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METAPHORICAL REPRESENTATION OF DISASTER IN THE ENGLISH-LANGUAGE MEDIA DISCOURSE

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The paper investigates the use and implications of disaster metaphors in the English-language media discourse, examines their formation and role in shaping public understanding of disasters. Drawing from conceptual metaphor theory and discourse analysis, the study explores how metaphors structure understanding and influence public perception of various events. It has been stated that metaphors in media discourse frame events, influence emotional responses, and drive policy discussions. Disaster metaphors in media discourse have evolved significantly, reflecting shifts in societal concerns, challenges of technological advancements, and threats from global crises. This study explores how metaphor shapes the discourse surrounding disasters and the impact of media framing on audiences. By analyzing the publications of news reports, opinion pieces, and broadcast media from famous English-speaking media outlets (including The Guardian, CNN, BBC, The New York Times, Fox News, CNBC, The Washington Post, The Wall Street Journal) since 2017 up to now, this research identifies common metaphorical framings for representing disasters in media coverage, including WAR, NATURAL FORCES, DISEASE, and GAME metaphors. Through the analysis of metaphorical language in media reports of natural disasters, pandemics, and socio-political crises, this study highlights the rhetorical power of disaster-related metaphors and their implications for societal reactions. The findings reveal how these metaphors shape narratives around disastrous events, and discuss their functions in constructing social realities in media discourse. The emotional impact of such metaphors is diverse and intense: war metaphors may intensify fear and anxiety, natural disaster metaphors can evoke the feeling of helplessness, personification metaphors may influence ethical perceptions of disasters. Understanding and critically analyzing metaphorical language is essential for both authors and consumers of modern mass media.

МЕТАФОРИЧНА РЕПРЕЗЕНТАЦІЯ КАТАСТРОФИ В АНГЛІЙСЬКОМОВНОМУ МЕДІА ДИСКУРСІ

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Ключові слова: *метафора, теорія концептуальних метафор, катастрофа, дискурс, медіа дискурс, громадське сприйняття.*

У статті досліджується використання метафор катастрофи в англійськомовному медіа дискурсі, розглядаються особливості їхнього утворення та роль у формуванні громадської думки щодо катастрофічних подій. Спираючись на теорію концептуальних метафор та дискурс-аналіз, наукова розвідка виявляє, яким чином метафори структурують розуміння та впливають на публічне сприйняття суспільно значущих подій. У статті зазначено, що метафори в медійному дискурсі через фреймінг подій впливають на емоційні реакції аудиторії та стимулюють публічні дискусії. Розмаїття метафор катастрофи у медіа дискурсі відображає зміни у ставленні до суспільних проблем, виклики технічного прогресу та загрози, що несуть людству глобальні кризи. У роботі досліджується, як метафора формує дискурс навколо катастроф та як медіа фреймінг впливає на аудиторію. Аналізуючи публікації новинних повідомлень, аналітичних статей, телевізійних репортажів відомих англійськомовних ЗМІ (включаючи The Guardian, CNN, BBC, The New York Times, Fox News, CNBC, The Washington Post, The Wall Street Journal) з 2017 року дотепер, це дослідження визначає поширені схеми метафоричного фреймінгу (які включають метафори ВІЙНИ, ПРИРОДНОЇ СТИХІЇ, ХВОРОБИ та ГРИ) для представлення катастроф під час висвітлення подій у ЗМІ. За допомогою аналізу метафоричної мови у медійних повідомленнях про стихійні лиха, пандемії та соціально-політичні кризи, дослідження підкреслює риторичну силу метафор, пов'язаних з катастрофами, та їхній вплив на формування реакції суспільства. Емоційний вплив таких метафор на цільову аудиторію є різноманітним та доволі інтенсивним: метафори війни можуть посилювати страх і тривогу, метафори стихійного лиха викликають відчуття безпорадності, метафори-персоніфікації можуть впливати на етичне сприйняття катастроф. Критичний аналіз та розуміння особливостей метафоричної мови є важливим як для авторів сучасних мас медіа, так і для користувачів.

Introduction. However sad the statement is, disasters and emergencies are common occurrences in our day that strike us with their heavy toll and provoke fundamental reflections of life. Disasters are

defined by the UN Office for Disaster Risk Reduction as “a serious disruption of the functioning of a community or a society at any scale due to hazardous events interacting with conditions of exposure,

vulnerability and capacity, leading to one or more of the following: human, material, economic and environmental losses and impacts” [UNDRR 2025]. As the “events that results in great harm, damage, or death, or serious difficulty” [Cambridge], disasters, whether natural or human-made, often have serious immediate and localized effects that could turn widespread and last for a long period of time, the information about them is bound to evoke strong emotional responses, so “communications is core to the success of disaster mitigation, preparedness, response, and recovery” [Haddow, 2023, p. xvii]. Mass media play a crucial role in framing such kind of events through language. Since metaphors are important rhetorical devices, particularly when the aim of communication is explanation or persuasion, metaphor serves as a powerful cognitive and communicative tool of shaping public understanding of disasters. From natural catastrophes to political crises, media coverage frequently employs metaphors to frame complex events in accessible and emotionally resonant ways. In disaster reporting, metaphors help simplify complex events, create emotional resonance, and influence public perception. So, metaphors associated with disaster function as powerful cognitive frameworks that structure public understanding of wicked problems and crises via media discourse, particularly in relation to the narrative development of media reports.

This article **aims** to examine the nature and function of disaster metaphors in English-language media discourse, focusing on their linguistic structures, cognitive functions, and sociopolitical implications.

To explore how metaphor shapes the discourse surrounding disasters and the impact of media framing on audiences, it is necessary to complete the following **tasks**:

- 1) to outline how do metaphors construct narratives in media coverage of disasters;
- 2) to single out the most common metaphors framing disaster in the English-language media discourse;
- 3) to find out what cognitive and rhetorical effects disaster metaphors produce;
- 4) to analyze how these metaphors impact public understanding and policy responses.

The **object** of the research is represented by metaphors of disaster.

The **subject** of the article is the formation and functions of disaster-related metaphors in English-language media discourse.

Theoretical Framework. Metaphors are not mere stylistic devices and linguistic decorations, they serve to structure our thinking, they shape how people view and respond to various phenomena, including crises and disasters. This study is grounded in Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT), especially the ideas of source–target domain mapping, cognitive framing, and the affective dimension of metaphor. The the-

ory developed by G. Lakoff and M. Johnson states that metaphor is a fundamental mechanism of cognition that defines and structures the human conceptual system by mapping one domain onto another [Lakoff, Johnson, 1980, p. 6]. Another foundation for the research is Framing Theory that explains framing as selecting some aspects of a perceived reality and making them more salient in a communicating text. By doing so, it tends to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation for the item described, which can be used to influence perception in mass communication [Entman, 1993, p. 52]. The study is also based on key provisions of Critical Discourse Analysis (Fairclough, 1995) that examines how language shapes ideology and power dynamics in narratives, including media. As V. Mottier puts it, “with discourse theory, we shift the main analytical focus away from interpretive processes to the political work that metaphors perform” [Mottier, 2008, p. 189]. In media discourse, metaphors serve to simplify complex issues, influence interpretation, and legitimize specific responses or ideologies. Authors use metaphors to convey events in ways that make them more relatable or urgent, to reveal their most striking dimensions. In the paper “Metaphor and Politics” J. S. Mio explores the usage of metaphors in political discourse and suggests that metaphors are persuasive in political communication by tapping into shared symbolic themes and simplifying complex issues. However, it also demonstrates the limited effectiveness of metaphors [Mio, 1997].

A qualitative content analysis was conducted on a corpus of 200 media texts from 2017 to 2025, including articles from *The New York Times*, *The Guardian*, *CNN*, *BBC*, and *Fox News*. The texts were selected based on their relevance to disaster topics, including natural and technological disasters, public health crises, and political upheavals. Then the metaphors were singled out through Metaphor Identification Procedure (MIPVU) specified in [Steen et al., 2010] which allows to mark metaphorically related words resulting from across-domain mapping based on similarity (topological or perceptual).

Results and discussion. Media discourse refers to interactions that take place through a broadcast platform, whether spoken or written, in which the discourse is oriented to a non-present reader, listener or viewer. Though the discourse is oriented towards these recipients, they very often cannot make instantaneous responses to the producer(s) of the discourse, though increasingly this is changing with the advent of new media technology [O’Keeffe 2012, p. 441]. The multidimensional character of the disasters and the resulting wicked problems (for dimensions see [Chowdhury et al., 2024, p. 299–301]) generates a wide range of ways to communicate about them with

mass audiences. As media discourse is primarily aimed at informing, persuading, and shaping public opinion, the media coverage of disasters employs a variety of metaphors as an effective means to frame the disaster in emotionally and cognitively engaging ways: “the more complex and long-term a phenomenon, the more we need different metaphors to capture different facets and phases, and to communicate with different audiences” [Semino, 2021, p. 52]. The detailed analysis of the corpus of 200 English-language mass media texts from 2017 to 2025 revealed that disaster-related metaphors are frequently applied by the authors through engaging and overlapping the domains that do not only create vivid imagery, but can also stimulate certain reactions from the public. So, here is the range of metaphorical representations of the concept of disaster in the popular English-language media of 2017-2025:

1. DISASTER IS WAR

Disasters are often framed as war, military actions or attributes, with language evoking a sense of aggression, confrontation, urgency and struggle. War metaphors are pervasive in media narratives, especially in such contexts as the COVID-19 pandemic, terrorism, and economic crises. Terms such as *battle*, *fight*, *frontline*, *bomb*, *explosion*, and *enemy* frame issues in combative terms, prompting militarized responses and promoting unity against a perceived threat.

For instance, coronavirus the pandemic provided a rich context for metaphor use. E. Semino suggests that it is also relevant to study the framing effects of metaphors involving an aggressor of some kind within communication about the Covid-19 pandemic [Semino, 2021, p. 52]. Mass media worldwide adopted war metaphors to describe the aggressive nature of the deadly virus, and the response effort, portraying healthcare workers as “*soldiers*”, the virus as an “*enemy*”, and hospitals as “*battlefields*”. For instance, The Washington Post compared the struggle of mankind against the pandemics with military actions: “*The war against covid-19 is far from won*”, “*if we let our guard down now, we could see a virus getting worse*” (The Washington Post, March 29, 2021). The Guardian speculated on the warlike features of the healthcare system’s struggle against coronavirus: “*The language of war is baked in to most of us, to one degree or other. Our new daily discourse runs deep with talk of field hospitals, frontlines, the battles against an invisible enemy*” (The Guardian, April 7, 2020). The article even doubted the appropriateness of war metaphors for depicting what is already utterly devastating without such comparisons: “*We don’t really require a metaphor to throw the horror of viral death into sharper relief: you have to think it’s bad enough already*” (The Guardian, April 7, 2020)..

The BBC video report about the intensive care ward at University College Hospital in London

was almost entirely framed in terms of war: “*This is the frontline in a war... Every day some battles are won and some are lost*” (BBC, April 20, 2020), such extended metaphor intensifies the overall feeling of threat and insecurity that the narrative aims to convey. President D. Trump’s declaration of being a “*wartime president*” in the fight against the coronavirus (CNN, March 24, 2020) exemplifies how the metaphor was employed to proclaim political leadership. The media widely used phrases like “*fighting the pandemic*” and “*defeating COVID-19*” to emphasize urgency and collective effort, for example, The New York Times discussed the “*ongoing conversation about how to defeat the coronavirus*” describing lockdowns as “*defensive strategies in an ongoing battle*” (The New York Times, December 5, 2020). Another article in the same media depicted vaccination as the shield or some kind of protection against the disease: “*the high-risk population is shielded by vaccinating the individuals who are most likely to transmit the virus*” (The New York Times, December 20, 2020), “*as vaccine manufacturers race to update the first-generation shots in the hopes of patching up our protection for the fall, other scientists are taking a different approach*” (CNN, July 22, 2022). CNN referred to the vaccine as the ammunition to be used against the disease: “*An effective vaccine has been touted as the magic bullet that will allow the global economy to quickly shift back into gear*.” (CNN, September 7, 2020).

It is not only COVID-19 pandemic that is described as war and its attributes in mass media, other topics are also often covered using such metaphoric profiling. For example, the threat of famine in Gaza provoked by Israel was compared to a weapon in The Guardian: “*Starvation is used as a weapon of war. Israel is provoking famine*” (The Guardian, Mar 18, 2024). The Washington Post described the malignant brain cancer threatening to the patient’s life as a “*ticking time bomb*”: “*the tumor almost always grows back, often aggressively. I am learning to live with the knowledge that there’s a ticking time bomb in my head*” (The Washington Post, August 11, 2024). The problems of climate change have received a massive media coverage, in which war metaphors also play a huge role: “*Renewables caught in misinformation crossfire from Australia’s nuclear cheerleaders*” (The Guardian, July 17, 2024). Even for picturing corporate and individual crises with disastrous results (which can be made public due to the public status of the participants or the virality and aftereffects of the case), the war metaphors are still quite productive. This can be observed, for instance, in The Guardian’s article on the consequences of H. Weinstein scandal to the future of some television programmes: “*What next for the TV shows caught in the post-Weinstein crossfire?*” (The Guardian, Nov 27, 2017). The col-

lapse of careers, perspectives or businesses is compared to appearing in the shooting epicenter, with the effects as devastating: “*Sydney Morning Herald caught in the Crikey crossfire as letter to Lachlan Murdoch knocked back*” (The Guardian, August 26, 2022). This appears to be a common metaphor for modern media reports of crises and disastrous conflicts where the third party can suffer: “*LGBT people of faith caught in the crossfire between two communities*” (The Guardian, Mar 25, 2019); “*Robert Mueller caught in conservative crossfire as indictments begin*” (The Guardian, October 30, 2017); “*Australian researchers risk being caught up in the crossfire of intensifying “tech wars” between the United States and China*” (The Guardian, June 15, 2020).

As the examples demonstrate, such kind of “war” framing emphasized the urgency and scale of the wicked problem, but also facilitated surveillance and control measures. War metaphors foster the audience’s solidarity, but may also create unnecessary or specially targeted fear to trigger intense emotional response. Such metaphors also reinforce an “enemy vs. hero” dynamic, influencing government responses. Generally, while war metaphors in media discourse can mobilize public action, they may also obscure underlying causes and reduce complex issues to binary conflicts.

2. DISASTER IS NATURAL FORCE

One of the most prevalent metaphorical framings involves depicting calamities via ascribing them the features of natural disasters, even when reporting on the devastating effects of non-natural phenomena. Economic recessions are depicted as *tsunamis* or *earthquakes*, political scandals as *storms*, and social unrest as *eruptions*. Metaphors based on likening disasters to natural forces convey suddenness, uncontrollability, and widespread impact. For example, The New York Times, following the idea first suggested by B. Johnson, referred to the Brexit process as a “*political earthquake rolling across Britain*” (The New York Times, December 12, 2019), the same metaphorical description can be found in the other media: “*Brexit may have been a political earthquake, but for some, it was a widely expected one*” (The Washington Post, October 4, 2022). A nature metaphor was applied to summarize the infamous Zelensky-Trump-Vance scene in the Oval Office: “*A whirlwind day in Washington drew to a close as Trump boarded Air Force One*” (CNN, March 1, 2025). The meeting turned out to be a catastrophe for the Ukrainian delegation as the political leaders’ logomachy escalated into a full-blown argument: “*For supporters of Ukraine, the moment was disastrous*” (CNN, March 1, 2025).

Financial downturns are often framed as natural disasters to highlight their sudden and overwhelming impact. For instance, The Guardian described

the economic fallout of the COVID-19 pandemic as a “financial tsunami”: “*Billions of dollars of debt owed by poor countries must be permanently cancelled in order to stave off a “looming financial tsunami” caused by Covid-19 and the ensuing global recession*” (The Guardian, Jan 26, 2021). CNBC referred to stock market crashes likening them to an earthquake: “*Politicians urge calm in Europe after Trump tariffs drive ‘stock market earthquake’*” (CNBC, April 7, 2025). In the same way, the recent D. Trump’s tariffs are predicted to ruin economic stability: “*The car tariffs would be ‘a hurricane-like headwind to foreign (and many US) automakers’*” (The Guardian, March 31, 2025).

Metaphors of flooding and inundation, such as “*waves of refugees*”, “*inundated hospitals*”, or “*a deluge of misinformation*”, have also become quite common in media discourse to emphasize the disasters’ overwhelming force and lack of control. CNN reported on “*the beginning of the second Covid-19 wave on November 2020*” and hospitals being “*inundated with COVID-19 patients*” (CNN, Jul 29, 2021). The drastic consequences of symptomless spreading of coronavirus were likened to a storm by The New York Times: “*I was surprised that it would cause such a storm*” (The New York Times, June 27, 2020). BBC used the headline “*Three points to understand this current wave of migration into the US*” (BBC, Oct 6, 2023), using quite a stale metaphor to promote narratives of crisis and threat, at the same time somewhat dehumanizing the subjects (the migrants). Such metaphorical profiling extrapolates the power and danger of natural forces on the conceptual domain of other disasters, regardless of their origin, and amplifies the disasters’ dramatic effects, creating in media texts a sense of inevitability, implying anxiety and loss of control.

3. DISASTER IS DISEASE

Metaphors of disease often appear in political and economic discourse, depicting corruption, extremism, or financial instability as *viruses*, *cancers*, or *epidemics*. For example, the threats of radical extremism are frequently profiled in the media via the cancer metaphor: “*The cancer of Islamist extremism spreads around the world*” (The Washington Post, November 2, 2017). Fox News also referred to extremism by ascribing to it the features of a deadly disease: “*We have to act decisively to address the poison of white supremacy and domestic terrorism in America. It’s a poison, it’s a cancer, it’s destroying our society*” (Fox News, March 20, 2025). However, other diseases and their scales could also give the foundation to some metaphors in the descriptions of non-medical concepts and events: e.g., The New York Times called the false information about the coronavirus pandemic spread by Fox News, the news channel famous for its falsehoods, conspiracy theories and manipulative

depiction of events, *“Fox’s Fake News Contagion”* (The New York Times, March 31, 2020). The New York Times referred to the initial stage of COVID spread around the world as *“early, paralyzing weeks of the coronavirus pandemic”* (The New York Times, March 11, 2025). These metaphors pathologize wicked problems, casting them as invasive and requiring surgical or solutions similar to pharmaceutical. Such a representation can stigmatize individuals or groups, and contribute to fear and moral panic.

4. DISASTER IS GAME/SPORT

Game metaphors of disasters, including references to playing or losing the game, losing points, missing shots, goals or blows, are commonly used in political reporting and economic commentary. Since *disaster* initially has negative connotations, such metaphors mainly emphasize the risks taken, fierce competition, and eventual defeat. For instance, mass media frequently characterize politics as “playing chess”: *“Truth and equal respect function as the rules of democratic debate, just as the rules of chess govern its practice”* (The Washington Post 2020), *“Nikki Haley’s political chess move on Trump”* (CNN, November 11, 2019).

US president D. Trump’s reference to politics and diplomacy as playing cards was picked up by many news media channels: *“You don’t have the cards right now,” he bellowed, talking right over Zelensky when he objected* (CNN, March 1, 2025), thus revealing his attitude towards politics as a game of cards. CNBC discussed U.S. Federal Reserve’s financial policy as *“playing a long game with inflation”* (CNBC, September 20, 2021). The same media used a bright metaphor of playing a catch-up game to describe how Generation X Americans respond to the risk of losing jobs of the recent years: *“As retirement looms, many Gen Xers are still playing catch-up”* (CNBC, June 20, 2024). Similarly, the game metaphor was applied to describing the COVID-19 pandemic, however distant the two domains might seem at first sight: *‘The Pandemic Is a Prisoner’s Dilemma Game’ “to watch the pandemic play out”* In this way the authors conveyed an risk and everyday complexity of choices that the spreading virus had demanded: *“Some people might play a ‘wait-and-see game’”* (The New York Times, December 20, 2020). *The mysterious nature of COVID-19 revealing its puzzling character is highlighted by The New York Times: “with more than 9 million cases around the world, and a death toll approaching 500,000, Covid-19 remains an unsolved riddle”* (The New York Times, June 27, 2020). These metaphors suggest choosing appropriate strategy, competition, and measurable outcomes of the described events. However, they may trivialize serious issues and prioritize negative consequences over carefully considered gradual progress, which is frequently so characteristic of media reports.

5. DISASTER IS FIRE/HEAT

In many cases disasters are talked about in media discourse through metaphors of fire. As J. Charteris-Black puts it, “fire offers our earliest experience of contradiction and ambiguity” [Charteris-Black, 2019, p. 8], therefore bearing potential for numerous metaphorical expressions. Fire metaphors – such as *flames of protest, heated debates, or fiery rhetoric* – evoke the intensity, spread and uncontrollability of disasters. The Guardian described the 2020 protests in Minneapolis as *“cities in flames”* in the article headlined *“A week that shook a nation: anger burns as power of protests leaves Trump exposed”*: *“America has been here before, split by racial division that left its cities in flames and its citizens demanding a different country”* (The Guardian, June 8, 2020). The metaphor is further expanded to convey the atmosphere of the ardent protest: *“The fires lit in Minneapolis by a police officer squeezing the life out of George Floyd, by kneeling on his neck for nearly nine minutes, ignited the biggest protests since the anti-Vietnam war and civil rights movement of the 1960s”* (The Guardian, June 8, 2020).

Fox News commonly reported of hearings, arguments, conflicts with phrases like “heated exchanges”, “blazing accusations”, “fiery argument”: *“Flint, Michigan, city council gets heated after ‘ghetto’ comment”*, *“After more heated exchanges, during which Worthing apparently left, Winfrey-Carter restored order”* (Fox News, May 8, 2022); *“China is escalating its trade war rhetoric with a fiery propaganda video released on Trump’s 100th day in office”* (Fox News, April 29, 2025). The Wall Street Journal described inflation as a fire that gradually went out: *“Inflation Cools Off, But Tariffs Present A Threat”* (The Wall Street Journal, March 13, 2025). BBC often referred to public protests and riots as the fire ignited by violent dispersal: *“The fatal stabbings at a children’s dance class on 29 July sparked riots in England and Northern Ireland”* (BBC, October 25, 2024); *“Demonstrations began in Istanbul on 19 March, sparked by the arrest of leading opposition politician Ekrem Imamoglu”* (BBC, March 24, 2025). According to E. Semino, fire metaphors are appropriate and versatile in communication about different aspects of the pandemic [Semino, 2021, p. 50]. Such verbalization highlights the responses and urgency, metaphors like this are used in media texts to dramatize social unrest or ideological conflicts, incite fear or excitement, influence the emotional tone of discourse.

6. DISASTER IS (EVIL) PERSON

Media often assigns human-like qualities to disasters, diseases, or financial crises, depicting those like evil people, rivals, criminals, enemies, etc.: *“The virus does not discriminate”*, *“COVID-19 is an invisible enemy”*. Such personification is aimed

at creating vivid dynamic images and eliciting a certain emotional response among the audience, like, for instance, portraying pandemic as a robber who deprived people of the opportunity to look after the dearest: “*Families were **robbed** of the ability to care for their loved ones*” (The New York Times, March 11, 2025). In some cases the wicked problems’ “behavior” is depicted in quite a neutral tone: “*The U.K.’s **inflation rate rose** sharply to 3% in January, coming in above analyst expectations of a 2.8% reading*” (CNBC, February 19, 2025), but the negative tone still predominates in media reports due to the disasters’ mainly adverse effects on society and individuals. “*Bangkok authorities declared the Thai capital a “disaster area” on Friday, after a powerful earthquake in neighboring Myanmar **created tremors** which caused buildings to sway dramatically*” (CNBC, March 28, 2025). Climate change discourse frequently employs metaphors that personify environmental threats. The BBC framed the extreme the catastrophic landslide as the revenge of nature: “*Now in his 50s, he has turned from illegal logger to forest ranger after witnessing what he describes as “**nature’s revenge**”*” (The BBC, January 5, 2023). BBC reported of the huge wildfires in Western Europe comparing it to an enraged person: “***Wildfires are raging** across Europe, where a heatwave has intensified drought conditions*” (BBC, July 20, 2022). Severe 2023 floods in Greece were pictured in the media like a furious human: “*severe rainstorms turning streams into **raging torrents**, **bursting dams**, **washing away** roads and bridges, and **hurling cars** into the sea.*” (CNBC, September 7, 2023). In such a way personification metaphors encourage moralistic interpretations of disaster responses, frame disasters as conscious entities rather than spontaneous occurrences.

The **linguistic analysis** reveals such structural, semantic and pragmatic features of disaster metaphors found in in media discourse:

1. Morphological and syntactic patterns of disaster metaphors. Disaster metaphors often take specific syntactic forms that reinforce urgency, agency, or inevitability. The most common patterns are:

a) nominalization: Many metaphors involve **nominalized verbs**, which make abstract concepts appear as tangible entities. For instance, “*the collapse of the financial market*” (instead of “*markets are collapsing*”); “*the rise of misinformation*” (instead of “*misinformation is rising*”). This linguistic choice is typical of media reports, especially in headlines, it increases the rhetorical impact and makes disasters feel more concrete and unavoidable to the audiences.

b) agentive constructions: As it was mentioned before in this paper, media discourse often assigns agency to disasters, reinforcing personification metaphors: “*COVID-19 attacks the elderly*”; “*the hur-*

ricane spared no one”. These constructions create a narrative of an active disaster, increasing the emotional intensity of the communicated message.

c) Passive Voice for object/victim framing: Disaster metaphors often appear in passive constructions to emphasize the objects or victims rather than causes of the wicked problems, for example: “*banks were swept away by the financial tsunami*”; “*thousands were caught in the economic storm*”. This structure distances agency from responsibility, shaping the interpretations of events from this specific perspective.

2. Semantic features of disaster metaphors. Disaster metaphors extend meaning beyond their literal sense, they correspond with embodied experience by creating conceptual associations which that activate the conceptual spheres sometimes quite distant from each other and seemingly incompatible, to outreach the audience’s reasoning and influence the public perception of the media reports. The semantic aspects of mass media disaster metaphors worth highlighting are:

a) metaphoric domains and conceptual mappings: According to Conceptual Metaphor Theory [Lakoff, Johnson, 1980], media maps disasters onto familiar domains, such as: *WAR METAPHORS*: “*battle against the virus*” → health crisis framed as war; *NATURAL FORCE METAPHORS*: “*flood of refugees*” → immigration crisis framed as a natural disaster; *FIRE METAPHORS*: “*inflation is burning through savings*” → economic instability framed as destruction by fire.

b) metaphor strength and intensity: Some metaphors intensify a disaster’s perceived severity through exaggerated imagery, as in: “*a financial earthquake shakes Wall Street*” (more impactful than “*economic instability affects Wall Street*”); “*wave of panic spreads through the country*” (implying uncontrollable force and widespread fear). Strong metaphors heighten emotional engagement, making events feel more urgent and dramatic.

3. Pragmatic effects of disaster metaphors. The use of disaster metaphors in media has significant pragmatic consequences, shaping public reactions and policies, they can “persuade citizens of compliance with policies, ... ameliorate blame and responsibility by the political authorities” [Charteris-Black, 2021]. Metaphorical frames influence reasoning, thought and decision-making among the media discourse addressees in such ways:

a) fear appeals and emotional framing: Martial metaphors like “*a ticking time bomb*” or “*a political explosion*” increase the feeling of anxiety, pushing urgency in crisis management. For example, COVID-19 was frequently framed as a “war”, which led to war-like perception of the pandemic and, consequently, to responses such as lockdowns, curfews and emergency government strategies. At the same time, as the pandemic developed, the weaknesses

of war metaphor became salient [Charteris-Black, 2021], and the media started using it less regularly.

b) impact on policy and decision-making:

The persuasive power of metaphors is hard to overestimate – they are used in media discourse to urge and appeal, to propagate and convince. War metaphors justify combat-like approaches to addressing the disastrous events, while natural disaster metaphors imply the passive victimhood, e.g.: “*fighting climate change*” suggests the participants’ proactive position, whereas “*climate catastrophe*” might express fatalism and discourage the audience from any action.

c) political and ideological framing: As a powerful means of political and ideological impact, media uses metaphor clusters strategically to align disasters with political agendas: “*economic tsunami*” in financial crises justifies such responses as large-scale interventions; “*immigration flood*” frames migration as an uncontrollable disaster, influencing policy responses. According to J. Charteris-Black, the appropriateness of a metaphor depends greatly on the communicator, context, purpose and audience [Charteris-Black, 2021]. Media outlets tend to selectively employ metaphors that resonate with their ideological leanings and target audiences, as demonstrated by the analysis of political speeches in [Charteris-Black, 2018].

Hence, we can point out the profound role of disaster metaphors in shaping the media audiences’ perception of significant events coverage. Metaphors in media discourse are not neutral, they frame understanding in ways that favour certain interpretations and public opinion. War metaphors, for example, encourage aggressive policy responses and may lead to acceptance of authoritarian measures, while disease metaphors may lead to stigmatization. Economic disaster metaphors have the capacity to impact financial regulations and market perceptions, and natural disaster metaphors may create the sense of inescapable danger, and justify large-scale interventions as inevitable. In this respect E. Semino highlights that in the same way as metaphors can be used to deceive and prevaricate, they can also be used to enlighten and comfort [Semino, 2021, p. 52]. So, the analysed cases demonstrate that understanding the use of disaster metaphors is essential for critical media literacy.

While this study focuses on the English-language media, it’s important to point out **cross-media and cross-cultural considerations**, as far as metaphor use varies across languages and cultures. However, globalized media often export dominant metaphorical frames, leading to homogenization. For example, the WHO’s use of the phrase “*to flatten the curve*” became a universally adopted metaphor across multiple languages during the pandemic.

Discourse analysis also reveals certain **implications for journalism and public discourse**. Journalists must be aware of the power of metaphor in

shaping modern media discourse. Responsible metaphor use involves reflecting on the implications of metaphor choice and avoiding frames that stigmatize or mislead. Media literacy programs should include metaphor analysis as a critical skill. As A. Musolff argues, repeated metaphorical frames can create entrenched ideological narratives that are difficult to challenge as they invoke ‘typical’ situation scripts or scenarios that invite recipients to draw conclusions that have ideological, emotional and action-inducing consequences [Musolff, 2023], and can thus become the basis for manipulations and propaganda.

Conclusion and prospects for further research.

From the study it follows that in the contemporary English-language media discourse a range of metaphors is employed to reflect different aspects and visions of disasters. Striking occurrences and overwhelming catastrophic happenings prove fertile ground for linguistic invention in the media texts. Representing the concept of disaster via metaphors serves as powerful cognitive and discursive strategy that can shape the public perception of various catastrophic events (social, political, economic, natural, etc.). Grounded in the framework of Conceptual Metaphor Theory, these metaphors map experiential knowledge from the domain of natural or human-made catastrophes – such as earthquakes, wildfires, or epidemics – onto other phenomena and events, rendering them more tangible and emotionally resonant. Media coverage of disasters frequently uses metaphoric expressions which not only dramatize the events, but also impose specific frames of urgency, instability, anxiety or existential threat. Such constructions operate at multiple linguistic levels: semantically and cognitively through activated associations and schemata, syntactically through specific structures, and pragmatically through narrative patterns aimed at evoking certain reactions from the audiences. Importantly, disaster metaphors in the media do more than describing – they influence public cognition by activating emotional responses, shaping evaluative stances, legitimizing particular interpretations, stimulating social or political actions.

Disaster metaphors of the English-language media discourse play a central role in constructing social realities, directing the audience’s attention, shaping public understanding of disasters and emotional responses to them, and influencing the public policy. Examining semantic mappings, syntactic patterns and pragmatic implications offers an insight into how language frames the concept of disaster and drives public responses. Disaster metaphors often fulfil ideological functions, aligning wide audiences with specific political or social agendas as they can carry ideological weight and ethical consequences.

Disaster metaphors in media discourse open rich avenues for in-depth linguistic inquiry, further research can focus on their comparative analy-

sis across various media genres or on viewing them through a cross-linguistic perspective by studying the use of disaster metaphors in mass media to frame similar political, social or natural events in different cultures and languages (e.g., in the English vs. Ukrainian media).

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