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**| RESEARCH ARTICLE**

## **A Critical Metaphor Analysis of Anti-telefraud Public Legal Education Discourse**

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**| ABSTRACT**

Nowadays, news media provides an important platform for knowledge dissemination of public legal education (PLE) and combating fraud is one of the most important topics in PLE news reports. WAR, ANIMAL and CONTAINER metaphors are three important metaphors that frequently appear in anti-telefraud PLE discourse. The present paper analyzes the role of the three metaphors in English and Chinese anti-telefraud PLE discourse based on the framework of critical metaphor analysis. Specifically speaking, the paper focuses on two research questions: 1) How WAR, ANIMAL and CONTAINER metaphors are used in PLE discourse that serves for anti-fraud activity. 2) Whether, if so, how do the metaphors achieve the function of evaluation and persuasion in PLE discourse. Our analysis shows that WAR, ANIMAL and CONTAINER metaphors construct different metaphor scenarios in anti-telefraud PLE discourse, highlighting different aspects of telecom fraud. Moreover, WAR, ANIMAL, and CONTAINER metaphors, as a very powerful tool for framing reality of telecom fraud and anti-telefraud topic, play an important role in simplifying and facilitating the understanding of telecom fraud and anti-telefraud process; they also enhance the effects of persuasion by its role of expressing "evaluative stances" on the perceived reality.

**| KEYWORDS**

WAR metaphor; ANIMAL metaphor; CONTAINER metaphor; anti-telefraud public legal education discourse

**| ARTICLE DOI:** 10.32996/ijllt.2022.5.3.14

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### **1. Introduction**

Telecom fraud has become a global issue and of great severity in many countries, causing great property loss. Take the United Kingdom as an example. The figures available from the Crime Survey of England and Wales reveal there were 3.4 million incidents of fraud in 2016-17 and in fact, fewer than 20 percent of incidents of fraud are actually reported, which means the true figure may be much higher<sup>1</sup>. The 2017 Annual Fraud Indicator estimates fraud losses to the UK at around £190 billion every year, with the private sector hit hardest losing around £140 billion. The public sector may be losing more than £40 billion and individuals around £7 billion. Another statistic reveals that from 2015 to 2018, the numbers of various frauds, i.e. identity fraud, misuse of facility fraud, application fraud, facility takeover fraud, false insurance claims, asset conversion, all demonstrate an increase<sup>2</sup>. In the year ending June 2019, according to the statistics released by National Fraud Intelligence Bureau (NFIB), 740,845 offenses of fraud were reported. Due to the outbreak of coronavirus, the cases of fraud have risen significantly in the half-year of 2020<sup>3</sup>. In China, telecom fraud is also very severe. According to statistics, 200,000 telecom fraud cases were cracked nationwide, and 163,000 criminal suspects were arrested, up 52.7% and 123.3% year-on-year respectively in 2019<sup>4</sup>.

From above, we can see telecom fraud can easily intrude into all sectors and cause great financial losses to people. Besides, fraudsters have many ways to commit crimes and the type of telecom fraud is very diverse, such as impersonation crimes, fake

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<sup>1</sup> The data comes from the website: <https://www.nationalcrimeagency.gov.uk/what-we-do/crime-threats/fraud-and-economic-crime>

<sup>2</sup> The data comes from the website: <https://www.statista.com/statistics/753411/fraud-types-reported-uk/#statisticContainer>

<sup>3</sup> The data comes from the website: <https://www.ukfinance.org.uk/policy-and-guidance/reports-publications/2020-half-year-fraud-report>

<sup>4</sup> The data comes from the website: [http://www.xinhuanet.com/legal/2020-01/21/c\\_1125491558.htm](http://www.xinhuanet.com/legal/2020-01/21/c_1125491558.htm)

investment crimes. In addition, the fast-developed technology makes telecom fraud nowadays more covert and complicated. Therefore, despite great attention, some people may still fall into the ubiquitous traps of telecom fraud.

Against the backdrop of the severity of telecom fraud, many countries have carried out various anti-telefraud activities, including anti-telefraud public legal education (PLE) to reduce the occurrence of telecom fraud crimes. In anti-telefraud PLE, anti-telefraud PLE discourse is an important vehicle to disseminate the knowledge of telecom fraud on new media. The aim of anti-telefraud PLE discourse is to make people aware of telecom fraud in life and avoid being defrauded. Metaphor, as an important communicative tool, is pervasive in PLE discourse.

Metaphors can play a role in communicating the risks of telecom fraud in public legal education discourse. It has been recognized as an important tool in various discourse, with its two pragmatic functions, evaluation and persuasion. It claims that speakers are highly likely to choose and use metaphors that are compatible with their own emotions, attitudes and evaluations (Cameron, 2007). The role of metaphor has been examined in various discourse, such as promotional discourse that concludes strong persuasive effects of metaphors on consumers (Abuczki, 2009; Caballero, 2009) and political discourse that suggests the influence of metaphor on people's ideology (Baş, 2020; Fallah & Moini, 2016). There has been surprisingly little research into the role of metaphors in public legal linguistics literature. Scarce attention has been paid to the linguistic and communicative aspects of how metaphor promotes the dissemination of PLE knowledge.

The present study aims to draw attention to the metaphor in PLE discourse that promotes anti-fraud activity. Specifically, we will focus on three pervasive metaphors in anti-telefraud PLE discourse, i.e. WAR metaphor, ANIMAL metaphor and CONTAINER metaphor. The study investigates the following questions: 1) How WAR, ANIMAL and CONTAINER metaphors are used in PLEs that serves for anti-fraud activity. 2) Whether, if so, how do the metaphors achieve the function of evaluation and persuasion in PLE discourse. Through the research, we hope to reveal the role of metaphors in PLE discourse and thus to shed light on the people devoted to anti-fraud activity and promote the PLE campaign.

## 2. Background: critical metaphor analysis

Critical Metaphor Analysis (CMA henceforth) is defined as an approach to metaphor analysis that aims to uncover the covert and unconscious intentions of language users employing CMT (Conceptual Metaphor Theory) (Charteris-Black, 2004, p. 34). CMA is based on the main tenet of CMT in which metaphor is conceptual in nature. In addition to the cognitive view of CMT, this approach integrates a pragmatic approach and views metaphor as a method of argumentation, composition and style (Charteris-Black, 2004; Zibin, 2020). This reveals that metaphor choices are not only motivated by cognitive and semantic factors; pragmatic and ideological aspects of metaphor use should also be taken into consideration. Charteris-Black (2004) proposed that by identifying the conceptual metaphor in a text or discourse, it would be possible to suggest or reveal intangible aspects of the speakers' views on their discourse and the ideologies underlying them, as is stated "identification of the conceptual basis of metaphors is a way of explaining the associations that underlie metaphor." (p. 24)

Context is a central factor in the pragmatic analysis as meaning can vary with different contexts. Therefore, the context in which metaphor appears should be taken into consideration, as it is essential to the understanding of the metaphor in question (Charteris-Black, 2014). This means that the analysis should focus on what speakers or writers intend to convey pragmatically when metaphors are used in a certain context to reach a particular communicative purpose (Charteris-Black, 2004, 2014). Thus, an adequate account of metaphor analysis should combine three criteria: linguistic, cognitive and pragmatic, so as to provide a comprehensive explanation for metaphors in question.

To conduct a CMA study, three processes are proposed: identification, interpretation, and explanation (Charteris-Black, 2004). Metaphor identification entails a rigorous study of a text/corpus in order to ascertain the metaphors employed (Charteris-Black, 2004, p. 35, 2004, p. 174). Metaphor interpretation is concerned with the classification, organization, and arrangement of metaphors. Later in the metaphor interpretation process, the analyst must determine the communicator's specific meanings, representations, and evaluations, i.e. whether they are positive or negative. Following the identification and interpretation of metaphors, the analyst returns to the broader social and political context to explain why these metaphors were chosen over others in a given situation.

Many studies have employed critical metaphor analysis on various discourses before. However, the discourse types mainly focus on politics, economy, and education, not on PLE discourse. For example, Johnson (2005) integrated CMA and CDA (Critical Discourse Analysis) to analyze the metaphors used in bilingual education and uncover the hidden ideology of education policy via the control of language in a multi-ethnic society. Liu (2015) employed critical metaphor analysis to compare the metaphorical representations of the currency dispute between China and the United States and investigates the role of conceptual metaphors in framing the disputes and constructing the argumentative position and ideological stance of each news. Kelly (2016) compared the metaphors in Chinese and American cosmetic advertising slogans and unveiled the ideology hidden in these cosmetic advertising slogans. Baş (2020) examined how metaphor conceptualizes democracy in American and Turkish political discourse

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from the perspective of critical metaphor analysis, and revealed that war metaphor is more used in American political discourse and journey metaphor more in Turkish political discourse, representing two different ideologies towards democracy.

From the literature, we can see that few studies have been conducted on metaphor analysis of PLE discourse within the framework of CMA. Therefore, the paper aims to employ the framework of CMA to investigate war metaphor, animal metaphor and container metaphor and their roles in anti-telefraud PLE discourse.

### 3. Methodology

The data come from the corpus of anti-telefraud news reports established by the author. As the present study focus on anti-telefraud discourse, anti-telefraud news reports are collected from the special column of fraud on BBC websites and some Chinese mainstream news websites including BAIDU, THE PAPER, GUANGMING and WANGYI. The reason for collecting data on these websites is that they are the largest mainstream media platforms in the UK and China, which means a large group of viewers. Especially, BBC opens a special column on fraud, which is home to the latest news reports for anti-telefraud activity. To identify the relative metaphors in the anti-telefraud PLE discourse, we will follow the metaphor identification standards of MIPVU (Steen et al., 2010). This paper will adopt the qualitative approach and focus on the WAR, ANIMAL, CONTAINER metaphors, investigating their roles in English and Chinese anti-telefraud PLE discourse within the framework of critical metaphor analysis.

### 4. Results and Discussion

#### 4.1 Metaphor from the source domain of war

A number of expressions that belong to the source domain of war exist in both Chinese and English anti-telefraud PLE discourse, including “safeguard, frontline, combat, block, tactic, force, target”. The war metaphor creates a conceptual link between the physical attack and the process of the fraud and anti-fraud task. Therefore, preventing fraud is a battle or physical defense that people fight in; people or organizations who mainly shoulder the anti-fraud task are the “force”, “frontline”; the fraudsters are the enemy who use “tactics” to defraud people; people who are defrauded are the target of fraudsters.

For example, in example (1), tactics originally refer to the science and art of disposing and maneuvering forces in combat<sup>5</sup>. Here, in this sentence, the subject of using tactics is the fraudsters, instead of the army, which means that tactics here metaphorically refer to the method and tricks used by the fraudsters to defraud people. In this way, the attributes of craftiness and sophistication are mapped from tactics onto fraudsters’ tricks for defrauding people. Thus, it can remind people that fraudsters are very sly and citizens should raise their awareness to avoid being defrauded. In example (2), college students are metaphorically described as force, which shows that college students shoulder great responsibility in “combating” the enemy of telecom fraud, as the force shouldering the responsibility to fight in a war. In example (3), the anti-telefraud measures are metaphorically described as a sharp sword. The sharpness of the sword shows its effectiveness in killing the enemy in the battlefield, which is mapped onto the target domain of anti-telefraud measures, showing its effectiveness to combat the enemy of telecom fraud. Thus, the policeman is metaphorically assigned the role of the force who hold the sword of anti-telefraud measures to kill the enemy of telecom fraud.

- (1) The number of investment scams has quadrupled since the first UK lockdown began in March, with fraudsters using more sophisticated tactics.<sup>6</sup>
- (2) 举报诈骗人人有责，大学生成举报电话的“主力军”<sup>7</sup>(It is everyone’s responsibility to report fraud, and college students are the “main force” to report fraud)
- (3) 通化公安：高举反诈利剑 守护群众利益<sup>8</sup> (Tonghua Public Security: Hold high the sharp sword of anti-telefraud (measures) to protect the interests of the masses)

#### 4.2 Metaphor from the source domain of animal

The metaphorical expressions that include dog, phish (fish), spider, prey, pig, are found to belong to the source domain of animal in Chinese and English anti-telefraud PLE discourse.

On the one hand, different animals are used to describe the roles in the fraud or anti-fraud activity in anti-telefraud PLE discourse. Due to the distinctive features of different animals, various images can be represented. Dogs are featured by their high attentiveness and they are representative of loyalty. Therefore, “watchdog” is used metaphorically to refer to the fraud-prevention organization in anti-fraud discourse, as the example (4). Pig is another metaphorical word in the anti-telefraud PLE discourse, as in

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<sup>5</sup> The definition is given by Merriam-Webster, which is retrieved from <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/tactics>

<sup>6</sup> This sentence comes from the news on the platform BBC, which is retrieved from <https://www.bbc.com/news/business-55126228>

<sup>7</sup> This sentence comes from the news on the platform BAIDU, which is retrieved from <https://baijiahao.baidu.com/s?id=1700152260464363270&wfr=spider&for=pc>

<sup>8</sup> This sentence comes from the news on the platform of WANGYI, which is retrieved from <https://www.163.com/dy/article/GGNN35OH0534ASOC.html>

the example (9). Pig-butcher scam refers to a kind of online scam in which fraudsters win the trust of victims through a romantic relationship before tricking them into a gambling or financing trap. The pig here is used to metaphorically describe the victims in this kind of romantic scam. Pig is a symbol of silliness and defenselessness in Chinese culture. They also are a major kind of meat on Chinese dining tables. Thus, in this metaphor, the pig is of negative connotations. The attributes of silliness and defenselessness are mapped onto the victims, showing that victims are silly and their endings of losing money are as miserable as being butchered and eaten. In this pig-butcher scenario, fraudsters are assigned the role of butcher, which is very brutal when they butcher a pig. The attribute of brutality is mapped onto fraudsters which indicates that fraudsters are cruel and brutal when they defraud victims' money. Besides, in example (8), victims are described as prey, which is the target of huntsmen, i.e. fraudsters. It shows the process of defrauding victims is metaphorically described as the scenario of hunting.

On the other hand, animal-related scenarios are used to metaphorically describe the fraud or anti-fraud process. We find the metaphorical expression "phish" is used both in the English and Chinese anti-telefraud PLE discourse, as in example (5) and example (7). "Phish", which originates from fish, creates the fishing scenario. In the process of fishing, fish will bite the bait on the hook as the victims are defrauded by the seductive things provided by the fraudsters. Thus, in this phishing scenario, the phishing emails are the bait, the victims are the fish and the fraudsters are the fishermen. For another example, "caught me Spider's web" in example (6), which is from the title of an anti-telefraud news report, creates the scenario of spiders successfully catching the food of insects. Insects that are hard to escape from their web and doomed to be spider's food, indicate the victims that fall into the fraud carelessly and become difficult to get out of it. Besides, the delicateness of the web woven by spiders and from which insects are hard to escape corresponds with the tactics delicately designed by fraudsters.

- (4) The spending watchdog said up to £2bn of taxpayer money may have gone to criminals using fake companies.<sup>9</sup>
- (5) Ms. Worobec said criminals were also using the cover of Christmas shopping deals to roll out data harvesting scams, attempting to prompt consumers to provide details through phishing emails.<sup>10</sup>
- (6) Fraudsters 'caught me in a spider's web'.<sup>11</sup>
- (7) 收到含有链接的短信，务必提高警惕，谨防钓鱼短信诈骗。<sup>12</sup> (When you receive a text message with a link, you must be vigilant and beware of phishing SMS scams)
- (8) 网上物色“猎物”引诱投资电诈团伙竟开“加盟连锁”。<sup>13</sup> (Looking for "prey" on the Internet to lure investment, the fraud gang opened a "franchise chain")
- (9) 又见“杀猪盘”！女子 180 万元打水漂……遇到这种人，立即报警！<sup>14</sup> (See "pig-butcher scam" again! Women's 1.8 million yuan went down the drain. If you encounter such a person, call the police immediately! )

### 4.3 Metaphor from the source domain of container

The source domain "CONTAINER" includes metaphorical expressions such as "snare, trap". Within the container source domain, fraud is understood in terms of the bounded-space schema. More specifically, a container refers to a bounded entity with a shape. For example, in our database, fraud is metaphorically depicted as a container such as "snare, trap", which victims fall into. Thus, the process of which people are defrauded is that of being caught in the container "snare, trap" and avoiding the fraud is "being away from" the fraud, which is shown in the following examples.

- (10) Developing "a suspicious mind" and educating our nearest and dearest would also stop many people from falling into the fraudsters' traps, he said.<sup>15</sup>
- (11) 七旬阿姨险些落入电信诈骗圈套 民警联动成功劝阻<sup>16</sup> (Seventy-year-old aunt almost fell into the snare of telecommunication fraud, and the police cooperated to successfully avoid the scam)

<sup>9</sup> This sentence comes from the news on the platform of BBC, which is retrieved from <https://www.bbc.com/news/business-54650538>.

<sup>10</sup> This sentence comes from the news on the platform of BBC, which is retrieved from <https://www.bbc.com/news/business-54931146>

<sup>11</sup> This sentence comes from the news on the platform of BBC, which is retrieved from <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/business-54278707>

<sup>12</sup> The sentence comes from the news on the platform of WANGYI, which is retrieved from <https://www.163.com/dy/article/GTM1C8740550B3GO.html>

<sup>13</sup> The sentence comes from the news on the platform of GUANGMING net, which is retrieved from <https://m.gmw.cn/baijia/2020-06/23/1301309507.html>

<sup>14</sup> This sentence comes from the news on the platform of THE PAPER, which is retrieved from [https://www.thepaper.cn/newsDetail\\_forward\\_13456887](https://www.thepaper.cn/newsDetail_forward_13456887)

<sup>15</sup> This sentence comes from the news on the platform of BBC, which is retrieved from <https://www.bbc.com/news/business-54529456>

<sup>16</sup> This sentence comes from the news on the platform of BAIDU, which is retrieved from <https://baijiahao.baidu.com/s?id=1725534224010709025&wfr=spider&for=pc>

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(12) 开学赴校园，这些提醒帮你远离电信诈骗陷阱<sup>17</sup> (These reminders help you stay away from telecom fraud traps when school starts.)

#### 4.4 Discussion

The persuasive function of the WAR, ANIMAL and CONTAINER metaphors has been acknowledged, as it has a remarkable capacity to simplify things and make them intelligible by enabling people to understand highly complicated phenomena in terms of more concrete ones (Silaški & Đurović, 2019).

On the one hand, the anti-telefraud process is presented by metaphor in an impressive way. Public legal educator delineates various metaphor scenarios to build narrative frames for anti-fraud activity (Musolff, 2006). For example, the WAR metaphor scenario frames the difficulty, fierceness and tension of anti-fraud activity vividly, with fraudsters constructed as “enemy” and anti-telefraud people as “force”. It profiles that achieving no fraud is a process of constant physical combat. Fraud is a common illegal activity. Hence, it cannot be rooted out without the great efforts of the “force”, i.e. anti-telefraud people.

On the other hand, demonstrating the telecom fraud process is another important task of metaphor. Public legal educators delineate metaphor scenarios of how fraudsters defraud people through the ANIMAL and CONTAINER metaphors (Musolff, 2006). For example, fishing is a typical metaphor scenario constructed in anti-telefraud discourse to depict the fraud process, as the example (5). In such a scenario, fraudsters are depicted as fishermen and victims as fish that are going to bite the hook or be caught in the fishing net. In the CONTAINER metaphor, examples also show the metaphor scenario that being defrauded is falling into the container.

Besides, in anti-telefraud discourse, metaphor enhances the effects of persuasion by its role of expressing “evaluative stances” on the perceived reality (Musolff, 2017, p. 3). On the one hand, anti-fraud organizations are endowed with a positive image by metaphors. A most apparent example is the expression “watchdog” to construct the dedicated and responsible image of anti-telefraud organization. On the other hand, metaphors construct negative images of fraudsters and victims. Animal metaphors “pig”, “prey”, and “fish” are employed in describing victims, constructing the image of vulnerability and carelessness, while the fraudster is the image of contemptibility, aggressiveness and skillfulness. Moreover, the use of metaphor scenarios is also a powerful tool for conveying evaluative content when set within a specific socio-political context (Silaški & Đurović, 2019). As mentioned above, for example, the WAR scenario conveys the praise for dedication and bravery of forces, i.e. anti-telefraud people or organizations, and the hatred to the enemy, i.e. fraudsters.

#### 5. Conclusion

The present paper analyzes the role of the three metaphors in English and Chinese anti-telefraud PLE discourse based on the framework of critical metaphor analysis. Through detailed analysis, we find that the WAR, ANIMAL, and CONTAINER metaphors can play an important role in anti-telefraud PLE discourse. The main roles can be elaborated as follows: first, they can simplify and facilitate the understanding of fraud and anti-telefraud process; both telefraud process and anti-telefraud process are presented by metaphor in an impressive way. Public legal educator delineates various metaphor scenarios to build narrative frames for telecom fraud and anti-fraud activities. Second, they can enhance the effects of persuasion by its role of expressing “evaluative stances” on the perceived reality. Anti-fraud organizations are endowed with a positive image by metaphors, while metaphors construct negative images of fraudsters and victims. Moreover, the use of metaphor scenarios is also a powerful tool for conveying evaluative content when set within a specific socio-political context (Silaški & Đurović, 2019).

The research is significant. Firstly, the analysis of the metaphors and their roles in anti-telefraud PLE discourse can enhance people’s understanding of the metaphors in the discourse and further the overall understanding towards the anti-telefraud PLE discourse, promoting the anti-telefraud PLE campaign. Secondly, it can shed light on the future public legal educators to appropriately use metaphors and better design their anti-telefraud PLE discourse. Thirdly, the research is the first to focus on metaphors in anti-telefraud PLE discourse, which paves the way for future metaphor studies in the anti-telefraud PLE discourse.

Despite the great efforts, there are still some limitations in the present study. On the one hand, the present study is only limited to a qualitative approach to metaphors in anti-telefraud PLE discourse, which may lead to subjectivity. In the future, quantitative analysis can be adopted and combined with qualitative analysis. On the other hand, the present study only analyses three kinds of metaphors. In the future, more metaphors and their roles in anti-telefraud PLE discourse should be focused on and investigated.

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<sup>17</sup> This sentence comes from the news platform of BAIDU, which is retrieved from <https://baijiahao.baidu.com/s?id=1726543961351985954&wfr=spider&for=pc>.

**Funding:** This research was funded by Graduate Research Innovation Project of Guangdong University of Foreign Studies (21GWCXXM-023).

**Conflicts of Interest:** The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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