

A Humorous perspective to a frustrating time: Multimodal analysis of COVID-19 memes in the Lithuanian social networks

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Abstract: The global threat of a new out-of-control pandemic, the daily growing number of coronavirus victims, stringent personal self-isolation regulations and fear of the future make people feel anxious, uncertain and miserable. In this situation social networks become highly valued communication channels through which one can obtain relevant information about the virus and exchange ideas about personal life and daily activities. Memes with their apt verbal messages and clear visual expression help people to see the humour of the situation and to maintain moderately positive outlooks. This article sets out to reveal the conceptualisation of COVID-19 in Lithuanian social networking. The analysis was employed to exhibit the dominant modes used to disclose the foremost aspects of the pathogen in the Lithuanian context. The theoretical framework provides an overview of modes and their multimodal nature. The subsequent sections are devoted to Lithuanian memes that are employed to communicate information about divergent aspects of coronavirus. Concepts, groupings and distinctive features of memes and their prevailing functions in social networking are included in the analysis as well. The empirical part of the paper puts an emphasis on the multimodal analysis of the COVID-19 virus as encoded in Lithuanian memes, drawing special attention to the multimodal expression in terms of its conceptualisation.

Keywords: conceptualisation, Lithuanian social networking, memes, multimodal modes, multimodality.

1. Introduction

Humor can be regarded as one of the effective ways to escape from complicated personal and even intimidating collective social situations. On the one hand, as psychologists note, “being able to laugh during all the uncertainty and loss, creates a powerful mental health ‘safety net’ that helps to cultivate resilience and courage” (Petherick, 2020). Therefore, humor can contribute to the changing states of seriousness to playfulness (Frijda, 1989; Willibald, 2008). On the other hand, humor and witty comments provide people with beneficial advice on how to act under particular circumstances and what prevention practices can be undertaken to protect their relatives and themselves (Petherick, 2020). The widespread impacts of COVID-19 are no laughing matter. Dramatic increases in the number of people infected with the virus, the daily appalling statistical facts, strict personal self-isolation and even targeted curfews have

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thrown everyone into a traumatic collective experience. “The rawness of the collective fear and sadness, the oddly communal aspect of self-isolation, combined with freely available technology, has created the perfect conditions for unprecedented viral humour” (Petherick, 2020). In that situation a growing number of Lithuanian memes about coronavirus has appeared on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and other social media. Describing the impact of COVID-19 on various social milieus, memes exhibit dominant aspects of people’s behavior and communication, revealing peculiarities of social interaction in a rather lighthearted way. Despite this, memes are meaningful cultural units that represent how a particular modern society perceives and therefore conceptualizes a threatening phenomenon. Accordingly, this paper aims to analyze the conceptualization of COVID-19 in memes in Lithuania, thereby contributing to multimodality analysis for examining the meaning which is encoded in Lithuanian memes and expressed by different combinations of modes. The analysis of the conceptualization of coronavirus in the present study includes theoretical insights about memes, their notions, and their distinctive features. Multimodality and dominant modes applied in Lithuanian memes are discussed. Next, for the empirical analysis, multimodal expressions for revealing the conceptualization of COVID-19 in Lithuanian memes will be examined. The present research promotes a complex study of conceptualization of the imminent situation and therefore is conducted by applying a cognitive approach and a descriptive qualitative method.

2. Memes as a unique snapshot of a social event

In the modern society a meme can be defined as an idea, video extract, catchphrase, textual witty message or photo that is shared through social media; and functions as an effective way to connect with an audience, collect ideas, share emotions, and actions in an easily transferable manner (Dawkins, 1989; Holland, 2020; Shifman, 2014). They are “digital content units with common characteristics that are created in mutual consciousness and distributed, imitated and transformed by many users over the Internet” (Shifman, 2014, p. 7). Memes constitute “an integral part of global popular culture, often shared on social media in multimodal formats like images and videos” (Tay, 2014, p. 48). As Sergio López (2019) notes, “memes produced in social media did not serve any other purpose than poking fun” of various political and social situations. “Being vessels for public sharing of serious information and opinions” (Dyner, 2021, p. 176), they elucidate current social situations, overview political topics, ecological problems, existential questions, etc., which can be dictated in publicly available forms (Huntington, 2016). Accordingly, “memes are more than internet humor; research shows them to function by appropriation and, resistance to dominant media messages, expanding understanding of the way memes function in a participatory media culture” (Huntington, 2013, p. 4). In the internet as the fastest growing form of communication, memes “emerged as a one-dimensional satirical illustration; they do not engage with the issue

and, therefore, their moral message and practical impact are limited” (López, 2019). Thus, memes can be described as illustrative units of information, “modifications or spoofs added to the profile of the original idea”, which are spread via social networks and turn the concept “into a humorous phenomenon that transgresses social and cultural boundaries” (Shifman, 2014, p. 20).

In a culture, memes may take different forms, such as an idea, a picture, a video, a behavior, a phrase or other media containing cultural information. The transmission of a meme occurs in the social interchange process, when elements of cultural information containing a meme are shared by users through imitation, customarily via social media, e-mail, and different types of Web sites. The process of transmission itself is performed by means of verbal, visual, or other audiovisual communication, i.e. from written sources, various chats, video extracts taken from TV programs, films, e-mail, or the Internet (Shifman, 2013; Shifman, 2014; Phillips, 2015; Miltner, 2018). In this respect, a meme can be seen as a unit of cultural information spread by imitation (Al-Rawi et al., 2022). Hence, memes are “digital texts – verbal, visual, or audial – that share common attributes and undergo variations by multiple users” whose “practice meets both the demand for individualism and the yearning to belong to a participatory culture” (Gal, 2018, pp. 529-530).

Taking into account both their functions and their discernible effects, memes bare a close resemblance to editorial cartoons as both transmit visualized information and are used especially for humorous purposes. Despite the fact that editorial cartoons are artistic caricatures or graphic representation of their creators’ ideas, insights and views, they and memes alike are based on current events, include visual and verbal vocabulary that are recognizable to the public, and are intended to make the audience think about current social and political issues (Gallagher, 2020). Unlike editorial cartoons, “citizens are the main creators and participants in producing memes” (Semotiuk & Shevchenko, 2023, p. 85) by adding a witty captions or cultural references to a photo, picture or video and distributes them among people exclusively through the Internet, typically by means of social media platforms; “while state or media control is relatively more limited or less conspicuous” (Semotiuk & Shevchenko, 2023, p. 85). In other words, the creation of memes can be as simple as “uploading a photo to a meme-making website, which is programmed to overlay text on the image” (Schacht, 2013). Structurally, memes can contain a combination of image macros, a photo shopped image or other picture modifications made by applying programs like Photoshop, Paint or the standard Windows application; a catchphrase, simplified phrases or any multicolored text with intentionally incorrect grammar can be added as well (Denisova, 2019, p. 3).

Internet meme is a broad category. It can be defined as “a piece of culture, typically a joke, which gains influence through online transmission” (Davison, 2012, p. 122) and manifestation of which can take various elaborated forms such as GIF’s, videos, and viral sensations. The most common Internet memes are *image macros*, i.e. “images captioned with lines of text. Typically, one line of text is placed at the top of the image and another is placed along the bottom, though the format can vary” (Phillips, 2015, p.

10). To draw readers' eyes to the message, the text is bold and dominating. Early image macros typically included images of animals (especially cats) with the caption written to imply the idea that the particular animal was sharing its penetrating insights. Formally close to cartoons or amateurish comics are classic Internet memes known as *Rage Comics* (Holland, 2020, pp. 9-10). This type of Internet meme "recounted the tales of several poorly drawn characters who would find themselves in sad, frustrating, joyful, or embarrassing situations" (Shifman, 2014, pp. 113-114; Holland, 2020, p. 10). The distinguished features of this type of memes are their comics-like form representing so called 'troll-face' characters² with their complex emotions typically expressed in an exaggerated manner. Since 2013 modern Internet memes have been including images of various animals with short caption phrases which imply the subjects' thoughts. This type includes so called *doge*, i.e. memes with a Shiba Inu dog typically with raised eyebrows, *dat boi*, i.e. images of a frog, and *lolcats*, i.e. memes with humorous images of cats. Despite the dominant characters, nowadays this kind of Internet memes has evolved to include more animals alongside humorous messages of casual language (Dyne1, 2016, p.p. 663-666; Holland, 2020, pp. 12-15). However, the most popular and frequently spread Internet memes called *template memes* follow clear and simple templates and "rely upon custom captions or overlaid imagery in order to make sense. The base image stays the same whilst various components are edited to change the meaning or context" (Holland, 2020, p. 15). Template memes commonly take stock photography, screenshots of film or television, various images of animals or celebrities and can be adjusted by predefining the layout or modifying the caption (ibid.). Regarding the impact all Internet memes create, they are notable for their versatility, pervasiveness, widespread appeal and are considered as a new form of viral communication (Shifman, 2013, p. 374).

In addition to this, scholars have noticed that in becoming very popular, Internet memes "have progressively become an umbrella term referring to any piece of quickly-consumed comedic or relatable content" (Holland, 2020, p. 26) with their distinctively functioning linguistic construction frame aimed at spreading ideas and cultural opinions about social and political situations – even threatening ones.

3. Memes and multimodality

Cognitive linguistic studies justify the view that human minds are culturally embodied in the world, i.e. "our conceptual systems draw largely upon the commonalities of our bodies and of the environments we live in" (Lakoff & Johnson, 1999, p. 16) as well as on the "specifics of the physical and cultural environments" (Yu, 2009, p. 148); therefore, "thinking and reasoning are largely metaphorical and imaginative, shaped by embodied and acculturated experience" (Gibbs, 1999, p. 156). Conceptualization of the

² "An Internet 'troll' is a person who attempts to cause upset and disruption to other Internet users, or 'victims' of their trolling" (Holland, 2020, p. 10).

world can be encoded by verbal and non-verbal means to constitute a multimodal view on perceived entities in reality. According to Stöckl (2004, p. 4), multimodality refers to “communicative artefacts and processes which combine various sign systems (modes) and whose production calls upon the communicators to semantically and formally interrelate all sign repertoires present”. Thus, as a phenomenon of communication, multimodality can be considered as the compilation of different semiotic resources called modes, such as images, speech, a written message, layout, gesture, sound, color, etc. Adami highlights the key assumptions in the study of multimodality by stating that all communication is multimodal and the analyses that focus solely on language “cannot adequately account for meaning” (Adami, 2016, p. 452). Additionally, “each mode has specific affordances arising from its materiality and from its social histories which shape its resources to fulfil given communicative needs” (Jewitt, 2014, p. 31) And finally, modes, each with a specialized role, combine together to collectively contribute to meaning-making. Therefore, relations among modes are essential to understand every aspect of communication (Jewitt, 2014; Yus, 2018). Accordingly, an Internet meme as a particular communicative event is not a mono-mode digital entity; the combination of a written text, an image, layout, colors plays an important role in the overall construction of meaning. Two salient modes – text and images – in the process of analyzing memes as the way to reveal conceptualization of particular social events are regarded as predominant. Here the text as a verbal mode discloses the meaning of the dialogue while the image helps to identify the object, subject or event that the message is speaking about. Therefore, “interpreting a meme entails a ‘division of labor’ between the processing of the text, the processing of the picture, and the identification of possible interpretive meanings for text picture, and text-picture combinations” (Yus, 2018, pp.2-3). Thus, the analysis of memes will attend to pictorial and verbal modes as their combination into multimodal expressions helps to reveal conceptualization of COVID-19 in the Lithuanian context.

4. Methodology

The following analysis is carried out on a corpus of nearly 75 memes taken from various Lithuanian social networks, with the primary source being the web site <https://demotyvacijos.tv3.lt/>.³ The research period takes 7 months (from October 2020 to

³ This web site was created by the private Lithuanian TV company *ALL MEDIA DIGITAL* in 2012 and, according to the announcement, it shares “the best Lithuanian demotivators, jokes and puns black humor, funny pictures and funny video clips” (<https://demotyvacijos.tv3.lt/privatumo-politika>) and covers a wide range of topics of interest to consumers, such as *Life, Sciences, Animals, Love, Entertainment, Style, Sport, etc.* This site is public and created for registered internet users to upload their memes and GIFs. The uploaded material is also available in Facebook https://www.facebook.com/Demotyvacija/?locale=lt_LT).

May 2021). The methodology is based on multimodal discourse analysis, presented in Kress (2012) and Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) framework for the semiotic analysis of multimodal communication (Hakoköngäs et al., 2020), in which “all modes are framed as one field, as one domain” (Kress, 2012, p. 38). In this case, the content of a meme is constructed by means of a juxtaposition of images and accompanying text. Initially, a research collection of memes was compiled. The main criteria for selecting memes were *their target*, i.e. all chosen memes were oriented to the Lithuanian context and shared by Lithuanians during the period of March to September 2020; and *their semantic input*, i.e. all the memes were associated with different readings of COVID-19 in Lithuania as well as representing ideas related to human cognition, perception and experience of the coronavirus threat.

The main focus here has been put on multimodal cognitive aspects, i.e. conceptualization of this phenomenon in terms of its digital multimodal expression. Therefore, both visual and verbal (textual) modes of the memes have been taken into account. Regarding the formal representation, a majority of the Lithuanian memes related to COVID-19 information dissemination constitute different kinds of so called *template memes*: some include black background photo shopped images with famous politicians, celebrities and practical situational contexts with catchphrases or puns; other memes take a colorful slide-like form with simplified phrases, witty sayings or adapted quotations. Few cases were observed in which ideas were visualized by photo images alone, without any verbal hint, or with a text without any image. Lithuanian memes representing the coronavirus situation with macro images such as *lolcats* or *doge* (Holland, 2020) were not detected in this collection.

After that, the grouping of the memes into broader themes according to their defined content was made. Regarding the main theme, that was defined by taking into account all the components of memes, namely, their visual representation and written text, the Lithuanian memes constitute three thematic groups:

- behavior and habits of the Lithuanian society, i.e. how individuals’ habits and behavioral norms have changed in the pandemic situation, what new patterns of behavior have emerged or been modified;
- professional activities, namely, what changes are evident in the daily work and duties of medical practitioners, educators and politicians;
- cultural changes pertaining entrenched religious belief, social customs, and national historic events.

Each thematic group presents its particular visual and verbal vocabulary to reveal diverse cognitive aspects related to the conceptualization of coronavirus.

5. Findings – conception of COVID-19 in Lithuanian memes

5.1. Memes about behavior and habits of the Lithuanian society

The largest group of memes (almost 60 per cent of all the selected instances) depicts a particular style of social behavior, which has been modified due to the occurrence of coronavirus. The adapted behavior affects daily actions such as shopping, eating, sport activities, holiday-making as well as learning and working practice.

With regard to shopping habits, the memes typically depict a situation with shoppers who prefer huge shopping carts, enormous bags full of various products, packages of toilet paper, electrical devices, etc. Verbal messages included in the memes indicate that Lithuanians are disposed to experience panic and compulsive shopping for products unnecessary for self-isolation. Frequently used words such as “panic”, “lose one’s head”, “isolation”, “quarantine”, “survival” also imply the idea that this situation is perceived as a long-term period with potential negative consequences that should be accepted.

Despite this, the Lithuanian memes of this thematic group obviously perpetuate gender stereotypes related to social roles, aspects of behavior, inner traits and attributes. In the tense situations depicted, women are represented as careful mothers, humble ladies, dutiful wives, friendly and chatty with their colleagues, neighbors and friends; men, on the other hand, are presented as strong, often armed, but relaxed, unreasonable and selfish, engaged in hobbies related to laziness, such as watching TV, drinking beer and sleeping. However, some memes imply that the prolonged quarantine can modify such understanding of stereotypes. For instance, in spite of being careful housewives, women can become a bit easygoing and take any chance to be with friends and go shopping, disregarding the spreading virus threat and the risk of being infected themselves (Figure 1.); while men being conceived as selfish individuals try to provide their family (including pets) with food (Figure 1).



Figure 1. Lithuanian memes depicting modification of stereotypes
 (Eng. Left side: “‘Milk, salt, sugar, bread, butter, onions, eggs.’ When you go shopping it is important not to forget anything”. Right side: “Only women contribute to the spread of coronavirus. No normal man would even be able to get out of bed with a temperature of 37.4 C”!)
 (Permission is granted from copyright right holder)

Complete self-isolation related to restricted social interactions, lack of exercises and obesity leads to evident changes in visual body appearance (Figure 2). The negative effects of these factors are depicted in people, pets and even familiar objects of cultural heritage.



Figure 2. Memes about physical changes

(Eng.: Left side “Quarantine calendar: March, April, May”; Middle: “Maybe it’s time to think about exercise: summer is already coming...”; Right side: “Two periods of quarantine life”)

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Thus, visual elements and verbal content of the memes depict COVID-19 as a long period of time, an unusual social situation or even invisible predatory force which can modify stereotypical understandings, change a physical shape, strike unexpectedly.

Another aspect included this thematic group is related to working and learning practice. In many cases, memes imply the idea that coronavirus is perceived in terms of a long period of stagnation, which causes people to dramatically alter their habits (Figure 3).



Figure 3. Memes about school

(Eng.: Left side “It is time for kids to school and finally parents will have vacation”; Middle: “Go to school”; Right side: “The quarantine puzzle of the day: do you know the result?”)

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The visual and verbal elements included in the memes indicate that the period of quarantine was long enough for parents to get tired of being with their kids and for school children to adjust to their free time at home. This led to a decrease in learning skills, knowledge and a loss of a desire to proceed with learning.

Vacationing is also an important social activity affected by changes in human habits. In this case, because of the quarantine restrictions people are planning their holidays in their home locations.



Figure 4. Memes about holidays

(Eng.: Left side “AT THE WINDOW”; Middle: “Last summer and this summer”; Right side: “Summer holidays in 2020”)

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All the above mentioned memes depict COVID-19 by disclosing its metonymic conception, i.e. coronavirus is conceptualized in terms its major “attributes” such as self-isolation, quarantine, various inner and outer individuals’ changes, etc. This gives rise to the cognitive understanding that COVID-19 is a long lasting period of time with its beginning, duration and end leading to unexpected, abnormal consequences, resulting in noticeable changes in social life. Therefore, Lithuanians construe the conceptual understanding that COVID-19 is a long time span and COVID-19 causes indisputable modifications in human social life.

In addition to metonymic conceptualizations of coronavirus, metaphorical conceptualization has been observed as well. An example of such conceptualization of COVID-19 is depicted below.



Figure 5. A meme about COVID-19

(Eng.: Left side “My immune system is weak”; Right side: “COVID-19 virus”)

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The above image shows two popular Lithuanian pop singers: Simonas Donskovas (left side) who is famous for his strong vocal power, great charisma and Natalija Bunkė well known for her soft voice and a sensitive way of singing. In this meme the man is represented as a strong, attractive, sexual conqueror trying to entice a weak and womanly charming personality who is giving way to masculine temptation and persuasion. The verbal labels supplement the images with descriptive information. Thus, by applying principles of Cognitive Metaphor Theory, according to which “abstract entities, processes, events, attributes and relations (X) can be managed conceptually as concrete objects or tangible substances (Y)” (Navarro i Ferrando, 2017, p. 167) in terms of the metaphorical reading X IS Y, the conceptual metaphor COVID-19 IS A STRONG AND VICTORIOUS POWER is construed.

5.2. Professional activities in Lithuanian memes

The second thematic group of the Lithuanian memes includes situations related to the practitioners whose work has had close relations with COVID-19. Professionals either have been in a close contact with patients or have had to change their working manner due to the pandemic (see Figure 6). The Lithuanian memes depict various actions of medical specialists, politicians, educators, cleaners, though all their efforts are presented as doomed to failure. For example, a scientist released the virus from the laboratory, medical nurses and doctors were too painstaking and disciplined that they did more harm to their patient than benefit.



Figure 6. Memes about failures in professional activities

(Eng.: Left side “TV NEWS: Because of the coronavirus pandemic in the Lithuanian territory corona virus is cancelled”; Right side: The Speaker of the Board of the Parliament “When you sneeze at work”)

(Permission is granted from copyright right holder)

Thus, the ideas represented in the memes by means of both pictorial and verbal elements help to construe conceptualization that COVID-19 provokes changes in professional life and that the COVID-19 virus results in failure in professional activities.

5.3. Memes depicting cultural changes in Lithuania

Traditions, cultural background and religious insights are acknowledged oftentimes helping people to find true ways to overcome historical calamities and to restore ruined social and cultural life. Accordingly, one more thematic group of the selected memes depicts the Lithuanian cultural and religious confrontation with COVID-19. Formally, the memes include either photographic images of well-known paintings alongside additional visual elements or artistic drawings illustrating historical and mythological personalities.



Figure 7. Memes with cultural elements

(Eng.: Left side: “Guys, let’s scatter!”; Middle: “Please, show identification documents of the participants of this illegal meeting”; Right side: “After the quarantine you can finally ignore people not because you need to but because you no longer want to see them at all.”)

(Permission is granted from copyright right holder)

People can easily recognize well known national and foreign paintings which intimate that even seemingly invariant historical and cultural elements might undergo the impact of COVID-19. For instance, the famous painting “*Battle of Žalgiris*” by Jan Matejko, 1878 (Figure 7, on the left side) portrays the significant historical event which led to the crucial victory of the Lithuanian nation. However, in the foreground of this meme, a visible figure of a police officer and his direct command imply that the acknowledged event have already been regarded as a negligible, officially banned social meeting without its immense historical significance. Similarly, the indisputable religious event known as “The Last Supper” is also treated as an officially unacceptable, illegal meeting. Even a legendary creature *Giltinė* (the goddess of death)⁴ from the Lithuanian folklore, which is always identified with death, likewise has failed in its duties and has gone on holiday.

Additionally, some memes of this group refer to religious practice, though modified as well. It should be noted that their diverse structure is distinguishing. The majority of them take so called template form with both pictorial and verbal information; while some constitute only one salient mode: either a sole image without any verbal message or only a verbal note presented on the colorful background.



Figure 8. Memes with religious motifs

(Eng.: Left side “Why is it best to pray to Virgin Mary during the virus pandemic? – Because she is healthy”)

(Permission is granted from copyright right holder)

The conception encoded in the memes discloses a painful insight: religious truths and practice, which faithful Christians have been following since birth, have also undergone modifications due to the complicated coronavirus situation. For instance, the meme (Figure 8) portrays a changed situation of the seemingly invariable religious ritual

⁴ According to Lithuanian mythology, *Giltinė* is a Lithuanian goddess of death and looks like as a tall and bony woman, always dressed in white or yellow (traditionally wrapped in a white shroud). Everyone can her recognize because of her main attributes – a sickle or a scythe. Therefore, her main duty is all the time to watch, follow people and kill them when their destined times come (more about about *Giltinė*, see Ferre (2017)).

of the “The Last Supper”, during which Jesus Christ is having his last supper and conversing with his disciples remotely. In addition to this, the verbal meme (Figure 8) constitutes word play by adding humorous effect to the well accepted religious dogma. The message declares that during the pandemic people had better pray to the Blessed Virgin Mary, as in the Lithuanian variant of this prayer the vocative “Hail Virgin” refers to the fact that Virgin Mary is always healthy and therefore can cure others.⁵ This meme indicates that people still maintain a spiritual power which helps them ease stress and stay healthy. Thus, taking into account pictorial and verbal elements of the memes, which elaborate the notion that the COVID-19 pandemic can change customs, traditions and other practice that seemed invariant to Christians, coronavirus is conceptualized as deconstructing traditions and customs as well as evident cultural modifiers.

6. Conclusions

In conclusion, COVID-19 has been a novel phenomenon in the world, which has affected all spheres of social life and made everyone feel stress, uncertainty and fear about future consequences. In order to lower the level of tension and anxiety, people have made attempts to reckon with the global calamity by soothing themselves with different types of humor devices. The most popular way to manage the stressful situation in a humorous way is through the application of Internet products such as memes, which can be considered as particular media content that people can replicate, modify and spread among each other to share funny messages and laugh at various situations.

Memes as a particular digital humorous message with its fairly clear visual structure have been studied by researchers, first of all, as a form of visual rhetoric to subvert media messages in terms of semiotics and discourse (Huntington, 2013). They also have been investigated as a multimodal way of rendering political, economic and social phenomena (Tay, 2014; Semotiuk & Shevchenko, 2023) and as an instrument which, through the symbiosis of verbal and visual elements, in the social media has been applied to take a different perspective on frightening social situations (Dyrel, 2021; Al-Rawi et al., 2022).

In the Lithuanian scientific context, memes depicting the stressful period of the pandemic have not been analyzed from the cognitive perspective. Therefore, this is an attempt to investigate the conceptualization of COVID-19 encoded in memes that were captured in Lithuanian social networks by applying multimodal discourse analysis. Thus, the present paper investigates the conceptual ‘portraiture’ of COVID-19 depicted in Lithuanian memes in terms of multimodal expression. Both pictorial and verbal elements

⁵ The association is constructed by using a polysemous word *Sveika* (Eng. *healthy*). Etymologically, a word *hail* as interjection is “a salutation in greeting, c. 1200, from Old Norse *heill* “health, prosperity, good luck” or a similar Scandinavian source, and in part from Old English shortening of *wæs hæil* “be healthy” (Online Etymology dictionary).

as dominant modes in memes have been taken into consideration. On this basis, the research suggested that COVID-19 in Lithuanian memes is conceptualized in diverse ways. However, the key aspects depicted in the memes lead to the conception that coronavirus takes a long period of time during which people undergo both visual and inner changes by adapting their routine, adjusting to new daily situations and even by modifying their traditional and deeply-held worldviews. This leads to the conclusion that in Lithuanian memes COVID-19 is conceptualized as a long time span during which indisputable modifications in human social life develop; in professional activities COVID-19 is commonly associated with extensive changes and failure; while in the cultural and religious sectors COVID-19 is perceived as a radical modifier. As a result, all-encompassing conceptual metaphors COVID-19 IS A STRONG AND VICTORIOUS POWER and COVID-19 IS TRANSFORMATION can be inferred.

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