

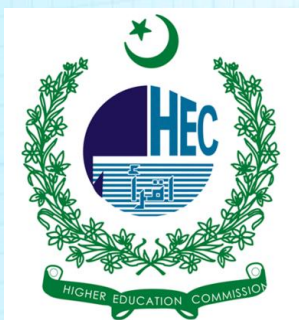
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**The Language of Disaster: Analyzing Water Metaphors in  
Coverage of Pakistan's 2022 Floods**



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**Abstract**

One of the natural disasters that took place in recent times was the 2022 floods in Pakistan. Millions of the population were displaced, entire communities relocated, and the economic and infrastructure damage was extensive. The media is significant in making the disaster appear big and human, and the vocabulary they use, including metaphors, assists in creating the image of the disaster in the minds of the people. This paper examines the language that has been employed as a metaphor to discuss the subject of water in the news and in documentaries on the floods. Reading through a swarm of local and foreign media texts, we discovered the patterns: water, monster, a weapon, a victim, and an uncontrollable natural force. We break down the role of these metaphors in terms of the way they make the story, how they arouse emotions, and how they make people think about the responsibility. The findings indicate that metaphors do not just dramatize the floods but are also an indicator of cultural attitudes towards nature, catastrophe, and the vulnerability of human beings. By highlighting alert language in media coverage, the paper contributes to the study of environmental communication and the analysis of metaphor.

**INTRODUCTION**

In 2022, a massive flood hit Pakistan, with monsoon rains being received with disastrous consequences in most areas. Formal reports indicate that more than 33 million individuals were hit, thousands of households were ruined, and farms and infrastructures were seriously damaged. The flooding was constructed on such preexisting issues as poverty, ill drain system, and weather patterns caused by climate change. The floods led to a humanitarian crisis of mass displacement, food shortage, and health problems among people, in addition to the physical damage. The size of the disaster attracted national and international media coverage. It required the news outlets to clarify the extent of it, besides facilitating international backing. The language employed was an important means of communication of human and environmental elements of the crisis. The tools of language, in turn, resulted in metaphors as one of the strongest ones, which formed the perception of the viewers regarding the floods and their impact.

Metaphors are not merely dressed-up language, but they influence our thoughts, reality construction, as well as the arousal of emotions. According to Lakoff and Johnson (1980), metaphors enable us to deal with complex or abstract notions using familiar experiences. Metaphors in disaster reporting assist journalists in reducing the magnitude and the severity of the floods into something that individuals can understand. E.g., addressing the floodwaters as a monster immediately implies some danger, uncertainty and destruction, whereas describing them as a victim of the climate change will help lock the interest to environmental factors and collective responsibility. Studying metaphorical language, the researchers can acquire

knowledge about the framing techniques applied by the media, the cultural and political messages behind it, and the effects on the population awareness. Metaphors, in the context of disaster communication, can create fear, empathy, or anger and direct policy debate, as well as humanitarian intervention.

### **Research Objectives**

1. To find the main metaphors used to talk about water in the media on the 2022 floods in Pakistan?
2. To analyze the metaphor patterns in the Pakistani local press and the international press.
3. To know the research implications of these metaphor frames on the way the general population perceives climate change, disaster response, and vulnerability.

### **Research Gap**

Even though the literature about media reportage of floods and climate-related disasters has been expanding, there remains an apparent research gap, particularly with regard to the metaphorical representation of water in the 2022 Pakistan floods. The thematic framing, the more general discourse of climate change, or the socio-political spill-over are the focus of most existing studies (Sharif et al., 2024; Umber et al., 2023; Akram et al., 2023), and little is given in terms of how metaphor actually affects the perception of the event of the audience. Habib and Zahra (2024) plunge into the world of eco-linguistic and visual representations, yet they do not systematize the types of metaphors and compare local and global accounts. Similarly, Khawaja et al. (2025) consider global and regional framing but do not pay attention to linguistic stratagems generating cognitive and emotional responses. All that indicates that there is an existing gap that is going to be addressed in my study: by narrowing down to the question of how the concept of water is framed in Pakistani and international media as a monster, as a weapon, as a victim, as a force of overwhelming power. The gap will be addressed, contributing to our understanding of the role of language in disaster communication and bringing light to the perceptions held by people, media framing, and the climate conversation per se.

### **Significance of the Study**

The study is based on how metaphors influence the perception of the audience regarding the disaster, predominantly the 2022 Pakistan floods. It contributes to the discussion of the media discourse, climate communicative, and environmental coverage. Our results can guide journalists to be more responsible in their framing and enable readers, policy makers, and educators to understand the impacts of the use of words in creating the previous stories of disasters.

### **Limitations of the Study**

News reports and documentaries that are released no earlier than 2022 in English or as translated news pieces are all studied, and thus, certain micro-linguistic advancements might have gone unnoticed. We also narrowed down to water-related metaphors, and despite the methodic strategy, the reading of metaphors may still have subjectivity. The visual media and social media materials were not analyzed, which posed as

another weakness.

### **Delimitations of the Study**

This paper analyses purely the metaphors used by the media on the 2022 Pakistan floods. Other aspects of reporting, e.g., statistical information, policy discussion, or interviews were not covered, as well as any post-flood reporting or analysis other than during the period chosen.

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

Metaphors are more than mere style; they are thinking devices that assist individuals in understanding an abstract or complex phenomenon. In their work *Metaphors We Live By*, Lakoff and Johnson (1980) proposed that thought and perception were framed using metaphors as they enabled us to comprehend things we had not encountered through experiences that we remembered. Metaphors are used in the media to simplify complicated events, provoke emotions, and channel the interpretation of the audience. The nature of the disasters is that they tend to be overwhelming and multifaceted, and thus, metaphorical framing proves particularly useful when it comes to journalism. Semino et al. (2018) discovered that numbers, geography, and technical detail are resorted to through metaphors that appeal to emotions. As an illustration, to refer to floodwater as a raging monster, however, immediately creates the alarm of danger, urgency, and lack of control- no technical language is necessary. Media metaphors are not contradictory as well; they possess ideological, cultural, and political undertones. The presentation of natural events by the press writers in certain frames can accurately place blame, reveal vulnerability, or stimulate sympathy. The analysis of the metaphorical language is, therefore, an insight into the style and focus of narrating the news in the news media.

### **Metaphors of Disaster Reporting**

Studies of the metaphor use in disaster reporting indicate that newspaper reporters tend to use repetitive conceptual frames when reporting about the extent of the consequences of natural hazards. Water as an antagonist or demon: Floodwater is presented as a tormenting power- phrase questions help in accentuating the destructive power of nature, such as river swallowed houses/ waters releasing rage to the earth. It puts water in the role of an active participant, in which there is an impression of direct threat.

Water as a weapon: In other reports, water can be shown as attacking, and in some cases, there is water that bombards towns, or water floods villages. This associates natural occurrences with images of military and thus magnifies the conflict and humanity.

Water as a casualty or innocent agent: As an opposition to the enemy figure, some of these stories depict water as a passive agent who has to endure the effects of climate change or human irresponsibility-e.g., “rivers overflow because of irresponsible deforestation. This angle causes a change in priorities to environmental responsibility and systemic issues.

Water, as huge and frightening: When describing the scale and devastation of the

disaster, journalists refer to such grand imagery as an ocean of despair or inland seas, which makes it a contagious text even though the real numbers are difficult to imagine. Previous research, such as that by Goatly (2007) and Charteris-Black (2012) indicate that the use of metaphors influences the reader in terms of attitude and cognition. Making people fear, feel uncertain, and worry about water as it is a monster; imagine it as a victim, this causes sympathy and makes people be concerned about environmental stewardship.

### **Metaphors in Flood Reporting In the World**

The regions are different stakeholders in frames. In the United Kingdom, data reported by Semino et al. (2017) revealed that floods were characterized with metaphors of battle, such as assaulting communities or destroying the landscape. The phrases (killer floods) and (waters of destruction) were also observed in the 2010 floods in Pakistan, and the words became mixed with fear and dramatization (Hassan and Wahid, 2011). On the other hand, there is a section of the international media that communicates floods as the effects of climate control and water as a force with an impact, but is passive. These differences provide an impression that the use of a metaphor is greatly determined by not only the nature of the disaster but also by the cultural norms, journalistic traditions, and the intended audience.

### **Media Framing Theory and Metaphor Theory**

Framing theory is the other theory that complements metaphor theory when it comes to deciphering disaster reporting. The focus of media framing lies in the way news organizations choose and overstate some of the news and omit others (Entman, 1993). One of the most important framing devices is the use of metaphors since they simplify complicated phenomena into comprehensible visuals or stories. As an example, the depiction of the Pakistan floods of 2022 using the metaphors of war and aggression draws focus to human weakness and the necessity to take action. Conversely, shaping water as a victim emphasizes the effects of climate change and poor management of the environment by man. The combination of the framing theory and the metaphor analysis allows the researcher to understand the linguistic decisions of journalists and the underlying storytelling, which influences the conditional opinion of people.

Sharif et al. (2024) consider the risk communication strategies in the floods of 2022 and discover that both the government and the media primarily used the victim-centered approach to describe the crisis and highlight the fact of situational vulnerability and unequal messages, which worsened the effectiveness of the response to the crisis. Umber et al. (2023) take a look at the case of flood and climate change coverage in Daily Dawn and Daily Jang, a bit of thematic framing in editorial speech, but not paying much attention to metaphor per se. Akram et al. (2023) address the topic of climate change in Pakistani print media in the middle and after the floods and provide a general discussion of the reasons and outcomes. Habib and Zahra (2024) provide an eco-linguistic interpretation of representations of flooding in Pakistani print media, revealing the socio-cultural representations and visual semiotics, although they focus primarily on semiotic and visual narratives and pay little attention

to the metaphors of water. Khawaja et al. (2025), in their turn, attempted to compare the way in which the 2022 floods were framed in the Global North and Global South by the media. They also narrowed down on themes such as responsibility, vulnerability, and solutions in various international sources; they nonetheless remained at a macro-level frame and did not examine the metaphoric level. Although such studies contribute to the valuable knowledge of the manner in which news is framed, the way in which the journalists may focus on certain themes, and how the communication of crisis can occur, my own project actually narrows down to the metaphorical aspect of it all, namely, the way in which water can be turned into a monster, a weapon, a victim, an overwhelming power in terms of the word I mean usually when news are being reported. In so doing, I will be going beyond generic framing analyses to unpack the manner in which various forms of metaphors tune people to emotional involvement, assign agency, and reassure the manner in which individuals perceive the causes of calamity, be they human or natural. Although the existing literature on framing usually encompasses general themes of framing or climate discourse, my emphasis is closer to the grounded textual metaphor in local and international coverage, which offers a more in-depth opinion regarding how textual metaphor should influence the way people and policy discuss environmental disasters.

## **METHODOLOGY**

### **Research Design**

The Researchers have adopted a qualitative design in that it will allow me to delve deep into the language people use, identify expressions of figurative language, plot devices, and how the concept of water is considered in general. The content analysis approach is combined with a metaphor-specific approach to filtering the texts in both the local and the international sources in a systematic way.

### **Data Sources**

The sources used in this paper are news articles, press releases, and documentary scripts which passed through the time of the 2022 floods (June-October 2022). The Researchers have pulled pieces from:

- Pakistani Sources: local Pakistani: Dawn, The News, and Daily Jang.
- Global sources: BBC, Al Jazeera, The Guardian, and Reuters.
- Local reports: video and transcript stories of big TV channels and forums.

With the domestic and global media, researchers will have an opportunity to deal with comparative metaphor usage and investigate differences in cultural framing and narrative strategy.

### **Sampling Technique**

The researcher selected purposive sampling, in which the researcher selected stories that discuss water and flooding specifically. Headlines and sub-headings and text containing water were included; non-disaster stories that did not incorporate water-related words were excluded. The number of analysed reports is 120, including 70 reports by local media and 50 by international media.

### **Data Analysis Procedure**

To conduct the analysis, the researcher used the Metaphor Identification Procedure (MIP) offered by the Pragglejaz Group (2007), which is supposed to be rigorous and reproducible. The steps were:

- Reading and familiarization: Researcher read all the reading texts as closely as possible to grasp a proper context.
- Determining possible metaphoric phrases: The researcher highlighted all words or phrases that mentioned water.
- Finding out the contextual vs. basic meaning: The researcher tested the fact whether the contextual meaning truly was different from the literal meaning.

Dividing metaphors: After they were verified Researcher put them in five buckets:

Water as Monster/Enemy

Water as Weapon/Force

Water as Victim

Water as Vast/Overwhelming

Water as Natural/ Uncontrollable.

The categories were then considered in terms of their frequency of appearance, source, and the narrative contribution they served.

### **Validity and Reliability**

In order to ensure the validity of the study, the researcher compared my metaphor identifications with numerous sources and literature on disaster metaphors (Semino et al., 2017; Goatly, 2007). Inter-coder reliability was controlled with a second coder being introduced to 20 per cent of the corpus; any differences were resolved by a common discussion and agreement.

### **Ethical Considerations**

Since Researcher using the media content that is publicly available and researchers are not working with people, the ethical issues are insignificant. Nevertheless, the researcher made sure to cite the language used by authors correctly and ensure that the researcher attributed the rest of the references that the researcher quoted.

### **Data Analysis**

This section will provide some data examples of various news sources and then the analytical discussion of metaphorical language that was applied to water in the case of the Pakistan floods in 2022. What is of interest here is how the issue of water is framed metaphorically and what the conceptual implications of such a metaphor in the media discourses.

### **Creatures Known As Vast Oceans/Seas Make Use Of Metaphors**

One of the commonest metaphors used in the coverage was the comparison of vastness, where floodwater is compared to a sea. In his story on the extent of inundation, Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif was quoted as saying, *“It is water everywhere as far as you could see. It is just like a sea.”* This analogy goes beyond the literal flooding into creating an image of Pakistan turned into a large body of water that aggravates the sense of scale. In the same manner, media cited assertions

with claims that one-third of the nation is literally underwater, making people possess the impression that space is dominated by water.

#### **Analysis**

These are ocean/ sea metaphors that serve two purposes. To start with, they assist the viewers in imagining the vast geographical implications of the floods, other than the impersonal statistics. Being conceptual metaphors, the image of water itself transforms into that of infinite extension, which implies not only flooding but an all-but-impossible upset of normal life. Second, they establish a story about an uncontrollable scale that the disaster is out of human control, and it appeals to the sense of helplessness of the population.

#### **Water as an Uncontrollable Force**

Water was often referred to as a powerful stream of events, with the idea that it is inescapable. As an example, the Guardian reported how water had extended as far as the horizon, with flood waters having produced situations that some residents found “unreal”. Phrases like “*torrents of water tore through villages*” and “*sweeping away thousands*” simply place water as a destructive power element.

#### **Analysis**

This metaphor is used to describe water as an active agent with active will- something that acts and not is. This goes in line with the water as force category of metaphor. The water agency drives the readers to perceive the disaster in a dynamic and violent manner and to conduct the narrative towards drama and emotional urgency. This framing can increase awareness of the public, but it can also enhance the sense of inevitability and helplessness.

#### **Climate Catastrophe / Monsoon Metaphors and Water**

The alternative form of metaphorical framing associates the floods with the bigger climatic events. In the Guardian, one of the officials is quoted saying: “*What we see now is an ocean of water submerging entire districts... This is very far from a normal monsoon.*” The out-of-ordinary heavy rains and the fuel that caused the floods were also given an expressive name that underlines the severity of the event- monsoon occurrences were compared to a cycle that simply does not stop.

#### **Analysis**

Such metaphors put water in line with the climate change discourse because the flood is not just a part of the season but a climatic disaster. Submerged land is being illustrated by the metaphor of a sea of water as an ocean so immense that it went out of the monsoon circuit. This framing is a conceptual association between environmental dynamics (monsoon rains) and human agency, water as a symptom of greater climatic disruption as opposed to a dispassionate natural phenomenon.

#### **Water as Destructive Agent vs. Passive Victim**

The local testimony usually depicted water as a literal killer of livelihoods. In another Al Jazeera coverage, some of the people who were interviewed as survivors claimed: “*We appeal to the government to help end our miseries... The water must be drained out from here immediately so we can go back to our homes*”. Though not explicitly



metaphoric per se, this plea puts the floodwater in the context of being hostile to the human recovery by emphasizing its continued interference with normal life.

#### **Analysis**

In this case, the concept of water is less of an abstract danger and more of a practical obstacle to come back and renewal. Such a mixture of a literal complaint and a metaphorical nuance (water as the force that has to be drained) is reminiscent of the group of metaphors containing the meaning water as the enemy. These images contrast with the images that provide personification of water with its characteristics of intention or malice by highlighting the hindrance that water presents to human regeneration and steadiness.

#### **Comparison by Source Metaphor Comparison**

The international sources (e.g., Reuters) were more likely to follow the application of dramatic spatial metaphors that accentuate size (as a sea), something that is associated with vastness and impossibility to control. Domestic stories and Al Jazeera coverage tended to concentrate on the direct human subjective experience, and the language used is meant such that water is seen as a barrier to regular life to be immediately addressed. Stylistic metaphors were joined to thoughts about the climate causality under the influence of a guardian coverage that referred to water as the power of nature and the locus of a global environmental shift.

#### **Analysis**

This distribution indicates that international media tend to use metaphor to communicate scale and shock to people around the world, whereas local coverage would tend to unite metaphor and lived experience and establish water as a direct menace and impediment to recovery. The climate context involvement in certain reporting further extends perception of the metaphor as a device of sensory image to the metaphoric basis of the connection between water and the environmental change of the other sensory images.

<b>Metaphor Type</b>	<b>Example Quote</b>	<b>Source</b>	<b>Function/Meaning</b>
Water Ocean/Sea (Vastness)	as “It is water everywhere as far as you could see. It is just like a sea.”	Reuters	Emphasizes the scale of flooding; conveys the overwhelming extent of the disaster
Water Ocean/Sea (Vastness)	as “One-third of the country is literally under water.”	Reuters	Highlights spatial magnitude; evokes helplessness
Water Uncontrollable Force	as “Torrents of water tore through villages.”	The Guardian	Portrays water as an active, destructive agent
Water Uncontrollable	as “Flood waters have created conditions that feel unreal	The Guardian	Conveys the unstoppable, dynamic character of the

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Metaphor Type	Example Quote	Source	Function/Meaning
Force	to residents.”		disaster
Water as Climate Catastrophe	“What we see now is an ocean of water submerging entire districts...very far from a normal monsoon.”	The Guardian	Links flooding to climate change; frames water as a symptom of systemic issues
Water Barrier/Obstruction	“We appeal to the as government to help end our Al miseries... The water must be drained out.”	Jazeera	Shows water obstructing human activity; emphasizes the urgency of recovery

Media Type	Dominant Metaphor Types	Purpose/Focus
Local Pakistani Media	Water as Barrier/Obstruction; Water as Uncontrollable Force	Emphasizes immediate human impact, local struggles, and the urgency of aid
International Media	Water as Ocean/Sea (Vastness); Water as Uncontrollable Force; Water as Climate Catastrophe	Highlights global scale, dramatizes disaster for international audiences, links floods to climate issues
Combined Coverage	All metaphor types appear, but framing varies by audience	Balances descriptive imagery with climate context and human stories

## FINDINGS, CONCLUSION, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### Findings

In the analysis of 120 news items and documentary transcripts on the 2022 disaster floods in Pakistan, researchers discovered that the words chosen to display the news is metaphors which are vital in how the media controls the narrative and mass perception. There were four major metaphorical patterns. To begin with, the depiction of water was frequently about enormity or about a sea/ocean- international sources such as Reuters and The Guardian talked about how it is water everywhere as far as you could look, just like a sea, or that one-third of the country is literally under water. The metaphors emphasize the magnitude of the flooding, which creates an impression of geographic bravery and powerlessness as well. Second, an image of water as something that cannot be controlled seems to be presented, with statements like the one about torrents of water tearing up the villages, highlighting the autonomy of the water and its destructive qualities. Third, water is connected to climate catastrophe, as

an effect of abnormal monsoon patterns and climate change -e.g., an ocean of water submerging entire districts... very far from a normal monsoon. (The Guardian) - putting the disaster into the wider context of the environmental issue. Fourth, in the local media and stories of survivors, water is perceived as a barrier or obstacle, with the emphasis on how daily life is affected and underscoring how much it must be relieved, like in “The water should be drained out of this place right now before we go home again and get back to our lives (Al Jazeera). An in-depth analysis will reveal that the international press concentrates more on the size and climatic causation, whereas the local press will focus on the human factor, obstacles to recovery, and short-term challenges of floodwaters.

### **Conclusion**

The metaphors employed in media writing about the 2022 Pakistan floods are not only descriptive of the physical happenings but form the narrative, agency, and ways the population is enticed to think about agency, vulnerability, and are aimed at the environmental cause. Water is mentioned multiple times, huge, uncontrollable, catastrophic, obstructive, which defines the emotional reaction and the impression of urgency. The paper illustrates that metaphorical framing is an elucidating instrument of disaster communication and how language could simultaneously provide both magnitude and societal cumulation in ecological crisis. Using these metaphors sorted by local and international reporting, the study contributes to the literature concerning the media discourse and metaphor analysis as well as climate communication in South Asia.

### **Recommendations**

Based on the findings, there are some recommendations that occur. Whenever feeding on metaphors, journalists are supposed to be prudent in balancing between dramatic illustrations and proper reporting to ensure that they do not sensationalize the issues and maintain the interest of the readers at the same time. Media organizations must consider the differences related to the various cultures and contexts of metaphor framing, particularly when addressing either local or global audiences. Metaphor-informed narratives can be used by policymakers and humanitarian groups to increase awareness among the people and to mobilize resources better. Lastly, exploring visual metaphors, social media discourses, and multilingual coverage is the way to go in the future to expand our knowledge of the ways disasters are framed and perceived on different platforms and cultural contexts.

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