doctors, nurses and health personnel are the opponents of the enemy; Weapons or tools in war are vaccines, administrative orders or requirements; The place of war is where COVID-19 has spread; The battle is compared to the use of various approaches of treating COVID-19; The success of COVID-19 treatment is victory and the number of deaths from COVID-19 is a loss in war.]

Based on the analysis of metaphors that compare COVID-19 treatment to war, the appeared words represent the concept of COVID-19 treatment in thinking system that the government applied the concepts experienced in combating warfare to compared or understood in the treatment of COVID-19 for communicating with the public. This process of comparison is called “conceptual metaphor”, which is transmitted through the use of language. The results of the study reflect the conceptual metaphor of the government that [COVID-19 treatment is a war]

IV. THE WORLD DECLARED WAR ON COVID-19.

Thailand is not the only country that sees "COVID-19 is the enemy" and the government is at war with it. Many countries around the world are also declaring war on the COVID-19 virus attacking countries which be seen from the use of the language of war to deal with the widespread epidemic crisis. For example;

US President Joe Biden [6] said that “a new generation of American men and women, working with the day’s — working with today’s latest technology, is going to build a new arsenal to defeat the current enemy of world peace, health, and stability: COVID-19.”

Chancellor of the Federal Republic of Germany Angela Merkel [7] mentioned the medical personnel who have to fight with COVID-19 that “2020 was a year of worry and uncertainty. But it was also a year when so many went above and beyond themselves without asking any attention for it. We have seen this in the doctors, nurses and care workers in our hospitals, nursing homes and other facilities. We have seen it in the employees of our health offices, who found themselves suddenly thrust into the centre of the battle against the virus”

President of the French Republic Emmanuel Macron [8] mentioned the epidemic crisis in his country as “Nous sommes en guerre, en guerre sanitaire certes. Nous ne luttons ni contre une armée ni contre une autre nation, mais l’ennemi est là, invisible, insaisissable, et qui progresse.”

President of the People's Republic of China Xi Jinping [9] declared the "People's war with the COVID-19 virus as “The fight against COVID-19 is an all-out war that calls for a systemic response to coordinate pharmacological and non-pharmacological interventions.” Similarly, Singapore's

Prime minister, Lee Hsien Loong, [10] saw the treating COVID as a war that “we must continually adjust our strategies and raise our game to keep COVID-19 under control.” as can be seen from the solution in such situations that the strategy must be adjusted which is a using of word to fight war.

The above examples show that the supreme leaders of many countries chosen the language of war in formulating policies to deal with the COVID-19 situation which resulted in the "war
language" became a phenomenon that spreads rapidly like the COVID-19 virus. This raises the question of why so many countries chose war language to create a framework for linking it to the treatment of COVID-19.

The use of war metaphor by addressing the physical problems of the epidemic with control is a framing to describe a health crisis as a form of militaristic framing, or security to emphasize the people to build solidarity in dealing with the epidemic of the disease.

The explanation of the crisis situation or treatment for COVID-19 with a war analogy became a common occurrence all over the world as a ready-made narrative plot. This probably won't be the last time that war language has been used to compare the treatment of plagues.

CONCLUSION

First, in this academic article, the author studied metaphors that the government uses to communicate "COVID-19 treatment" by using the conceptual framework of linguistic metaphor. The found important metaphor was [COVID-19 treatment is a war] which is the use of language to create ideas through creation of government metaphor in communicating with people to reflect the framework that connects the situation of the COVID-19 outbreak with a war situation where people in society must help fight against the hostile COVID-19 virus. Various policies, regulations and measures to use as a weapon in the battle to win from this virus war were determined.

Second, the use of such metaphors can also explain the functions of metaphors as Goatly [11] classified the functions of metaphor into 3 main areas as: 1. The function of conveying ideas; 2. The function of human relations and 3. The function of composing. The way government chooses metaphors to communicate the COVID-19 treatment through the concept of war in line with the task of conveying ideas because the government sees a distinctive feature that has similarities between the two concepts. Therefore, the concept of fighting and making war was chosen to explain treatment for COVID-19 to help infected person or the public to see pictures about the treatment of COVID-19. This may be intended to help the infected person stay motivated to fight the disease affecting the psychological and adaptation of the infected person.

Last, considering the way the supreme leaders of many countries, including Thailand use the language of war to compare the situation of the COVID-19 epidemic, it is possible to say that [COVID-19 treatment is a war] is a universal concept exists in the whole human perception system.

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