ADVANCE SOCIAL SCIENCE ARCHIVE JOURNAL
Available Online: https://assajournal.com
Vol. 5 No. 01 Jan-Mar 2026.Page#.2437-2443
Print ISSN: 3006-2497 Online ISSN: 3006-2500
Platform & Workflow by: Open Journal Systems

Metaphors of Crisis and Hope in Social Media Discourse about the 2025 floods in Buner and Swat: An Ecolinguistics Perspective

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Abstract
Climate-related disasters have become more common in Pakistan; the 2025 floods in Buner and Swat severely damaged homes, livelihoods, and communities. This study uses an ecolinguistic method to examine metaphorical language in fifty publicly available social media posts from Facebook, Instagram, X (Twitter), TikTok, Wikipedia, and Reuters, investigating how common people express their experiences of hope and tragedy. Based on Lakoff and Johnson's (1980) Conceptual Metaphor Theory and Stibbe's (2015) "stories we live by," the analysis finds two main patterns: crisis metaphors and hope metaphors. Crisis metaphors emphasize vulnerability and destruction by depicting rivers as fierce adversaries, darkness, or emotional drowning. On the other hand, hope metaphors, which represent healing and optimism, place an emphasis on resiliency, community strength, spiritual faith, and ecological regeneration. The results show that metaphorical language encourages ecological knowledge, community cooperation, and perceptions of environmental calamities. Policymakers, environmental communicators, and researchers can develop more effective catastrophe communication and resilience-building initiatives by comprehending these linguistic patterns.

Keywords: *Ecolinguistics, Conceptual Metaphor Theory, Social Media, Floods, Buner, Swat, Crisis Metaphors, Hope Metaphors, Environmental Discourse, Pakistan.*

Introduction

In recent years, Pakistan has seen an increase in the frequency of climate-related disasters. Extreme weather events, landslides, and floods have seriously harmed infrastructure, natural ecosystems, and human life. The floods in Buner and Swat, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, in 2025 were the most devastating of these calamities. Severe flooding brought on by heavy rains and rising river levels destroyed homes, uprooted families, and interfered with livelihoods throughout the area.

People frequently use internet platforms to communicate information, feelings, and experiences related to environmental disasters. Social media sites like Facebook, Instagram, X (Twitter), and TikTok have grown to be significant venues for people to record disasters and interact with larger audiences. In addition to reporting events, these blogs show how people interpret environmental issues through language.

The use of metaphors is a crucial language element in this kind of communication. By contrasting complex situations with well-known concepts, metaphors enable people to describe them. For

instance, characterizing a flood as a "monster" or a "violent enemy" reflects feelings and influences how people view the calamity.

Ecolinguistics is the study of how language and the environment interact. Ecolinguistics studies how language affects people's perceptions of sustainability, the environment, and nature. Stibbe (2015) argues that language contains narratives, or "stories we live by," that influence people's perceptions of and reactions to environmental challenges.

Because social media discourse features informal statements from regular individuals rather than institutional voices, it is especially useful for ecolinguistics research. People use language to create meanings about nature, loss, and healing when they narrate tragedies online. Many social media users used metaphors that conveyed dread, devastation, and powerlessness to describe the floods in Buner and Swat. Other metaphors emphasized resiliency, hope, and group healing at the same time. These two patterns show how language expresses both the need to rebuild and emotional damage.

In order to identify and assess metaphors of disaster and hope, this study focuses on social media posts regarding the floods in Buner and Swat in 2025. The study investigates how these metaphors influence environmental awareness and societal reactions to climate-related calamities by using an ecolinguistic viewpoint.

Significance of the Study

By investigating how common people apply language on social media during environmental crises, this work advances the area of ecolinguistics. The majority of earlier studies have concentrated on how organizations, governments, and journalists convey information about disasters. But the perspectives of common people who are directly affected by these events are frequently disregarded.

This study examines social media posts to show how people use common language to understand environmental concerns. These blogs offer insightful information about cultural perceptions of disasters, communal solidarity, and emotional reactions.

The study's emphasis on metaphorical language in environmental communication is another significant contribution. Metaphors impact public perceptions of nature and climate change as well as how individuals perceive environmental issues.

Policymakers, environmental organizations, and communication specialists can create more successful catastrophe communication plans by comprehending these linguistic tendencies. Additionally, it can help promote sustainable attitudes toward nature and increase environmental awareness.

Research Questions

1) How are the floods in Buner and Swat in 2025 described by social media users using metaphors of disaster and hope?
2) How do these metaphors represent environmental meanings and beliefs?
3) How do these analogies affect how the general public perceives natural disasters?

Objectives of the Study

- To find crisis and hope metaphors in social media messages on the floods in Buner and Swat in 2025.
- To examine how these metaphors create emotional reactions and environmental meanings.
- To investigate how ecological knowledge and resilience during disasters are reflected in metaphorical language.

Methodology

This study analyzes the metaphorical language in social media conversation about the 2025 floods in Buner and Swat using a qualitative descriptive research design. Because qualitative discourse analysis concentrates on analyzing meanings within language rather than quantifying numerical data, it is suitable for this study. The goal of the study is to comprehend how people articulate their emotional experiences and linguistically build environmental catastrophes.

The research is guided by two main theoretical frameworks:

Ecolinguistics

Ecolinguistics is the study of how language affects how people interact with their natural surroundings. In particular, the study makes use of Stibbe's (2015) notion of "stories we live by." These narratives are linguistic patterns that influence people's attitudes and actions regarding their surroundings.

Conceptual Metaphors Theory

Additionally, the study makes use of Lakoff and Johnson's Conceptual Metaphor Theory (1980). This idea holds that metaphors are cognitive tools that enable people to comprehend abstract experiences through well-known notions rather than merely decorative statements.

The study examines how metaphorical language creates meanings regarding tragedy, vulnerability, and recovery using these frameworks.

Data Collection

The dataset comprises of 50 publicly accessible social media posts from August and September of 2025, when the districts of Buner and Swat in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan, experienced significant floods, make up the dataset.

Posts were gathered from the following platforms:

i. Facebook
ii. Instagram
iii. X (Twitter)
iv. TikTok
v. Wikipedia contributors
vi. Reuters

Purposive sampling was used in the study, which means that postings were chosen according to how well they addressed the research question.

The selection criteria included:

- Buner or Swat floods must be mentioned in the post.
- An individual person, not an organization, must share the post.
- The post needs to use metaphorical or emotive language.
- The post needs to be open to the public.

The posts were saved as screenshots, which were then converted into text for analysis. Only the posts' textual elements were examined; pictures and videos were not included unless their captions included metaphorical language.

Coding Techniques

Both deductive and inductive coding methods were employed in the analysis. In order to comprehend their contents and emotional tone, each post was first read multiple times. Second, the posts were found to include metaphorical language. Personification, symbolic descriptions, and figurative verbs were among them. Third, the metaphors were divided into two primary categories:

Crisis Metaphors

Expressions of devastation, terror, powerlessness, and environmental danger.

Hope Metaphors

Expressions that stand for courage, unity, reconstruction, and rebirth. In order to comprehend the metaphors' underlying environmental implications, ecolinguistic theory was used to their interpretation.

Table 1: Metaphors of Hope Identified in Social Media Posts

Metaphorical Expression	Conceptual Metaphor	Interpretation	Ecolinguistic Meaning
"The sun will rise again."	HOPE IS LIGHT	Recovery is associated with sunrise and brightness.	Promotes optimism after disaster.
"We will stand like mountains."	COMMUNITY IS A MOUNTAIN	Community strength is compared with mountains.	Symbolizes resilience and unity.
"Our valley will grow again."	RECOVERY IS REBIRTH	Rebuilding is seen as new life after destruction.	Encourages long-term recovery.
"Faith is our anchor."	FAITH IS STABILITY	Religious belief provides emotional strength.	Shows cultural and spiritual coping strategies.
"Nature will heal again."	NATURE IS A LIVING BODY	Nature is seen as capable of regeneration.	Reflects ecological awareness and environmental balance.

Despite the destruction brought forth by the floods, numerous posts also featured metaphors that highlighted perseverance and healing. These optimistic metaphors emphasize the resilience of communities and the revitalization of the environment. Table 1 presents the important cases.

Thematic Analysis

The study adhered to Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step paradigm for theme analysis. The following steps were engaged in the analysis:

1. Getting acquainted with the dataset
2. Initial code generation
3. Recognizing recurrent motifs
4. Themes are reviewed and improved
5. Theme identification and definition
6. Composing the interpretive analysis

Metaphors of crisis and metaphors of hope were the two primary thematic patterns that resulted from this procedure.

Results and Interpretation

The examination of social media posts showed that people's descriptions of the floods heavily relied on metaphorical language. Metaphors of crisis and metaphors of optimism emerged as the two predominant discursive patterns.

Crisis Metaphors

Posts shared during the height of the flooding were more likely to use crisis analogies. These analogies highlighted vulnerability, dread, and devastation.

Table 2: Metaphors of Crisis Identified in Social Media Posts

Metaphorical Expression	Conceptual Metaphor	Interpretation	Ecolinguistic Meaning
"The river turned into a monster."	DISASTER IS AN ENEMY	The flood is described as a violent attacking force.	Nature is framed as hostile and uncontrollable.
"Water invaded our villages."	DISASTER IS WAR	The flood is portrayed as an invading army.	Humans are positioned as victims of nature.
"The flood swallowed everything."	DISASTER IS A DEVOURING CREATURE	The disaster is seen as destroying all surroundings.	Emphasizes loss and helplessness.
"A dark day for Swat."	CRISIS IS DARKNESS	Darkness represents despair and uncertainty.	Highlights emotional trauma caused by disaster.
"We are drowning in grief."	EMOTION IS WATER	Emotional suffering is described using water imagery.	Reflects psychological impact of the flood.
"Our homes are broken."	HOME IS A BODY	Houses are described as injured bodies.	Shows emotional attachment between people and their homes.

The study found that the catastrophic nature of the floods was described by a number of frequent metaphors. These metaphors highlight emotional fragility and present the catastrophe as a hostile force. Table 2 summarizes the main crisis metaphors.

Flood as a Violent Enemy

Many social media users used aggressive and conflict-related terminology when describing the disaster. Expressions like:

"The river became a monster."

"Our villages were overrun by water."

The idea that "disaster is war" is reflected in the phrase "the flood swallowed everything."

In this metaphor, human societies are portrayed as the targets of assault and nature as a hostile force.

Nature as Dark Shadows

Another recurrent metaphor linked darkness to the catastrophe. Expressions like: "A gloomy day for Swat"

"Darkness envelops the valley."

Explain the metaphor "CRISIS IS DARKNESS." Emotional feelings of anxiety, uncertainty, and despair are reflected in these utterances.

Drowning in Emotions

A number of postings described emotional experiences using images of water. Examples consist of:

"Our grief is drowning us."

"There are waves of fear everywhere."

These analogies show how environmental catastrophes affect people's mental and emotional health.

A Broken Body at Home

Comparing broken homes to wounded bodies was another potent metaphor. For instance: "Our houses are damaged."

"The walls are bleeding."
The emotional bond that exists between people and their living environments is emphasized by such expressions.

Spiritual Understandings

Some posts used religious ideas to explain the catastrophe. The description of the flood was:
"A divine test"
"A warning from the natural world"
Pakistani society's cultural and spiritual viewpoints on environmental occurrences are reflected in these perceptions.

Hope Metaphors

Many social media posts included metaphors that conveyed optimism and resiliency despite the devastation brought on by the floods.

After Darkness, Light

Light imagery was one of the most popular metaphors for hope. Examples consist of:
"The sun will rise once more."
"After darkness, there is light."
These phrases emphasize hope and healing, embodying the conceptual metaphor HOPE IS LIGHT.

The Mountain as a Community

In certain posts, communities were compared to mountains, which stand for stability and strength. Mountains are a symbol of tenacity and fortitude in areas like Buner and Swat. This allegory emphasizes how crucial group support is during disasters.

Rebuilding as a Rebirth

Metaphors of rebirth and renewal were frequently used to characterize recovery. Expressions like:
"Our valley will flourish once more."
"A fresh start for our people" demonstrate the metaphor "RECOVERY IS REBIRTH."

The Anchor of Faith

During the crisis, religious metaphors were also employed to convey emotional stability. It was said that faith is an anchor that keeps people strong under trying circumstances.

The Healing Cycle of Nature

Some posts acknowledged that nature itself is capable of healing. It was said that landscapes were "breathing again" or "healing."
Environmental regeneration and ecological awareness are reflected in these metaphors.

Conclusion

This study employed an ecolinguistic approach to analyze metaphorical language in social media posts on the floods in Buner and Swat in 2025. Two predominant groups of metaphors were identified by analyzing fifty social media posts: crisis metaphors and hope metaphors. Crisis metaphors emphasized devastation and vulnerability by depicting the flood as a fierce foe, darkness, or emotional drowning. Hope metaphors, on the other hand, emphasized spiritual resiliency, light, rebirth, and community strength.
These results show that people's perceptions of environmental calamities are greatly influenced by language. Communities use social media discourse as a platform for emotional expression, ecological event interpretation, and recovery story construction.
Researchers, lawmakers, and environmental communicators can create more successful catastrophe communication and environmental awareness campaigns by comprehending these linguistic patterns.

In the end, the study emphasizes how language not only records ecological calamities but also fosters social hope and emotional fortitude in the face of environmental catastrophes.

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