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**An Ecocritical Discourse Analysis of American News Coverage  
of Los Angeles Wildfires: A Corpus-Based Study**



**<sup>1</sup>Haya Rauf**

**<sup>2</sup>Asma Arif**

<sup>1</sup>Bachelor Student, Department of English, University of  
Lakki Marwat. Email: [haya.rauf12@gmail.com](mailto:haya.rauf12@gmail.com)

<sup>2</sup>Bachelor Student, Department of English, University of  
Lakki Marwat. Email: [khanatifa565@gmail.com](mailto:khanatifa565@gmail.com)

**Abstract**

This study analyses the representation of the Los Angeles wildfires in American English news media by critically analysing the coverage of the two television networks: CNN and Fox News. A corpus-based approach was employed, whereby a self-assembled corpus was assembled from wildfire news items, and AntConc software was used for lexical and concordance analysis. The study focuses on identifying the most common linguistic patterns used to describe wildfires, human beings, and government intervention. The research findings show that wildfires are frequently anthropomorphised and described using emotive and destructive adjectives, such as “killer,” “monster,” “deadly force,” and “destroyer.” This narrative positions the wildfires as independent agents of destruction, thereby absolving human agency and environmental context of responsibility within the narrative. Humans, by contrast, are often portrayed as victims, innocents, and displaced persons, while government agencies are depicted as helpers or rescuers. These representations create a narrative that displaces the catastrophe from its anthropogenic causes, such as climate change and environmental neglect. The study argues that this discursive trend is not environmentally positive, as it downplays the role of human activity in intensifying such events and hinders the development of environmental awareness. In conclusion, the study emphasises the need for more ecologically responsible media narratives that acknowledge human blame and promote sustainable ecological narratives.

**Keywords:** Los Angeles Wildfires, Media Discourse, Corpus Linguistics, Environmental Representation, American News Media

**Introduction**

Natural disasters are severe and often hazardous events that occur due to natural processes on Earth. These include floods, wildfires, earthquakes, hurricanes, droughts, and other natural disasters. Such events can destroy homes, harm the environment, cause injury or death, and bring long-lasting changes to people’s lives. Natural disasters are often unpredictable and beyond human control, making them even more perilous.

When a natural disaster occurs, the news media reports it through various channels,

including newspapers, news channels, social media platforms, and radio broadcasts. The Online news website is crucial in reporting the event and informing people about natural disasters. The news channel provides detailed reports, images, and analysis of the impact of the disasters. The media provide alerts, warnings, and safety measures to help people stay prepared. The media share inspiring stories of the survivors, community unity, and recovery. Sometimes, the Media exaggerates events, causing unnecessary fear and panic. Sometimes the media blames the Government or Authorities instead of finding constructive solutions. Most of the time, the media ascribes blame for natural disasters to the natural phenomenon.

The media's representation of a natural disaster shapes the public's perception of it. The media reporting may lead the public to believe that they are innocent regarding natural disasters. They may start believing natural phenomena are responsible for natural disasters and their impacts, and as a result, they may take actions that have severe implications for the environment.

The media representation of natural disasters has been studied from different perspectives. For example, Liu and Stevenson (2013), Carmen (2019), and Koteyko et al. (2013) investigated climate problems from a media perspective by analysing the different linguistic choices using corpus linguistics as the primary method. Liu and Stevenson (2013) examined cross-cultural media discourse in calamity reportage; unlike Liu and Stevenson (2013), Carmen (2019) analysed media views on natural disasters. Carmen (2019) also analysed the discourse around climate change in the Brazilian press. Like Carmen (2019), Oteyko et al. (2013) investigated peer-to-peer discourse surrounding climate change. Advertorials. Gull et al. (2021) analysed the Meta functions of language in Pakistani COVID-19 Advertorials from an ecolinguistics perspective. Nuh and Prawira (2023) investigated climate change news in Indonesia. On the contrary, Zaman (2021) analysed the role of the popular discourse about climate change in disaster preparedness. Similarly, Cox (2008) examined the sequestering of suffering in natural disaster media coverage.

The above studies analysed disaster discourse from different perspectives. However, none of them investigated disaster discourse from the ecolinguistics perspective. Moreover, the recent disaster, i.e., the Los Angeles Wildfire, has not been thoroughly investigated; therefore, a gap remains. The present study aims to fill the

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gap by examining the representation of the Los Angeles Wildfires in American English news channels from the perspective of ecolinguistics.

## **Statement of the Problem**

When a natural disaster strikes any country, it is typically covered by that country's media. When the media reports on a natural disaster, it usually ascribes blame for the disaster to the natural phenomenon and represents humans as innocent victims. Such a representation of the natural disaster can lead humans to believe that they are innocent and that the natural phenomenon is responsible for the disaster and its impact. As a result, they might take such actions that can negatively impact nature and the environment. There is a dire need to investigate how the media represent natural disasters in their reporting. This study aims to analyse the representation of Los Angeles Wildfires from the perspective of ecolinguistics. It aims to examine whether the representation of the Los Angeles Wildfires on American English news channels is friendly, destructive, or otherwise to the environment.

## **Research Questions**

The study aims to address the following research questions.

- i. How are the Los Angeles Wildfires represented in American English news channels?
- ii. What lexico-grammatical devices are used to present Los Angeles Wildfires in the American English News Channel?
- iii. How is the particular representation of Los Angeles Wildfires in American News Channel environmentally friendly, destructive, or otherwise?

## **Literature Review**

Wildfires are uncontrolled fires that spread across vegetation, particularly in grasslands, shrublands, and forests. They are influenced by factors such as wind speed, fuel moisture, and vegetation type (Cheney et al., 1998). Wildfires can have a significant impact on vegetation, soil characteristics, and surface processes, particularly in drylands (Stavi, 2019). Wildfires pose a significant concern for ecosystems and the climate, with both natural and human-related causes (Sherpa et al., 2022). While lightning is a natural cause, human activities such as stubble burning, discarded cigarettes, and power line issues significantly contribute to wildfire ignition (Sari, 2022; Flachbart, 2015). Factors such as heat, wind speed, moisture,

precipitation, and vegetation influence wildfire risks and sizes (Sherpa et al., 2022). Seasonal patterns play a role, with spring and summer being particularly high-risk periods (Flachbart, 2015; Sherpa et al., 2022). The increasing severity of wildfires is attributed to excess forest biomass, expanding wildland-urban interfaces, and climate change (Bracmort, 2012). To mitigate wildfire risks, it is crucial to identify cause-based risk zones and implement targeted prevention strategies (Sari, 2022). Understanding these factors can help in developing effective wildfire prediction, prevention, and management approaches (Sari, 2022; Sherpa et al., 2022; Bracmort, 2012).

When disasters occur in any country worldwide, they are reported by the news media globally. The news media typically visit the disaster's specific location and cover it exclusively. When the media reports on it, they generally focus on different aspects, such as causes, fatalities, economic loss, and others. In their reporting of the disaster, the news media portray different elements in various ways, such as presenting specific individuals as both victims and agents of the disaster and destruction. The media reporting of natural disasters and their impacts can have different positive and negative effects on humans and their attitudes and perceptions of the disasters. Since media reporting significantly affects humans and other ecological systems, studying its representation in relation to the Los Angeles Wildfires is important.

A large number of researchers have investigated disaster discourse from different perspectives. For instance, Liu and Stevenson (2013) examined multicultural mass media discourse in catastrophe reportage, explicitly focusing on the 2008 Sichuan earthquake and its subsequent news coverage. The findings showed that the three sources differ 'methodically.' Their research focused on analysing how the media reported the earthquake. Their research verified that different news channels employ diverse approaches to covering natural disasters. Liu et al.'s (2013) study also contends that the socio-cultural situation plays a significant role in news reportage.

Carmen (2019) investigated the discourse about climate change in the Brazilian press. In 2019, the Amazon forest continued to burn, marking an increase in farmland. This became ready for control, but instead extended into a huge wildfire, leading to massive carbon emissions into the atmosphere. According to Carmen,

unlike the administration in Brazil, Brazilians are extremely worried about climate change. Carmen's research focused on expanding discourse in broadcasting about climate change from the initial 2000s to 2013. In addition, Carmen also concentrated on exploring the 'most central linguistic patterns in the discourse.' As Carmen's (2019) research is a measurable corpus study with 11.4 million words, it provides a comprehensive understanding of investigative climate change in media discourse on a large scale. Koteyko et al. (2013) examined the discourse of immediate climate change by analysing sections of news channels that addressed climate problems to generate a distinct discourse.

Contrary to the above studies, Kanwal (2024) analysed discourse in Bina Shah's *The Monsoon War* and found that the novel Shah is not only a story around struggle, but it also lies within its certainty a significant passageway of man-nature interrelationship and repeats the necessities for a piece of extra knowledge on ecological common relationship. Prastio (2023) investigated the representation of woodland protection observed in the discourse of the Anak Dalam Jambi tribe in Indonesia. He establishes that the preservation observes supported by the ADJT are linked toward 4 phases, which they engage in preserving ecological agreement: philosophy (as a directorial opinion in a lifetime), biology (as a situation for meeting necessities), sociology (as a reference aimed at adaptable communications among people, people and deities, and humans and the woodland), and culture (as a reference for managing traditional ways of considering the forest).

Moreover, Nasir et al. (2021) analysed the relationship between language ecology and environmental sustainability in Pakistani news media reports, establishing that environmental difficulties in Pakistani newspaper articles are often presented as uncertain discourses that emphasise only environmental deprivation and natural tragedies, with anthropocentric perceptions. Moreover, they proved that opinion and salience are also integrated to circulate the concepts of ecosophy. However, they need to be enhanced, and their perception should be extended to incorporate the characteristics of nature that, although not destructive to humans, are detrimental to nature itself and the environment.

Unlike Nasir et al. (2021), Nuh and Prawira (2023) analysed climate change media reports in Indonesia from the perspective of ecolinguistics. They contend that the

corpus highlights the importance of descriptions that promote nature preservation, analysis of the administration's environmental responsibility, and maintenance rules and technical advancements. They shaped perceptions into media narratives and promoted environmental awareness in traditional Indonesian cultures. Agwuocha and Prof (2023) analysed flood representation, particularly Nigerian Print Media Reports, from an Ecolinguistics Perspective. They establish that the ideas of the source domains of WAR, ANGRY MONSTER, and CONTAINER SUBSTANCE, among others, have been assumed to exchange about the target domain of flood.

Jabeen (2024) analysed Media Discourse from an Ecolinguistics perspective. She demonstrated that the newspaper discourse effectively represented climate concerns by incorporating the concept of temperature change as a disaster, a battle, and a joint societal obligation through extensive policies, including the regular replication of ideas, specific word choices such as “destructive” and “tough”, sensitive words, as well as procedures of identification and creating existing situations. Furthermore, the authors proposed helpful clarifications and measures that individuals and nations must take together to address the ever-growing climate challenges. Mohammed (2023) analysed the Arab Media Analysis of the Safer Uncontrolled Oil Tanker in the news media. He states that the themes repeated in the corpus include the balance of disaster and environmental destruction in the incident of an escape, economic significance, the UN alternative idea, echo-jihad, and the contrast between ‘we’ and ‘them’, among others. The occurrence of the word *al-bī’ah* in the corpus expressions that human beings remain characterised by the best active of existences: individuals who consider and act in the world, and individuals who perform and express. Extinct things, on the other hand, are represented as reflexive members; things are done to them.

The studies mentioned above examined disaster discourse from various angles and perspectives. However, none of them analysed the media discourse on the most recent natural disaster in the world, i.e., the Los Angeles wildfires. Moreover, there are limited studies on natural disaster discourse from ecolinguistic perspectives. Considering the existing literature's gap, this study aims to investigate the representation of Los Angeles wildfires from an ecolinguistic perspective.

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## **Research Methodology**

### **Research Paradigm**

The study employed an interpretivist paradigm, utilising a qualitative approach to collect and analyse the data. This paradigm best suits this study as it analyses the representation of Los Angeles wildfires in the American English News Channels.

### **Research Approach**

The study adopted the qualitative approach to investigate the representation of Los Angeles wildfires in American English news channels. Other methods do not suit this study as it does not analyse the data quantitatively. The study collected qualitative data and analysed it qualitatively.

### **Data Collection**

The data were collected from 2 American English news channels, CNN and Fox News. Only news reports from the news channels were selected for the study. News reports published from 7 January 2025 to 22 January 2025 will be collected. A corpus was developed from news reports on the wildfires and was named the Corpus of Los Angeles Wildfires (CLAWF).

### **Data Analysis**

The data were analysed using a corpus linguistics tool, AntConc 4.3.1 (2024). The corpus was uploaded to the tool, and a keyword list was generated. After that, primary keywords were selected from them. The concordance lines of the selected keywords were analysed and interpreted using the study's theoretical framework, which is explained below.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This research employed an ecolinguistics framework put forward by Arran Stubbe in 2021.

#### **Stubbe's (2021) Ecolinguistics Framework**

Arran Stubbe has provided a total of eight stories in his book, *Ecolinguistics: Language, Ecology, and the Stories We Live By*. However, in this research, we will focus on only three stories: Salience, Erasure, and Metaphor.

#### ***Erasure***

Language can be used to emphasise some specific feature or perspective of occurrences while disregarding others. When a section raises obtainable, a serious



reader would be capable of signing what is signified and what is background, excepted, or removed. Through the word “erasure,” Stibbe states that this sentiment is close to approximately slight unhappiness because it means that approximately significant is missing. Stall Meyer and Dearborn (2020) note that the first destruction removes or eliminates approximately completely. The next sense of erasure is the suggestion that is missing lately due to the attempt to remove it. As in text, erasure affects results that continue on the pages (Stallmeyer & Dearborn, 2020)

### **Salience**

In distinction to erasure, salience is a method that highlights an area of life as being significant and worthy of reflection (Stibbe 2021). Observed since a psycholinguistics perception, salience is “the possessions a motivation to stance out since the repose” and the outstanding matter “are further expected to be professed and [...] to arrive into succeeding reasoning treating and knowledge” (Ellis 2017:71). Linguistically, to create approximately leading resource that the object requirement to be spoken around is a means that is pure, noticeable, and actual, as effort to detention the receiver consideration and fear to this entity. Later, a significant stage in managerial public attention to and defence of the environment will involve making extra prominent linguistic designs for the more-than-human world.

### **Metaphor**

Lakoff and Johnson (2008) suggested that metaphor is an expansive area of linguistics that touches on reasoning and supports people in appreciating concepts, expressing them, and explaining others. Metaphors are clarified in expressions of intangible planning, where communication is established between the foundation and goal fields. The basic area is planned adjacent to the aim field and determined by understanding the constituent extent. The foundation field is the obsolete van, which is less intellectual, i.e., simply comprehensible or thinkable by the social attention associated with the goal field. The aim field is outdated. In the, i.e., “LOVE IS A JOURNEY OF THE HEART,” the basis field is a journey, i.e., the idea of affecting a lane to spread a determination is helpful in love (Hamendaz, 2011). Metaphor happens in the phonological arrangement and the thought course (Hampe, 2017). The metaphor casts off to the conversation around the surfaces of a lifetime and observes them in a specific way. These figures of speech are considered intangible metaphors because the

abstract context of life is functional in envisioning additional life surfaces. It is expanded with the example, “LIFE IS A JOURNEY” (p.16), in which the explanation of life is strengthened by its metaphor. Life is agreed in a position of a passage anywhere diplomacies are complete, some aim to realise, the partiality of about paths over others to spread the purpose, etc., by creating such judgment, life is professed in terms of the intangible metaphor, i.e., “LIFE IS JOURNEY,” which has consequences in the linguistic practice of the expedition for a lifetime. (Kovecses, 2017).

### **Data Analysis and Findings**

#### **Salience of Wildfires in News Discourse**

The concept of salience, borrowed from ecolinguistics and Stibbe’s (2015) theory in particular, refers to the elements rendered visible, highlighted, and foregrounded in discourses. The concept of salience in media narratives holds a significant position in telling which aspects of the event are highlighted prominently, while other elements are less visible or completely erased. For the case of the wildfires in Los Angeles, the concept of salience is achieved by characterising the wildfires as cataclysmic forces that devastate landscapes, affect human life, and draw public interest. The dataset of news articles (CoNRoLAW) reveals that wildfires are consistently portrayed as lethal agents, made particularly conspicuous by the deployment of devastating verb forms, affective intensifiers, and narratives that prioritise human loss and victimhood. This section discusses these findings through three central sub-themes: the presentation of wildfires as agents of destruction, the use of adverse and affective vocabulary, and the emphasis on human victims.

#### **Wildfires as Agents of Destruction**

A prominent trend observed throughout the corpus is the characterisation of wildfires as the principal agents of devastation. Frequently, news headlines and introductory sentences directly attribute the responsibility for destruction and fatalities to the fire itself. For example, it has been reported that “the wildfires killed a total of 73 people” and that “the death toll due to the wildfires rose to 82.” In another instance, CNN noted: “Historic, wind-driven wildfires have killed at least 27 people in the Los Angeles area and displaced tens of thousands.” Such linguistic constructions position wildfires as active perpetrators of harm, emphasising their portrayal as entities endowed with agency and intentionality.

In blaming human deaths and displacements solely on the fire, rather than the circumstances that amplify wildfire spread—such as drought, urbanisation in fire-vulnerable areas, or global warming—the media narrative makes the wildfires especially conspicuous agents of destruction. The process of attributing agency covers up the systemic and structural circumstances inherent in the disaster. The visibility of the wildfires as separate, deadly forces then impacts public opinion: fires become seen as outside threats imposed on society by nature, rather than as events heavily connected to human-environmental processes.

This construction has profound ideological implications. By presenting wildfires as the primary agents of death and destruction, the agency of individuals—conveyed through choices in policy, land use, or emissions—becomes less defined. The stress in such a construction operates to focus the wildfires as the seat of disaster, and the acts by individuals and institutions toward escalating vulnerability become peripheral.

### **Negative Verbs and Emotive Language**

The use of negative verbs and emotionally charged words in wildfire reporting is closely linked to the concept of destructive forces. The CoNRoLAW corpus reveals that verbs such as ravaged, devoured, consumed, scorched, incinerated, and engulfed are frequently employed. For instance, one news story said, “the wildfire devoured the city and left nothing behind,” while another mentioned that “flames ravaged the hillside, leaving nothing but ashes.” Additionally, the phrase “a fast-moving fire consumed thousands of acres in ju” portrays the fire as if it were alive and intentionally destructive.

In addition to indicating the fire as active, the patterns also render the fire more powerful and uncontrollable. When accompanied by such adjectives as deadly, raging, devastating, unimaginable, and unstoppable, the wildfire reaches the utmost degree of force. The combination of action and descriptive words renders the wildfires unique by continuously emphasising the power and unpredictability of destruction.

From an ecolinguistic perspective, this pattern illustrates how repetition and strong words make a statement stand out. Instead of explaining the details of wildfires, ecological cycles, or how nature bounces back, the news focuses on destruction. The use of negative action words and strong feelings adds to a story of fear, making

wildfires seem like unstoppable forces that cause significant damage. This not only makes the events seem more dramatic but also presents them as significant natural occurrences within broader environmental contexts.

### **Victims and Emotional Appeals**

Another key aspect of wildfire coverage is the emphasis on human victims and the heart-wrenching stories they tell. Newspaper articles feature the injuries and misery of people and towns affected by the fires. One article wrote: “A mother cried as she saw her home reduced to ashes,” and another stated: “Families ran for their lives as the flames advanced.” Coverage also emphasises the loss of family pets and wildlife: “Dozens of pets were abandoned and died in the fires.”

These are central narratives of journalism: they make the disaster personally and emotionally resonant to people. People experience empathy and care most when they are exposed to the suffering of others. However, ecocritically, this focus can be damaging. As much as the narratives overtly illustrate human loss, the environmental aspects of the fires are not considered or pushed to the sidelines. The burning of the forests, animal habitats, and environmental diversity are less and curtly recounted while human misery takes centre stage.

This people-centred emphasis, through which people are seen as the most important victims of wildfires, supports the view that nature exists only when it involves people. Within such a view, wildfires are tragedies fundamentally because people get hurt in them, not because the natural processes they signify are nuanced and have both positive and negative dimensions. This one-dimensional view influences what the public learns about wildfires and promotes responses that focus on immediate assistance for people and rebuilding, while overlooking the long-term recovery of the land and the need for long-term adaptation to changing climates.

### **Erasure of Wildfires in Positive Actions**

While the hyper-visibility of wildfires in catastrophic and devastating contexts contrasts radically with the destruction and death they bring about, another conspicuous pattern in the CoNRoLAW corpus is the erasure of wildfires from discourses of reconstruction, situative action, and community resilience. Stibbe (2015) points out that erasure, as a concept in linguistics, is not the absence or silence; it is what gets backgrounded, obscured, or linguistically salience dictates what goes into

focus, and erasure dictates what goes out of focus. For the case of wildfire coverage, erasure occurs when the fire goes unnoticed in discourses of rebuilding, adaptation, or ecological recovery, particularly when such activities bear a direct relation to occurrences of wildfire. This section examines how erasure occurs in three key ways: through recovery discourses avoiding the origin of wildfires, through the use of imprecise and euphemistic language, and through the consequences for public knowledge.

### **Positive Actions Without Explicit Cause**

Newspaper reports typically highlight the good deeds undertaken by individuals, nations, and states in the aftermath of wildfires. These vary through the reconstruction of residential stock, the rebuilding of public spaces, afforestation exercises and the implementation of new policies or laws aimed at preventing future disasters. What emerges from the corpus, however, is that such reports generally do not mention the wildfires as the immediate cause, but rather the triggering causes for the acts.

For example, one such report says: "California constructs new green spaces to conserve the environment." At first glance, this appears to be a positive and promising report. However, if the green spaces are those resulting from post-wildfire restoration, the failure to include the wildfire as the causal agent amounts to erasure. By the same token, if another report asserts, "A new legislation will strengthen buildings in the event of disasters," the legislation may have been initiated to respond to the destruction wrought by recent wildfires. The failure to explicitly mention the fires renders them outside the causal chain conveyed to the public.

These scenes demonstrate how the wildfire vanishes from the narrative at the very moment that long-term, positive measures are highlighted. By removing the wildfire from the composition, news articles depict positive solutions—such as legislation, community unity, or environmental initiatives—as context-free progress. The challenge that led to the solution fades into the background, rendering the wildfire inconspicuous in its own restoration narrative.

### **Language of Hiding**

Even when the wildfires are obliquely mentioned in the accounts of recovery, they are often linguistically obscured by imprecise or euphemistic terminology. The corpus abounds in instances where more precise terminology, such as "damage," "disaster,"

or even “event,” replaces the explicit term “wildfire.” For instance, one account writes: “The land is recovering from damage.” Another claims: “People came together following the disaster to rebuild.”

In each instance, the wildfire is the very agent of the damage and the disaster, and the lexical option eliminates it from explicit mention.

This language of hiding operates at a subtle level. By substituting abstract or generalised terms for the specific word “wildfire,” the discourse softens the immediacy of the cause. The result is that wildfires are not denied, but their presence in the narrative is linguistically diluted. The vagueness of terms like “disaster” allows the story to focus on recovery and resilience without engaging the ecological and systemic realities of wildfire occurrence. From the ecolinguistic perspective, this type of erasure has absolute power. Perception is linguistically framed, and when wildfires are erased by generalised language, the public cannot readily tie recovery efforts to environmental causes. This hinders the potential for a critical examination of climate change, land-use behaviour, or ecological adaptation. The lexical choice indeed severs the causal connection and foregrounds the beneficial effect while backgrounding the environmental emergency necessitating it.

### **Consequences of Erasure**

The omission of wildfires from positive-action narratives has several significant consequences for the general understanding and environmental awareness. It first confirms the suggestion that wildfires are only tragic and destructive events. By failing to acknowledge the fact that they provoke recovery, innovation, or ecological rejuvenation, the narrative frames them only as threats to be averted. This diminishes the culturally meaningful nature of the wildfire in such a way that it overlooks its multifaceted roles in natural ecosystems and its capacity to provoke adaptive responses.

Second, erasure buries the ecological connection between destruction and renewal. Fire has a natural function in clearing vegetation, releasing nutrients, and facilitating plant growth in many ecosystems, including some regions of California. Although catastrophic wildfires fueled by climate change pose severe threats, recognising the dual function of fire—as both destroyer and renewer—would yield a fuller narrative. The exclusion of wildfires from recovery narratives gives the public

less opportunity to engage fully with this ecological nuance.

Thirdly, erasure reduces the visibility of systemic and structural issues. When recovery stories include rebuilding, replanting trees, or new laws unrelated to wildfires, audiences are likely to view such initiatives as commonplace progress and not specialised responses to environmental disasters. This reduces the ability of news sources to foster responsibility or inspire long-term policy reform. For example, while a new code story takes environmental context only when explicitly tied to wildfire exposure, the story sounds like a commonplace rule of law and not an adaptive necessity when not framed.

Lastly, erasure continues an anthropocentric narrative framing of the wildfire. Optimistic narratives often centre on human resilience and community, excluding the ecological aspect. Omission from such narratives means that recuperation is understood less as a human-nature entanglement that captures the larger dynamics of environmental disaster and adaptation, and more as a mostly human victory story.

### **Metaphorical Constructions of Wildfires**

Metaphor is among the most robust communicative tools employed in news language, influencing how audiences think about complex events by projecting them onto more accessible areas. Within ecolinguistics, metaphor cannot be seen as mere ornamentation, but rather as ideological, because it delineates how individuals perceive their connection to nature and the environment. The CoNRoLAW corpus reveals that wildfires are intensely metaphorized in the American press coverage and are frequently presented as animate agents or belligerent enemies. Such metaphors enhance the sensational effect of wildfire narratives but bear troublesome consequences, as they conceal ecological complexity and reinforce anthropocentric worldviews. This section examines three prevailing metaphorical constructs of wildfires: as murderers and fatal powers, as monstrosities, and as wartime enemies.

### **Wildfires as Killers and Deadly Forces**

Among the most prevalent metaphorical frames in the corpus is the characterisation of wildfires as killers or deadly forces. Accounts tell of how there are “killer blazes” that leave entire neighbourhoods in ashes and stress that “wildfires killed dozens of people.” So too CNN observed that “historic, wind-driven wildfires have killed at least 27 people in the Los Angeles area and displaced tens of thousands.” By

assigning direct agency for human fatalities to the fire, the discourse gives anthropomorphic life to wildfires by portraying them as murderous agents.

Another striking set of metaphors describes wildfires as deadly forces of nature that actively consume and destroy. For example, one report states: “Fueled by dry winds, the wildfire turned into a deadly force, consuming everything in its path with terrifying speed.” Another reads: “The wildfire devoured the city and left nothing behind.” The verbs “consuming” and “devouring” reinforce the image of the fire as a predatory force with agency and appetite.

Such metaphors increase the salience of wildfires by presenting them as intentional living agents rather than natural processes. The consequence of such metaphors is a discursive shift, through which the event of wildfire, rather than systemic human causes such as climate change, land mismanagement, or unsustainable urban development, becomes the focus of blame. By foregrounding the killer metaphor, the discourse renders the events of wildfire sensational while understating the ecological and socio-political complexity thereof.

### **Wildfires as Monsters**

Another dominant metaphorical frame depicts wildfires as monsters. News coverage routinely uses the kind of language as “a raging monster” or “a monster blaze tore through the national park.” One report cited residents who described the wildfire as “a raging monster, burning trees and buildings callously.” These are the kind of metaphors that depict wildfires as raging beasts, unpredictable and uncontrollable, and they create fear in human beings.

The monster metaphor reinforces the perception of wildfires as alien and hostile forces that stand in opposition to human society. By emphasising imagery of monstrosity, the discourse removes wildfires from their ecological context, positioning them instead as unnatural predators that must be fought and defeated. Such representations leave little room for recognition of fire’s ecological functions, such as clearing undergrowth, supporting biodiversity, and enabling regeneration.

From an ecolinguistic perspective, the metaphor illustrates how cultural values are embedded in language. By characterising wildfire as a monster, news reporting evokes fear and justifies radical suppressive action, even when such action may not be environmentally sustainable in the long run. The metaphor also continues the cultural



story that nature poses a threat to be suppressed, reinforcing human-nature dualism and discouraging a more nuanced ecological view.

### **Wildfires as Enemies in War**

The most evident metaphorical frame in wildfire news reporting is the war frame, whereby wildfires are framed as enemies moving against human defenders. The following are extracts from the corpus: “The firestorm marched across the landscape like an army” and “We are at war with this enemy,” the fire chief said as the wildfire moved toward populated areas. Firefighters and fire officials battle “flames” and “wage a day-and-night battle” to contain the fire.

This war narrative frames wildfires as foreign enemies and firefighters as brave defenders. The metaphor projects the battlefield dynamics of attack and defence, victory and defeat, onto the natural process of wildfire. Though such a framing amplifies the threat and celebrates human bravery, it reduces the complexity of wildfire management. By positing wildfire as the foe to be beaten, the narrative emphasises short-term attack approaches and overtly dismisses long-term ecological solutions, such as the use of controlled burning, forest management, and adaptation to global change.

The ideological implications of the war metaphor are profound. It naturalises the idea that wildfires are illegitimate events that must inescapably be overcome, despite the ecological functions they perform in sustaining some ecosystems. Furthermore, by portraying government agencies and firefighters as troops or rescuers, the metaphor supports a narrative of institutional heroism that exculpates larger systems of responsibility. The war narrative thus enables a narrow policy discussion, framed in terms of short-term suppression rather than long-term environmental policies.

### **Conclusion**

This study sought to analyse the coverage of the Los Angeles wildfires in American English news sources, specifically CNN and Fox News. Using a corpus-based theory of ecolinguistics and guided by Arran Stubbe’s formulations of salience, erasure, and metaphor, the analysis revealed how language patterns and discursive choice shape public perception towards wildfires. The findings show three dominant trends in the corpus: the prominence of wildfires in frames of tragedy and destruction, the omission

of wildfires from recovery and positive action stories, and the metaphorical personification of wildfires as killers, monsters, and enemies. Together, these trends constitute a discourse that prioritises fear and destruction, eschewing ecological complexity and human agency.

The very first significant finding was concerning the salience of wildfires in negative framing. News discourse consistently brought wildfires centre stage as apocalyptic forces of destruction. They were bluntly blamed for killings, evictions, and the ruination of neighbourhoods. Strong verbs such as ravage, consume, devour, and destroy were used in conjunction with adjectives like deadly, raging, and unstoppable to portray wildfires as relentless forces. Human casualties were made hyper-visible by emotive stories of loss and trauma, so that audiences heard about the fires foremost as human tragedies. Their prominence reinforced a human-centred worldview, in which wildfires were significant only because of their impact on humans.

The second finding concerned the erasure of events in recovery stories. As narratives of positive action, such as rebuilding, reforestation, and new legislation, were relayed, they often failed to mention wildfires as the reason explicitly. Moreover, more generic words, such as “damage” or “disaster,” are substituted for more precise references to fire, thereby erasing any link between the crisis and the reaction. What was left was a form of linguistic erasure in which wildfires disappeared from the narrative just when constructive solutions were being pushed to the forefront. This discursive choice limited public understanding of the environmental and systemic origins of wildfires, defining restoration as a discrete progression instead of as an adaptive strategy to environmental disaster.

The third most significant finding emphasised the metaphorical constructions of wildfires. News accounts routinely employed figurative language that anthropomorphised wildfires as active and assaultive forces—the killer metaphor constructed fire as a killing force responsible for the deaths of human beings. The monster metaphor portrays wildfires as raging predators that devour houses and forests. The war metaphor characterised wildfires as invaders advancing across land, fended off by dashing firefighters. These metaphors heightened the passion of wildfire reporting but also diminished the ecological nuance, ushering in suppression-focused

approaches and eliminating discussion of prevention, climate, or ecological adaptation. Collectively, these results highlight the ideological work performed by wildfire discourse in US English news media. By emphasising destruction and tragedy, erasing ecological contexts from recovery narratives, and metaphorising fire as an enemy, news stories affirm a worldview in which nature is enemy-like and humans are either victims or heroes. This world is attractive according to Stibbe's concept of stories we live by: cultural narratives that shape societies to think, feel, and act towards the environment.

Such accounts are not ecologically sustainable. They displace the human agency behind exacerbating wildfire threats through climate change, land management, and unwise development. They also obscure the ecological roles of fire, which can serve to renew forests and maintain biodiversity. Rather than encouraging ecological thinking, the prevailing account encourages fear-driven reactions and temporary shutdown measures. By so doing, it jeopardises more sustainable and enlightened public interaction with wildfire control and climate policy.

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