From Microbe to Menace: A Comparative Analysis of Monster Metaphors in Pakistani and Chinese Print Media during COVID-19 Pandemic

Dr. Humaira Jabeen[1], Dr. Afia Tasneem Wasti[2], Syeda Neelam[3]

Article Details

[1]Dr. Humaira Jabeen
Assistant Professor, Department of English, Abasyn University Peshawar, KP, Pakistan.
humairaJabeen423@gmail.com

[2]Dr. Afia Tasneem Wasti (Corresponding Author)
Assistant Professor, Department of English, Kohat University of Science & Technology (KUST)Kohat, KP, Pakistan. afiawasti27@gmail.com

[3]Syeda Neelam
Visiting Lecturer, Institute of Peace and Conflict Studies, University of Peshawar, KP, Pakistan.
syedaneelam92@gmial.com

ABSTRACT

Conceptual Metaphor Theory" (CMT) is a good tool for conceptualizing various phenomena. To understand how the COVID-19 pandemic (2019-2021) was understood, reported, and represented in Pakistan, COVID-19-related news stories were extracted from the daily, *Dawn* (January-December 2020) by using the Pragglejazz group of Identification Method for Metaphors (2007). The main purpose of the present research was to understand how fear was mongered and instilled in the people's hearts to keep them indoors. One way to achieve this aim is to represent something as dangerous, deadly, and imminent. One widely reported conceptual metaphor used to realize this objective was to represent COVID-19 as a monster that is COVID-19 IS MONSTER. News stories extracted from *Dawn* were compiled into a Corpus for concordance using AntConc. The analysis revealed that the conceptual metaphors COVID-19 IS MONSTER in the Dawn corpus existed with the frequency of 138 and the Global Times corpus occurred with the frequency of 121 metaphors. The monster metaphor in COVID-19 communication has been instrumental in conveying urgency and mobilizing collective action. However, its use also demands caution to avoid over simplification, stigmatization, or fear-driven narratives. Ultimately, metaphors like this reflect how society deals with unprecedented crises, blending cultural epitomes with contemporary realities. Future research in this area would benefit from including more metaphor areas and search words or using larger corpora.

1.   Introduction

Language provides ways to construct social reality which certainly reflects in the prevalent discourses of that certain societal setup (Fairclough, 2001; Hymes, 1972; Said, 1978). Similarly, language is perceived not only as a tool for communication but also as an instrument of power and a vehicle to construct identity (Bourdieu, 1977; Fairclough, 1993; 2015). These discursive and figurative arrangements in discourses draw the attention of not only linguists but also critical discourse analysts. One of the major developments in the field of linguistics is the study of language about the mind and how language is organized by ideas, thoughts, and embodiment. Understanding language and the meanings of linguistic items are related to conceptualization and embodiment. This approach to studying language is provided by Cognitive Linguistics, which is a newly emerged field that investigates the relationship between language, mind, and embodied experience (Evans, 2011).

The COVID-19 pandemic has left deep marks in the consciousness of people all over the world. Because of its unexpectedness, rapid pace, and global scale, the pandemic has forced significant changes into our lives. The enormous challenge issued by the dreaded pandemic is being discussed, explained, rationalized, and interpreted in numerous publications of health and media reports, newspaper articles, write-ups as well as news headlines, etc. Since, it was a new phenomenon, novel and fresh metaphors were used for effective reporting and warning. Under such circumstances, immediate response, and efficient prevention have become the greatest challenges faced by the world community (Kozlova, 2021).

Lakoff and Johnson (1980) gave a theory called conceptual metaphor theory (CMT). In their work, they described that metaphor as the cross-domain mapping between the source domain and target domains. The key aim of metaphor is not only to analyze a language but to find the way people "conceptualize one mental domain in terms of another" (Lakoff 2006). Understanding one domain in terms of another requires a prearranged set of parallel points between the source and target domains. These sets are known as "mappings." Think of them in terms of a road map. In conceptual linguistics, mappings form the basic understanding of how someone got from one Point (the source) to the other Point (the target). Each point and movement forward along the road that eventually brings you to the final destination informs your travel and also gives meaning to the journey once you've arrived at your destination. Kövecses, Zoltán. (2010) and Gul et al., 2023(b)).

Rhetorical language plays an important role in effective communication. As Aristotle (Poetics 1457b) claimed metaphor is a rhetorical device, so we cannot ignore the pragmatic function of metaphors. The present study explored the pragmatic function, and the cognitive and cultural nature of metaphors being used in COVID-19. For this purpose, two of the newspapers were selected for the collection of metaphors about Covid-19 viz the daily Dawn newspaper from Pakistan and The Global Times newspaper from China respectively. The study was an attempt to compare the conceptual metaphors manifested in describing the search word   Covid-19 in these two cultures. The news articles in the year 2020 in the above-mentioned newspapers were divided into twelve sub-folders, corresponding to the twelve months (from January 2020 to December 2020). According to Deignan's (1999) method, the cross-cultural variations in conceptual metaphors can be explored in three ways: i) the conceptual metaphor is the same but the linguistic expressions are different; ii) an alternative metaphor; and iii) different metaphorical extensions of the same literal words (Deignan 1999). While comparing the cross-cultural variations of the metaphors, the study will explore the ideas, attitudes, values, and thinking of the different cultured people concerning the Covid-19 pandemic.

Unlike former contagious diseases like Ebola and Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS), the nature of the Covid-19 outbreak as the infection has endangered many lives. The pandemic began in December 2019 and grew into the largest and most severe outbreak in the history of the disease (Liu, et al., 2020). Due to this, it has received international consideration and a public health emergency has been declared by WHO. The spread of corona virus has not only affected the economies, trade and industries of the world but also affected the social and domestic lives of people along with causing a great deal of fear, anxiety and panic in the public (Katermina & Yachenko, 2020). It has not only instilled fear in individuals at a social and psychological level but has also drastically changed the conventional patterns and behaviors of people.

Along with other changes caused by Covid-19 globally, the communication approach is also affected at the linguistic level. In this regard, a major role is played by the media coverage on all media platforms. COVID-19 receives demanding global coverage in print as well as in electronic media. The image of COVID-19 is depicted differently in various languages from diverse perspectives utilizing different styles of communication. Usually, corona virus or disease discourse is part of the medical and scientific discourse, which is accurately employed. However, when the disease is used by ordinary people in their discourses, it is sometimes used both personally and metaphorically to conceptualize the phenomenon.

To study this feature of language, a corpus study can indicate different usages of the words created by the speakers. Therefore, the primary aim of the present study is to examine the framing of COVID-19 in Pakistani English newspaper as well as Chinese English version newspaper by focusing on metaphors. As metaphor is good tool for conceptualizing the novel disease (Rasool, et al. 2021 and Gul et al.,2022). For this purpose, the data was analyzed using the theoretical framework of "Conceptual Metaphor Theory" (CMT), which is proposed by George Lakoff and Mark Johnson (1980) in the field of Cognitive Linguistics. Previously, in linguistics, metaphors are just considered as ornamental parts and stylistic tools of language, but

Lakoff and Johnson (1980) negate this approach and propose that metaphors are not just ornamental tools but important reflections of human thoughts and embodiment.

Journalists, media consumers and policymakers in both Pakistan and China are affected by Covid-19 pandemic. Miscommunication and cultural misunderstandings can arise, leading to potential diplomatic tensions and ineffective public health messaging. If this problem is not addressed, it can lead to continued misrepresentation of cultural contexts in international media. This misrepresentation can exacerbate cultural tensions, hinder international cooperation, result in ineffective communication during global crises.

Previous studies have explored the use of metaphors in media (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980; Charteris-Black, 2004), but there is a lack of focused research on the cross-cultural differences monster metaphors between Pakistani and Chinese media during the COVID-19 pandemic. This study aims to fill this gap by providing a comparative analysis of the Monster metaphors used in the daily Dawn news from Pakistan and the Global Times from China.

For the reason above, two corpora of data are obtained from two newspapers, the daily *Dawn* News from Pakistan, and The *Global Times* newspaper from China. As the news articles are from two different countries, the background and culture must be different from one another, so cross-cultural variations in metaphors could be observed. Besides the above observations, the study also explores the thinking, ideas, attitudes and values of two different places concerning as COVID-19 IS MONSTER. The study also takes help from the previous literature on metaphors on relative issue.

1.0.   Method & Material

This study employs Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT) as the primary framework for analyzing metaphors. To address the limitations of CMT, the researchers also used Grady's Primary Metaphor Theory and Fauconnier's Blending Theory to provide a comprehensive understanding of metaphorical expressions. The corpus was created by gathering conceptual metaphors related to the 'Monster' source domain in the context of COVID-19 using the Pragglejazz Group's Identification Method for Metaphors (2007), spanning from January 2020 to December 2020. AntConc software (Anthony, 2022) has been used for the quantitative analysis, specifically to count the frequencies of lexical items related to the 'Monster' source domain. The software was utilized to generate frequency counts and concordance lines, providing insights into the prevalence and contextual usage of these terms. Qualitative analysis was performed to assess the metaphor's influence on public perception and communication about the pandemic.

2.0.   Results & Discussion

According to the Oxford Learner's Dictionary (2024), a monster means an imaginary creature that is very large, ugly, and frightening. Monsters represent the unfamiliar, threatening, and sometimes the soulless and inhuman qualities. In the corpus of *Dawn* following are the words that describe the COVID-19 as a monster, a huge terrifying creature 'deadly virus', 'demon virus', 'virus fears', 'virus perils', etc. Using monster metaphors to describe COVID-19 can evoke a sense of threat and danger associated with the virus. Here are some monster-related metaphors that have been used to depict various aspects of the pandemic.

Table 1: *The frequency of the lexical items related to COVID-19 IS MONSTER*

Lexical words	Frequency
Deadly	113
Demon	3
Fear	17
Worried	3
Peril	2
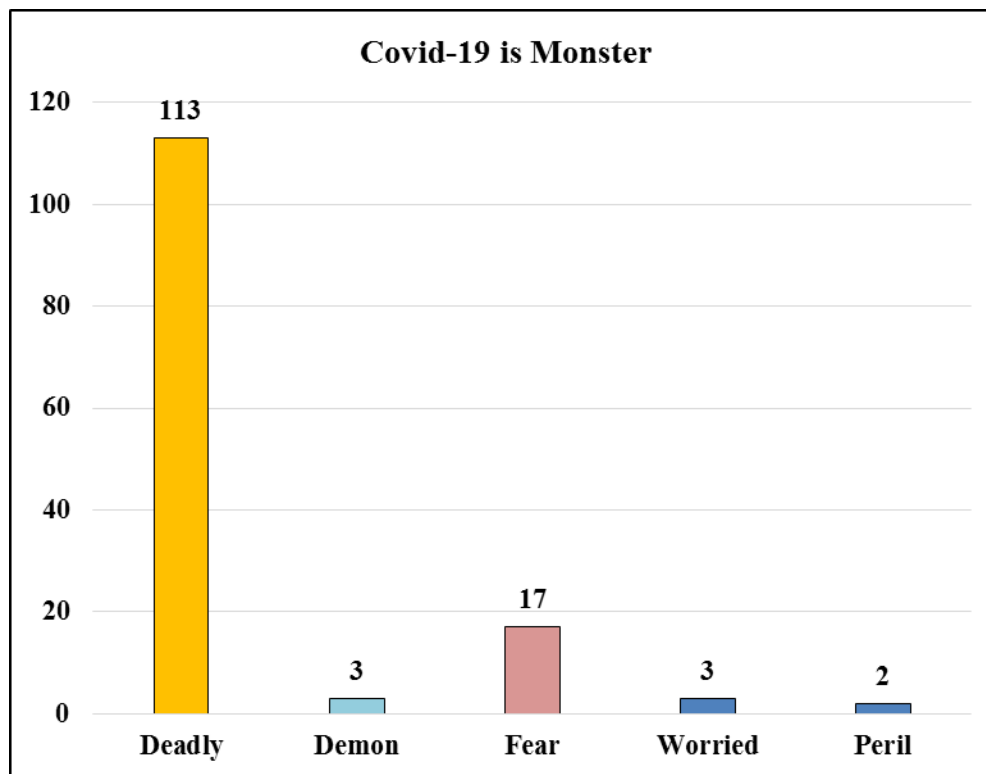
Figure 1: *COVID-19 IS MONSTER*

In the current study data, 138 metaphors fall under the monster category. Many metaphorical expressions related to the Source Domain (SD) MONSTER are used, such as deadly, demon, fear, worried, peril, etc. Searching the frequency of the source domain **DEADLY** in the corpus, 121 tokens of the lexical item were found. However, 113 tokens were used metaphorically to refer to the metaphorical concept COVID-19 IS MONSTER. An example is, "The deadly virus has hampered the BRI to an extent, but the initiative has been overcoming difficulties, bringing benefits to participating countries" (April 23, 2020).

1	dawn data ...	surveillance and protective measures to check the spread of the	deadly	virus in the district. A statement, issued by the
2	dawn data ...	was the best way to control the spread of the	deadly	virus in the country. The prime minister said the
3	dawn data ...	facilitation centre tested positive. As many as 8,227 people contracted the	deadly	virus in the Rawalpindi district in last eight months
4	dawn data ...	etc have been dealing with the challenges posed by the	deadly	virus in a phenomenal manner. They are the frontline
5	dawn data ...	results published until 2005," he said. Five Britons test positive for	deadly	virus in France February 9, 2020 A man wearing a facemask
6	dawn data ...	on Thursday, taking the tally of the victims of the	deadly	virus in Punjab to 60. Of the nine deaths, five
7	dawn data ...	on Tuesday about how to implement new regulations amid a	deadly	virus outbreak in this city.—AFP WUHAN: China is
8	dawn data ...	sixth green jacket this week at Augusta National had the	deadly	virus outbreak not halted sports worldwide. "Somehow it all
9	dawn data ...	locked down some 20 million people at the epicentre of a	deadly	virus outbreak on Thursday, banning planes and trains from
10	dawn data ...	danger is inside the house," added CNN. "This means the	deadly	virus has likely circulated in the White House living
11	dawn data ...	on Tuesday formally announced that the second wave of the	deadly	virus has started in the country. He also said
12	dawn data ...	medical university have got panicked as patients infected with the	deadly	virus have been shifted to a building located near
13	dawn data ...	medical university have got panicked as patients infected with the	deadly	virus have been shifted to a building located near
14	dawn data ...	many of them to wonder whether the spread of the	deadly	virus is far more than what has been reported.

Figure 2: *The lexical word Deadly used in the Dawn corpus*

The lexical word **'DEMON'** was used four times in the Dawn corpus. For instance, "China is battling a "demon" virus that has so far killed more than 100 people," (January 29, 2020). Metaphors like this are often employed to capture the gravity of a situation or to emphasize its threatening nature. They can be found in various contexts, including literature, media, and public discourse. There were 74 instances of the metaphorical use of 'deadlyvirus' to refer to COVID-19. For example, "Ministry issues alert about the deadly virus" (January23, 2020). The deadly virus, like a monstrous beast, prowled the streets, claiming lives with each silent strike. Fear gripped the populace as they faced an invisible adversary, its presence looming like a sinister specter over their daily lives. The following quote is an example of how impartial words get involved in utterances with expressive vocabulary and acquire strengthening to communicate about the pandemic terrors and fears. Another lexical word 'horror 'occurred one time to refer to Covid-19 as a monster. An example of horror is "The virus has suddenly decided to behave but like horror movies, I fear it to come back",(August 29, 2020).

According to Struthers (2017), it is all the more contradictory in an age in which we talk about the post-human, which includes hybrid human and scientific modes of life and living. School is one site where the nurturing of human values and attempts to form or rather transform society for the better start. In a time of societal change, the application andintegration of technology are often perceived to be a threat to human integrity, as well as to emotional relations between human beings. Furthermore, at a time of conflict and division in politics and society in the UK and beyond, groups of diverse perspectives, religions, and cultures can be 'bothered' in a way that they become regarded as monstrous (Struthers, 2017 and Gul et al., 2023(a)).

Penny Crofts (2022) presented academic and judicial writings as corporations' monsters. Like monsters, corporations are creatures of fiction that problematize and challengeorder. Corporations do not fit neatly into common law illegal or legal policy, which was conceived and structured around the classic legal subject, that is, the individual human being. Corporations are immoral deities, which 'have no conscience and feel no pain'. They have superhuman strength, growing exponentially in size and wealth by the dictates of capitalism, and are capable of doing great harm and evil.

Similarly, in the collected data the word 'fear' is used to present a monstrous creature in front of the people. In the literature, Furedi & Yıldırım (2022) define fear as a mechanism that enables the human mind to concentrate on the object of fear when faced with unexpected and unforeseen situations. It is a human reflex to feel fear, and anxiety when faced with a sudden positive or negative unexpected appearance of something in one's life. Due to this anxiety and fear that arises, people want to stay at home and safeguard their selves and their families from unseen monsters.

Similarly, Onturk *et al.* (2022) and Khan et la., 2025, also explain that the fear and anxiety of university student-athletes, about what is happening during the process, help predict what will happen in the future. In addition, fear and anxiety are moving from an individual level to a social level due to the pandemic diseases that cause a high loss of life in today's modern society, and a new disease is encountered every year. Ulaş *et al.* (2021) and Ishtiaq et la. 2022(b) also called Covid-19 as a monstrous disease. They grouped monster metaphors under the category of fatal due to the lethal nature of the Covid- 19.

Describing COVID-19 as a "monster" captures the severity and impact of the pandemic on individuals, communities, and societies worldwide. COVID-19 has caused immmense suffering, illness, and loss of life on a global scale. The metaphor of a "monster" conveys the magnitude of the pandemic's impact and the widespread devastation it has caused. Covid-19 was an invisible threat. Like a monster lurking in the shadows, the virus is often unseen and unpredictable. Its ability to spread rapidly and its invisible nature make it seem ominous and menacing.

The pandemic has triggered fear and anxiety among people, who may feel helpless in the face of an unseen enemy. The metaphor of a "monster" encapsulates the emotions of fear and uncertainty that many individuals experience during these challenging times. Just as heroes in stories must overcome monsters to restore peace and order, societies are facing significant challenges in combating the pandemic. The metaphor suggests that defeating COVID-19 requires collective effort, resilience, and determination. While describing COVID-19 as a "monster" in the *Global Times* newspaper data can evoke strong emotions and convey the severity of the situation, it's essential to balance such metaphors with accurate information, empathy, and constructive actions to address the pandemic effectively.

TABLE 2: The Frequency Of The Lexical Items Related To COVID-19 IS MONSTER

Lexical words	Frequencies
Deadly	119
Fear	12
Dangerous	5
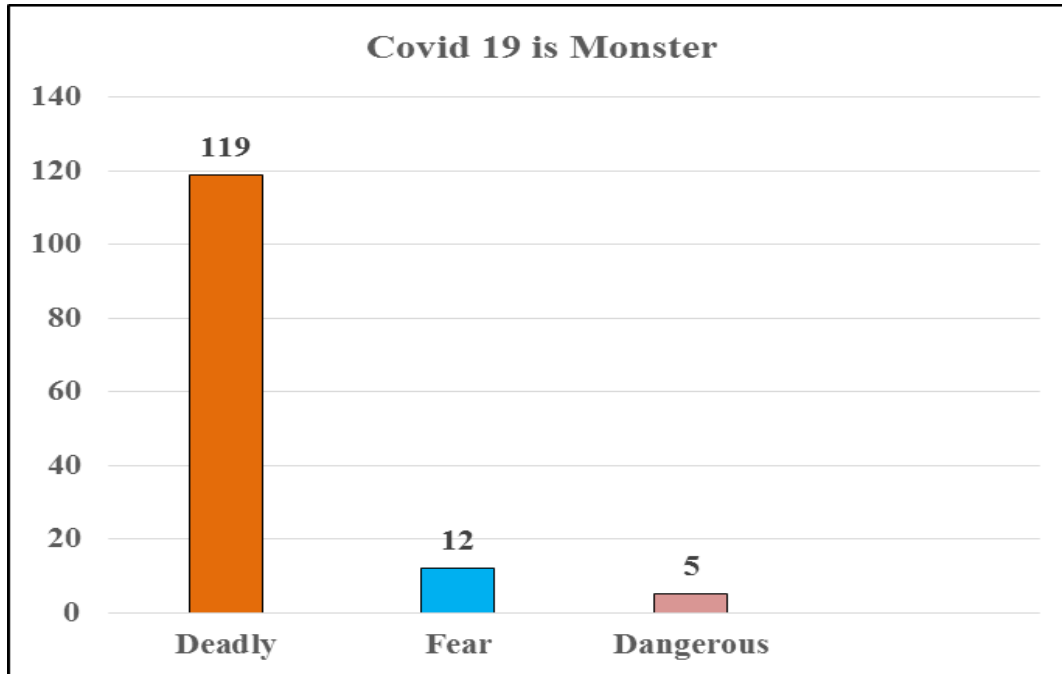
Figure 3: *COVID-19 IS MONSTER*

The analysis of the corpus of "Global Times" Newspaper reveals that the conceptual metaphor COVID-19 IS MONSTER found in the data. Virus was portrayed as a monster withthe metaphorical expressions related to the Source Domain (SD) MONSTER is used, such as deadly, fear with 136 frequencies. Searching the frequency of the source domain **DEADLY** in the corpus, 121 tokens of the lexical item monster were found. However, 119 of them were used metaphorically to refer to the metaphorical concept COVID-19 IS MONSTER. For example, "Let's all unite to fight deadly virus" (Jan 30, 2020). As the statement "Let's all unite to fight deadly virus" fall under the monster metaphor category. In this metaphorical framework, the virus is personified as a menacing entity, akin to a monster, that poses a grave threat to humanity. The call to "unite" implies a collective effort to confront and overcome this formidable adversary, much like banding together to defeat a monstrous creature. This metaphor emphasizes the seriousness of the situation and the need for solidarity andcooperation in combating the spread of the virus.

may 2020 dawn...	danger is inside the house," added CNN. "This means the	deadly	virus has likely circulated in the White House living
october dawn ...	on Tuesday formally announced that the second wave of the	deadly	virus has started in the country. He also said
febraury 2020 ...	medical university have got panicked as patients infected with the	deadly	virus have been shifted to a building located near
febraury 2020 ...	medical university have got panicked as patients infected with the	deadly	virus have been shifted to a building located near
febraury 2020 ...	results published until 2005," he said. Five Britons test positive for	deadly	virus in France AFP Published February 9, 2020 0 A man wearing
Novermber da...	tation centre tested positive. As many as 8,227 people contracted the	deadly	virus in the Rawalpindi district in last eight months
may 2020 dawn...	many of them to wonder whether the spread of the	deadly	virus is far more than what has been reported.
december daw...	and the number of patients who have recovered from the	deadly	virus is increasing which is a good sign. He
june 2020 dawn...	Pakhtunkhwa to help those heroes on the frontlines facing this	deadly	virus on a daily basis," said USAID Mission Director
december daw...	even people died in Rawalpindi district and 144 more contracted the	deadly	virus on Monday. The death toll in the district
febraury 2020 ...	season, might carry coronavirus as research had showed that the	deadly	virus originated from meat of birds and animals in
febraury 2020 ...	season, might carry coronavirus as research had showed that the	deadly	virus originated from meat of birds and animals in
january 2020 ful...	on Tuesday about how to implement new regulations amid a	deadly	virus outbreak in this city.—AFP WUHAN: China is
january 2020 ful...	locked down some 20 million people at the epicentre of a	deadly	virus outbreak on Thursday, banning planes and trains from
january 2020 ful...	status of supplies like protective equipment, face mask and gloves.	Deadly	virus accelerating, warns Chinese president AFP Published January 26
Covid july data ...	around 50pc of the total infected patients have defeated the	deadly	virus across the country. According to data released by
may 2020 dawn...	between their two apparent goals: preventing the spread of the	deadly	virus and resuming regular activities to avoid an economic

Figure 4: *The Concordance Lines Of The Lexical Word Deadly In The Global Times Corpus*

The monster metaphor typically portrays a threat as a monstrous entity, emphasizing its terrifying or malevolent qualities. While the virus itself could be metaphorically depicted as a "monster," the statement primarily focuses on China's response to the virus, rather than personifying the virus itself as a monstrous entity. However, if we were to force a connection to the monster metaphor, we might say that China's efforts to contain the virus at thecommunity level represent a heroic struggle against a formidable adversary—the "monster" being the virus. In this interpretation, China's actions could be seen as akin to battling a monstrous creature, emphasizing the seriousness and urgency of the situation.

Kozlova, T. (2021) and Ishtiaq et al.,2022(a) also communicates the struggle against the pandemic with the metaphor "a fight with a monster". He also described the virus as a monster who turns thecity into a ghost town. He presented Covid-19 as wolves or vampires and was fired to death with silver bullets by vampire hunters. This conceptualization is a very interesting instance ofcognitive frame development. It is based on the mapping between vampire lore and contemporary knowledge about the evil of the pandemic.

Similarly the statement "Rising gun sales could be more deadly than COVID-19" shows the increased availability of guns could be seen as a menacing force that poses a significant threat to public safety, akin to a monster lurking in society. This interpretation would emphasize the potential dangers associated with increased gun ownership and the needfor measures to address gun violence. The monster metaphor typically involves depicting a threat as a monstrous entity, emphasizing its terrifying or malevolent qualities.

However, another lexical word related to the conceptual metaphor "COVID-19 IS MONSTER" is **FEAR**. The frequency of the word is 12 out of 62 occurrences in total. Most of the occurrences are used literally for instance, "Owners of farms and orchards fear their products cannot reach the market as the traffic disruption continues with road blockades in different towns and villages". (Feb 10, 2020). And the metaphorical use of the word mentioned word item is "Exiled Tibetans eye return to China for fear of virus" (April 27, 2020). Here, we could view the virus as a metaphorical monster. In this sense, the virus couldbe seen as a lurking threat that instills fear and drives individuals to take drastic actions, such as returning to China despite potential risks. This interpretation would emphasize theperceived dangers associated with the virus and its impact on decision-making processes. Bilgin, & Taş, (2022) stated in their research that positive association was found between the fear of COVID-19 and sleep disorders, while a negative association was found between psychological resilience and fear of COVID-19 and

sleep disorders.

Next is the lexical word that falls under the monster category "**DANGEROUS**". The total frequency of the word is 45 in number but only 5 occurrences are used metaphorically. For example "Allowing a dangerous virus that we don't fully understand to run free is simply unethical" (Oct 13, 2020). Similarly, Onturk et al. (2022), also explain that the fear and anxiety of university student-athletes, about what is happening during the process, help predict what will happen in the future. In addition, fear and anxiety are moving from an individual level to a social level due to the pandemic diseases that cause a high loss of life in today's modern society, and a new disease is encountered every year. Ulaş et al. (2021) also called Covid-19 as a monstrous disease. They grouped monster metaphors under the category of fatal due to the lethal nature of the Covid- 19.

Using the metaphor of a dangerous virus as a monster to emphasize the ethicalimplications of allowing it to spread unchecked is apt. Just as one wouldn't knowingly releasea dangerous creature into the wild, allowing a virus to proliferate without understanding its full extent and potential harm can lead to disastrous consequences. It underscores the importance of taking proactive measures to contain and mitigate the spread of such virusesfor the well-being of society.

Monster metaphor is the third most frequent category. A monster is an imaginary creature that is very large, ugly, and frightening. Monsters represent the unfamiliar, threatening, and sometimes the soulless and inhuman qualities. In the corpus of Dawn following are the words that describe the covid-19 as a monster, a huge terrifying creature 'deadly virus', 'demon virus', 'virus fears', 'virus perils', etc. Using monster metaphors to describe COVID-19 can evoke a sense of threat and danger associated with the virus" as confirmed from previous studies such as Struthers (2017), Penny Crofts (2022). (For more details see chapters 4 & 5).

3.0.   Cross-Cultural Variations in Monster Metaphors

In monster metaphors some metaphorical expressions are same like "covid-19 is a deadly virus". However some metaphors are different in both the corpora. The frequency of COVID-19 IS MONSTER in both newspapers were almost same. The use of monster metaphors in relation to COVID-19, and the frequency being similar across different regions like China and Pakistan, due to some factors. Firstly, COVID-19 is a global pandemic affecting countries worldwide. The widespread nature of the virus and its impact on societies globally may lead to similar metaphorical framing across different cultures and regions. Secondly, the concept of a "monster" often conveys a sense of fear, danger, and threat. COVID-19, being a novel and potentially deadly virus, is commonly perceived as a threat to public health and safety regardless of geographical location. Therefore, the use of monster metaphors to describe the virus may arise from a shared perception of its menacing nature.

Thirdly, the globalized nature of media means that metaphors and narratives surrounding COVID-19 are often disseminated and shared across different cultures and regions. As a result, certain metaphorical framing, such as likening the virus to a monster, may become widespread and consistently used across various contexts. Fourthly, during times of uncertainty and crisis, people may resort to metaphorical language to make sense of complex or abstract concepts like infectious diseases. The use of monster metaphors to describe COVID-19 may therefore reflect a universal human tendency to anthropomorphize and externalize threats to better understand and cope with them.

Lastly, while cultural differences certainly exist, there are also universal themes and symbols that resonate across different cultures. The idea of a menacing, invisible entity like COVID-19 can evoke similar responses and metaphorical framing across diverse cultural contexts. In summary, the similar frequency of monster metaphors in discussions of COVID-19 across regions like China and Pakistan likely stems from a combination of shared perceptions of the virus as a threat, global media influence,

and universal human responses to crisis and uncertainty.

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