



A Corpus Analysis of ‘Disaster’ Metaphorical Expressions taken from Dawn Newspaper

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Abstract

As metaphor is a good tool for conceptualizing the COVID-19 pandemic. So, metaphors are extracted from COVID-19-related news stories which offer a unique lens for examining how the individual writers perceive the pandemic. The current paper aimed to describe conceptual metaphors related to COVID-19 IS DISASTER in the discourse of Pakistani newspaper’s news stories. For this purpose, the data was analyzed using the theoretical framework of “Conceptual Metaphor Theory” (CMT), which is proposed by George Lakoff and Mark Johnson in the field of Cognitive Linguistics. The antconc software was used for Dawn newspaper’s data analysis. The data was collected from January 2020 till December 2020 by using the Pragglejazz group of Identification Method for Metaphors (2007). The analysis of the corpus of "Dawn " Newspaper reveals that the conceptual metaphors COVID-19 IS DISASTER and COVID-19 IS NATURAL DISASTER were found with the frequency of 53 and 102 metaphors respectively in the data. The findings proved the effectiveness of metaphor in print media communication, its significance to understand difficult situations, efficiently communicate ideas and influence the audience. Any future research in this area would benefit from including more metaphor areas and search words by using a larger corpus.

Keywords: Disaster Metaphors, COVID-19 pandemic, Dawn Newspaper, Analysis

1. Introduction

In December 2019, a novel coronavirus known as Covid-19 infected the lives of many people working in Wuhan, China with unfamiliar pneumonia (She, et al., 2020, Gul et al.,2022(a) and Sajjad et al.,2023). Thereafter, the disease quickly took over the country, and in February, the World Health Organization (WHO) declared the Covid-19 as a pandemic due to its rapid spread throughout the world. According to the data collected by the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control, from December 31, 2019 to August 21, 2020, about 22705647 cases of Covid-19 have been reported and 794104 people have been killed by the contagious disease (COVID-19 situation update worldwide, as of 21 August 2020).

Unlike former contagious diseases like Ebola and Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS), the nature of the Covid-19 outbreak as the infection has endangered many lives. The pandemic began in December 2019 and grew into the largest and most severe outbreak in the history of the disease (Liu, et al., 2020 and Gul et al.,2022(b)). Due to this, it has received international consideration and a public health emergency has been declared by W.H.O. The spread of coronavirus has not only affected the economies, trade and industries of the world but also affected the social and domestic lives of people (Katermina & Yachenko, 2020). It also caused a great deal of fear, anxiety and panic in the public. It has not only instilled fear in individuals at a social and psychological level but has also severely changed the conventional designs and behaviors of people.

According to Colak (2023), with the continuation of the past global diseases, recently the humanity is struggling with the arrival of Corona virus disease 2019 known as Covid-19 pandemic. As the disease started or emerged from China at the end of 2019 but then rapidly it was spread throughout the globe. Although scientific knowledge about the COVID-19 virus has increased from the early days of the outbreak but there was still no proven therapeutic medicine. While the epidemic affects the world in multiple waves, there have been no other precautions in addition to social distancing, wearing masks, and strict cleaning measures are adopted to protect individuals.

Along with other changes caused by Covid-19 globally, the communication approach is also affected at the linguistic level. In this regard, a major role is played by the media coverage on all media platforms. Covid-19 receives demanding global coverage in print as well as in electronic media. The image of Covid-19 is depicted differently in various languages from diverse perspectives utilizing different styles of communication. Usually, coronavirus or disease discourse is part of the medical and scientific discourse, which is accurately employed.

However, when the disease is used by ordinary people in their discourses, it is sometimes used both personally and metaphorically to conceptualize the phenomenon. To study this feature of language, a corpus study can indicate different usages of the words created by the speakers. One of the major developments in the field of linguistics is the study of language about the mind and how language is organized by ideas, thoughts, and embodiment. Understanding language and the meanings of linguistic items are related to conceptualization and embodiment. This approach to study language is provided by Cognitive Linguistics, which is a newly emerged field that investigates the relationship between language, mind, and embodied experience (Evans, 2011 and Gul et al.,2022(c)).

To study language from this approach is to study conceptualization. Language is a window to cognitive function

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and provides knowledge about the nature, structure, and organization of thoughts and ideas. This approach deviates from other traditional views as it assumes that language can provide insightful explanations about certain basic properties and features of human mental faculty i.e., mind (Evan & Green, 2006 and Gul et al., 2022(d)).

As metaphor is good tool for conceptualizing the novel disease (Rasool, et al. 2021). The current paper also examined that COVID-19 IS DISASTER metaphor in Pakistani newspaper, s news stories. For this purpose, the data was analyzed using the theoretical framework of “Conceptual Metaphor Theory” (CMT), which is proposed by George Lakoff and Mark Johnson in the field of Cognitive Linguistics. Previously, in linguistics, metaphors are just considered as ornamental parts and stylistic tools of language, but Lakoff and Johnson (1980) negate this approach and propose that metaphors are not just ornamental tools but important reflections of human thoughts and embodiment.

The study of metaphor has a long history, and can be traced back to 1932 when Aristotle stated that metaphor is "the application of a word belonging to something else" (p.51). Also, Aristotle’s views on metaphor provide insights into modelling the conceptualization of metaphors. Kövecses (2010) has identified five common characteristics of the traditional concept of metaphor: First is Metaphor is the property of words. Secondly, Metaphor is used for some creative and rhetorical purpose. Thirdly, Metaphor is based on the similarity between two entities that are compared and identified. Fourthly, Metaphor is a conscious and thoughtful use of words, and you must have a distinct talent to be able to do it well. Lastly, Metaphor is a figure of speech that we cannot do communication without it, we are using it for special effects, and it is not an unavoidable part of everyday human communication. (Kövecses, 2010 and Gul et al.,2023(a)).

Similarly, Hunston (2020) argued based on corpus analysis that there are some verbs and nouns used indicating less coercion and more encouragement, for instance, guideline, advice, maintain, observe, comply with, and adhere to are the expressions of positive language use related to COVID-19. Nor and Zulcafli (2020) conducted a corpus-driven study through collocation analysis of Malaysian news reports (Gul et al.,2023(b))

The present study is based on the analysis of corpus made of disaster metaphors from dawn newspaper. Similarly, Nor and Zulcafli (ibid) have used “La Repubblica” corpus as a reference corpus and analyzed it through Sketch Engine. They generated wordlists of nouns and adjectives aiming to explore journalistic communication during the coronavirus situation in Italy. The findings of this study based on concordance analysis revealed an emergency situation in the health and economy of Italy. Few studies have recently been published on COVID-19 discourses produced in Pakistan. For example, Rafi (2020) and Hassan et al., 2023(a) in content analysis, found cure, racism, and conspiracy theories as important topics discussed on social media by Pakistanis. Similarly, the spread of misinformation through public WhatsApp groups was found by Javed, Shuja, Usama et al. (2020) in addition to propagating religious ideologies to combat the COVID-19 crisis.

Nauman and Islam (2020) explored a large corpus of more than 70 news websites from Pakistan and reported an exponential change in the English language used in Pakistan. However, none of the abovementioned studies conducted in the Pakistani context explored newspaper editorials. Hence, the present study opting for the conventions of corpus-driven approaches explores various themes, through concordance analysis, in Pakistani newspapers editorials related to the spread of the pandemic.

Figen Unal Colak (2022), (Afaq et al., 2022) and Gul et al., 2022(e) also carried out his research on social media users who derived metaphors have conceptualized COVID-19, as a disaster along with other categories as well. This category includes metaphors that are about sudden and unexpected situations that may also cause fear and anxiety. The study showed that Covid-19 affects every area of life suddenly and unexpectedly—with a “disaster.”

2. Methods & Materials

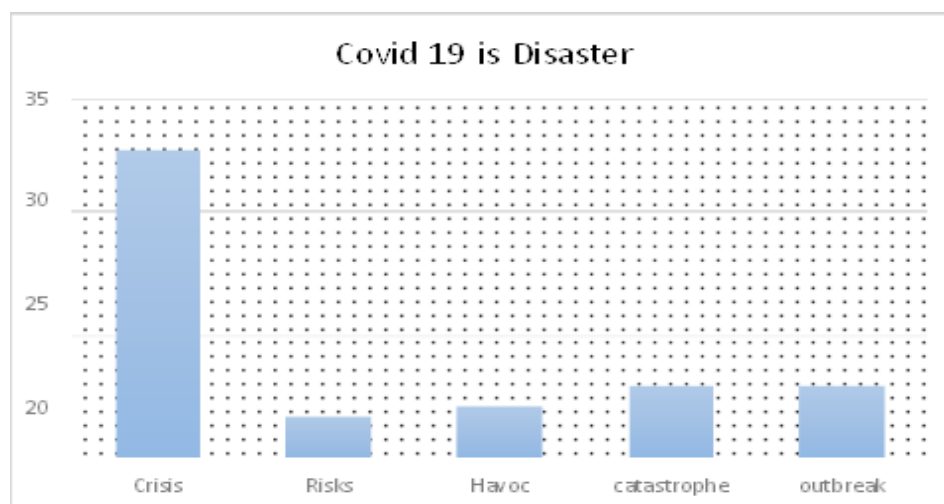
Conceptual metaphor theory (CMT) was adopted for conducting metaphor research. Along with the CMT, two other theories Grady’s Primary Metaphor Theory and Fauconnier’s Blending Theory were taken to overcome the limitations of this theory. For the collection of ‘Disaster’ metaphors on the Covid-19 pandemic, the software Antconc was selected. The data was collected from January 2020 till December 2020. When the corpus was made, collocations of Covid-19, coronavirus, pandemic, and virus were examined manually to find out the different types of source domains used in both corpora by using the Praggel jazz group of Identification Method for Metaphors (2007). The frequency of the source domain “disaster” was counted and provides a discussion on the metaphorical expression in relation with COVID-19 pandemic taken from Dawn newspaper.

3. Results & Discussion

According to the Oxford Dictionary disaster means “a sudden accident or a natural catastrophe that causes great damage or loss of life”. Disasters are grouped into two categories like natural and man-made by the reason of formation. A natural disaster is defined as an event of nature, which overwhelms local resources and threatens the function and safety of the community (March 2002: 1). As the virus causes deaths, destroys jobs, risks the safety of laborers, and creates greater risk for smokers, it is called a disaster in the lives of the citizens. The print media described the disaster in the form of metaphors. The present study included the metaphors mentioned above in the disaster category due to the destruction and harm caused by covid-19 crisis.

Table 1: The Frequency of The Lexical Items Related to Covid-19 is Disaster

Lexical word	Frequency
Crisis	30
Risks	4
Havoc	5
catastrophe	7
outbreak	7

**Figure 1: Covid 19 is Disaster**

3.1. Covid-19 is Disaster

The analysis of the corpus of "Dawn " Newspaper reveals that the conceptual metaphor COVID-19 IS DISASTER is found with the frequency of 53 metaphors in the data. The damage caused by the virus was portrayed as a disaster. Many metaphorical expressions related to the Source Domain (SD) DISASTER were used, with lexical words like crisis, risks, havoc, disaster, and catastrophe. Searching the frequency of the source domain Crisis in the corpus, 319 tokens of the lexical item crisis were found. However, 30 of them were used metaphorically to refer to the metaphorical concept COVID-19 IS CRISIS. Most of them talk about economic crises For example, " Boryeong launched the festival on Daecheon Beach in 1998 to rejuvenate a local economy hit by the Asian financial crisis." (July 18, 2020). Although the lexical item crisis in this context was not used metaphorically, it talks about the COVID-19 crisis. The lexical item crisis was also used metaphorically to talk about the pandemic, for example, "Third volume of e-book on the economy during Covid-19 crisis launched." (10 April, 2020). The lexical item HAVOC was used five times metaphorically to refer to the pandemic. For example, "countries as well as Japan, Canada and Jordan intensified fears of more Covid-19 havoc to come." (Dec 28, 2020 and Afaq et al., 2023). The mention of intensified fears suggests growing concerns about the potential for further havoc caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. This reflects a broader global context where uncertainty and anxiety about the virus persist, despite efforts to control its spread through vaccination and other measures.

Searching the lexical outbreak, the quantitative analysis shows that there were 475 tokens, and examining the context reveals that 196 were used metaphorically to refer to the pandemic, remaining instances were excluded because they did not refer to the COVID-19 crisis. For example, "The fear of a coronavirus outbreak has forced US Secretary of Defence Mark Esper to postpone a key visit to Pakistan, India and other countries in the region, the Pentagon announced on Tuesday" (March 11, 2020 and Ishtiaq et al., 2022 and Gul et al., 2023(c).

Another lexical word CATASTROPHE was used 7 times metaphorically to hit the target domain Covid-19 out of 11 occurrences. The example taken from the corpus was, "What now? On top of this disaster, a coronavirus catastrophe?" said 55-year-old Roxane Moukarzel."(Aug 23, 2020).

Roxane Moukarzel's statement highlights the compounded challenges faced by individuals and communities dealing with the aftermath of a disaster, such as those mentioned earlier, alongside the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. The term "coronavirus catastrophe" underscores the severity of the situation, suggesting that the pandemic has exacerbated existing difficulties and added another layer of complexity to an already challenging

scenario. Searching the lexical word ‘Risk’ that hit the Target domain Covid-19. There were in total 43 instances of the lexical word ‘risk’ but only four times were used metaphorically to refer to Covid-19. As exemplified by the corpus “Trump’s age, weight add to Covid risks: experts” (Oct 3, 2020). It refers to the increased vulnerability of former President Donald Trump to COVID-19 due to factors such as his age and weight. Both age and weight are known risk factors for experiencing severe illness from the virus.

The verb sapped has a sense of a fluid as it is defined as "of a body fluid (such as blood) essential to life, health, or vigor". Using disaster metaphors to describe the COVID-19 crisis can help convey the scale of the challenges and the urgency of the situation. Here are some disasters-related metaphors that have been used to depict various aspects of the pandemic

In the analysis of the metaphors, 17 metaphors come under the disaster category. The most common words used to describe disaster were “crisis, risks, havoc, surge, upsurge, wave, catastrophe, fire, breakout, outbreak, disaster, storm, and tsunami”. According to the Oxford Dictionary disaster means “a sudden accident or a natural catastrophe that causes great damage or loss of life”.

It is evident from the present study that metaphor is a powerful tool to frame the government and all the public problems generated by the coronavirus. Most politicians take help from metaphors to convince the public about the situation as: “Lockdown a temporary solution to Covid-19 crisis: PM”, “Imran praises team for help in Covid-19 crisis”, “Several projects launched despite Covid-19 crisis, says CM”. The word crisis is used to persuade the public about the severity of the situation.

The crisis was conceived in terms of a structured set of conceptual metaphors that depict it as a disaster, and a harmful object. The metaphors in the present study not only shape the readers’ view of the crisis but also construct a negative assessment of the situation by highlighting its harmful effects. As Sam van Steenkiste (2020) also investigated the use and effects of climate change is a crisis conceptual metaphor that maps the crisis domain to the domain of climate change.

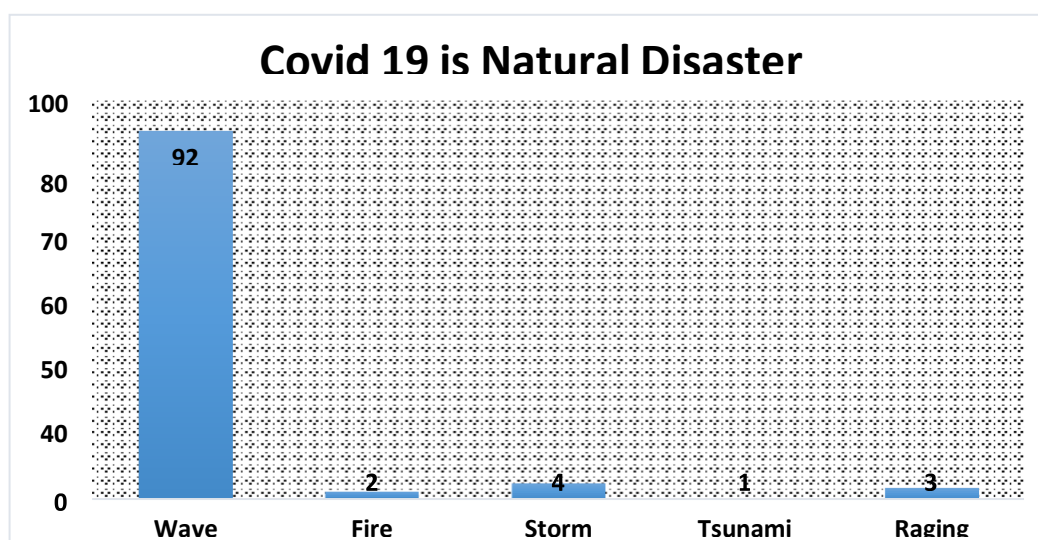
3.2. Covid-19 is Natural Disaster

Metaphors are commonly used to describe and understand complex phenomena like natural disasters and pandemics. There were 102 metaphors found in the natural disaster category. The concept of "waves" has been frequently used metaphorically to describe the different phases and surges of COVID-19.

Table 2: The Frequency of The Lexical Items Related to Covid-19 is Natural Disaster

<i>Lexical word</i>	<i>Frequency</i>
Wave	92
Fire	2
Storm	4
Tsunami	1
Raging	3

Figure 2: Covid-19 is Natural Disaster



The conceptual metaphor COVID-19 IS NATURAL DISASTER was frequently described with various lexical words in the corpus with the frequency of 102 metaphors in total. Lexical items such as “wave, fire, storm, and

tsunami” were used metaphorically to refer to the pandemic. There were 92 instances of the metaphorical use of WAVE to refer to COVID-19. For example, “They told Dawn that the second wave of the virus was considered to be more dangerous than the previous one” (28 Nov 2020) The spread of the pandemic is compared to water by using the lexical items wave to convince the audience of the dangers of the disease as it quickly spreads.

One of the most powerful images from nature has also become a powerful metaphor—the wave. Just in the last few months, we have heard such metaphors used to describe our elections and the COVID-19 pandemic. Leading up to the election, many had dubbed their anticipation of a strong showing by Democratic candidates as a blue wave. The debate on election night was whether that blue wave had materialized. Around the same time, the World was told to brace itself for a third wave of the coronavirus as we approached winter and the Holiday season. The First Wave metaphor refers to the initial surge of COVID-19 cases in a particular region or country. It's often likened to the first wave of an ocean swell, marking the onset of the pandemic's impact. Second Wave metaphors are following the decline of cases after the first wave, subsequent rises in infections are referred to as the second wave. These metaphors suggest a cyclical pattern of resurgence, much like the repeating waves of the sea. Third Wave: Similar to the second wave, the third wave represents another increase in cases after a period of relative calm, indicating ongoing challenges and resurgence of the virus.

More with the former example than the latter, the metaphor of a wave can be seen as positive or negative, depending on your point of view. But, examining the natural phenomenon will help us to determine why the wave is such a popular metaphor, and why some believe it is overused and misused to the point that they battle against it.

Waves are relentless. The water crashes on the beach, ebbs back toward the ocean, only to be followed by another wave of crashing water. It never stops. Waves can be powerful. People caught in one are taught to relax and ride the wave to safety. The most powerful ships attempting to ride against and past a wave will—at the least—find themselves making no forward progress. We can take the meaning of Covid-19 when using the wave metaphor that it is not only powerful as well as continuous process. It can take the life of the people and a continuous threat to the health of public.

Roman Suligowski, Tadeusz Ciupa (2023) also found that the continuous death rates recorded in several waves of COVID-19 worldwide. They investigated five waves of COVID-19 in Poland during 800 days of the pandemic. Moodley and Lesage (2020) expressed that the natural forces invasion metaphor feeds into fears Pasaribu, T. A., Dewi, N., & Bram, B. (2021) described natural force is the second prominent category of metaphors. By drawing on the literal uncontrollability of waves, possible preventive measures are backgrounded and Covid-19 is conceptualized as beyond human control, as if nothing can be done to prevent an increase in cases (De La Rosa, 2007, p.25). Despite being “warned from the very beginning” and “regardless of all the measures that were taken”, the wave still came crashing.

The wave metaphor seems to imply that the number of Covid-19 cases increases not because of human behavior, but because of the virus itself. Therefore, the wave metaphor also has the potential of hiding the fact that the measures taken by the government to slow the spread of the virus have failed to stop an increase in cases. One of the most powerful images from nature has also become a powerful metaphor—the wave. Just in the last few months, we have heard such metaphors used to describe our elections and the COVID-19 pandemic. Leading up to the election, many had dubbed their anticipation of a strong showing by Democratic candidates as a blue wave. The debate on election night was whether that blue wave had materialized. Around the same time, the World was told to brace itself for a third wave of the coronavirus as we approached winter and the Holiday season.

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Another lexical item related to the conceptual metaphor COVID-19 IS NATURAL DISASTER is fire. Searching the corpus, 10 occurrences of the lexical item fire were found. By examining them carefully, 8 tokens were excluded because they did not refer to the COVID-19 crisis. For example, “Johnson ‘on top of things’, but under fire over initial virus response.” (April 20, 2020). Here, “under fire” conveys the idea of facing harsh criticism or being attacked, much like a target being bombarded with projectiles during a military assault or, more metaphorically, like being engulfed in flames during a fire. This metaphor vividly captures the level of

scrutiny and pressure faced by Johnson due to perceived failures or shortcomings in his handling of the COVID-19 pandemic in its early stages.

The next lexical item related to the conceptual metaphor COVID-19 IS NATURAL DISASTER was FLARE UP. There were 3 instances of those mentioned above lexical metaphorically. The example is taken from the corpus, "Epidemiologists say contact tracing will become a vital weapon in containing future flare-ups in Covid-19, the flu-like disease caused by coronavirus, once national lockdowns slow the rapid spread of the virus." (April 02, 2020).

The above two examples were categorized by Semino as fire metaphors (Semino, E. (2021). The next lexical word which is also in the fire metaphors is 'RAGING' used as a noun or verb, as exemplified from the corpus, "This epidemic is like a raging fire." (April 21, 2020). Comparing an epidemic to a raging fire is a common metaphor used to convey the rapid spread and destructive nature of infectious diseases. Just like a fire can quickly engulf everything in its path, an epidemic can rapidly spread through populations, overwhelming healthcare systems and causing significant harm. This comparison highlights the urgency of taking swift and decisive action to contain the spread of the disease and mitigate its impact on communities.

In addition to this, the lexical word STORM was used 4 times out of 11 occurrences. An example of the above lexical word was taken from the corpus, "Face masks will become compulsory in England's shops and supermarkets from next week, while South Africa reimposed a nationwide curfew to prevent a "coronavirus storm" (July 16, 2020). In this metaphor, "coronavirus" represents the viral outbreak, and "storm" evokes imagery of a powerful and uncontrollable force. Just like a storm, the spread of the virus can be rapid, widespread, and unpredictable. By describing it as a "coronavirus storm," the metaphor emphasizes the urgency and severity of the situation, highlighting the need for preventive measures such as reimposing a curfew to curb the spread of the virus and mitigate its impact on public health and safety.

Moodley and Lesage (2020) express that the natural forces invasion metaphor feeds into fears. Pasaribu, et. Al. (2021) described natural force as the second prominent category of metaphors. By drawing on the literal uncontrollability of waves, possible preventive measures are backgrounded and Covid-19 is conceptualized as beyond human control, as if nothing can be done to prevent an increase in cases (De La Rosa, 2007, p.25 and Ali et al., 2022). Despite being "warned from the very beginning" and "regardless of all the measures that were taken", the wave still came crashing.

Whereas, Repetskaya, E. R., & Ivanova, A. G. (2022) described that natural disaster metaphors are productive metaphors. Especially frequent sources for describing the economic and social consequences of a destructive pandemic are natural disasters, against which people and the economy are weak (corona storm, Covid tornado, corona earthquake, Covid disaster, Covid chaos).

The last lexical word related to the conceptual metaphor "COVID-19 IS NATURAL DISASTER" was 'TSUNAMI' found in the corpus of Dawn newspaper. There was one example of tsunami used metaphorically out of three instances. An example is "Today everyone witnessed that Pakistan was facing a tsunami of price hike and coronavirus" (August 06, 2020).

Wicke & Bolognesi, (2020), also found that words in the natural disaster category seem to relate to events and actions associated with the arrival and spreading of the pandemic (e.g., "wave", "storm", "tide", "tsunami", "disaster", "tornado". With the use of such terms, a wave of fear is inflicted in the minds of people and they take COVID-19 situation as a devastating wave of storm or sea and a real threat to the health of people.

Describing COVID-19 or Corona virus as an emergency, as a global or international emergency emphasizes the urgent need for international cooperation and coordinated efforts to address its impact. In one example the word "Virus alarm" is used to convey a sense of urgency and heightened awareness in response to a viral outbreak or pandemic like COVID-19. Just like a traditional alarm warns of a potential threat or danger, the metaphor "virus alarm" suggests the need for immediate attention, action, and preparedness in the face of a contagious disease.

In an emergency metaphor, words like 'virus rescue' and 'virus curfew' were used. "Virus rescue" is a metaphor that can be used to describe the efforts and actions taken to combat and mitigate the impact of a viral outbreak or pandemic. Just as a rescue operation is carried out to save individuals in danger, the metaphor "virus rescue" suggests a concerted and organized response to save lives, contain the spread of the virus and minimize the damage caused by the outbreak.

4. Conclusion

The COVID-19 pandemic has left deep marks in the consciousness of people all over the world. Because of its unexpectedness, rapid pace and global scale, the pandemic has forced significant changes into our lives. The enormous challenge issued by the dreaded pandemic is being discussed, explained, rationalized and interpreted in numerous publications of health and media reports, newspaper articles, write ups as well as news headlines. The present study analyzed the COVID-19 disaster related metaphors with the help of Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT).

The source domain of metaphors disaster is the second high frequency of metaphorical expressions both in the Dawn and Global Times corpora which seems to confirm that COVID-19 is a sudden accident or a natural

catastrophe which caused great damage or loss of life” as confirmed from previous studies such as Figen Unal Colak (2022), Eleonora Piromalli (2021) etc, (for more details see chapter 4).

In terms of disaster metaphors, Pakistani newspaper shares the use of the concept of “fire, raging, Wave, Storm, Tsunami, crisis, risks, etc. The fire metaphors within the natural disaster category capture the infectiousness of the COVID-19 pandemic, where even a small spark can trigger a large-scale fire. Moreover, using “forest fires” as a metaphor for the COVID-19 pandemic also has a certain basis of recognition, just as people feel the heat and high temperature in a forest fire; COVID-19 patients also experience the torture of high body temperature (Semino, 2021). At the same time, other types of disaster metaphors appear in the mentioned text, such as “tsunami metaphors” and “storm metaphors,” which aim to awaken people’s awareness of the severity of the COVID-19 epidemic. In the “tsunami metaphor”, “storm metaphor,” and wave metaphors the patients or viruses are compared to the “tsunami” or “storm,” while the human body or medical and health institutions are compared to the suffering side.

Any future research in this area would benefit from including more metaphor areas and searchwords and by using a larger corpus. This would allow for both a broader and more detailed view into the purposes and effects of metaphor usage in text discourse regarding Covid-19.

Further researchers can compare more metaphorical representations of COVID-19 across different types of media, such as news articles, social media posts, government communications, and public speeches. Investigate how metaphors vary across these platforms and their impact on public understanding and response to the pandemic.

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