

Metaphorical Framing of Pakistan's 2025 Flood: An Ecolinguistics Analysis of Selected Newspaper Articles

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Abstract

This study investigates the metaphorical framing of Pakistan's 2025 flood through an ecolinguistics analysis of selected newspaper articles from Dawn and The Nation. Using Conceptual Metaphor Theory and a qualitative research approach, this study explores how language shapes public understanding of environmental disasters (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). The findings show that floods are frequently portrayed as violent agents, historical milestones, and material destroyers through war and conflict-related metaphors. The analysis also highlights themes of climate injustice, ecological imbalance, governance failure, and human responsibility. The study demonstrates that media discourse plays a significant role in influencing ecological awareness and shaping perceptions about climate-related crises in Pakistan.

Keywords: Ecolinguistics, conceptual metaphor, Pakistan's flood, environmental discourse, media framing

Introduction

The climate change is one of the biggest crises in recent years but unfortunately the most effective are developing and underdeveloped countries. Pakistan being a developing country is facing this imbalance very clearly and dominantly. Although Pakistan has introduced projects of greenhouses and has produced almost one percent of greenhouse emissions still it is considered as the most vulnerable country in the world (Eckstein, Künzel, & Schäfer, 2021; Kreft et al., 2017). In recent years a climatic extreme has been observed in Pakistan such as Punjab and Sindh have observed floods and excessive rain fall several times in 2025. As a result, research about flood in Pakistan has increased significantly with emphasis on socioeconomic impacts, food security and remote sensing (Waseem & Rana, 2023).

Media is an important tool for environmental communication and is a big source to deliver message more widely. Newspaper discourse works as an important tool in shaping public understanding of social, political, and environmental problems because the job of newspaper is not simply reporting events, they also expose reality through language, patterns of representation, and ideological framing. These texts transform disasters of climate into a discourse which can affect policies with priority of funding and actions for the people (Entman, 1993; Gamson & Modigliani, 1989). According to Jasanoff, 2010; Weingart, Engels, & Pansegrau,

2000 the language and metaphors of articles do not only describe floods instead they shape perception, risk, blame and forms of solution.

Metaphors help people to understand scientific text of environmental discourse in easy words. According to Lakoff and Johnson (1980) Metaphors are important mechanisms of thinking process which help people to understand new concepts while using already known concepts. On the other hand, metaphors do not describe full situation. Sometimes they emphasize few things and conceal others which has deep impact on the interpretation and choices of the acceptable solution (Larson, 2011; Nerlich, Koteyko, and Brown, 2010). The 2010 floods affected 20 million people and caused over \$10 billion in damage. In 2022, 33 million people were displaced (Haq et al., 2012; Mahmood & Jia, 2016). The 2025 floods show that the problem and destruction continue so several people are still at risk. This shows gap in ecological fragility and resilience planning. It is therefore essential to conduct research on Pakistani media coverage of floods, especially the language and metaphors through ecolinguistics lens.

According to Stibbe (2014), ecolinguistics analyses how language shapes relationship between human and environment "it can investigate the stories we live by, mental models that influence behavior and lie at the heart of the ecological challenges we are facing" (Stibbe, 2015, pp. 1-2). The fields of Ecolinguistics and Critical discourse analysis shows related perspectives for discovering ideologies and ecological consequences that are an integral part of these metaphors. There is noticeable absence of contextual and methodological domains specifically about the 2025 flood event in Pakistan. This research uses a qualitative Eco-linguistic approach to examine metaphors in newspaper articles. Its aim is to fulfill existing gaps in Pakistani climate studies and global Ecolinguistic perspectives.

Problem Statement

Media reporting plays an important role in shaping opinions and public understanding of national and international events and crises. However, the news media can accidentally make social problems worse just by ignoring them. A very quick look at Dawn news shows that during coverage of natural disasters, they rarely blame human actions for making things very critical. This is an area which is ignored by researchers. Therefore, this study examines the Dawn News and The Nation's articles on 2025 floods in Pakistan, during the peak of the crisis to identify the dominant conceptual metaphors.

Objectives of this study

- To identify dominant conceptual metaphors used in newspaper articles about the 2025 floods in Pakistan.

Research Question

What are the dominant conceptual metaphors used by selected newspaper articles to depict the 2025 Pakistan floods?

Literature Review

Environmental discourse and media representation of climate disasters have received growing scholarly attention in recent years. Researchers argue that newspapers and media texts do not simply provide information about disasters, but also shape public perception through framing strategies, metaphorical language, and ideological positioning. As stated by Entman (1993), framing emphasizes certain aspects of reality while downplaying others, affecting how audiences understand environmental crises and responsibility. Similarly, Gamson & Modigliani (1989) explain that media discussion forms interpretive framework that guide public understanding of social and political events.

Metaphor is crucial in environmental communication because it allows readers to understand complex climate-related issues through familiar ideas. Lakoff and Johnson (1980) argue that metaphors are not

merely linguistic decorative but also cognitive instruments that align human thinking. Environmental issues such as floods, climate change, and disasters are frequently explained through war, violence, illness, and destruction metaphors. These metaphorical constructions shape emotional responses and policy attitudes. As stated by Larson (2011) further explains that metaphors can either enhance ecological responsibility or hide the human causes behind environmental destruction.

Therefore, the present study contributes to existing literature by examining metaphorical framing in Dawn and The Nation newspaper articles related to the 2025 floods in Pakistan. By applying Conceptual Metaphor Theory and ecolinguistics analysis, this study investigates how language constructs floods, assigns responsibility, and reflects ecological ideologies within Pakistani media discourse.

Methodology

This study uses a qualitative research method to find out how language represents disasters in media discourse. It is well suited method because it gives in depth study of how metaphors frame events and deliver meaning. Therefore, this study examines the Dawn News and The Nations on 2025 floods in Pakistan, during the peak of the crisis to identify the dominant conceptual metaphors.

Target Population

The target population consisted of newspaper articles on Pakistan floods 2025. It included two articles from The Dawn News and two articles from The Nation. The selected newspapers have well reputation and wide readership in Pakistan. Articles are selected because they have opinion shaping text which is carefully selected for better public understanding and for policy debates. This makes them effective and perfect for metaphorical and ecological analysis of newspaper discourse.

Sampling Technique

A purposive sampling technique was used to select the newspaper articles. The articles that provide detailed coverage of 2025 floods were selected. Total four articles were chosen, two from Dawn newspaper and two from The Nation. This sampling process makes it clear that the selected texts are relevant to the objectives of the study. Furthermore, it is also suitable technique for in-depth qualitative analysis.

Data Analysis

The study analyzed 4 newspaper articles mainly selected from The Dawn and The Nation ,published between August to November 2025.From the news article two each from The Dawn and The Nation were chosen and total 30 metaphors about Pakistan's flood crisis were collected. The metaphors were then analyzed in detail by suing the Conceptual Metaphor Theory and from Eco linguistics perspective to identify how language explains environmental disasters. The analysis from this study revealed three key patterns that were used to describe 2025 floods in Pakistan in newspaper.

Metaphors Distribution across Sources

Article No.	Source Title	Article Title	Publication Date	Total Metaphors (n)
1	Dawn	Not just a disaster, the 2025 floods are a call to reimagining resilience	September 10, 2025	5
2	Dawn	Learning from floods	November 4,2025	6-8

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3	The Nation	T Natural Disasters or Self-Inflicted Wounds	September 03, 2025	7
4	The Nation	Pakistan's deadly floods	August 29, 2025	6-8

Table -1

Floods as Violent Agents

In this framing, floods are presented as aggressive and uncontrollable forces that attack communities and destroy lives. Expressions such as “water aggression,” “battle against water, (Memon, 2025)” and “unleashed virulence (Memon, 2025)” personify floods as violent agents capable of causing chaos and fear. This metaphor highlights the destructive power of nature and creates a sense of urgency and danger in the discourse. It adds the emotional intensity in the discourse. It also represents disaster as destructive force and personifies water.

Floods as Historical Milestones

Here, floods are depicted as significant occurrences that highlight important moments in the nation's history. Looking to floods of “1950, 1973, 1992, 2010, 2022, and now 2025” position them as repeated historical turning points that shape collective memory and national identity. This portrayal indicates that each flood brings forth sight, trauma that affect upcoming policies and public understanding.

Floods as Material Destroyers

This perspective highlights the physical and economic destruction caused by floods. The discourse emphasizes on destructive homes, submerged farmland, broken infrastructure, and financial deficits. Some interpretive metaphorical patterns identified in the analysis include “flood as war,(Memon, 2025)” where floods are associated with aggression and destruction, and “nation under water,”(Memon, 2025)which creates a sense of collective vulnerability and urgency. These representations make floods as forces that destroy livelihoods, harm the economy, and disrupt daily routine, especially for communities that are relying on agriculture and local resources.

Conceptual Categories in Flood Framing

Below are the conceptual categories that were found during the metaphorical analysis of the newspaper articles.

War/Violence/Conflict Metaphors

The article “Pakistan's Deadly Floods” contains language as a carrier of environmental ideology, a few conceptual metaphors, and grammatical agency. In the article, discourse presents nature as a victim due to climate change caused by human beings, as a threat because of its destructive and dangerous features, as a resource due to its constructive role, and as a moral teacher because it provides lessons to human beings. A few conceptual metaphors have been used where water has been conceptualized as a weapon and tool of war, flood as a destroyer and enemy, climate as a force, and disaster as classroom (Memon, 2025) In terms of grammatical agency, nature has been shown as the active agent, India as an aggressive agent, the Pakistani government as a careless and negligent agent, and the public as passive victims of natural disasters and governance mismanagement. ‘Floods unleashed virulence’ (Memon, 2025) interprets that floods are personified as violent living agents. ‘Wash away everything’ (Memon, 2025) interprets that Floods are represented as an uncontrollable destructive force. In some cases, responsibility has been hidden and no one has been directly blamed for the massive disaster. A nature-supportive counter-discourse has also been

presented where harmony, sustainability, and environmental responsibility are encouraged. The writer criticizes the government for its negligence and poor management, promotes nationalism, encourages environmental awareness, and supports positive ecological discourse.

Active agents

In terms of grammatical agency, nature has been shown as the active agent, India as an aggressive agent, the Pakistani government as a careless and negligent agent, and the public as passive victims of natural disasters and governance mismanagement. 'Monsoon unleashed' (Memon, 2025), 'Floodwater carve' (Memon, 2025) they all show nature as actor and its active constructions. In some cases, responsibility has been hidden and no one has been directly blamed for the massive disaster. A nature-supportive counter-discourse has also been presented where harmony, sustainability, and environmental responsibility are encouraged. The writer criticizes the government for its negligence and poor management, promotes nationalism, encourages environmental awareness, and supports positive ecological discourse.

Nature as Victim

Nature has been presented as a victim due to human actions, disasters as self-inflicted harms because they are human-caused, nature as a consequence-provider due to human mismanagement, and humans as ecological destroyers because of their destructive actions. A few conceptual metaphors have been used where disaster has been conceptualized as a self-inflicted wound, ("Pakistan's Deadly Floods," 2025) here it is being Pakistan is portrayed as harming itself through poor governance and environmental neglect and self-destruction ("Pakistan's Deadly Floods," 2025) as physical injury; and nature as a system. In terms of grammatical agency, humans have been shown as active agents, while nature has been represented as passive agents. A counter-discourse is also presented in the article where environmental protection, sustainable planning, and responsible governance are emphasized. An anthropocentric ideology has also been criticized. The writer criticizes the government and society for environmental mismanagement while encouraging environmental responsibility, policy reforms, and sustainable thinking. The discourse promotes ecocentric ideology and supports ecological protection.

Key Findings

The metaphors analysis using Conceptual Metaphor Theory framework and Eco-linguistic perspectives was done to determine how language presents environmental disasters, assigns blame and influences public understanding. Each metaphor used in the article were analyzed and evaluated. The findings reveal that how consistent patterns in metaphor use actually highlight deeper ideas about climate fiasco, government action and global responsibility. This is also evident that the flood is linguistically conceptualized as an uncontrollable external enemy. In every article we can see that how flood is personified as enemy and nature is considered as actor and sometimes it shifts to being victim. The second category i.e. climate change emphasizes ecological responsibility and global injustices in relation to climate change. Economic and body metaphors link ecological destruction with country's vulnerability. Metaphors about infrastructure and government highlight governmental responsibility. Taken as a whole, these metaphor trends paint a picture of moral emergency and fragility felt by those viewing the floods in Pakistan through an eco-linguistic lens. The language used bucks notions that floods are solely "acts of God" and instead points to problems with governance, ecology, climate negligence, urbanization, and overdevelopment.

Governance failure framed as natural illness

While floods are considered as natural events, the study argues that their destructive effects are aggravated by many wrong practices which mainly include poor planning, encroachment on floodplains, environmentally harmful development, and weak institutional regulation. The blame is assigned to human actions and practices directly and institution. As in new article (Memon, 2025) such as "We build on floodplains, then call it misfortune" foreground collective social responsibility using active voice and the inclusive pronoun "we." The discourse targets government planning authorities that they are failed to regulate the constructions on riverbeds and ecologically sensitive areas. This also raises point that

'capricious climatic behavior' (Nation) interprets that Climate is personified as unpredictable anything can be changed. We cannot blame the climate if our own practices are destructive towards nature.

Natural Forces as Actors

These types of metaphorical framing portray weather as a living agent (17.6%) that gives the impression that natural forces act with intention. Through expressions like monsoons "unleash" rain (Memon, 2025) and 'Gushing flows' (Memon, 2025) shows that Nature is represented as powerful and uncontrollable agent.

Conclusion

Language plays a integral role in shaping and understanding the environmental crisis. The metaphors gathered from newspaper editorials published in Dawn, The Nation suggest heavy usage of war and conflict related metaphors with floods being characterized as enemies and infrastructure damage being illness. This propagates language that demands urgent, reactionary responses instead of preparedness and long-term solutions. It conceals how governmental policies and decisions have gone wrong to construct this disastrous situation. They also found absence of communities from any sort of agency with people affected by floods being seen as victims or helpless on-lookers. Future studies could include analysis of multiple languages, social media, and comparative studies and longitudinally to build upon this research. This would create a more rich understanding of climate communication within a context of environmental hazards and societal injustice. Metaphors of disaster shape public perceptions of climate change, the solutions they need, and whose voices get amplified.

In this discourse the floods are represented as socially and environmentally fatal. The analysis shows how the climatic issue is portraying the inequality and lack of governance. The news articles examine through ecolinguistics frames and the choice of words frame humans as blameless victims and separates nature and society.

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