

# **Proximization Theory and Threat Construction in Selected E-Storybooks for Children on COVID-19**

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## **Introduction**

There is a human need to tell stories about the world and the others, and the stories addressed to children help them to develop and grow up (Stockar 2006). Psychology considers that children prefer story books which explain the happenings here and there (Shavlik, Bauer and Booth 2020). Since children usually raise questions and seek explanations about the world around them, they are described as being little scientists (Piaget 1952). For children to understand the causes of the lockdown, school closure and the quarantine, discourses of crisis must be negotiated appropriately. For these reasons, this research is interested in children's e-books. An e-book, an electronic book, is a book publication in a digital form. This article examines nine e-storybooks which are directed towards informing children about the novel Coronavirus Disease-2019 (COVID-19) and the required practices which would stop its outbreak.

Spreading across almost all countries and bringing about death and fear, COVID-19 results in global effects which restructure social relations, activities, plans, behaviors and all forms of practices pertaining to humans. Being highly contagious, COVID-19 can lead to sickness and death. This pandemic poses a challenge because there is no approved vaccine to stop it completely. Consequently, countries have to take protective measures so that the spread of the pandemic may be slowed down or stopped. For example, gatherings are banned, schools are shut down, the division of labor is restructured, social distancing is enforced, and a strict quarantine is effectuated. Each government starts to spread awareness campaigns informing people that they must wear a medical mask outside and that it is better to stay at home. People are told to practice physical distancing and be careful about personal hygiene. COVID-19

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has forced a change in all forms of life and interaction. The more fears and threats increase, the more the behavioral reactions increase (Kovecses 1990).

The worldwide outbreak of COVID-19 makes governments put into effect severe restrictions on people's movements. Technology, within this context, proves to be thoroughly influential on people's daily activities. It guarantees communication and access to information despite being at home. Thanks to digital technology, students and children can be educated without going to schools, and social interaction is fostered while respecting social distancing. Digital technology provides solutions to many problems which emerge due to the pandemic. One of these problems is child education and awareness while staying at home.

Adults can listen to the media and understand the extensive changes in rituals and schedules. Due to the impact of the pandemic, children must have many queries and doubts. Accordingly, children need new methods which can create an awareness of COVID-19. School closure during the pandemic has posed a challenge in the field of child education. For that reason, digital data and online interaction become a must.

There is a strong connection between words and the world as we can "do things with words" (Mazid 2014, 2). Words have the power to embody views, affect people's interpretations of events and shape realities (Neüff 2018). In consequence, a due attention has to be paid to the way words are being organized so that a certain meaning may be established. The study of meaning in its contextual situation by means of language use is the core of pragmatic analysis (Cap 2010a&b). To proximize is to bring closer to the mind. This is the strategy the speaker employs so that he may depict certain events as being directly influencing the hearer. Proximization is a cognitive-linguistic, pragmatic and critical apparatus of discourse analysis which construes the spatial relations among linguistic elements (Cap 2006, 2008, 2009, 2013a, 2013b, 2016). It is the discursive strategy by which remote events and distant states are presented as being resultant and unfavorably eventual, a thing which leads to the legitimization of certain actions (Cap 2013b). Proximization Theory (PT) is a methodological model approaching the construal of threats in discourse (Cap 2006, 2008, 2009, 2013a, 2013b, 2016). This threat is posed by peripheral entities which exist outside the discourse space center (ODCs). The ODCs are conceived as passing over the space between them and the central entities which exist inside discourse space center (IDCs) with the result of a dreadful threat. The threat has a tri-dimensional nature: spatial, temporal and ideological or axiological (Cap 2006, 2008, 2009, 2013a, 2013b, 2016).

Spatial proximization refers to the action by which ODCs intrude on IDCs. It considers threat to be a concrete entity. Temporal proximization has to do with elucidating the threat as being newsworthy. It illustrates the directness of a pressing threat. Axiological proximization is indicated by the opposing values between the ODCs and the IDCs. Consequently, proximization analytical model is tri-dimensional including Spatial-Temporal-Axiological (STA) axes (Cap 2006, 2008, 2009, 2013a, 2013b, 2016). The result of using the three axes of proximization in discourse is that addressees approve of the speaker's actions facing the ODCs (Cap 2009).

This research falls within the Cognitive Linguistics approach to critical discourse analysis. The research selects children's e-books during COVID-19 pandemic to be the target of analysis which is based on the cognitive-pragmatic model of PT. Analysis aims to detect threat construction and the relevant legitimization of the preemptive measures.

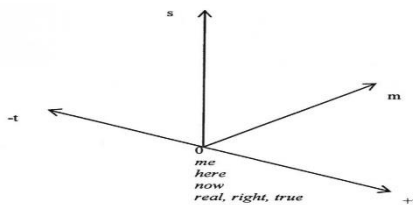
This research aims to demonstrate the role played by PT in the critical study of the discourse of crises. Children's e-story books which focus on COVID-19 are investigated within the framework of PT. This paper is significant in the sense that it presents a cross-disciplinary model to analyze child digital books which spread COVID-19 awareness. The paper integrates PT which pertains to pragmatics and cognitive linguistics, and critical discourse analysis. This research is expected to answer the following questions: How are the discourses of threat structured in children's e-books during COVID-19 outbreak? What is the role played by PT in order to raise COVID-19 awareness in children's digital stories? What are the discourse strategies employed to legitimize various protective measures in children's e-books?

### **1. Proximization as a Concept**

Chilton (2004) and Cap (2005) are the first to use "to proximize" and "proximization". Cap (2007) defines proximization as "a heavily legitimization-oriented strategy to picture the occurring events and their actors as directly affecting the addressee" (13). Proximization is the discursive strategy by which the speaker positions the addressee in the center of the events (Cap 2006). Chilton (2004) explained that people usually locate discourse elements along space, time and modality axes. This tri-dimensional axis has a deictic center indicated by *the self* or first-person deictic expressions "I, we." He added that the deictic center was indicated by *here, now, I, and we* (Chilton 2004). This center is the pivotal point around which the three axes revolve.

According to Chilton (2004), the space axis (s) refers to locative deixis as the first-person pronouns which are *here*. In this concern, second and third-person

pronouns are more remote from *the self* and closer to *the other*. The temporal axis (t) signifies the time of the speech event via the deictic expression *now*. Events, therefore, have a time of occurring that may be at a close or a remote time. The modality axis (m) is about epistemic and deontic modality. When something is expressed as being real and a must, it is proximized and positioned close to the deictic center. Figure (1) is adopted from Chilton (2004) to summarize the three-dimensional axes.



**Figure 1. The Tri-dimensional Deictic Axes (Chilton 2004, 58).**

## **2. The Spatial-Temporal-Axiological Model of Proximization (STA)**

The model is adopted from Cap (2006, 2008, 2009, 2013a, 2013b, 2016). The STA proximization model puts into words the discourse endorsements for certain political demands and social appeals. After explaining the STA model, the discourse elements responsible for the enactment of each dimension of the STA model are illustrated.

### **2.1. Spatial Proximization**

Discourse elements are either central, located in the deictic center, or peripheral. Central elements are called the IDCs, inside-the-deictic-center. Peripheral ones are the ODCs, outside-the-deictic-center. The distinction between both located elements has to do with geographical and ideological distances. The IDCs signify the speaker and the positive value sharing crowd. Negative and destructive values are related to the ODCs with the result of needing a preemptive action on the part of the IDCs.

### **2.2. Temporal Proximization**

Temporal proximization signifies the speaker's timing of *now*. The *now* frame is positioned between the past and the future. Past-to-present conflation indicates acts performed by the ODCs which solicit the current concerns on the part of the speaker. The future-to-present shift is about future actions stemming from the present situation.

### **2.3. Axiological Proximization**

It deals with the clashing conflict between the values of the ODCs and IDCs. It is marked by two kinds. The first one is of a higher probability, while the other is of a lower probability. Axiological proximization with high and explicit

probability aims to recompense the absence of an interpretation via spatial and temporal proximization. Axiological proximization is the strategy accounting for an ideological explanation for an appeal. This is done via illuminating opposing values and using clear references and markers referring to them. Axiological proximization with lower/implicit probability occurs with spatial and temporal proximization as “it adds to the stance of constant preparedness to confront an external threat, which the latter is construed as “routinely present” at all times” (Cap 2013a, 97).

### 3. The STA Model Enacted in Discourse

#### 3.1. Spatial Proximization Framework

As far as the spatial proximization is concerned, discourse peripheral elements- devastating and withering- try to transgress against discourse central elements, ODCs versus IDCs. Accordingly, discourse authorizes corresponding language categories regarding the Discourse Space (DS): “Noun phrases (NPs) construed as elements of the deictic center of the DS (IDCs)” and “Noun phrases (NPs) construed as elements outside the deictic center of the DS (ODCs)” (Cap 2013a, 105). Both categories include single words or noun phrases embodying the two clashing elements/parties. A third category is that of verb phrases which symbolize the ODCs threatening movements towards IDCs: “Verb phrases (VPs) of motion and directionality construed as markers of movement of ODCs towards the deictic center” (Cap 2013a, 106). More categories are added: “Verb phrases (VPs) of action construed as markers of impact of ODCs upon IDCs” such as “destroy,” “Noun phrases (NPs) denoting abstract concepts construed as anticipations of impact of ODCs upon IDCs” such as “threat,” and “Noun phrases (NPs) denoting abstract concepts construed as effects of impact of ODCs upon IDCs” such as “catastrophe” (Cap 2013a, 107). The framework is summarized in table (1).

**Table 1. A summary of the spatial proximization framework**

Category	Explanation	Exemplification
Noun Phrases (NPs)	Elements of the deictic center (IDCs)	Positive traits as: free nations, democracy, our people
Noun Phrases (NPs)	Elements outside the deictic center (ODCs)	Negative traits as: oppression, dictatorship, terrorists
Verb Phrases (VPs)	Verbs of motion	ODCs moving towards IDCs as: confront, attack, seek
Verb Phrases (VPs)	Impact of ODCs on IDCs	Examples: destroy, burn, explode

Abstract Noun Phrases (NPs)	The anticipated impact of ODCs on IDCs	Examples: fear, threat
Abstract Noun Phrases (NPs)	The effects of ODCs on IDCs	Examples: disaster, crisis

### 3.2. Temporal Proximization Framework

The temporal proximization has to do with the *now* setting, which marks the speaker’s present position. The temporal framework includes “Noun phrases (NPs) involving indefinite descriptions construing ODC actual impact acts in alternative temporal frames,” “Discourse forms involving contrastive use of the simple past and the present perfect construing threatening future extending infinitely from a past instant,” “Noun phrases (NPs) involving nominalizations construing presupposition of conditions for ODC impact to arise anytime in the future,” “Verb phrases (VPs) involving modal auxiliaries construing conditions for ODC impact as existing continually between the now and the infinite future,” and “Discourse forms involving parallel contrastive construals of oppositional and privileged futures extending from the now” (Cap 2013a, 113-115). The framework is summarized in table (2).

**Table 2. A summary of the temporal proximization framework**

Category	Explanation	Exemplification
Noun Phrases (NPs)	Indefinite description of ODCs acts in differing times	A train explosion, a sunny day
Discourse forms	Using simple past and present perfect to set a fearful future	Past markers followed by present crisis and future concerns
Noun Phrases (NPs)	Presupposing ODCs coming threats	ODCs emerging threat, danger coming
Verb Phrases (VPs)	Modals indicating ODCs threat at the present and the future	ODCs + present time markers followed by future threats
Discourse forms	Presenting IDCs future acts	IDCs believe, suggest

### 3.3. Axiological Proximization Framework

The axiological proximization is related to ODCs and IDCs opposing merits. Thus, it refers to the clashing ideological structures between ODCs and IDCs via “Noun phrases (NPs) construed as IDC positive values or value sets (ideologies),” “Noun phrases (NPs) construed as ODC negative values or value sets (ideologies),” and “Discourse forms no longer than one sentence ... construing materialization in the IDC space of the ODC negative ideologies” (Cap 2013a, 119-120). The framework is summarized in table (3).

**Table 3. A summary of the axiological proximization framework**

Category	Explanation	Exemplification
Noun Phrases (NPs)	IDCs positive value systems & ideologies	Decent, free, freedom, democracy
Noun Phrases (NPs)	ODCs negative value systems & ideologies	Indecent, dictatorship, oppression
Discourse forms	Phrases denoting ODCs-IDCs conflict	Verb phrases denoting a close or a remote confrontation and the consequences

#### 4. Related Studies on Theory of Proximaiton

Many have examined the theory of proximization. Cap (2010a&b) conducted a critical analysis of the way Bush's administration employed language in order to legitimize the Iraq War. The study had an emphasis on the discourse of war and the relative strategies of legitimizing political decisions. It investigated war rhetoric, legitimization of violence and the spread of fear, and clarified these language practices to the readers. The research aimed to prevent power-abuse in relation to the Iraq War as an example.

Cap (2014) considered proximization to be a cognitive-pragmatic model of threat and fear erection. Cap presented Bush's war rhetoric, depending on Iraq's obtaining weapons of mass destruction, as the premise justifying the Iraq War. Bush employed spatial proximization to make the threat closer before the war. Pro-war rhetoric involved axiological proximization to legitimize that war. The theory was also applied to samples of public discourses in health, environment and modern technology. Analysis indicated that the discourses signify dependence on threat and fear construction. Analysis of cancer discourse, for instance, likened cancer to an enemy threatening the patient. Analysis of climate change discourse mirrored the threat posed by that change. The discourse of cyber-terror/threat described that threat in "personally consequential terms" (27).

Kowlaski (2018) presented an outline of proximization theory as proposed by Cap (2006) and Chilton (2004). It was concluded that proximization was an important method in the analysis of critical discourse. He focused on the unexplored side of proximization theory, which was the manner in which the audience received and perceived proximization. He proposed that comments occurring with media texts, Facebook and Twitter communication can be a suggested start.

Wang (2019) examined the three-dimensional model of proximization, the Spatial, the Temporal and the Axiological in order to analyze the Chinese President Xi Jinping's speech. His paper focused on the value of "a community of shared future" and its construction in political discourse. The temporal proximization was employed to recall past conflicts so that the future might be guided by them. The spatial proximization of threats and challenges, which were marked as being expected and imminent, motivated the listeners to endorse the pre-emptive reactions. The axiological proximization reflected China's positive endeavors to build the future. It was concluded that the Spatial-Temporal-Axiological model of proximization was powerful in value construction.

Basarati and Rezaei (2019) carried out a critical analysis of the discourse of Iranophobia in the US political discourse via examining Trump's speeches during 2017-2018 which focused on Iran. Cap's theory of proximization (2013) led to the results that Trump positioned Iran as a regional threat.

Wieczorek (2019) conducted research on presidential speeches concerning levels of narrative representation. Data of analysis included three sub-corpora: John Kennedy Corpus, Bill Clinton Corpus and Barack Obama Corpus. Cap's Proximization Theory was used in order to detect levels of embedding of discourse spaces. Primary and multilevel embedding of discourse spaces were addressed. Wieczorek used primary embedding to signify the situations in which the discourse space pertaining to the speaker interfered with that of the sayer. Consequently, the speaker's image as a leader or an individual could be identified. It was found out that primary representations were predominant.

Katila, Gan, and Goodwin (2020) examined haptic trajectories during COVID-19 pandemic. They investigated video recordings of politicians in order to show ways of negotiations of space and touch. Findings clarified that when one party initiated a handshake, the other party declined and apologized. It was noticed that politicians adapted their body to remedy the face-threatening situation resulting from social distancing.

Chen et al. (2020) analyzed political discourse communication on the basis of PT. The cyber discourse space, China Xinhua News Agency, was the source of data. Key words pertaining to Sino-US trade war were considered. It was concluded that political discourses utilized proximization to serve the purpose of political legitimacy. Prieto-Ramos, Pei, and Cheng (2020) presented a socio-semiotic examination of the practices of naming COVID-19 in a corpus of headlines. The study focused on the changes in the pattern of naming in eight different newspapers. The paper also clarified that after the World Health Organization had announced the name of the pandemic, the newspapers modified the naming pattern of the disease.



Based on the aforementioned review, children's e-books are not given due attention till now. Hence, this study attempts to analyze these books in order to clarify the ways writers structure discourses of crisis in a manner that interprets the threat without frightening the child.

## **5. Methodology: Spatial-Temporal-Axiological Proximization**

Cap's model (2006, 2008, 2009, 2013a, 2013b, 2016) of Spatial-Temporal-Axiological proximization is the basic framework of analysis in this discourse study. Within PT and its related STA model as the theoretical framework, children's e-books during COVID-19 pandemic are analyzed. The study focuses on nine e-books which spread an awareness concerning COVID-19 and help the child to cope with the pandemic. The nine e-books are downloaded, saved in separate files and manually examined. Each story is separately investigated so that the STA model may be detected, and the construal of threat may be figured out. The analysis section is divided into nine sub-sections. Each section handles one storybook. The sub-section begins with a summary of the story. After introducing the story, the PT-based analytical investigation of threat construction is presented. Selected extracts are used to clarify the analysis. Each quoted part from every story is followed by its page number in the original story.

"My Hero is You" is a fictional storybook intended to be read to children aged from 6-11 years. This fictional book is available online, at UNICEF's website. "The Princess in BLACK and the Case of the Coronavirus," "Coronavirus: A Book for Children," "The Magic Cure," "COVID-19 HELPERS," "BRAY BRAY CONQUERS THE CORONAVIRUS," "Together: Living Life during COVID-19," "We're Going to be OK" and "What Color Is Today?" are also available online. These nine stories are the digital data selected for the analysis. Some stories are totally written in capital letters in their original form. When quoting any part of the story, the written form of the original work is observed. The analysis section explains each story in reference to the PT and STA model. It is followed by the discussion section which clarifies the implications of the analysis and adds more interpretation. The conclusion summarizes the findings. The study limitations and suggestions for further research are added before the reference section.

## **6. Analysis: Children's E-books During the COVID-19 Pandemic**

### **6.1. *My Hero is You***

"My Hero is You" is a fictional storybook which aims to help children cope with COVID-19. The book is translated into Arabic, French, Chinese, Russian and Spanish. This book is a project developed by more than 50 organizations

concerned with humanitarian affairs including the World Health Organization and the United Nations Children’s Fund. The storybook is about Ario, a fantasy creature, who helps children to fight COVID-19 and to protect their family and friends.

Spatial proximization has to do with the manner in which ODCs encroach upon IDCs. In discourse, the IDCs are the speaker, his audience and all those who share the same positive values. The ODCs refer to the embodiment of threat and negative values. In other words, the ODCs are depicted as having a destructive entity. The ODCs are conceived as having an unavoidable negative impact on the IDCs. Accordingly, some preemptive actions are carried out by the IDCs to face the threat posed by the ODCs. Spatial proximization results in the addressees’ legitimization of the speaker’s precautionary plans. The following analysis detects the mechanisms of spatial proximization in “My Hero is You.” The key lemmas and discourse patterns which reflect the spatial framework of proximization are analyzed.

The story introduces “Sara’s mum” (p.4) as being a brilliant scientist. Yet, she can’t “find a cure for the coronavirus” (p.4). A virus is unseen; however, spatial proximization depends on the embodiment of entities which threaten those inside the discourse space. That’s why the virus is impersonated throughout the story. At the very beginning, the story presents the IDCs – the good camp – which include Sara and Sara’s mother who is described as “the best mum and the best scientist” (p.4). The ODCs are represented by one entity: COVID-19. Traits ascribed to COVID-19 are “so tiny,” incurable and dangerous because “we can’t see it” (p.4.). The adjective “tiny” serves to make the child imagine the physical shape of the unseen virus. Sara’s mother moves to describe the harm caused by the virus: “it spreads in the coughs and the sneezes...” (p.4). The verb “spreads” stands for the virus movement speed, a thing which makes the virus so contagious. In “get a fever and a cough and can have some trouble breathing” (p.4), the impact of the ODCs, the virus, on the IDCs is illustrated. So, verb phrases denote the speedy motion of the virus and its impact on the good camp. No abstract noun phrases are used to reflect the effect of the virus. This is suitable for two reasons. The first reason is that the story is addressed to children who conceive physical entities better than abstract ones. The second has to do with the desire not to scare the child with abstract noun phrases affecting his emotion. Scaring the child is not the goal of the story. Informing the child and persuading him/her of the near danger, without terrifying him/her, is the required outcome.

The effect of the previous characterization of the virus makes Sara so enthusiastic that she wants to fight the virus. Yet, she doesn’t know the way: “we

can't fight it because we can't see it?" (p.4). Had Sara been scared by the description of the ODCs, she wouldn't have had the courage to face the virus. The mother tells Sara that the best way to fight COVID-19 is "to stay safe" (p.4). At this point, the IDCs extend to include all people: "The virus affects many kinds of people, and everyone can help us fight it. Children are special and they can help too" (p.4). Consequently, the IDCs are represented by Sara, her mother, all children and everyone. Sara's mother could have mentioned that the virus affects everyone without a focus on "children." The focus on "children" is deliberate because the desired outcome of the story is to make children interested in their role to "fight" the virus via being safe.

Spatial proximization makes the physical distance between the IDCs and the ODCs narrower by using NPs as "people, children, everyone" to represent the vast categories threatened by the virus: "The virus affects many kinds of people, and everyone can help us fight it. Children are special" (p.4). The verb "fight" is used by Sara and her mother to imply that the virus is an enemy and can be defeated. The metaphor COVID-19 IS AN ENEMY refers to a new category of VPs used by the IDCs, VPs which denote the anticipated reaction of the IDCs against the ODCs. The ODCs spread, the IDCs fight.

After these words, Sara goes to her bed and thinks of a chance to be "a hero" and fight the virus. So, the metaphor A CHILD IS A HERO/ FIGHTER is established in response to the spatial proximization strategies. The fantasy part of the story begins when Sara imagines that Ario appears. She tells Ario that she wants to be a superhero so that she may inform children all over the world about COVID-19 and how to protect themselves and, in accordance, protect everyone else. Spatial proximization sets, once more, the material nature and the globality of the virus threat when Sara asks Ario "is it safe to travel with the coronavirus around?" (p.6). Once Ario reassures Sara, she jumps on his back, and they start their fanciful journey in which they inform children everywhere how to fight the virus. Their first destination is Egypt where they meet Salem. They continue their imaginative journey to different areas in which they meet many children such as Sasha, Leila and Kim. In every location, Sara plays her part and informs the children about the measures needed in order to be safe. All these children join the IDCs. The universality of COVID-19 threat is accomplished by the containment of as many entities as possible in the IDCs. This leads to an extension of the threat and the negative consequences posed by the ODCs. This journey makes all humans belong to the same camp, the IDCs. The journey sets the metaphor INFORMATION IS A WEAPON because Sara's role is to raise children's awareness about the virus so that they may be able to protect themselves.

The story ends with a new addition to the IDCs when Sara's mum says: "There are many heroes keeping people safe from the coronavirus, like wonderful doctors and nurses" (22). This deliberate focus on doctors and nurses as NPs added to the IDCs signifies the great role played by them. At the end, Sara's mum says, "we can all be heroes, every day, and my biggest hero is you" (2). The story emphasizes on the metaphors EVERYONE IS A HERO/A CHILD IS A HERO. The heroic act is meant to be just staying at home. This, in turn, is to convince any child that being safe at home is an act of heroism.

Temporal proximization is the construction of the present and its momentousness. To proximize the present means to put into words the speaker's present as the focal point in the timeframe. Temporal markers reflect the current status of the IDCs due to the threat posed by the ODCs. The demonstrative "that" is followed by a real time "night" to refer to Sara's first time thinking about COVID-19. This time marker, "that night" (5) signifies the start of Sara's imaginative journey. The IDCs future acts are chained because of COVID-19 impact "People will have to stop travelling soon, at least for now" (10). The previous sentence is structured as a clause with a future VP followed by a present time marker. Except for using a present VP, the same discourse structure is used in "It is normal to miss people we love that we can't see right now" (11). A new structure contrasts the past with the present in "Staying home felt weird at first, but now it feels normal" (13). The first clause has a past VP and contrasts the second which has a present VP. Future anticipation is expressed in "one day, we will all be able to play again and go back to school like we used to" (20). This complex sentence consists of clauses denoting two opposing time frames: the future in "we will," and the past in "we used to." The aforementioned examples are almost all the instances of temporal proximization in the story. Based on that, temporal proximization depends on using discourse forms showing the IDCs present/ future acts due to the impact of ODCs, COVID-19.

Axiological proximization in the story is of low and implicit probability because it accompanies spatial and temporal proximization to show the IDC-ODC clashing features. Examples used in the analysis of spatial and temporal proximization illustrate the IDCs good camp which includes all humans on earth. The other bad camp, the ODCs, includes COVID-19. The word "fight" is frequently used to denote the IDCs-ODCs confrontation. Analysis of "My Hero is You" indicates that the story primarily depends on spatial proximization so that the children may be persuaded to stay at home and follow the preemptive measures without being scared.

### **6.2. *THE Princess IN BLACK and the Case of the Coronavirus***

This story, which is written in capital letters, is completely fictional. It presents the princess in black as its main superhero. The princess is facing a problem she is unable to defeat by herself, and that is why she calls all heroes. The princess starts to explain the problem saying, “IT’S A GERM SO TINY, WE CAN’T EVEN SEE IT” (3). Spatial proximization makes the virus a physical entity “SO TINY” and dangerous as we are unable to see it. This goes in line with the description of the virus in “My Hero is You.” The IDCs are the princess and all her superhero friends. The ODCs include the germ, COVID-19. Like the previous story, the good camp includes many heroes while the bad camp has only one entity, the virus. The princess starts to tell the measures required so that the virus may be defeated.

Temporal proximization is manifest in “THIS TIME” (3), which refers to the present threat. In “I HAVE CANCELLED ALL OF MY PLAY-DATES UNTIL THE GERM IS DEFEATED” (5), the complex sentence structure presents two timeframes: the present action followed by the future. Axiological proximization is based on IDC-ODC clashing values and conflicts, as apparent in the use of “FIGHT” (3). The metaphor COVID-19 IS AN ENEMY is established in this story, a thing which resembles the previous story.

This story depends on fictitious characters. It summarizes the problem and the solution. It does not present an explanation of the virus and its effects. Unlike the previous story which conflates real characters with fictional ones, this story is totally fanciful.

### **6.3. *The Magic Cure***

In a total world of fantasy, “The Magic Cure” is the story of Mavros the wizard, Bromley the elf and two siblings, Eve and Jem, in their consideration of a cure to the disease attacking the elves in the city of Rosymere. Eve and Jem suggest that wearing magic shields is the solution to stop the disease. For this reason, Mavros addresses the crowd saying, “we need everyone to do this for the sake of Rosymere” (8). The IDCs camp includes “everyone”; the ODCs camp has the disease. Time is set at present. The IDCs-ODCs are in a clash which needs IDCs cooperation. The fictional story ends with the success of the children’s plan to stop the disease. So, the metaphor CHILDREN ARE HEROES is evoked.

### **6.4. *BRAY BRAY CONQUERS THE CORONAVIRUS***

This story, which is written in capitals, has a main character. The protagonist in “BRAY BRAY CONQUERS THE CORONAVIRUS” is a young black boy,

Bray Bray, who helps children to know the symptoms of COVID-19 and come up with ideas that may be useful in fighting the virus. The story has no imaginative angle at all. It addresses children's logic in a rhythmic and simple style.

As far as spatial proximization is concerned, the story identifies two categories from its title. The first category is Bray; the second is that of Coronavirus. The virus is defined as being a physical entity that can be conquered. The title places Bray as a member of the IDCs camp. The ODCs camp has Coronavirus as its sole member. The VP "CONQUERS" means that the two camps are close and are fighting. The IDCs-ODCs relation is that of combat. The VP "CONQUERS" marks the impact of the IDCs on the ODCs. So, the title depends on spatial proximization in order to indicate the significance of the story from the very beginning. The title sets the metaphors BRAY IS A HERO FIGHTER and COVID-19 IS AN ENEMY. This metaphorical expression attracts children so that they may imitate Bray.

The story revolves on Bray's rhythmic language by which he informs the readers about COVID-19. Bray starts to enlarge the IDCs camp so that it may include many people: "I JUST LEARNED ABOUT THE CORONAVIRUS. MAYBE YOU LEARNED ABOUT IT TO. MANY PEOPLE SAY THAT IT REMINDS THEM OF THE FLU" (4). The IDCs include the speaker, the addressees, and many people. The ODCs include Coronavirus. VPs serve to make the distance between the IDCs and the ODCs narrower through a series of VPs reflecting the ODCs impact on the IDCs: "IT MAKES YOU COUGH, GIVES YOU A FEVER, AND MAKES IT REALLY HARD TO BREATH. SOME PEOPLE HAVE TO GO TO THE HOSPITAL TO FIGHT IT" (5). The word "FIGHT" activates the metaphor COVID-19 IS AN ENEMY; PEOPLE ARE FIGHTERS. This metaphor is expressed clearly when Bray considers himself, doctors, nurses and workers to be hero fighters: "I'LL BE A HERO! KIND OF LIKE THE DOCTORS, NURSES, AND CASHIERS AT THE GROCERY STORE TOO" (9). The IDCs camp becomes larger as it has the doctors, the nurses, and all people. The larger the IDCs camp becomes, the closer the IDCs-ODCs distance becomes. As a result, more threat is posed. This legitimizes the preventive measures and convinces children to follow them. That is why Bray continues to talk about his plans and his activities at home in the time of the pandemic.

Temporal proximization sets the pandemic at the present moment. This is apparent when Bray says, "I STARTED FEELING REALLY DOWN AND BLUE UNTILL I LEARNED THERE ARE MANY THINGS TO HELP THAT I CAN DO" (6). The complex sentence structure compares the past to the present

and shifts the child's psychological state from being frustrated into being optimistic. Bray begins to narrate the things recommended at this time. He uses markers denoting the current time: "I STILL REALLY MISS MY TEACHERS, MY FRIENDS, AND GOING TO THE PARK. BUT I KNOW THAT IF I STAY AT HOME THAT I'LL BE DOING MY PART" (8). To stay at home becomes legitimized when it is depicted as being a positive act. Bray ends the narration of his own activities with their impact on him. He sets events at the present saying: "I FEEL SO MUCH BETTER HAVING A PLAN TO FIGHT THE CORONAVIRUS" (12). The pre final sentence is a conditional one denoting a present fact "IF YOU COME UP WITH A PLAN, YOU WILL TOO!" (12). The final one is an imperative clause: "WRITE YOUR PLAN TO FIGHT THE CORONAVIRUS BELOW!" (13). The final imperative clause motivates other children to think of plans in order to fight the virus by being safe at home. The metaphor CHILDREN ARE HEROES/FIGHTERS is always present in children's literature during the pandemic.

Axiological proximization goes with spatial and temporal proximations to add enforcement to the current threat construction, which is achieved via NPs showing the IDCs positive values, such as the doctors, the nurses and the workers who help people, versus VPs signifying the ODCs negative effects: "IT MAKES YOU COUGH ..." (5). The IDCs-ODCs fight is expressed clearly from the very beginning in the title itself.

The story employs spatial proximization via characterizing the threat in the form of the virus and making the IDCs-ODCs distance closer. No NPs signifying abstract negative effects are detected. This is suitable in the discourse directed to a child. The metaphors COVID-19 IS AN ENEMY and CHILDREN ARE HEROES/FIGHTERS are dominant. The story addresses children's minds rather than imagination.

### **6.5. *We're Going to be OK***

"We're going to be OK" is a story about the child, Parker whose parents tell him that he won't go to school, and they won't go to work because of Coronavirus. The child starts to inquire about the virus. The IDCs include Parker, his family and all people. The ODCs include only the Coronavirus. The distance between the IDCs and the ODCs is close as evident from the virus impact on the IDCs: "a new virus causing people to get sick" (8). The virus is embodied, as clear in "forms of coronavirus...this new version" (9) and described negatively as being "super sneaky" (9). This sets the threat which is enforced by the global impact of the virus as it "has caused many people across the world to become sick" (9). Temporal proximization is mainly established via the use of present

simple tense which denotes facts about the virus. The title is a sentence with a future verb that has a positive meaning. It spreads optimism that if the child follows the required step, we are going to be ok. Axiological proximization depends on the creation of two opposing camps: the IDCs and the ODCs. Style is a little bit scientific as the story deals with facts without any touch of imagination.

This story evokes the metaphor that A CHILD IS A HERO when the mother mentions that doctors and workers are “SUPERHEROES” (11) as they work for people’s safety. The mother, in reference to staying at home and washing hands, adds “if you do your part you can be a hero, too” (16).

### **6.6. COVID-19 HELPERS**

The title is misleading. It does not mean helping COVID-19. Once the story is read, it becomes clear that the story is about the way all people, and children in particular, can fight COVID-19. The very beginning of the story sets temporal proximization via an NP referring to an unspecified time in the past “In the spring of 2020, something very unusual happened” (3). The weird thing is clarified in a similar structure “In the spring of 2020, it seemed like kids everywhere were doing nothing” (6). The story moves to its focus on children’s role during the pandemic: “They were doing something very important. They were helping to fight a brand new disease” (7). This sentence sets spatial proximization. The virus is shaped and put as an element in the ODCs camp. Children are depicted as fighters in the IDCs camp. This story follows a new strategy, that of beginning with temporal proximization so that children’s interest may be attracted.

Spatial proximization depends on showing the large impact of the ODCs, that is why the story enlarges the categories affected by the ODCs: “it made some people very sick...so people everywhere began to help” (9). Many jobs and roles are mentioned during the pandemic which extends the IDCs camp. The story focuses on the role made by children “And kids helped too, just by staying at home...this was an important job” (13). The metaphor KIDS ARE HELPERS/FIGHTERS is at the heart of the book. This legitimizes the preemptive measures. Axiological proximization is subordinate to spatial and temporal. It presents the IDCs-ODCs fight and clashing values. The IDCs are fighters and helpers; the ODCs make people sick. This story addresses logic and depends on facts narrated in a simple style.

### **6.7. Together Living Life During COVID-19**

In this storybook, Olivia wakes up one morning to find out that schools are closed, and everything has changed. She starts to learn about the virus as the



story develops. Explaining the situation, her father says to her “There is a new virus called coronavirus that is making a lot of people sick” (3). The act of naming the virus is in itself an act of incarnating it. The ODCs, Coronavirus, has a negative impact on the IDCs, all people in general, because it makes them sick. This harm is a sign of the IDCs-ODCs close distance and conflict. The father employs spatial proximization so that Olivia may be convinced of staying at home. When he describes the virus saying, “the virus looks like a princess crown” (4), the father gives the virus a material shape so that threat may be closer. Temporal proximization focuses on the present threat “it’s important right now to stay home” (5). The father starts to mention present-tense activities that may help pass the time.

Axiological proximization is best understood in the father’s use of “together” (5). The word “together” is repeated (7, 9) so that a remarkable concentration on the IDCs cooperation may be considered. While the IDCs are together, the ODCs include just one harmful virus that will be defeated by the IDCs’ collaborative work. The story depends on simple facts explained by a father to a daughter so that they can adapt to life in the time of the pandemic.

### ***6.8. Coronavirus: A book for children***

The book presents simple information about the virus. The virus is shaped as “tiny germs” and dangerous because “it causes an illness” when it “gets inside the human body” (4). The IDCs camp includes any human. Time is set at the present which is suitable for this informative book. The IDCs-ODCs relation is that of a fight “everyone...to fight the coronavirus” (7). The last pages of the book tell children how to help by their “staying at home” (1) and washing their hands all the time.

### ***6.9. What Color Is Today?***

The book is about emotions expressed by colors during the pandemic. The title sets “Today” as the main concern. The book begins with the blue day “Because no one really knows what to do about a disease that travels with such ease” (4). The IDCs camp has all people while the ODCs camp has the disease. The disease is dangerously moving as indicated by the VP “travels with such ease.” The virus is embodied, “there’s no telling where it may land” (5) and is shown to spread widely. Hence, its negative effect becomes global. The story moves to describe “today” as being “red...Everything is cancelled” (6) which is a consequence of the threat. Pink has to do with not knowing what to think, gray means “business is going away” (10) and orange refers to the child’s confusion. Colors are given meanings in the story; each signifies the child’s feeling during

the pandemic. Axiological proximization is present in the IDCs-ODCs clashing values. This story has a psychological touch as it aims to train children to express their feelings freely.

### **7. Discussion: The Story of Covid-19 As Told to Children**

Hygiene, physical distancing, wearing medical masks, staying at home and information about COVID-19 must be available for everyone. COVID-19 outbreak has made it necessary for everyone to understand its related terms. Children's e-books, which appear during the pandemic, tell the story of the disease in an interesting style. It is noticed that children are depicted as being active agents fighting the virus in these books. This is significant as it motivates the child to embody the anti-virus fighter in real life. These e-books provide children with age-appropriate information about COVID-19 without terrifying them. The stories also must represent the current threat. This is the main reason for selecting children's books to be the data of analysis. Each story has to be presented in a manner that legitimizes the protective measures, such as quarantine and lockdowns, without scaring the child. Accordingly, PT as a cognitive/pragmatic model of the discourse of fear and threat seems to be suitable in this context. Analysis shows the way discourse analysis proximizes the crisis and legitimizes the protective reactions without scaring the child.

This study examines nine e-books. Spatial proximization of the threat is predominant in them and depends on the embodiment of the threat and narrowing the IDCs – ODCs distance. All stories consider COVID-19 as being the sole entity in the ODCs camp, while the IDCs camp includes all people. Abstract NPs which describe the negative impact of the ODCs on the IDCs are absent in all stories. This is accepted because these NPs may scare the child rather than motivate him/her to face the threat. The metaphor A CHILD IS A HERO/FIGHTER is created in the books, a thing which convinces the child that his/her being at home is a heroic act. Apart from "COVID-19 HELPERS," all stories set the present as the timeframe. The nine e-books employ axiological proximization of a lower probability as it accompanies spatial and temporal proximations. It also signifies the IDCs-ODCs conflicting values.

"My Hero is You" is a mixture between reality and imagination. "The Princess in BLACK and the Case of The Coronavirus" and "The Magic Cure" address the child's fantasy and emotions through fictional protagonists. The rest of the storybooks address children's minds through simply narrated facts. This research considers that blending reality and fantasy is better than focusing on just one mode of communication. That is why "My Hero is You" is thought to be more effective as it addresses the child's mind and imagination, which

interests the child more than addressing just one angle. *Coronavirus: A book for children* is criticized as it relies on presenting mere information, which may not attract a child to read or listen to. “What Color Is Today?” seems to be more remarkable as it prompts children to express the fears and the negative feelings they may have.

This research aims to present a cross-disciplinary model of analysis of children’s e-books during the pandemic. The paper integrates Cognitive Linguistics via the cognitive-pragmatic theory of proximization and critical discourse analysis.

### **Conclusion**

In the time of COVID-19 pandemic, discourses of crisis addressed to children in the selected e-books are structured in order to legitimize the preventive measures without frightening the child. PT and the relevant STA model of proximization serve to illustrate how threat is shaped in discourse. Threat embodiment, present time frame and concentration on the conflicting entities render that threat nearby. This is needed so that children may be more careful about their safety. The smart formation of the metaphor CHILDREN ARE HEROES/FIGHTERS induces children to be active agents by their staying safe at home. The metaphor makes children satisfied with their role because their act of staying at home helps in stopping the outbreak of COVID-19.

Spatial proximization is the dominant type in the stories. This signifies the writers’ interest in explaining the threat. Coronavirus is frequently described as being a physical entity. Conceptual/mental discourse elements are almost absent. Had a child heard an abstract notion, he would have formed it in his mind in a way that renders that notion frightening. So, discourse in the stories depends on presenting material descriptions of the virus/threat so that the child may be able to conceive of the danger with no panic. This helps in convincing the child to comply with the required protective measures. While everybody, especially children, belong to the IDCs, Coronavirus is the sole entity in the ODCs. The resulting close distance between the IDCs and the ODCs legitimizes the preventive steps. VPs denoting the IDCs fight/reactions trigger the metaphor COVID-19 IS AN ENEMY.

PT seems to be an effective theoretical framework that analyzes the discourse addressed to children during the crises. The theory provides the strategies detecting threat construction so that it may seem to be closer to discourse recipients. Accordingly, the addressee becomes ready to accept the needed procedures.

Insufficient literature on PT and COVID-19 discourse is a major limitation. Studies on children's books in particular are not sufficiently examined although the discourse addressing children should have had more focus. More studies on children's storybooks are suggested to researchers in the field of humanities. It is thought that children's books are an understudied genre which needs more analytical research.

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