

## THE METAPHORICAL MODELING OF ANTHONY FAUCI IN AMERICAN MEDIA DISCOURSE

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### Abstract

In this paper, we analyze the American media discourse and metaphorical image of Anthony Fauci, prominent physician, immunologist, director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, and former chief medical advisor to President Joe Biden. Our analysis is interdisciplinary and is carried out at the interface of cognitive linguistics, media linguistics, political linguistics, discourse theory, and linguistics and cultural studies. We analyze the functions and intentions of the use of metaphors and how they shape the American linguistic picture of the world.

**Keywords:** metaphor, American media discourse, Anthony Fauci, cognitive linguistics, discourse theory, linguistic picture of the world.

### Introduction

Metaphor is undoubtedly one of the most powerful rhetorical devices, as it can carry not only information but also evaluative judgment associated with emotion which "*may be either positive or negative*" (Štefančík, 2022, p.127). An appropriate and thoughtful choice of metaphors plays a key role in influencing the value and emotional system of the addressee. Thus, contemporary cognitive metaphorology considers metaphor not only as a means of embellishing speech but also as a form of thinking and constructing the surrounding world.

As Thagard points out, "*intellectual origins of cognitive linguistics date back to the mid-1950s when researchers in several fields began to develop theories of mind based on complex representations and computational procedures. Its organizational origins are in the mid-1970s when the Cognitive Science Society was formed and the journal Cognitive Science began*" (Thagard, 2000, p. 2). A shift in the perception of metaphor took place in Ortony's volume *Metaphor and thought* (1979), which started to view metaphors not only as a rhetorical and ornamental linguistic device but as a matter of thought. This publication set the stage for Lakoff and Johnson's revolutionary work *Metaphors We Live By* (1980) (Steen, 2011, pp. 26 – 27).

The study of metaphor is complex because as Steen states, "*metaphor is not just a matter of language and thought, but also of communication; and metaphor cannot just be approached from a linguistic (or more generally, semiotic) as well as a cognitive (or more adequately, psychological) perspective, but it also demands a social approach*" (Steen, 2011, p. 27). The cognitive revolution, therefore, emphasized an interdisciplinary approach that studied mind and intelligence, encompassing philosophy, psychology, artificial intelligence, neuroscience, linguistics, anthropology, etc.

### Precedent phenomena and their metaphorical potential

Metaphor as a stylistic device used in an indirect sense provides an opportunity to deepen the content of media texts by involving memorable, evaluative, often culture-specific images (Dobrosklonskaya, 2014, p. 138). These may be precedent phenomena that contain enormous metaphorical potential and at the same time are peculiar cultural codes of particular linguistic complexes. Precedent phenomena may be divided into precedent texts, precedent expressions, and precedent names. It is primarily precedent nouns that may be considered as the core of the category of precedence since they actively update precedent texts, utterances, and situations. By precedent names, we mean names of authors and characters, names of literary works, literary toponyms, and situational nominalizations. Precedent names are used for categorization,

conceptualization, and evaluation in the construction of the national linguistic picture of the world, forming a national system of values and anti-values, which to some extent influence the behavior of representatives of the linguocultural community (Nakhimova, 2007, p. 143).

The theory of precedence is related to the theory of intertextuality, which E. A. Nachimova sees as "*a feature of mass culture, advertising, mass media, cinema, and other performing arts. Not only speech but also non-verbal components (music, sculpture, drawing, etc.) are taken into account*" (Nakhimova, 2007, p. 40). Linguists use various terms in this connection, such as intertextuality, precedent phenomenon, historical (social, political) or literary (theatrical) metaphor, textual reminiscence, logoevisteme, element of vertical context, antonomasia and allusion as a kind of rhetorical tropes and figures, or proper noun, which functions as a common noun. The aforementioned terms are not completely identical in content, as they express different views on the belonging of phenomena to mental, cultural, or other spheres and are used in different scientific paradigms (Nakhimova, 2007, pp. 8 – 9). The study of the processes of metaphorical modeling using precedent phenomena (mostly nouns) is nowadays extremely popular in many scientific disciplines and often has an interdisciplinary character, being implemented mainly in cognitive linguistics, linguoculturology, stylistics, media linguistics, political linguistics, metaphorology, semiotics, etc.

### **Media discourse**

Since this paper explores the metaphorical picture of Anthony Fauci in contemporary American media, it is necessary to make a distinction between the concepts of text and discourse. N. Fairclough defines text not as a process but as a product of textual production. He uses the term *discourse* to refer to "*the whole process of social interaction of which text is just a part. This process includes in addition to the text the process of production, of which the text is a product, and the process of interpretation, for which the text is a resource. Text analysis is correspondingly only a part of discourse analysis*" (Fairclough, 24).

Media discourse is a group of processes and products of speech activity in the media. It is a combination of the linguistic and cultural statuses of a society because it reflects the linguistic and cultural statuses of a society. Discourse analysis is an interdisciplinary field of research because it lies at the intersection of linguistics, sociology, political science, psychology, ethnography, semiotics, stylistics, philosophy, cognitive linguistics, and other humanities and social sciences. The analysis of media discourse is a priority area of media linguistics, which intersects the research of linguists, journalists, media communication specialists, discourse analysts, etc.

Currently (among many others), the two most common ways of approaching the definition of media discourse may be identified. According to the first approach, media discourse is a specific type of speech activity that is characteristic exclusively of the field of mass media information. In this sense, it is necessary to distinguish between the media discourse and other independent types of discourse, such as political, religious, scientific, etc. The differences between them are determined by changes in different parameters of discourse – different linguistic practices, and communicative situations of their implementation, although the statements of these discourses may refer to a common thematic field. According to the second approach, media discourse is conceived as any kind of discourse, carried out in the field of mass communication, produced by the media. Therefore, we may talk about political, religious, pedagogical, and other media discourses, which suggests that for their implementation these types of institutional discourses presuppose a relatively stable set of practices for the production, translation, and interpretation of media information. In our paper, we draw predominantly on the second way of perceiving and analyzing media discourse.

## Methodology

This paper analyzes the metaphorical image of Anthony Fauci in American electronic media published from 2019 to the present. The methods applied in this paper are namely systematic, descriptive, and content-based (based on quantitative data exploration). This paper aims to obtain the most comprehensive metaphorical picture of Anthony Fauci in the American linguocultural space.

We draw on contextual analysis to determine the specifics of how metaphors function; pragmatic analysis serves to describe the intentions of the metaphorical process and the semantic background of particular metaphorical models. We also use quantitative analysis, which is accompanied by the interpretation of quantitative data, and a discourse approach, which allows us to trace the interrelationships between linguistic and extra-linguistic aspects of a media text. The aim is to reveal the use of metaphor as a tool of social and political power. We apply the axiological approach, which is closely related to the conceptual approach and its main task is to understand the inner world of linguistic (discourse) personality, human values, and society based on language.

## Metaphorical Modeling of Anthony Fauci in American Media Discourse

Anthony Fauci is a prominent American physician, immunologist, director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, and former chief medical advisor to the President. Fauci has advised 7 presidents and has been in public service for more than 50 years. He announced his resignation in August 2022 and left his post in December 2022. Anthony Fauci played an important role during the coronavirus pandemic.

Fauci was a national phenomenon during the pandemic outbreak when the vaccine even came to be colloquially referred to as *Fauci Ouchie*. Similarly, the so-called *Fauci Effect* began to be discussed in the US, with a surge in applications to medical schools in 2020 thanks to Fauci's handling of the coronavirus. The admiration for Fauci has also been reflected in products – various items with the slogan *In Fauci We Trust* have appeared on the market, as well as candles, the so-called *Dr. Anthony Fauci Prayer Candle*. A Republican politician from Florida Governor Ron De Santis, who has opposed lockdowns and strict pandemic measures, started selling drink koozies and T-shirts with the text *Don't Fauci My Florida*. Thus, Fauci's impact on society has been extremely pronounced, which is why we find the analysis of the metaphorical image of Fauci in the American media interesting in terms of a deeper understanding of the American picture of the world.

In the US media, the precedent name we have encountered concerning Fauci is *Rasputin*: *For his critics, Anthony Fauci cemented his status as the **Rasputin** of public health with his Senate testimony this week* (www.politico.com). Rasputin was a religious advisor at the court of Nicholas II who was suspected of exerting undue political influence on the tsar. The *Rasputin* in this case is Anthony Fauci, who had a great influence on US President Joe Biden. This image aims to evoke negative associations in relation to Fauci.

Fauci is often referred to as the contemporary *Galileo Galilei*: *Is Anthony Fauci today's Galileo Galilei, the champion of science?* (www.statnews.com) / *Truth is **heresy** to Donald Trump, which makes Dr. Anthony Fauci our Galileo* (www.eu.azcentral.com) / *From Galileo To Dr. Fauci: The History Of Science Denial And Conspiracies* (www.npr.org). Galileo Galilei came into conflict with the Pope in the 17th century over his claim that the sun and not the earth was the center of our solar system, which was contrary to Church doctrine. Galileo was accused of heresy and his works were banned. According to some American media, A. Fauci faced the same attacks, especially from the ranks of Donald Trump. The reference to Fauci as a contemporary *Galileo*, therefore, paints a positive image of Fauci as a person defending science, and at the same time it puts the Trump administration in a bad light.

A similar metaphor is *flat-earth time* which expresses the attitude of people who distrust science or refuse to accept long-established information: *It's **flat-earth time**. Nothing makes*

sense. This is a guy who tries to let science dictate what he says and does (www.washingtonpost.com). This metaphor also has a negative pragmatic potential in relation to opponents of science-based information. As a result of frequent attacks, the media often label Fauci a martyr: *But he did manage to criticize President Trump, aggrandize himself as a martyr, say that Florida "doesn't want to get vaccinated"* (www.nationalreview.com). Other powerful images may also be seen in the following excerpt: *Apart from the conspiracy-crazed Trump hardcore eager to burn him at the stake, Dr. Anthony Fauci generally basks in the admiration of a frightened public desperate for truthful leadership. For liberals, in particular, he personifies science in shining armor battling the mad dragon in the White House. Trump supporters see Fauci as a heretic they would like to burn at the stake; liberals, on the other hand, see him as a hero battling evil in the White House* (www.thenation.com).

Another metaphorical image that relies on the historical knowledge of the addressee is: *If Trump was Attila, he would be Pope Leo and save Rome* (www.thenation.com). To an addressee who is unfamiliar with the historical figures in question, the precedent names Attila and Pope Leo may seem uninteresting. Attila the Hun in 452 wanted to attack Rome with his army. Pope Leo decided to meet with him to protect Rome. At the end of the meeting, Attila and his army left without ravaging the city. According to the author, Fauci resembles the very Pope who is trying to save the US from Attila who is represented by Donald Trump.

Initially, Trump and Fauci were on good terms, but gradually their views on the pandemic began to diverge and President Trump became critical of Fauci. In the context of the Trump-Fauci disagreement, the metaphor of the *punching bag* is used frequently. It aims to portray Fauci as the victim of Trump and right-wing media: *Fauci is Trump's scapegoat for all of that stumbling and the favorite punching bag of arrogant 5'9" Trump wannabes because it thrills the MAGA supporters* (www.salon.com) / *Fauci has become a frequent punching bag among right-wing media and politicians* (www.businessinsider.com) / *Had someone suggested to me that a person like Anthony Fauci would become a right-wing punching bag before I'd lived through the past six years, I wouldn't have believed it. Fauci is a hero doctor* (www.abovethelaw.com). In the aforementioned examples, we may observe a positive attitude towards Dr. Fauci.

In the fragment, *He is hero and tormentor. Truth-teller and unreliable narrator. We want to kill the messenger, ignore his message and bury the horse he rode in on* (www.washingtonpost.com), Dr. Fauci is metaphorized as a *messenger* who had to deliver unpopular messages during the pandemic that were contrary to the rhetoric of the ruling establishment which sought to discredit him. The author of the given excerpt attempts to create a positive image of Dr. Fauci.

The portrayal of Fauci as a *James Bond villain* is also creative and compelling: *So how did it come to pass that Republicans now see him as some kind of James Bond villain? Nothing could be more unlikely* (www.salon.com). The given image is particularly striking to recipients who are familiar with James Bond movies. The *James Bond villain* is usually a charismatic, sinister mastermind who seeks to take control of the world. According to the author of the excerpt, Republicans see similarities between the *James Bond villain* and Dr. Fauci.

A considerable amount of irony may also be observed in the fragment: *It tells you that Tony Fauci is no longer a scientist, assuming he ever was one. Tony Fauci is a figure of religious veneration. He is Jesus for people who don't believe in God. The man now believes he's a deity accountable to no one* (foxnews.com). The author of the aforementioned metaphors is Tucker Carlson, host of the TV show *Tucker Carlson Tonight*, which airs on the *Fox News Channel*. Carlson is known for his negative attitude towards mandatory vaccination, and thus towards Dr. Fauci himself, as reflected in the following excerpts: *He's Jesus with better shoes. The muzzling. He was only on MSNBC six times this week, you can't stop this man! He's god / At the time, Fauci was studying to become a doctor, not the Pope. Little could he have known back in 1958 that public health would become America's reigning religion, and he, its high priest / What you're seeing here is Washington's new religion – Fauci-ism / There it was, the third-person self-*

reference. **Fidel Castro** in English. *But that wasn't a slip of the tongue. Tony Fauci is himself a devout member of the church of Tony Fauci. Look at a still photo from Tony Fauci's home office, in the back, on the bookshelf. There are Tony Fauci prayer candles, prominently displayed inside Tony Fauci's home. Toni Fauci isn't just the high priest of Fauci-ism. He's also a true believer himself* (www.foxnews.com). Conservative media often metaphorize Fauci as a god, a religious leader, a parish priest, or a pope. Such metaphors are loaded with a distinctly negative pragmatic potential. Similarly, Tucker Carlson most often portrays Fauci as the leader of a religion, a so-called *Fauci-ism*, thereby pointing to Fauci's self-love and his succumbing to the cult of his personality. Among other things, Carlson regards Fauci as a criminal and often accuses him of creating COVID-19. Tucker Carlson refers to Fauci as a dictator by using the precedent name *Mussolini: After two years of non-stop media adulation, Tony Fauci has morphed into an even shorter version of Benito Mussolini*" (www.foxnews.com). Carlson not only disputes Fauci's decisions but also mocks his stature, referring to him as *an even tinier version of the Dalai Lama and a Stalinist midget* (www.foxnews.com).

Former Fox News anchor Lara Logan was harshly criticized for referring to Fauci as *Joseph Mengele: And so in that moment, what you see on Dr Fauci, this is what people say to me, that he doesn't represent science to them. He represents Josef Mengele, Dr Josef Mengele, the Nazi doctor who did experiments on Jews during the second world war and in the concentration camps, and I am talking about people all across the world are saying this* (www.washingtonpost.com). This powerful image sparked outrage and condemnation from the American media and the public. Republicans as well try to disparage Fauci's work during the pandemic by labeling his decisions as *Frankenstein experiments: Leading Republicans predictably responded by promising to "hold him accountable" for the pandemic. They threatened to send him to prison for "his Frankenstein experiments"* (www.salon.com).

The author of the following excerpt accuses Fauci of narcissism: *SCIENCE IS REAL isn't a statement expressing the literal existence of science; it's yard-sign catechism, the shriek of a true believer. Given that half the nation wants to canonise him as the Patron Saint of Public Health, it was probably inevitable that Fauci would be ultimately unable to resist buying into his own hype* (www.unherd.com). Interesting metaphorical images may be found in the continuation of the aforementioned excerpt: *But while Fauci may be at fault for getting a bit too high on his own supply, he didn't appoint himself to this position; we did, when we decided to make him the Science Daddy without whose say-so we can never live normal lives again. We made science a civic religion, and we told Fauci he was the Pope. Unfortunately, he believed us* (www.unherd.com). The author does not blame only Dr. Fauci, but the entire society that elected him to that position. Fauci has become a symbol of science that people must trust unconditionally. The author of the excerpt disagrees with this behavior.

The following passage also creates a negative and ironic effect: *Surely, Saint Fauci will be remembered as a latter-day prophet and worker of miracles whose tireless efforts were largely responsible for subduing the dreaded COVID-19 menace. No, he didn't make wine from water or even walk on it. That's too amateurish. His mission was to convince 330 million U.S. citizens that unless they wore a mask, closed their businesses, churches, and schools, stayed home from work, skipped granny's 83rd birthday party, invited a maximum of four people to Thanksgiving dinner, stayed one aisle over from the closest shopper at Walmart, washed their hands every 15 minutes and obediently stand in line to receive multiple vaccinations and boosters, then, and only then, might the country survive* (www.gilaherald.com). The author uses creative metaphors from the religion to make an impact on the addressee. He refers to Fauci as *a prophet* or *a saint* who can perform greater miracles than just *making wine from water* or *walking on water*. He aims to persuade Americans to adhere to pandemic precautions. The irony and the author's negative attitude towards Fauci are strongly perceptible. The same attitude is observed in the continuation of the excerpt: *It was almost an impossible assignment, but our diminutive Prometheus excelled at pilfering cures from Heaven for the benefit of man. He had liberated society before, and he*

could do it again. Yet, the same authorities requiring we acquiesce to their demands were often seen and photographed in public not complying with their own regulations. Eventually, all good things come to an end. Once Dr. Fauci's particular role was no longer relevant, he simply faded into near obscurity. Perhaps **he was put back into the Genie bottle** until the next health scare "crisis" (www.gilaherald.com). The author uses the mythological figure of *Prometheus*, who gave mankind a precious and useful tool – fire. By using the adjective *diminutive*, the author mocks the stature of Dr. Fauci. Simultaneously, the author points out that when Fauci *liberated society*, his role was over and he gradually fell into oblivion, which the author emphasizes with the metaphor of the *Genie bottle*. The author's use of various metaphors makes the text both more interesting and compelling.

Dr. Fauci frequently faces accusations from the media and Republican politicians of collaborating with pharmaceutical companies: *The Drugfather. Like Sollozzo in "The Godfather," Anthony Fauci's business is drugs. The NIAID boss bags royalties from drug manufacturers but doesn't tell the patients who participate in his risky drug trials* (www.independent.org). The author of the given excerpt attempts to evoke a negative image of Fauci by portraying him as a *drugfather* who does not shy away from subjecting the population to experiments for the sake of profit, by which the author alludes to the vaccination against COVID-19.

One of Dr. Fauci's most vocal critics is Peter Navarro, an economist and the director of the National Trade Council throughout the Trump administration. The liberal media consider him a conspirator who spreads fake news on right-wing news channels. Navarro has repeatedly accused Fauci of creating the coronavirus and called him *the godfather of the pandemic: Navarro pointed to the image behind him and said: "Tony Fauci, if that [COVID] came from that lab, is the godfather of this pandemic and he has the blood of over 4 million people on his hands"* (www.newsweek.com). Rand Paul, U.S. Senator from Kentucky, sees a parallel between the *mafia don* and Dr. Fauci: *"This is more like what you'd see from a mafia don than from a government bureaucrat or scientist. If you disagree with him, they come down on you hard, and they try to suppress anybody with a different opinion"* (www.foxnews.com). The metaphors aim to portray Fauci as a leader of a criminal organization.

## Conclusion

Based on the analyzed metaphors, we may conclude that the Democratic-oriented media portray A. Fauci positively, using metaphors such as *hero*, *Galileo Galilei*, or *Prometheus*. Fauci symbolizes truth and science, and the metaphors such as *martyr* and *punching bag* are used to evoke trust and a positive attitude towards Fauci. In contrast, the Trump administration is portrayed in a reactionary way. Fauci is also metaphorized as a *saint* who suffers for his *faith* and whose enemies would like to declare him a *heretic* and *burn him at the stake*.

On the contrary, Anthony Fauci is portrayed negatively by the right-wing media. The authors of the analyzed excerpts seek to discredit Fauci, and therefore often refer to him as a *cult leader*, *a god*, *a mafia don*, or *a dictator* who uncompromisingly tries to promote the interests of pharmaceutical companies and who does not shy away from carrying out experiments on the population for the sake of profit. Fauci's opponents not only question his handling of the pandemic but often resort to images ridiculing his appearance, precisely his shorter stature (*diminutive Prometheus* or *the Stalinist midget*). The analyzed images have a strongly negative pragmatic potential, they are extremely impressive and therefore aim to induce distrust of Fauci, fear, and resistance to the vaccine and pandemic measures.

Our analysis shows that the media and politicians aim to engage the addressee with the help of strong metaphorical images. The more compelling the images they use, the more likely they are to influence the mindset of the population. By analyzing the metaphorical modeling of Dr. Fauci, we may better understand the linguistic picture of the world of Americans in the context

of the pandemic measures during Covid-19 as well as the political rivalry between the Republicans and the Democrats.

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