# The analysis of intimidation strategies in media discourse about Covid-19

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**ABSTRACT:** *With the spread of Covid-19 from China worldwide, the virus has been one of the majorly debated issues by journalists, politicians, health authorities and numerous organizations. While discussing Covid-19, Covid-19 discourse, in particular media discourse about Covid-19 creates a dichotomy between the group who is vulnerable to virus exposure and the virus through victimization of the former. Furthermore, discourse about Covid-19 employs various intimidation strategies in the dichotomization of the group and the virus. In order to explain the construal of dichotomous distance between the virus and the group, who is vulnerable to virus exposure and how intimidation strategies participate in the characterization of the virus, we adopted critical discourse analytic approach, proximization theory, which contributes to the understanding of narrowing of distance between peripheral virus entity and the group in the form of home entity through the identification of spatial and temporal lexico-grammatical markers. According to the results, intimidating elements, adopted by media discourse about Covid-19, such as negative metaphorization, modality markers, historical flashbacks, frequent emphasis on preemptive action against Covid-19, characterize the virus intrusion in the form of peripheral entity as negatively within spatio-temporal dichotomy and build credible writer or speaker who use these strategies as a means of convincing people in order to legitimate claims about the danger of Covid-19 and the need for preparedness against it.*

**KEY WORDS:** Covid-19 discourse, media discourse about Covid-19, intimidation, intimidating dichotomization

## INTRODUCTION

In December 2019, scientists found a new coronavirus in Wuhan, China which was supposed to be animal-born. Covid-19 is caused by severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 which belongs to the family of viruses, Coronaviridae. Since the emergence of the virus from China in December 2019, Covid-19 has spread fast around the world within three months. After the fast globalization of the virus, The World Health Organization (2020) declared Covid-19 to be "Global Public Health Emergency" on January 30.

Since the outbreak of the novel coronavirus, there has been substantial coverage of Covid-19 in media dsicourse. In that respect, international attention is paid to the virus due to the sudden spread of the virus from China to the world and its high transmissibility, leading to an increasing number of infections. In order to warn people about higher infection rates, governments hold daily press briefings. In addition, coronavirus content is leading the international media. The virus has received massive news coverage. The massive coverage of the virus in news discourse is the indicator of it to be a newsworthy topic. Generally, news media prefers to frequently cover the events which are considered dangerous, catastrophic or disastrous. In that sense, news media gives negative depiction of the catastrophic event. Bell (1991) characterized negativity as "the basic news value" (p.156). In other words, it is one of the basic criteria that makes a topic newsworthy. The preference for negativity doesn't only intend to inform the audience about the dangerous event but also to get more public attention since people find negative news more exciting and important (Shoemaker & Cohen, 2012). Because Covid-19 is generally characterized as disastrous negative event, news media selects it as a worthy topic to cover. In that way, Covid-19 reflects the negativity criterion of news values. The virus as a newsworthy item has become one of the discussed topics in the media.

When informing on coronavirus and discussing different topics related to the virus, media discourse about Covid-19 sets a distance between the virus and the group who has been exposed to the virus or vulnerable to virus exposure by signaling that the virus doesn't belong in the group. In other words, it creates a dichotomy between the virus and the group through depicting the virus exposure as negatively consequential to in-group. In that way, the in-group becomes the victim of virus exposure since the construction of oppositions between the victimized group and the virus aims to present virus's movement as threatening to the former. As a result, the virus-group distinction is achieved through negative virus presentation. The dichotomous vision of the virus and the group presents the former in a bad light. Furthermore, to reinforce the dichotomous representation of the virus and the group, media discourse about Covid-19 discourse adopt various intimidation strategies. Although several studies investigated intimidating elements in discourse about Covid-19, the use of intimidation in the negative characterization of the virus within the dichotomous construal needs further research. Taken this into consideration, we hypothesise that media discourse about the virus uses intimidation strategies to portray Covid-19 negatively in the dichotomous construal of the virus and the group who has been exposed to the virus or vulnerable to virus exposure. We claim that media discourse about Covid-19 uses intimidation strategies to signal the potentiality of growing threat emerged from the virus movement by depicting its movement as negatively consequential to the victimized group. To achieve this intimidating goal, various intimidating strategies have been adopted. Our aim is mainly to identify these intimidating discursive strategies. In that sense, we attempt to answer the following questions:

- What roles do the intimidation strategies have in characterization of virus in the dichotomous construal of the group who has been exposed to the virus or vulnerable to virus exposure and the virus?
- What are the main purposes for characterizing the virus as negative by setting a distance between the virus and in-group?

As stated above, compared to previous research studies which mainly focus on intimidation in Covid-19 discourse, the findings of this study give more systematic classification of various intimidation strategies which contribute to the negative portrayal of the virus within dichotomous construal of the virus and the group who is vulnerable to Covid-19. In that sense, the study adopts interdisciplinary approach for not only investigating intimidation but also how intimidation plays a role in the polarization of alien virus/home group entities. The findings also help to reveal the strategic nature media discourse about Covid-19, which intends to construct intimidating effect through various discursive strategies. Finally, the study provides critical understanding of the main purposes of producing such intimidating effect by looking at broad social, economic, political contexts.

**LITERATURE REVIEW**

Many studies have defined intimidating act as an intention to warn about threatening future action. For example, according to Blake et al. (2017), intimidation is illocutionary commissive act since it produces warning effect which prepares the audience to respond for threatful future action. As a result, the intimidating effect informs the addressee that "a threatened future action is detrimental to the receiver" (Salgueiro, 2009, p.217). In a similar way, Weigand (2010) stated that if you are warning about a particular behavior, you feel that is dangerous and is not recommended in certain circumstances.

In discourse, particularly in media discourse, intimidating act doesn't only express warning but also other intentions such as persuasion, manipulation, legitimization, construal of othering. Several studies analyzed how media discourse frequently use intimidation to realize such intentions. In their study, Arcimaviciene & Baglama (2018) investigated the use of metaphors as intimidating delegitimizing tool to divide between us as "good" and migrants as "bad" in media discourse. Kassayae et al. (2016) examined discriminative media discourse which creates a dichotomy between Muslims and "victimized" groups through intimidating portraying of the former. Altheide (2009) studied how media discourse uses fear to legitimate the necessity to take strong action against "Columbine school shooting" as an act of terrorism. The realization of such intentions also reveals the influential power of media discourse. In other words, it shows how media influences opinions. The opinion-shaping power of media discourse also leads many scholars to adopt constructivist approaches which

emphasize the reality-constitutive ability of media. In other words, media doesn't only describe reality but uses its influential power to persuade the audience to believe the reality that it constructs. Molotch & Lester (1974) saw media "as reflecting not a world out there, but the practices of those having the power to determine the experience of others" (p.111). Ionescu (2012) defined media as the one of the various agents that construct reality which includes "both individual and mass media systems, corresponding to the media-cultural constructivism current" (p.191). According to Yan (2019), the construction of reality by the media entails not only the choice of events or topics to be covered, but also how to define and interpret these events or topics. In other words, media uses various strategies which also include extra-discursive factors in constructing the reality (Lau, 2012).

The media portrayal of the virus/pandemic illustrates this intention of media discourse. In order to depict the virus as dangerous, media adopts intimidation strategy and negativity as extra-discursive factor. In that way, media is influencing opinions through persuading the audience that the virus is a threat to the public. By influencing public opinion via intimidation, media constructs the reality of threat in the form of the virus. Several studies examined the use of intimidation in the depiction of Swine flu end Ebola viruses in media discourse. In their study of Norwegian print news coverage of the 2009 pandemic, Bjorkdahl & Carlsen (2017) found that fear is the most notable aspect of the coverage. Doudaki's (2011) analysis of news about swine flu in Greece and Cyprus also focused on the use of fear in the portrayal of the swine flu pandemic since she stated that media frequently presents swine flu as a threat to the people's lives. In the analysis of local newspapers in West Africa, Halsey (2016) found the frequent use of fearsome photos, horror images and sensationalist headlines in the portrayal of Ebola virus.

Intimidation strategy is also dominant in the portrayal of Covid-19 in media discourse. In Sun's (2021) study of the major news stories, documentaries, opinions, and analyzes published in the Australian media, one of the major findings is the dominance of fear narratives about Covid-19 and racism-singed sensationalism in the tabloid media and on shock-jock radio. The investigation of Covid-19 language of fear and phobia in Pakistani newspapers' political cartoons by Aazam et al. (2020) revealed that the political cartoons of coronavirus attempt to convey Covid-19 related messages to its audience through depicting the severe downfall of the economy, the fear of coronavirus, the failure to control the pandemic. While analyzing Twitter users Covid-19 discourse, Xue, Chen J., et al. (2020) found that fear for the unknown nature of Covid-19 and fear for the uncertainty about Covid-19 consist of almost 50 % of the Tweets. Wicke & Bolognesi (2020) analyzed the fear producing effect of metaphors in the analysis of corpus of tweets about Covid-19 in which they stated that the war frame is most frequently used to talk about Covid-19 since discourse around Covid-19 often include words such as "fighting", "combat", "battle", and "fight" to refer to Covid-19. Chaiuk & Dunaievski (2020) discovered sensational language in the portrayal of Covid-19 in various British newspapers. The

British media is filled with alarming phrases that use the vocabulary of medical and military discourse in the portrayal of pandemic.

Several studies investigated the effects of the use of intimidation in the presentation of coronavirus pandemic on media audience. The studies show how media portrayal constructs public fear through intimidation. According to Manzoor & Safdar (2020), the presentation of Covid-19 in media cultivate fear especially among upper-class and middle-class people since they are the heavy users of media. Mertens et al. (2020) assumed that the outbreak of coronavirus is strongly correlated with increased levels of fear. In that sense, it was important to understand what exactly leads to increased levels of fear. Taken this into consideration, threat information and media exposure were included as one of the predictors of elevated levels of fear. According to Singer (2020), Covid-19 related hysteria is the outcome of exaggerated media portrayal of disease. Influenced by media, even people who have only a slight cough rush into the hospitals and demand to be hospitalized immediately.

## METHODS

### Corpus

The study investigates the patterns of intimidation tactics in media discourse about the virus. We claim that media discourse, framing Covid-19, generates fear through persuasive intimidation strategies. Media exploits its power as a control mechanism. The power is also associated with authoritative status of media to make decisions on how to present and interpret events. The manipulative and persuasive influence of media can shape attitudes, opinions, ideologies. Taken this into consideration, the study aims to identify discourse structures adopted by media discourse in the intimidating portrayal of Covid-19.

The sample source includes articles (news articles, opinions, headlines, analyzes) taken from British and American news and media websites (Guardian, BBC news, Time, CNN, Newsweek) and transcripts of Covid-19 press briefings and press conferences held by WHO, the former president of United States of America Donald Trump and the current Prime Minister of United Kingdom Boris Johnson between March-December 2020. We adopted purposive qualitative sampling by selecting the samples intentionally depending on whether they possess intimidating nature or not. After the identification of research topic and questions, the above-mentioned sample source was investigated in order to purposively select articles and transcripts which carry the elements of intimidation. The articles and transcripts, which didn't meet the purpose of the study, were rejected. The selected articles and transcripts were further analyzed to collect specific samples with the intimidating elements.

After careful examination of the research material including 42 articles and 23 transcripts, samples containing intimidating elements were determined. Overall, we collected 77 samples for the analysis of intimidation in the dichotomous construal between the virus and the group that is vulnerable to virus

exposure. The collected samples were inserted into various tables in a way that each table represents one intimidation strategy adopted by Covid-19 discourse.

**Model of analysis**

For the analysis of these intimidation strategies, proximization theory has been chosen. Proximization theory reflects the diverse nature of Critical Discourse Studies in a way that though the approach is mainly critical discourse analytic, it also combines "insights from pragmatics, cognitive linguistics, text linguistics and several non-linguistic theories within social and political sciences" (Cap, 2017, xi). According to Cap (2013), "proximization is a discursive strategy of presenting physically and temporally distant events and states of affairs (including "distant", i.e. adversarial, ideological mind-sets) as directly, increasingly and negatively consequential to the speaker and her addressee" (p.3). Proximization analyzes through generating fear how Self (home-group) strategically portrays Other (out-group) as threat by warning about narrowing distance between Self and Other entity within discourse space. "The threat comes from DS-peripheral entities, referred to as outside-deictic-centre (ODCs) entities, which are conceptualized to be crossing the Space to invade the inside-deictic-centre (IDC) entities, the speaker and her addressee" (Cap, 2017, p.16).

The threat comes from ODC alien entities possesses spatio-temporal as well as ideological nature, which means that proximization can be considered in three aspects. Spatial proximity is a forced construction of the alien ODC entities physically interfering with the home IDC entities. Temporal proximization creates fear through alarming the dangerous effects of ODC intrusion upon IDC entities within real time and envisaged time frames. Axiological proximization constructs polarization by depicting peripheral ODC values as negative and home values in positive light. In SPT model, the cognitive categories of space, time and value are represented by a number of lexico-grammatical items which mark a dichotomy between deictic center and deictic periphery. In other words, the representation of distance is presented through deictic markers. In that sense, in order to distant peripheral entities from deictic center and to introduce the negative characterization and destructive consequences of the former, spatial proximization framework includes the following deictic items:

> Noun phrases conceptualized as elements of the deictic center (IDCs), noun phrases conceptualized as elements outside the deictic center (ODCs), verb phrases (VPs) of motion and directionality conceptualized together as indicators of movement of ODCs towards the deictic center and vice versa, verb phrases of action conceptualized as indicators of contact between ODCs and IDCs, noun phrases expressing abstract notions conceptualized as anticipations of potential contact between ODCs and IDCs, noun phrases expressing abstract notions conceptualized as effects of actual contact between ODCs and IDCs. (Cap, 2006, p.60)

**Procedure**

Take Cap's classification of spatial, temporal, axiological frames into consideration, we decided to find deictic markers in the selected data, in particular by focusing on spatio-temporal markers. After the identification of various intimidation strategies, we analyzed data in each table according to spatial proximization framework. In other words, spatial proximization markers were selected through the close examination of data collected from research material. Spatial proximization deictic markers create a dichotomy between the virus and the group, who exposed to virus intrusion, within discourse space. Regarding to this, the virus represents outside deictic center that attempts to pass discourse space and the group, located in the deictic center, is defined as inside deictic center. In that way, Covid-19 discourse creates a geographical distance between Self-group and the virus in the form of Other-group. Spatial proximization framework characterizes the virus's encroachment to IDC entities as destructive. In other words, ODC always represents the negative values and its impact upon IDC is generally characterized as threatening. The positioning of virus and the group, exposed to virus attack, in the form of peripheral and central entities leads to gradual narrowing of distance in the discourse space since peripheral entity attempts to invade IDC territory.

After the identification of spatial proximization framework, the study also examined temporal proximization framework markers in the selected data. In particular, it attempted to explain in what ways temporal proximization framework signals the virus's intrusion into deictic center. In other words, we aimed to clarify how the relationship between outside deictic center and inside deictic center is presented within past, present, future frames.

**RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

The analysis of selected data shows that media discourse about Covid-19 adopts various intimidation strategies, which include negative metaphorization, the comparison of the virus with other historical events, low and high modality markers, frequent emphasis on the necessity of preemptive action against the virus intrusion, to give negative characterization of the virus in spatial-temporal dichotomous construal of Covid-19 in the form of ODC and IDC entities.

Furthermore, we emphasized that the data was also analyzed for the identification of spatial-temporal deictic markers. The identification of lexico-grammatical deictic markers sets the opposition between ODC and IDC entities by signaling the movement of ODC towards IDC space and intimidation strategies depict the movement of ODC as negatively consequential to IDC. In that regard, fear of the remote is achieved through intimidating elements bound up with spatio-temporal proximization framework.

As noted above, one of the intimidation strategies is the negative metaphorization of the virus. We observe the frequent framing of the virus as "the enemy" through conceptual metaphor "Disease is an enemy". By portraying the virus as "invisible enemy", "public enemy", "invader", "monster" with the spatial deictic markers, the speaker alarms that the alien entity is intruding Discourse space and threatens IDC. In that sense, spatial proximization uses metaphorization to characterize virus intrusion negatively.

| Table 1. Spatial proximization markers in the selected data | |
|---|---|
| They are among the greatest victims of coronavirus (CNN) | They, the greatest victims of coronavirus |
| This virus is public enemy number one (WHO) | This virus, public enemy number one |
| unknown disease which threatened to tear through its population (BBC news) | An unknown disease, threatened to tear through IDC, its population |

The use of conceptual metaphor "The bad situations are locations" also intends to warn that Covid-19 has already entered deictic center. Metaphorical noun phrases "great national trial", "great national struggle", "coronavirus disaster", which represent the elements of ODC, indicate the negative characterization of the virus in spatial proximization framework. Moreover, this negative characterization alarms that the deictic center has already been surrounded by the virus attack.

| Table 2. Spatial proximization markers in the selected data | |
|---|---|
| Our country is in the midst of a great national trial, unlike any we have ever faced before (Trump) | Our country, a great national trial, we |
| Britain is in the middle of a coronavirus disaster. (CNN) | Britain, coronavirus disaster |

The warning of the virus's successful intrusion into IDC is also attained by using another conceptual metaphor "Pandemic/Disease is a big/main natural force. In spatial proximization framework, the lexico-grammatical items of motion and directionality such as "spread", "surge" indicate the virus's dangerous movement towards IDC. The spatial deictic items such as "devastate", "upend" mark that the virus has already achieved its destructive goal through the negative impact on IDC. It shows that spatial proximization framework uses metaphorization as the intimidating tool to give dangerous characterization of the virus intrusion.

| Table 3. Spatial proximization markers in the selected data | |
|---|---|
| While COVID-19 has upended everyone's life, the novel coronavirus' impact on cancer patients is especially disruptive (Time) | COVID-19 has upended IDC,__the novel coronavirus' impact on cancer patients |
| What we do know is that despite quarantines and travel bans, the coronavirus has spread to every continent on the globe with the exception of Antarctica in just three months. (Guardian) | the coronavirus, has spread to every continent onthe globe, perfect predator, it, mostpeople, they |

Media discourse about Covid-19 also refers to the notion of death for intimidation purposes. In that sense, the characterization of Covid-19 is associated with the concept of death. Here we again observe the metaphorization of virus intrusion within IDC through conceptual metaphor "Disease is an enemy" by using spatial noun phrases "invisible killer", "deadly disease", "deadliest coronavirus outbreak", "ruthless disease". The characterization of the virus as "deadly", "killer" is also manifested in the metaphorical depiction of devastating consequences of the virus intrusion. This depiction involves the spatial verb phrases of action such as "cost IDC lives", "divide IDC", "turn IDC upside down", "pick IDC lives" "hit IDC" which mark the killer impact of ODC since it results in increased death tools in deictic center.

| Table 4. Spatial proximization markers in the selected data | |
|---|---|
| COVID-19 is dividing the country in many dangerous – even deadly – ways and now (Time) | COVID-19, the country, is dividing IDC |
| We're seeing the devastating impact of this invisible killer. (Boris Johnson) | We, the devastating impact of this invisible killer |

Another intimidation strategy is the comparison of Covid-19 with other historical events. In that respect, the historical flashbacks, analogy serve the function of intimidation. Through flashbacks the speaker and the writer use analogy to compare the threat levels of Covid 19 with other historical events such as 9/11 attacks, 2009 flu pandemic, 2007-2008 global financial crisis and portray the disease even more deadly than them. Using past analogy also aims to warn about the future catastrophic consequences of Covid-19 disease. In that sense, intimidating historical flashbacks also possess temporal nature since it uses other real time (RT) historical events to construe future envisaged actions of ODC intrusion.

| Table 5. Spatial proximization markers in the selected data | |
|---|---|
| Imagine a death toll equal to the 9/11 attacks, times 50. That's what the US suffered with Covid-19 (CNN) | Us, Covid-19 |
| We know that COVID-19 spreads fast, and we know that it's deadly, 10 times deadlier than the 2009 flu pandemic (WHO) | Covid 19, spreads, it |

High and low modality markers are other intimidation tools, identified in the analysis of the selected data. In other words, the high and low degree of predictability of the consequences of devastating impact of the virus, passing into IDC discourse space, is achieved by using modality markers. In particular, low modality focuses on the lower degree of probability of impact of ODC upon IDC while high modality markers aim to predict greater probability of devastating effect of Covid-19 on IDC entities. In that sense, the former uses metaphorical verb phrases of action such as "could overrun", "could infect", "could cause", "could leave", "could kill", "could exacerbate" which involve modal auxiliaries as lexico-grammatical items of spatial proximization and high modality is expressed through spatial noun phrases denoting abstract concepts.

| Table 6. Spatial proximization markers in the selected data | |
|---|---|
| The moment of surge, or peak, is now upon us, even if our best scientists simply can't be sure how deep is the horror it will bring. (CNN) | The moment of surge, or peak, it, upon us, horror, will bring |
| A number of coalescing forces could cause dramatic increases in deaths in the coming months, although they are far from inevitable (Guardian) | A number of coalescing forces, could cause, dramaticincreases in deaths, |

Media discourse about the virus discourse intimidates listeners and speakers by emphasizing the necessity of immediate preemptive action against the virus intrusion. The lexico-grammatical items such as "international action", "disruptive action", "urgent action", "swift, decisive action", "control the virus", "to come together" are frequently used by speakers and writers for this emphasis. Again, spatial proximization deictic markers warn the audience both about the danger of virus and its fast intrusion within deictic center with lexical items such as "the spread of Covid-19", "the impact of Covid-19", "common enemy", "deadly virus" and the effects of this intrusion through spatial deictic items "devastation", "disastrous", "indescribable human toll". In that sense, spatial deictic markers produce warning effect and support the belief that preemptive action is necessary.

| Table 7. Spatial proximization markers in the selected data | |
|---|---|
| This is where the challenge comes: slowing its spread depends on taking disruptive action, particularly in light of the fact that not all carriers will experience easily identifiable symptoms (Guardian) | its spread, all carriers |

The analysis of temporal proximization framework in the selected data suggests that temporal deictic markers also contribute to the dichotomous construal between the virus and the victimized group. Temporal proximization signals that the virus's entrance within IDC space is the result of past actions of ODC. Since the virus is in the IDC space, the speaker and the writer visualize the destructive future actions of the virus. In that way, temporal proximization contributes to the dichotomous construal between the virus and the victimized group by warning about the imminent of threat. The warning effect is achieved by the combination of above-mentioned intimidation strategies and the items of temporal proximization framework such as present, present progressive, present perfect tense forms, time adverbs, and time adverbials. While present tense signals that the virus is in the deictic center, the use of present perfect tense alarms about both the virus's intrusion upon deictic center and the devastating consequences of this intrusion. Moreover, the present progressive form indicates that the virus's negative impact is still continuing. Overall, these three tense forms imply that if the virus expansion is not taken under control, it will lead to more destructive consequences in the future. In particular, the verb phrases with modal auxiliaries signal the possible continuation of present ODC impact into the future. In that sense, present and present progressive forms contribute to the construction of ODC envisaged actions.

As seen from above-mentioned examples, intimidation strategies, which portray the virus as dangerous through metaphorical constructions, analogy, low and high modality markers personify the virus as "Other group" in a way that "the Self group" within discourse space becomes the victim of virus attack. Taken this into consideration, personification of the virus is used as a tool for fear. In that sense, spatio-temporal dichotomy between ODC and IDC is achieved through negative personification of Covid-19 through intimidation strategies adopted by media discourse about the virus. In other words, media discourse about Covid-19 victimizes the Self-group through alarming that the virus in the form of ODC is "bad". This personification creates a dichotomy between "us" and "them", "victims" and "enemy" by producing the fear of "them" or "others". The dichotomous representation of Self and Other helps to determine what is good for Self-group and what is bad for Self-group. In that sense, Covid-19, representing Other-group, is depicted as bad for Self-group.

We realized that negative metaphorization, analogy, modality markers contribute to the specification of the negative features of the virus and potentiality of virus to destruct the society in various ways. In that way, the society is presented as insecure since there is high probability of deadly impact of virus spread on its members. The portrayal of the virus as widely spread "deadly enemy" imposes persuasive effect on the listener and reader. In other words, this effect intends to persuade the listener and reader to believe that the virus poses a threat. Moreover, to describe the virus as dangerous also aims to persuade the listener and the reader to believe that preemptive action is required to stop the virus invasion. In other words, media discourse about Covid-19 is warning the hearer and the reader to act alert against the virus by giving negative characterization of the virus through intimidation tactics. In that sense, persuasive goal aims to produce legitimating effect. In other words, intimidation strategies enhance credibility in order to legitimate claims about the dangerous nature of the virus and the necessity of preemptive action against virus intrusion. Media discourse aims to create credible speaker to legitimate the construction of oppositions between victims and the virus. To accomplish their goal and to achieve public acceptance of their claims, media elites strategically adopt intimidation strategies. As we seen, the legitimating effect is produced by using intimidation tactics in the form of various lexico-grammatical items and spatio-temporal deictic markers. These markers generate fear through portrayal of the virus as a threat which help to legitimate the interests of media elites. We explained that the use of linguistic and pragmatic tools creates a dichotomy between Self-group in the form of IDC and Other-group in the form of personified virus who is threatening IDC entities. In that sense, dichotomization is one of the ways to achieve the legitimization. The justification for legitimization is built on the basis of closeness and imminence of threat facing the IDC since dichotomization divides between ODC through personified portrayal of virus invasion in negative light and IDC as the victim of destructive encroachment of the virus.

It should be emphasized that the demonized portrayal of the virus through persuasive intimidation strategies is also triggered by socio-economic factors. In that sense, we should also understand the impact of Covid-19 on social, economic, political spheres of life. It is because media discourse about Covid-19 uses intimidating dichotomy to claim that the impact of the virus on socio-economic life is destructive. It also explains that discourse about Covid-19 takes socio-economic contexts as a base for its persuasive intimidating construction of the virus. As Bakir et al. (2018) stated "persuasive force is attained via communicative contexts in which threats and intimidation is in play and communicated threats acquire force from physical, social and economic contexts" (p.324).

Covid-19/pandemic has impact on several aspects of economy. The virus pandemic has negative effect on production and employment. Due to massive closures, many people have lost their jobs since the closures "do have a severe impact on the world economy and employment, and in particular the production of non-essential goods and services" (Walmsey et al. 2021, p.21). The loss of jobs and decreases in economic income are also dependent on several other factors. Not only closures but also

"social distancing, self-isolation and travel restrictions have led to a reduced workforce across all economic sectors and loss of jobs" (Bhattacharya, 2020, p.6).

The socio-economic consequences of the virus pandemic have also resulted in different bans and restrictions. Governments have implemented policies with the intend to control high infection rates and high transmissibility of Covid-19. As Nicola et al (2020) stated countries in the world have adopted several precautionary measures to control the epidemic's exponential growth, including social distance, banning gatherings, border closures, quarantine, social isolation, travel bans. In particular, in Western democracies, the fast spread of the virus triggered anti-democratic protective restrictions. In other words, governments don't only allocate funds to support businesses and communities hardest hit by the pandemic but also limit the citizens' movement and freedom of assembly.

The protective restrictions implemented against the virus pandemic cause problems for the western countries which are loyal to liberal values. Since the protective measures limit the certain constitutional freedoms, citizens might lose the trust in their liberal governments. Some even emphasize the authoritarian nature of these measures. These authoritarian policies implemented by the western governments are the indicator of the virus's ability to reshape the world politics.

The restrictions adopted by western societies and social, economic, political challenges due to pandemic result in the use of intimidating elements in the media discourse about the virus. Through generating fear, intimidation and intimidating personification of the virus in the dichotomous construal of peripheral-entity and home-entity prepare the societies for the authoritarian policies to stop the virus infection and the negative socio-economic, political impacts of the pandemic. In that sense, media doesn't only inform about the virus. Presenting the virus in a bad light and the home-entity as a victimized group also aims to show how we should behave against it. As we stated, intimidation expressed through language prepares the listeners and the readers for dangerous Covid-19 intrusion and Covid-19 restrictions. This shows the opinion-forming function and influential power of media. Generally, people have an access to Covid-19 news through media discourse. In that sense, media as a public discourse uses its persuasive and discursive power to affect the audience. It explains why different elite groups choose media to convey their goals. As Dijk (1998) stated elites can effectively disseminate their voices to the general public via media. Media discourse attains this power through language. Media images can influence the mind. Taken this into consideration, media uses its power to determine how to present the virus. After the fast spread of the virus throughout the world, Covid-19 has become the main object of media coverage. As mentioned above, intimidating elements are one of the main strategic tools to characterize virus infection. Media adopts intimidation tactics to warn consumers about threatful nature of the virus and its negatively consequential encroachment upon victimized Self-entity. Media raises awareness on the dangers of the virus and attempts to influence the audience's decisions. In other words, media uses intimidation to persuade the audience to accept

the claims about how dangerous the virus is and the necessity to act against this danger. Therefore, it frequently portrays the virus intrusion as threatful by naming it "enemy", "deadly", "killer". In that sense, media makes careful lexico-grammatical and rhetorical choices to reach its influential goal.

As we stated, the free choices to represent the virus in a particular way via language is associated with the persuasive goal to legitimate above-mentioned claims. It also shows that in western societies, the legitimacy claims are realized through consent language. In that sense, threatful and intimidating language is a tool for legitimizing the consent. Via various discursive strategies, media elites play skillfully to get consent to fulfill ideological goals and to present their ideology as the best alternative for problem solution. Moreover, through skillful manipulation, media elites convince the audience to believe that it is the audience who makes the decisions instead of them.

This also shows that power is not mainly practiced through physical intimidating forces in western societies. Power control is attained by influencing the minds with the help of consent language. As Fairclough (1995) emphasized in industrialized capitalist countries, we live in a time where power and authority are largely wielded by generating consent and not by force.

**Implications and applications**

We suggest some implications of current study for future research. Future studies can take the present study's adaptation of proximization theory in the analysis of polarized construal of negative virus entity and home entity in the media as a base for the further investigation of media construction of dichotomous Othering. Furthermore, future studies will analyze whether the identified intimidation strategies also produce the same intimidating effects in other discursive contexts.

**CONCLUSION**

By looking at above analysis of intimidation strategies, we concluded there is sufficient evidence to support the hypothesis that "media discourse about Covid-19 uses intimidation strategies to portray the virus negatively in the dichotomous construal of the virus and the group who has been exposed to the virus or vulnerable to virus exposure". In particular, this hypothetical claim is supported by the first research question related to the identification of the role of the intimidation strategies in characterization of virus in the dichotomous construal. In that sense, media discourse about Covid-19 uses various spatio-temporal deictic markers to create the sense of remoteness between the virus as peripheral entity and home-entity. In order to depict the virus encroachment as negatively consequential to home-entity, media discourse about the virus adopts various intimidation strategies such as negative metaphorization, the comparison of the virus with other historical events, low and high modality markers, frequent emphasis on the

necessity of preemptive action against the virus intrusion. In the case of negative metaphorization, "Disease is an enemy" conceptual metaphor bound up with spatial proximization build the image of the virus as "enemy invader". "The bad situations are locations" conceptual metaphor alarms that IDC has already surrounded by the virus enemy. "Pandemic/Disease is a big main natural force" conceptual metaphor combined with spatial proximization construal signals that the virus in the form of ODC has already achieved its destructive goal. The metaphorical construction of death concept imposes the killer effect of the virus through spatial noun and verb phrases. Historical flashbacks generate fear by depicting Covid-19 more dangerous than 9/11 attacks, 2009 flu pandemic, 2007-2008 global financial crisis. High and low modality markers, expressed through spatial verb phrases of action and noun phrases denoting abstract concepts, alarm lower and higher degree of predictability of devastating consequences of virus invasion upon IDC. The frequent emphasis on the necessity of preemptive action against the virus is intensified by spatial deictic markers. Moreover, intimidation strategies contribute to the negative temporal dichotomy between the virus and victimized group. In that sense, intimidating elements are bound up with present, present progressive, present perfect tense forms, time adverbs, and time adverbials.

The above-mentioned intimidation strategies personify the virus negatively in spatial-temporal dichotomy between IDC and ODC. Negative personification characterizes Covid-19 as other group whose movement is depicted as "bad" to victimized Self-group.

Regarding to the second question related to main purposes for characterizing the virus as negative by setting a distance between the virus and in-group, we found that the main goal is to persuade the readers and the hearers to believe the claims about the dangerous nature of Covid-19 and the necessity of preemptive action to stop the virus invasion in home-entity space. In that sense, intimidation strategies achieve persuasive effect through creating credible speaker and writer. Credibility is necessary to legitimate claims about the threatening virus intrusion towards victimized group and the need for preparedness against Covid-19. It should be noted that persuasive intimidating construal of the virus is also triggered by the impact of Covid-19 on socio-economic and political life. To reduce the virus's impact on socio-economic spheres, the western democracies adopt anti-democratic protective policies which restrict the citizens' certain constitutional rights. In that sense, intimidation in media discourse about Covid-19 prepares the audience for authoritarian restrictions through alarming the threatening nature of the virus. Therefore, different elite groups choose media to realize such intentions since media has opinion-forming and persuasive power. It also shows that in modern societies, power is mainly exercised by manipulating the opinions of masses through consent language.

**Recommendations for further research**

As stated in the introduction, the study includes the analysis of limited portion of articles and transcripts taken from British and American sources. Taken this into consideration, the future studies can extend research material with the analysis of additional articles and transcripts. Furthermore, future studies can conduct comparative analysis of political leaders' Covid-19 discourse and news discourse about Covid-19 by looking at the differences and similarities in the intentions of using intimidating elements. Trump's use of "Othering" as persuasive intimidating strategy in his Covid-19 discourse also needs further investigation.

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