BOOK REVIEW

BOOK REVIEW of MUSOLFF, A., BREEZE, R. KONDO, K. & VILAR-LLUCH, S. (EDS.) 2022. *PANDEMIC AND CRISIS DISCOURSE: COMMUNICATING COVID-19 AND PUBLIC HEALTH STRATEGY.* BLOOMSBURY PUBLISHING. ISBN: 9781350232709 (EBOOK)

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1   Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic and the varied responses to it from the global community led to significant interest, not only in the ways the virus itself was discussed in the period 2020-2021 but also the ways in which governments communicated health measures and the threat posed by the virus. *Pandemic and Crisis Discourse: Communicating COVID-19 and Public Health Strategy* explores the linguistics of COVID-19 communication and consists of twenty-six studies that focus on different aspects of pandemic communication around the world. Largely using corpus-linguistic methods, the contributions employ a range of theoretical frameworks, including Discourse Analysis, Systematic Functional Linguistics, Cognitive Metaphor Theory, and Political and Media Theories. This review provides a general summary of each chapter, followed by a more in-depth review of Marta Degani's chapter on the pandemic communication of New Zealand's Prime Minister, Jacinda Ardern; this being of particular interest to readers of Te Reo.

2   Volume Overview[i]

2.1   Part I: The discourse of authority in a global crisis: Who defines (if there is) a pandemic?

Chapter 1: *COVID-19 press conferences across time: World Health Organization vs. Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs* (Dennis Tay) compares how information is communicated in press conferences by both the WHO and the CMFA over three months. The study uses computer-assisted analysis of lexical choices to identify attitudes and stance, and time series analytic methods to model shifts and regularities over time.
Chapter 2: *Exploring the multimodal representation of COVID-19 on the official homepage of World Health Organization (WHO): A social-semiotic approach* (Amir H. Y.

Salama) probes the multimodal discourse and compositional features used to produce the multimodal layout of the WHO homepage and determine how the WHO represents COVID-19.

Chapter 3: *COVID-19 representations in political statements: A corpus-driven analysis* (Alexandra-Angeliki Papamanoli & Themis Kaniklidou) examines political statements about COVID-19 and ensuing lockdowns in *New York Times* articles from March 16th to March 22nd, 2020, and considers the way in which they helped to construct the COVID-19 health crisis. This study utilizes the analytical approach of Joseph R. Gusfield (1981) to conduct a textual analysis with specific focus on the framing devices of metaphor and narrative.

Chapter 4: *How autocrats cope with the corona challenge: Belarus vs. Russia* (Daniel Weiss) uses data from a broad array of sources, including official government websites and press communiques, YouTube excerpts, and independent media sources to characterise the very different approaches to communicating crisis management in these two countries.

Chapter 5: *Counting coronavirus: Mathematical language in the UK response to COVID-19* (Lee Jarvis) considers the ways in which quantitative announcements were used by the British government to structure the story of the pandemic, position the government as capable and reliable, and legitimize their response between February and late June 2020. The study utilized the Framework Method to identify key index categories of 'mathematical and numerical claims around: (i) victimhood and hardship; (ii) actions and inputs; and (iii) successes and achievements' (p. 82).

2.2   Part II: The discourse of crisis management: How is the public meant to and how does it understand the pandemic?

Chapter 6*: "Coronavirus explainers" for public communication of science: Everything the public needs to know* (María José Luzón) is an analysis of twenty-eight online news explainers from four sources showing how COVID-19 research was recontextualized for, and disseminated to, a general audience via multimodal platforms. It shows how the digital medium was exploited to facilitate understanding, present information as trustworthy, and generate solidarity.

Chapter 7: *COVID warriors: An analysis of the use of metaphors in children's books to help them understand COVID-19* (María Muelas-Gil) is an examination of ten different children's books published between March and May 2020. It identifies and evaluates prominent textual and visual metaphors and how they are used to explain both the pandemic and necessary preventative measures to children.

Chapter 8: *Corona in the linguistic landscape* (Neele Mundt & Frank Polzenhagen) proposes a cognitive-linguistic classification of COVID-related signs using notions of intertextuality, localization and recontextualization.

Chapter 9: *Political comedy and the challenges of public communication during the COVID-19 crisis: A corpus-based study of Last Week Tonight's coverage of the pandemic* (Virginia Zorzi) discusses discursive elements present in a political comedy show covering

the COVID-19 health crisis and explores their functions in public communication about the pandemic.

Chapter 10: *Social reaction to a new health threat: The perception of the COVID-19 health crisis by British and Spanish readerships* (Sara Vilar-Lluch) examines British and Spanish comments in response to online news articles and how the public perceived and evaluated the threat during the three main stages of the pandemic during 2020: the first outbreak, the beginning of lockdown, and the ending of lockdown.

Chapter 11: *How to pass this exam? Dealing with COVID-19 through metaphors in Turkish online public discourse* (Melike Bas & Esranur Efeoglu-Özcan) focuses on COVID-19-related metaphors in Turkish online public discourse through an analysis of entries posted on the website Ekşi Sözlük.

2.3 Part III: The discourse of 'War' against the pandemic: How to 'Fight' COVID-19?

Chapter 12: *When wars are good: Emotional unpacking anti-coronavirus measures* (Molly Xie Pan) examines the use of WAR metaphors focusing on the emotional valences and diachronic changes in these metaphors in Hong Kong COVID-19 press conferences between January 26th and September 15th 2020.

Chapter 13: *Legitimizing a global fight for a shared future: A critical metaphor analysis of the reportage of COVID-19 in China Daily* (Yating Yu) explores how the concept of 'a community with a shared future'(p. 245), allied against a common enemy, was promoted and legitimized in Chinese news reportage.

Chapter 14: *Metaphoric framings of fighting COVID-19* (Mariana Neagu) compares public communication by the Romanian President and the British Prime Minister. It also includes a brief discussion of the use of *lockdown* and *bubble* as container metaphors in Aotearoa New Zealand vs. the UK. These metaphors have also been a topic of research within Aotearoa New Zealand (see Burnette and Long 2022; Kearns 2021; Trnka and Davies 2020.

Chapter 15: *From an invisible enemy to a football match with the virus: Adjusting the COVID-19 pandemic metaphors to political agendas in Serbian public discourse* (Nadežda Silaški & Tatjana Đurović) uses both presidential addresses and press conferences reported in electronic news media as a basis for a critical metaphor analysis of the uses of WAR and SPORT metaphors in Serbian discourse.

Chapter 16: *Are healthcare political responses gendered? A case study* (Fabienne Baider & Maria Constantinou) uses a socio-constructivist and intersectional approach to compare the choices of metaphors used by male and female French, Greek, Danish, and German leaders in speeches and interviews.

Chapter 17: *'War against COVID-19': Is the pandemic management as war metaphor helpful or hurtful?* (Andreas Musolff) explores the uses of the WAR metaphor in British government statements and the public reactions as reflected by media.

2.4   Part IV: The discourse of judgement and rivalry: Blaming other/s for the pandemic and comparing national performances

Chapter 18: *"Chinese Virus": A Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis of U.S. Government Communication about COVID-19 and its Impact on Chinese and Asian Americans in the U.S* (Peiwen Wang & Theresa Catalano) considers the role of right-wing populism on communication about COVID-19 in social media, and particularly how YouTube commenters engaged and aligned themselves with 'Chinese virus' discourse.

Chapter 19: *'Those lunatic zombies': The discursive framing of Wuhan lockdown escapees in digital space* (Janet Ho & Emily Chiang) focuses on comments posted to Weibo about controversial figures, such as those defying lockdown, in order to probe the discursive and collaborative construction of these figures in online spaces, particularly through the use of metaphor.

Chapter 20: *Identity as crime: How Indian media's coverage demonized Muslims as coronavirus spreader* (Aaqib Khan) examines newspaper articles from *Times of India* and *Dainik Jagran* covering the *Tablighi Jama'at* congregation and the ways in which they contributed to inflammation of anti-Muslim sentiment in India. It also considers the contribution of social media platforms to spreading Islamophobic narratives and how these narratives, combined with fear of COVID-19, manifested in increasing discrimination.

Chapter 21: *Media discourse in Slovenia and in the Slovenian-Italian cross-border area during the COVID-19 pandemic* (Vesna Mikolić) compares lexical content, intensity modifiers, and other discourse strategies employed by newspaper articles in Italy and Slovenia during the second wave of the pandemic. This study has a particular focus on expressions of power versus solidarity, the similarities and differences between traditional and new media, and the ways in which language is modified to strengthen or weaken meanings.

2.5   Part V: The discourse of empathy and encouragement: How to foster solidarity among doctors, patients, and health experts

Chapter 22: *Agency in end-of-life conversations during the COVID-19 pandemic* (Dariusz Galasiński & Justyna Ziółkowska) considers how decisions not to resuscitate patients are represented in documents from leading medical organizations. Particular importance is given to who is given agency, who talks, and what the implications are for clinical communication in medicine.

Chapter 23: *Doctors' empathy and compassion in online health consultations during the COVID-19 pandemic in Japan* (Kayo Kondo) compares doctors' communication in online text-based consultations between April to August 2019 and April to August 2020, focusing on the extent to which doctors expressed empathy for patients, how this was done, and its implications.

Chapter 24: *'Masks aren't comfortable or sexy, but…': Exploring identity work on Dr Mike's Instagram during the first phase of the COVID-19 pandemic* (Kim Schoofs, Dorien Van De Mieroop, Stephanie Schnurr, Haiyan Huang & Anastasia Stavridou) utilizes both Dr

Mike's own Instagram posts, and the responses of his followers to examine the discursive processes used to construct Dr Mike's hybrid 'doctor-influencer' identity.

Chapter 25: *Choosing to stay fit? Glocalized ideologies of health and fitness during a pandemic* (Ulrike Vogl, Geert Jacobs, Karin Andersson & Jesper Andreasson) explores the discursive strategies used by fitness instructors in six different countries to reproduce or contest ideologies of 'healthism' during the pandemic and considers how instructors navigated the tension between global and local constraints and safety rules.

Chapter 26: *Unite against COVID-19: Jacinda Ardern's discursive approach to the pandemic* (Marta Degani) provides a linguistic analysis of Ardern's discourse in post-cabinet press conferences held between February and late-April 2020, identifying strategies used to position the Government in relation to the people in order to persuade the public to adhere to new pandemic rules. This chapter is reviewed in closer detail in the following section.

3   Detailed review: *Unite Against COVID-19: Jacinda Ardern's discursive approach to the pandemic.* (Marta Degani)

Degani's chapter focuses on Prime Minister of New Zealand, Jacinda Ardern's early response to the COVID-19 pandemic and how she 'discursively engages the citizens in communal and cooperative efforts against the virus' (p. 471). Building on previous studies (including Jamieson, 2020, McGuire, Cunningham, Reynolds, K. & Matthews-Smith, 2020 and Wilson 2020), it provides an analysis of the linguistic strategies utilized by Ardern using data from eight post-cabinet press conferences held between the initial outbreak of the virus in February 2020 and the end of April the same year, when community transmission within Aotearoa New Zealand was declared at an end (prematurely as it turned out). Analysis focusses on the discursive positioning of the Government, the discursive connection between the Government and the people, and the use of different persuasive strategies to convince the public to adhere to new Government COVID-19 rules.

Degani suggests that Ardern positions the government as a 'protective and caring entity, whose prior concerns revolve around the well-being of the people and their needs' (p. 477). The public are also positioned as empowered by Ardern's regular attempts to reduce hierarchical distance between political authority and citizens. Through demonstrating emotional closeness and directing praise, recognition, and gratitude to the public she aimed to motivate them to actively participate in communal efforts and accept greater levels of personal sacrifice. Degani argues this is achieved in a number of ways, including strategic use of pronouns, a common strategy utilized by politicians (see, for example, De Fina 1995; Bull & Fetzer 2006; Kranert 2017). Ardern's pronoun use, positioning 'I/we' as 'Ardern/government' and 'you' as 'the people', helps to create a clear communicative relation between speaker and addressee. The use of these pronouns further helps to generate a sense of emotional closeness when used to signal empathetic attitude through variations of the statement 'I share your feelings' (p. 475). Some actions of the government, such as the decision that ministers and members of parliament should take a pay cut for six months as a show of solidarity with the public, further supported this sense of emotional closeness. The use of adjectives conveying positive evaluation, and the repetition of some key words such as 'trust' were used to further solidify feelings of emotional closeness and the idea that both the government and citizenry were working together toward a shared goal, which also may have made citizens feel more in control within an unstable context.

Degani further considers the rhetorical strategies Ardern used to persuade (with reference to logos, ethos, and pathos), positioning the government as strong, decisive, and strategic, and their COVID-19 approach as ethical. Government decisions are represented as rational and grounded in scientific evidence; and in calling for a display of public unity and community-focused values, rather than acting individualistically, citizens are encouraged to view themselves as part of a larger community in which adhering to government rules is framed as morally correct. Since the government is presented as an ethically-motivated protector, its requests are framed as reasonable.

The use of 'Māori linguistic expressions that are culturally appropriate' (p. 483), such as *kaumātua*, are additionally noted as a means to foster unity, though, as Degani notes, further evaluation of Ardern's approach with regard to effects on marginalized groups and their responses would strengthen this analysis. While still acknowledging the variables of external factors such as Aotearoa New Zealand's geographic isolation, small population, and the delayed arrival of the virus, within the scope of this study Degani concludes that 'Ardern's communicative style may indeed have had a positive effect on New Zealanders' high compliance with the severe measures imposed by the government' (p. 484).

Overall, Degani's conclusions support the findings of similar studies on the effectiveness of pandemic communication by the government of Aotearoa New Zealand (Mcguire et al., 2020; Wilson, 2020; Beattie and Priestley, 2021; Jamieson, 2020; Hafner and Sun, 2021). There are, though, two areas in which this study could have been strengthened. First, the focus on Ardern in isolation from other speakers present at the post-cabinet press conferences, with minimal mention of the crucial role played by other officials, especially Dr Ashley Bloomfield, Director-General of Health, misses an important dimension of the communicative strategy adopted by the government. For example, Dr Bloomfield was often the bearer of 'bad news', reporting the number of active COVID-19 cases and hospitalisations, and painting a particular picture which would then set the tone for any changes in lockdown levels that Ardern would subsequently deliver. Ardern and Bloomfield very much spoke in tandem, playing a key role in the public perception of the pandemic and of the government response, with Bloomfield's input further supporting Degani's observation that government measures were repeatedly framed as protective, necessary, and supported by science. More consideration of how figures such as Bloomfield contributed to pandemic communication alongside Ardern would have benefitted this study.

Secondly, given the size of the corpus of data investigated, a keyword analysis could have been fruitfully performed, in order to compare the rate of positive and negative words used (for instance, 'trust', 'freedom' vs. 'war', 'struggle', 'isolation'). Anecdotal evidence suggests that the communication strategy adopted by Ardern and her PR team often utilizes a repetitive and reinforcing schema, where the same general principles are outlined in the same general order, an approach frequently found in speeches and political communication (see, for example, Atkinson, 2005, and David, 2014). Such formulaic repetitions help persuade audiences to accept new ideas, and can also bring comfort and a sense of fulfilled expectation from audiences during times of (otherwise) great uncertainty. It would be interesting to probe the corpus data further for such repetition and perhaps analyse recurrent n-grams and collocations in order to ascertain whether these trends hold in the corpus.

4 Conclusion

This volume offers a range of studies on pandemic communication from a variety of approaches and geopolitical locations, and will be of relevance to anyone interested in corpus-linguistics, crisis communication, metaphors of crisis, and/or specifically the language

of COVID-19. The volume focuses on discourse and semantic levels of analysis (there are no studies of phonology or morphology) and despite being corpus-based is predominantly qualitative. The emphasis on the importance of framing in effective communication, along with the comparative studies of different pandemic communication approaches and their effectiveness, will prove beneficial reading for those working in or studying these areas.

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ⁱ The chapter titles in the version of this book sent to Te Reo for review differ in some respects from those to be found online. This review reflects the versions downloaded on 11/10/22 at https://www.bloomsbury.com/au/pandemic-and-crisis-discourse