

## Corpus-Driven Analysis of Pakistani Newspaper Editorials on COVID-19 Discourse

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### ABSTRACT

Cataclysmic changes by the gradual spread of COVID-19 have triggered the interest of scientists, scholars, academicians, and linguists in analyzing the discourse related to the spread of the pandemic. The descriptions made by all of these scholars not only contribute to language with linguistic innovations but also cause the emergence of human attitudes and behaviours. At the same time, the issues raised through the language used during the challenging time of such crises shape and reveal several human schemas of language, discourse, society, and culture. Several studies on past situations of diseases and calamities have provided critical analyses of these schemas of difficult times in human history. Discourses through various linguistic practices in this regard play a crucial role in shaping and demonstrating the schemas of the crisis hit societies. Media discourse, specifically, has hidden powers to exercise, identify and report various socio-cultural issues. The current study focuses on finding the themes of socio-cultural attitudes and behaviours that emerged from newspaper editorials published in Pakistani newspapers in February, March and April, 2020. To achieve this goal, the corpus-driven analysis of 198 newspaper editorials having 215,842 words was conducted. The study revealed various themes that prevailed in this pre-vaccination period of COVID-19 in Pakistan. The themes included the metaphoric use of the language such as *battle*, *corps* and *frontline*; racism while naming the virus as *China virus* or *Hazara virus*; *conspiracy theories* assumed to be associated with COVID-19 spread *i.e. suspected involvement of Bill Gates and the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), US and World Health Organization (WHO)*; negligence on the part of people; and criticism on government for health facilities and implications of globalization. It is concluded, based on these findings, that media representation of pre-vaccination phase of COVID-19 in Pakistan is loaded with unhealthy discourse which could have been avoided in order to shape positive attitudes and behaviours of the masses.

**Keywords:** COVID-19; Corona; Corpus-driven analysis; Pakistan; Editorials

### INTRODUCTION

Outbreaks of Pandemics and epidemics, sometimes, throughout human history had caused cataclysmic changes and, at times, these situations had resulted in the entirely different cultural habitus of the affected countries. Language is one of the rapidly affected cultural phenomena that appear during such health crises because it carries the whole essence of the meaning of every word uttered in the situations. The language used in these challenging times not only

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shapes new attitudes and behaviours but the use of language also reveals several cultural (social, religious, political, economic etc.) schemas of individuals and societies.

Several studies have been conducted on the cultural aspects of the outbreaks of the diseases in the recent past such as Cohn (2012) provided a brief historical view of pandemics in the West and explicated some socio-psychological behaviours such as blaming and hatred against 'others' as a result of the spread of A.I.D.S from the plague of Athens. Newman (2012) addressed the problem of less serious attitudes of the public towards being quarantined during the Bubonic plague in early modern England in 1637. A recent study by Gewirtz (2020) has attempted to address a macro-economic structural competition between capitalism and communism of the Chinese Communist Party. Another study by Keyes (2018) addressed the Euro-American xenophobic preconception that "they would die at the hands of so-called savages" (i.e Indians) during the middle of the nineteenth century. Researchers from the field of psychology found keen on addressing psychological issues being caused by pandemics. For example, studies on self-care, mental health, and few other psychological factors including anxiety, stress, and depression have also been studied by the researchers (Jo, Lee, Park, & Kim, 2020). However, the paucity of discourse studies of specialized corpora in this regard is noticeable. Moreover, corpus approaches, which are very effective in unveiling hidden layers of meanings, have also been least applied in these discourse analyses.

Though the bulk of studies has been published on the recent pandemic i.e. COVID-19 from various perspectives of health care, social science, and humanities (WHO, 2020); however, there are very few studies listed by WHO based on linguistic/discourse aspects of COVID-19 disease. For example, Su, Xue, Liu et al. (2020) conducted psychoanalysis of social media users of Wuhan (China) and Lombardy (Italy). They focused on conducting psycholinguistic analysis after lockdown. The results showed that individuals after the lockdown associated themselves with "home" on social media. Moreover, expressions of emotions and religious faiths became more noticeable in Wuhan especially. Similarly, Hunston (2020) concluded that language in general and metaphors in particular during such pandemics and epidemics "shape our experience of illness; our cultural discourse regarding diseases. This experience causes "fear and stigma" which deter health during recovery seriously.

Moreover, Briggs (2020) proffers an insight into a reappraisal of linguistic terms of the *body, health, care, disease, and communication* in the context of COVID-19. Hunston (2020) in the same context explicated the use of metaphor i.e. *the perfect storm* and how this metaphor may deceive the real perception towards such health crises. According to Hunston, this approach in health discourse may appear to be "reactive rather than proactive, reductive rather than holistic, and disempowering rather empowering". The discourse embedded with metaphors such as *perfect storm* may be an attractive catchphrase but it may invoke also the attitudes of "randomness and volatility" that might hinder our ability to face and address the current outbreak of COVID-19 and future health crises too. The current study focuses on exploring the linguistic nexus of newspaper editorial discourses related to socio-cultural attitudes and behaviours through corpus-driven approaches. Few studies from various linguistic and discourse aspects have been conducted in the Pakistani context also (Rafi, 2020; Javed, Shuja, Usama et al., 2020; Ijaz, Tahir & Ahmed, 2021; Rasool, Jan & Noreen, 2021; Dar, 2021). However, limited studies dealt with the representation of the discursive phenomenon of COVID-19 made in the newspaper editorials. Therefore the present study explores various thematic representations made in Pakistani newspaper editorials, of the earlier phase (pre-vaccine/treatment) of COVID-19 situation by utilizing conventions of corpus-driven approaches. However, further studies may be conducted to provide a holistic picture of the whole phenomenon (i.e. pre and post-vaccine/treatment). At the same time, corpus-driven approach through the dataset/corpus provides a future insight of comparing findings based on

pre-vaccine versus post-vaccine situations which would proffer counter-strategies to the operators of discourse grids such as media.

### COVID-19 AND LINGUISTIC INNOVATION

The current COVID-19 situation like any other cataclysmic change has been contributing to the linguistic matrix of all the languages in general and the English language in particular. We have been noticing linguistic innovations when uncommon words are becoming common such as *self-isolation*, *quarantine*, *lock-down*, *social distancing*, *flatten the curve*, *infodemic*, and *endemic*. Neologism has also been observed through the blending of various words, such as *covidiot* (*covid* + *idiot*), *covidient* (*covid* + *obedient*), *quarancut* (*quarantine* + *haircut*). The abbreviation is another process that has been contributing to language related to COVID-19, for example, the abbreviated forms or the short forms like *nCoV*, *c2019-nCoV*, *corona* and *COVID* are a few instances of human innovation to language. Similar linguistic variation has recently been observed by Nauman and Islam (2020) in the corpus of more than 70 news websites from Pakistan. Ijaz, Tahir and Ahmed (2021) also explored this variation in the corpus of opinion articles published in Pakistani newspapers in English.

### COVID-19 AND METAPHORIC LANGUAGE

Unfortunately, the use of language reported throughout the COVID-19 situation seems to be unhealthier from the medical point of view, and the choice of language expressions is likely to cause socio-cultural unrest among the masses. For example, excessive use of war-related metaphors such as *outbreak*, *fight*, *war*, *front-line soldiers* would not help people cultivate hope (Hunston, 2020) rather this practice may cause mental unrest. Rajandran (2020) also explored the war metaphor in the COVID-19 situation in the public broadcast including interviews, speeches, and statements of the Prime Ministers of Malaysia and Singapore. This study (ibid) concluded that war metaphors are usually deployed to refer to the diseases depicting a warlike scenario to sensitize the minds of the people. Both Prime Ministers have used war metaphors in their discourses while interacting with public broadcast forums. The researcher (ibid) also suggested that corpus-based studies may be conducted to identify more metaphors related to the spread of the pandemic. Similarly, metaphors, as reported by media worldwide, causing racism have also been used particularly against China by naming the Coronavirus as *Chinese Virus* and *Wuhan Virus*. Such metaphors may serve a few of the political agendas but these metaphors can never be appreciated by the world at large. Shaping such discourse of racism would never heal the world rather it is likely to cause more damage to humanity by creating a polarized world. Another noticeable metaphoric use of language has been observed when the health care of older people is discussed. The older people, supposedly the most vulnerable age group for COVID-19, were discussed as "*other*" among the rest of the age groups. Unfortunately, the virus i.e. COVID-19 has also been termed, according to media reports, *the "virus of the older people"* which would cause nothing other than anxiety, stress and panic among the individuals of this age group. A similar metaphoric use of language has recently been noticed by Rasool, Jan and Noreen (2021); and Dar (2021) in the corpus of Pakistani newspaper opinion articles and corpora of COVID-19 Open Research Dataset (CORD-19) respectively.

### CORPUS APPROACHES TO COVID-19 LANGUAGE ANALYSIS

According to Oxford English Dictionary (2020), the changes taking place in the English language are so rapid that the collocates of the word 'coronavirus' at the onset of this

disease were *flu-like*, *virus*, *SARS*, *human-to-human*, and *respiratory*. After two months the trend was shifted to *self-quarantine*, *self-isolation*, *social distancing*, *non-essential*, and *lockdown*, and later in April the frequent collocates with the word ‘coronavirus’ were *social distancing/social distance* and *self-isolation/self*. Hence, it can be concluded that this pandemic has marked the use of new vocabulary, slogans and specialist terms determining that the great linguistic changes occur with the occurrence of great social changes (Paton, 2020). Similarly, Hunston (2020) argued based on corpus analysis that there are some verbs and nouns used indicating less coercion and more encouragement, for instance, *guideline*, *advice*, *maintain*, *observe*, *comply with*, *adhere to* are the expressions of positive language use related to COVID-19. Nor and Zulcafli (2020) conducted a corpus-driven study through collocation analysis of Malaysian news reports. They found that the feeling of fear and threats of the virus are prevalent themes in Malaysian news reports. Nor and Zulcafli (ibid) have used “La Repubblica” corpus as a reference corpus and analyzed it through Sketch Engine. They generated wordlists of nouns and adjectives aiming to explore journalistic communication during the coronavirus situation in Italy. The findings of this study based on concordance analysis revealed an emergency situation in the health and economy of Italy. Few studies have recently been published on COVID-19 discourses produced in Pakistan. For example, Rafi (2020), in content analysis, found *cure*, *racism*, and *conspiracy theories* as important topics discussed on social media by Pakistanis. Similarly, the spread of *misinformation* through public WhatsApp groups was found by Javed, Shuja, Usama et al. (2020) in addition to propagating *religious ideologies* to combat the COVID-19 crisis. Nauman and Islam (2020) explored a large corpus of more than 70 news websites from Pakistan and reported an exponential change in the English language used in Pakistan. However, none of the above-mentioned studies conducted in the Pakistani context explored newspaper editorials. Hence, the present study opting for the conventions of corpus-driven approaches explores various themes, through concordance analysis, in Pakistani newspapers editorials related to the spread of the pandemic.

## THE CURRENT STUDY

Our study adopts corpus-driven approaches to discourse analysis, deals with the large collection (corpus) of newspaper editorials on COVID-19. Media play a significant role in disseminating and creating different ideologies. As Fairclough (2013) observed that media discourse having hidden power to exercise depends on systematic tendencies in news reporting and other media activities. Therefore, the current study explores newspaper editorials to find out these tendencies in the form of various themes. According to Fairclough (ibid), “a single text on its own is quite insignificant: the effects of media power are cumulative, working through the repetition of particular ways of handling causalities and agency”. Hence, corpus linguistics provides an opportunity to analyse the repetitions of specific lexical items in a cumulative collection of texts. The analysis of concordances of frequently occurring lexical items provides an opportunity to extract various themes in line with the particular lexeme. Considering the same manifestation of the linguistic analysis, the current study aims at finding the linguistic embodiment of COVID-19 discourse with socio-cultural attitudes and behaviours. In this regard, recurrent themes are analysed in the corpus and are further supported by concordance lines in the present study.

The attitudes and behaviours in the forms of issues raised were discovered in the current study through corpus approaches which rarely have been applied on the discourses that emerged out of such situations of pandemics/diseases. We conducted a corpus-driven analysis of newspaper editorials published in the most read newspapers in Pakistan in February, March

and April 2020. The corpus approaches are significant in this regard as these approaches proffer new linguistic insights into larger data set with less consumption of time and effort, and with more precision to map the content/themes embedded in discourse.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The data for the current study was collected from the newspaper editorials published in February, March and April 2020 in the mainstream newspapers of Pakistan including *The Express Tribune*, *Dawn* and *The News*. This was the time of lockdown and the first wave of COVID-19 in the country and there was no vaccine developed all over the world including Pakistan. Hence, identifying the representation of pre-treatment/vaccine sentiments is of unique significance to mapping attitudes and behaviours of the masses during the initial phase of any health crisis like COVID-19. Therefore, the data collected in the selected months would provide a detailed representation of the phenomenon when emerged in its initial phase. The data is comprised of 198 editorials on COVID-19 published during these three months in the aforementioned newspapers. The corpus consisted of 215,842 words. The details of the data/corpus have been provided in Table 1 below.

TABLE 1. Size of COVID-19 Corpus

Sr#	Name of Newspaper	Month	No. of editorials	Word Count
1	Dawn	February	3	2,766
		March	14	38,384
		April	37	32,130
		<b>Size of Corpus</b>	<b>54</b>	<b>73,280</b>
2	The News	February	1	711
		March	51	51,778
		April	23	25,171
		<b>Size of Corpus</b>	<b>75</b>	<b>77,660</b>
3	The Express Tribune	February	2	1,940
		March	26	25,067
		April	41	37,895
		<b>Size of Corpus</b>	<b>69</b>	<b>64,902</b>
<b>Total</b>		<b>Size of Corpus</b>	<b>198</b>	<b>215,842</b>

We developed the corpora of each month separately and coded/named as COVIDCorpFeb, COVIDCorpMar and COVIDCorpApr for February, March and April respectively. In February, we observed fewer publications related to the spread of coronavirus as no case was found till the end of February 2020 in Pakistan. There was a gradual increase in the publications in the upcoming months due to the increase of the reported cases in the country. Since the study focuses on identifying themes month-wise therefore the difference in corpus size of each month does not affect the findings of the current study.

Both quantitative and qualitative approach to discourse analysis was used for this study. We developed a wordlist to explore frequently occurring content words from the corpus. Wordlists help in identifying different themes (Zahra & Abbas, 2020) and determining the main focus of the corpus (Baker, 2006). Later, we explained various themes from the corpus through concordance analysis.

We developed wordlists of newspaper editorials published in each month (February, March and April) separately through a corpus software named AntConc 3.3.4 (Anthony, 2016). AntConc software has a tool to develop a word list (see Figure 1) that provides a list of both content words and functional words. However, we selected twenty-five frequently occurring



content words from the newspaper editorials published each month for this study, as mentioned in Table 2.

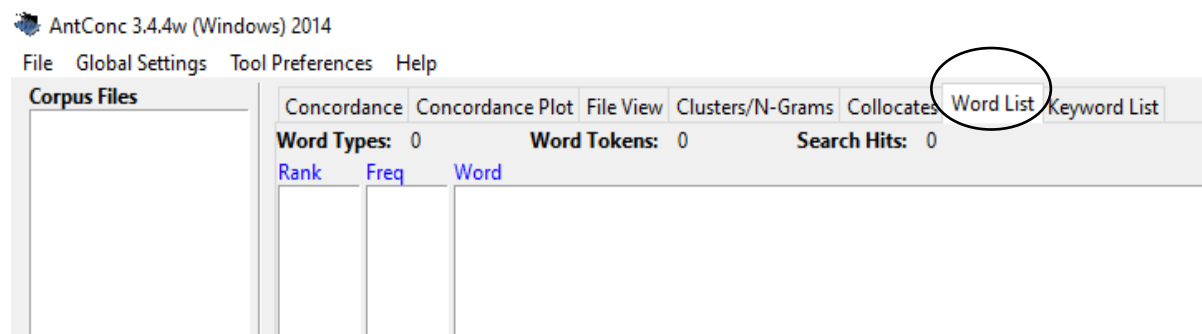


FIGURE 1. Word List tool in AntConc

The month-wise frequencies of words in the newspaper editorials are given in Table 2. The wordlists of each month consist of words with different frequencies. For this study, we selected twenty-five frequently occurring content words from the corpus of each month. The frequency of each content word is mentioned on the right side of words within closed brackets.

TABLE 2. Wordlists of twenty-five Content Words in COVID-19 Corpus of Pakistani Newspapers Editorials

Sr#	Wordlist-February	Wordlist-March	Wordlist-April
1.	China (41)	People (447)	World (311)
2.	Health (32)	Virus (330)	People (290)
3.	People (27)	Government (327)	COVID-19 (249)
4.	Coronavirus (24)	World (323)	Pakistan (246)
5.	World (22)	Health (283)	Pandemic (202)
6.	Chinese (21)	Pakistan (282)	Government (201)
7.	Countries (21)	COVID-19 (262)	Virus (198)
8.	Global (16)	Coronavirus (252)	Crisis (196)
9.	Virus (15)	Public (245)	Countries (194)
10.	Wuhan (13)	Time (240)	Economic (193)
11.	Diseases (13)	Crisis (232)	Political (180)
12.	Some (12)	Country (209)	Coronavirus (162)
13.	International (11)	Pandemic (192)	Health (161)
14.	Situation (10)	Social (188)	Social (157)
15.	Virus (10)	Countries (177)	Country (153)
16.	Pakistan (10)	Spread (170)	Time (145)
17.	Outbreak (10)	Lockdown (169)	Global (142)
18.	Epidemic (10)	Global (165)	Public (141)
19.	Disease (9)	Need (164)	Lockdown (115)
20.	Time (9)	Economic (149)	New (111)
21.	Development (9)	Cases (148)	Against (108)
22.	Passengers (9)	China (145)	First (104)
23.	Travel (9)	System (140)	Power (102)
24.	Face (8)	First (136)	State (96)
25.	Both (8)	Disease (130)	Economy (92)

## **CORPUS-DRIVEN APPROACH AS AN ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK**

After the derivation and selection of the words from wordlists, we examined the corpus using concordance analysis that establishes the discourse functions in corpus-driven discourse analysis. The concordance lines were analysed having a search window size of 55 (i.e. a string of 55 words). The Mutual Information (MI) score was used to calculate the number of actual occurrences of a word against the number of times that word was predicted to occur (Smyth, 2016). We used MI score of five to get the stronger association of lexical items with the node word. The MI score indexes the extent of co-occurrence of words which expresses the strength of association between two words X and Y. There is no ideal window span for the analysis of concordance lines and collocates which gave the ideal precision and recall. However, adjacent words/collocates help in identifying the context and themes of the occurrences. Moreover, sometimes we also use the tool of file view to get a deeper understanding of the text and identification of themes. In the final step of the identification of themes, we mapped the themes through careful consideration of concordance lines. Analysed concordance lines and extracted themes have been supported by excerpts also from the newspaper editorials. Hence, owing to these procedures of corpus-driven approach there is no need to apply inter-coder reliability which in other words may be considered a methodological strength of the corpus-driven analysis.

## **ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION**

Word list of each month revealed the spread of COVID-19 in Pakistan as well as the crisis faced by the whole world due to the spread of the pandemic. The analysis has been divided into three parts containing the month-wise analysis of word list through concordance lines to explore the worldwide effects of COVID-19 on socio-cultural attitudes and behaviours of the people.

### **COVID-19 OUTBREAK: ISSUES RAISED IN THE NEWSPAPER EDITORIALS PUBLISHED IN PAKISTANI NEWSPAPERS IN FEBRUARY 2020 (COVIDCORPFEB)**

The wordlist of the editorials published in February (i.e. COVIDCorpFeb) in the newspapers of Pakistan showed the focus of media on the origin and spread of coronavirus. The analysis shows that this virus has been originated in China that spread throughout the world. Not only Chinese people became the victim of this pandemic disease, but the whole world is also facing the adverse effects of this outbreak. We considered three major themes in the newspaper editorials published in February 2020; racism and stigmatization, failure of medical facilities and change in the architecture of globalization.

#### **RACISM AND STIGMATIZATION**

Unfortunately, the behaviour of stigmatizing “others” during such cataclysmic crises is quite ubiquitous in all ages. The modern age being not exceptional of such psycho-social behaviours of racism and stigmatizations that have been reported by various researchers (see Cohn, 2012; Keyes, 2018). Similar behaviours have also been noticed in the present scenario of the spread of coronavirus worldwide. The world’s media seemed to respond in a callously as they projected racist remarks against China, blamed China and Chinese eating habits for this pandemic disease.

*“The outbreak is being identified with China and the Chinese people in insensitive racial profiling.”*

It further states,

*"If one puts over 2000 deaths from Coronavirus into perspective, the fringing clearly point to an anti-China and Anti-Chinese bias in reporting."*

Lexical items such as *China* (41), *Chinese* (21) and *Wuhan* (13) carry high frequency in COVIDCorpFeb. The presence of these words in the corpus not only reveals the alarming situation created in Wuhan, China through the spread of COVID -19. Moreover, it also highlights the first outbreak of COVID-19 pandemic disease in Wuhan in December 2019 that gradually spread in the whole world.

The world has been facing and fighting against racism for centuries though still not free from it, unfortunately. The findings show that some Asians and specifically Chinese have reported that they are being publically mocked, lynched and blamed for this global pandemic. *"Due to negative reporting, Chinese people are facing a discriminatory attitude in different countries"*. Asians living in the US and Europe have already reported facing discrimination. Moreover, *"It is unfortunate that there is a tendency, for such health alerts to fuel racist sentiments internationally"* as reported in one of the editorials.

*"It goes further to stigmatize the Chinese food and culinary habits"*. The proposition that COVID-19 has emerged from the wet markets in Wuhan, China might be a fact but we cannot ignore another fact that bats or other wild animals are not eaten in China only. They are used as a food source in many other countries around the world including Africa. Therefore, *"finding a connection between China and virus is insensitive and callous."*

Furthermore, it is reported in the selected editorials that China has developed some biological weapons in the form of this pandemic disease to control the whole world. The western world, specifically the U.S claims that the spread of COVID-19 might be China's political strategy against their rivals to come into power. As mentioned in the corpus:

*"The Washington Times thinks in a bizarre manner that the virus might be China's secret biological weapon to undermine political and territorial rivals."*

Moreover, there is an observation that this pandemic got extra media coverage as compared to other epidemics in the past during its initial stages.

*"The 100 high circulation international newspapers have collectively published over 9,387 stories about the disease creating an atmosphere of fear."*

#### CRITICISM ON HEALTH FACILITIES

In the wake of this deadly pandemic disease, COVID-19, the world is facing challenges for which it was not ready and it has witnessed the suspension of all the structures of life including the health systems. The most developed medical systems of the world have collapsed and almost failed to handle this unpredictable situation. Countries like Italy and Iran with the supposedly the best health care systems have seen a shortage of ventilators and testing kits. However, after the initial shock, China made an exemplary comeback and took responsibility. Chinese government constructed a hospital especially for treating Corona patients in just ten days.

*"China has succeeded to manufacture a medical test kit for the coronavirus at such a short notice".*



China has proved its persistence and ability to tackle an unexpected calamity as reported by WHO quoted in one of the editorials as follows:

*"The WHO has praised China for both its efforts and its transparency."*

This desperate time reveals the standings of nations in the world and shows the capability to face calamities. Coronavirus has brought the strongest health systems down to their knees in days and makes it evident that the world needs to build up a stronger and efficient health care system. *"Health can no longer be taken in isolation."* Hence, to enhance the efficiency of our health systems, new strategies are needed *"both at national and international levels, a new political environment calls to reform the health sector."*

#### IMPLICATIONS OF GLOBALIZATION

Global trading has become mandatory to drive and stabilize the economies of the countries. *"As our link with the global community increases with an increase in the trade..."* This globalization where at one hand has its pros also has its cons. Easy transportation across borders may be a source to transmit diseases from one part of the world to the other in hours. In the recent scenario, Coronavirus emerged from Wuhan, China. Though the Chinese government took grim measures to stop its spread, till the time the authorities realized that it is a pandemic disease, it was already carried out of Wuhan in the other cities and even other countries.

*"The architecture of globalization means that when China sneezes, rest of the world is not immune from catching cold."*

As a result of this global pandemic disease, many countries across the world have banned travelling across borders.

Few powerful countries, unfortunately, are using this tragic situation to serve only their political and national interests instead of working on the common interest of the world. On one hand, Trump uses racist remarks and imposes travel bans against China, *"The developed west led by the US is seeing this human tragedy as an opportunity to obstruct the rise of China and as it is said that 'Kick China when it is down'."* On the other hand, inter-country politics is also in the swing.

*"The broad themes followed in the cited reporting of coronavirus include political point scoring against the Chinese communist party, hitting at its governance, response and even divisions, within."*

#### COVID-19 OUTBREAK: ISSUES RAISED IN PAKISTANI NEWSPAPER EDITORIALS IN MARCH 2020 (COVIDCORPMAR)

The wordlist of COVIDCorpMar demonstrates the increasing gravity of the issue in Pakistan. The first case of coronavirus was reported on 26<sup>th</sup> February 2020. And, Pakistani newspapers and TV channels started reporting the cases from 27<sup>th</sup> March 2020. COVID-19 became a focal point of media discourse as an important medical and scientific issue. In COVIDCorpMar, concordance analysis reveals themes related to the socio-cultural attitude in Pakistani newspaper editorials such as an increase in *fear and anxiety*, debate on *naming the virus* and *implications of lockdown* in Pakistan.

#### INCREASE IN FEAR AND ANXIETY

The spread of the coronavirus all over the world including Pakistan intensifies the psychological issues among the people. The use of negative language in the newspaper editorials to define and discuss the impacts of the disease increases the fear among the masses. Lexical items *darken*, *doom*, and *gloom* are used with coronavirus. Such uses of lexical items trigger anxiety among people.

*"Now is the time to remind oneself and everyone else of that truth, that possibility, so that all may endure the darkness of the moment."*

On the other side, people affected by COVID-19 are being referred to as "*cases and infected*". People "*most likely to not recover from it are those aged 60+, people with weak immune systems and those suffering from chronic illnesses*". The dehumanization of people who got affected by the disease may also create fear among other people and people keep themselves away from the testing, screening, and quarantining. The use of language expressions such as "*infected people*" and "*COVID-19 cases*" may create stereotypes that those who are suffering from this pandemic disease are less human. Moreover, the corpus talks about its rapid spread among old age or elderly people. It may create or even enhance anxiety and fear among people who are already fighting with their lives.

The metaphoric use of language also becomes evident in the COVIDCorpMar. We know that the metaphors depict scenarios as stated by Ranjandran (2020). The metaphor of war is continually used to threaten or create a realization of danger about any disease among people as an *enemy*. Lexical items such as *fight*, *battle*, *war against disease* are metaphors commonly used in everyday life too. In this metaphorical representation, the diseases are represented as an enemy/invaders/intruders and people are the victims/helpless creatures etc. They should fight for their survival against those diseases otherwise infected people would die and would kill other people too by spreading the infection. The analysis of the concordance lines also shows the use of wartime vocabulary such as *frontline*, *forefront*, *battle*, *explode*, *war corps* and *fight*.

*It needs a cadre equipped with scientific training, like Fidel Castro's magical doctors, China's disciplined medical **corps**, and Kerala's highly experienced people.*

*These WHO guidelines will provide a framework for the recent opposition parties' demand to chalk out a national action plan with mutual consultation so that all political forces can jointly fight the **battle** against the coronavirus.*

*But the number of infected people do not politely increase linearly; they **explode** exponentially.*

*Data so far supports supplying N95 masks to **frontline** health workers.*

These Military jargons are usually used in a wartime situation. The use of these lexical items in everyday life may enhance the severity of the situation among the people. They may have adverse psychological effects on the masses. The use of such vocabulary does not help to solve the issues and problems raised in the situation of the outbreak of pandemic disease, rather would raise anxiety, stress and fear among people. This unhealthy metaphoric use of language would ultimately affect the immune system of the people which is the main requirement to heal from COVID-19 disease (Jo, Lee, Park, & Kim, 2020). Similar unhealthy language has also been reported by Hunston (2020) in the European context who concluded that language in general and metaphors in particular during such pandemics and epidemics "shape our experience of illness; our cultural discourse regarding diseases; and produces fear and stigma" which deter health during recovery seriously.

#### DEBATE ON CHINESE VIRUS, CORONAVIRUS OR HAZARA VIRUS

There is enormous debate in Pakistani newspapers if the virus should be named *Chinese virus* or *Coronavirus*. It seems from the newspapers' discourse that a blame game has been started to strengthen the tussle between the US and China.

*“Keeping aside President Donald Trump`s insistence on labelling the coronavirus as the `Chinese virus`*

The pandemic disease created through Coronavirus has started in Wuhan, China but there is no clear evidence that the virus has been generated deliberately by the Chinese. To associate the virus with a particular location and ethnicity is a racist approach. People from other spheres of life such as traders also blamed the Chinese for the creation of this virus as presented in the COVIDCorpMar.

*“The entire trading community is shunning Chinese manufacturing. It would take years before China can restore its supply-demand equilibrium”*

In Pakistan, this issue was triggered when the number of cases raised and most of them had a travel history of China or Iran. People who returned from the pilgrimage to Iran are *Ahle Tashi* (i.e *Shia* sect of Muslims in Pakistan) were also blamed for the spread of this virus in Pakistan. People who belong to Hazara (*Ahle Tashi*) were bashed and even ridiculed by some of the politicians and other Pakistanis to spread coronavirus in Pakistan. Some people even named it *Hazaravirus*.

*In his press briefing on March 25, the Balochistan chief secretary exhibited zero degree of diplomatic decorum required in public governance when he stopped just short of declaring the coronavirus as the Hazaravirus.*

This discourse of racism shows that there is a dire need to educate people that coronavirus has no gender, no ethnicity, no religion and no nationality, rather it is just a cause of pandemic disease and anyone from any social group can suffer from this disease. These findings are similar to the results of Cohn (2012) who provided a brief historical view of pandemics in the West and explicated some socio-psychological behaviours such as blaming and hatred against 'others' as a result of the spread of A.I.D.S from the plague of Athens. Similarly, Rafi (2020), in content analysis, found *racism* as an important topic discussed on social media by Pakistanis.

#### IMPACT OF OUTBREAK OF COVID-19 IN PAKISTAN

The impact of COVID-19 in Pakistan can be seen by concordance lines in the corpus. Concordance analysis of lexical items *Government* and *Pakistan* as node words shows that in the early stages of the spread of coronavirus in Pakistan, it raises many doubts among the people about the ability of Pakistan to cope with the outbreak of this pandemic disease through the lockdown. In underdeveloped countries such as Pakistan, complete lockdown is difficult and the countries experienced lockdowns faced economic crisis. Though China was reported as an epicentre where COVID-19 emerged and spread throughout the world, China has become exemplary for the world that how to stop the spread of COVID-19 in any region by implementing various kinds of lockdown such as a smart lockdown.

*“The major European countries are occupied in coping with COVID-19 related challenges. This has allowed China, which has now recovered, to take the lead by helping nations like Italy and Iran”*

China, on one hand, is blamed for the cause of coronavirus, on the other hand, it is appraised by the world for the steps taken to stop this health hazard such as the strict administration, smart lockdown, building new hospitals, testing techniques, quarantining people and so on. Now it has become an example for the other countries and Pakistan too that how to curb the spread of this pandemic disease.

If we talk about the current situation of Pakistan, low GDP is spent on health and human development. Moreover, there is a lack of coordination between the federal and provincial government that may be the cause of the spread of coronavirus in Pakistan.

*“The lack of coordination between the federal and provincial government is pronounced and can worsen the situation.”*

There is a need to develop a holistic policy for all the provinces to protect people from coronavirus. The analysis also reveals that there are no solid steps taken by the government in Pakistan to deal with the high spread of pandemic disease. In March, coronavirus spread seems little controlled or there is less number of cases which make the people, as well as the government, relaxed.

*“the coronavirus outbreak had hit Qom. And yet the government here was sleeping. When the government woke up following public outcry”*

The outbreak of coronavirus has seriously hit Qom (City of Iran) and people faced a crisis due to a lack of health facilities. The reference of Qom is given as an example to the public. Here the word *sleeping* may refer to the ignorance as well as carelessness of the Pakistani government and this may create an alarming situation in the coming months (March 2020 onwards). A complete lockdown might be an effective strategy but it is very challenging for underdeveloped countries such as Pakistan.

*“Our government cannot lockdown cities like China for example, so it has to fight iranthrough the disease.”*

## WORLD LEADERSHIP

The US, supposedly, has been leading the world. Its media discourse indicates that this leadership role appears to be threatened by new emerging power i.e. China. The finding of the current study supports this assumption that China seems moving towards a new phase of world leadership. The similar nature of competition has also been reported and discussed by Gewirtz (2020) who focused on delineating a macro-economic structural competition between capitalism and communism of the Chinese Communist Party during the Covid-19 crisis.

As China faced the outbreak of the coronavirus and recovered effectively, hence it is considered a powerful country in terms of economy, administration and medication. Recently, China has taken the lead to help other countries such as Iran, Pakistan and Italy.

*“the major European countries are occupied in coping with COVID-19 related challenges. This has allowed China, which has now recovered, to take the lead by helping nations like Italy and Iran”*

This recent progress is also pushing the nations to assume that *instead of the US, China has played a leadership role in helping countries that are coping with this lethal crisis*. Hence, the successful dealing of China with the spread of pandemic disease drives the world to admit it as a superpower. It is also believed that China has implemented a regressive lockdown that may not be possible without the cooperation of the Chinese government and the Chinese people.

*“China enforced the largest and the most draconian lockdown in history”*

### **COVID-19 OUTBREAK: ISSUES RAISED IN PAKISTANI NEWSPAPER EDITORIALS IN APRIL 2020 (COVIDCORPAPR)**

Debates on the crisis in Pakistan, instability of the Pakistani economy and health issues faced by Pakistani people were initiated and observed in COVIDCorpApr. The analysis of concordance lines described the efforts to *stabilize the vulnerable world, conspiracy theories related to the creation and cure of coronavirus, lack of facilities and awareness among people, orientation of the world, and stance of the World Health Organization (WHO) on the cure of coronavirus disease*.

#### **EFFORTS TO STABILIZE THE VULNERABLE WORLD**

Taking the example of COVID-19, it can be observed from COVIDCorpApr that there was no such thing related to COVID-19 observed in December 2019. Then, the world heard about 'corona'. It then dawned upon that corona was a virus that affected the people of China. This 'corona', later on, crossed the boundaries of China and spread throughout the world so much so that till February 2020, it was present in almost all the countries of the world. Since the reason for its rapid spread was social interaction so all the social activities were brought to a halt.

*“The assault on social services has not been confined to the developing world alone”*

It also engulfed the developed world. People were not allowed to move from their houses in the mid of March 2020. There was a complete lockdown. This was done to stop the spread of this disease. *'Never before has the whole world been so helpless and vulnerable as it has been now.*

#### **CONSPIRACY THEORIES**

Akin to the finding of Rafi (2020) who found out discussing conspiracy theories related to the spread of COVID-19 is one of the major topics on social media in Pakistan, the present study also observed the same behaviours in newspaper editorials written by Pakistani journalists. Some conspiracies originated from the widespread of COVID-19 as the print media discourse of April 2020 suggests that *Bill Gates is behind the unleashing of the virus and that the CDC and WHO are also conspirators*. However, no practical evidence has been found to support the involvement of Bill Gates, the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), the US and World Health Organization (WHO) in spreading coronavirus throughout the world. Surprisingly, there is also a belief of some people that there is no COVID-19 at all.

The existence and origin of this virus is shaky. Initially, it was believed that the virus exists in animals, but later this was disconfirmed. Then, its place of origin was considered to be the city of Wuhan in China. This notion of the origination of the virus retained. Then, on the 2nd of March, 2020 it was declared officially that the cases of Italy and Iran were not related to Wuhan. The eruption in Milan (Italy) was out of nowhere and was not a coincidence too.



The virus got a new place of origin in the city of fashion. This shows that the virus is novel (i.e. new strain) and '*Our adaptive immune system may be as naive against this new virus.*' The origin of this virus with authentic evidence has not been discovered yet. So, it seems still a mystery for the whole world.

#### LACK OF FACILITIES AND AWARENESS AMONG PEOPLE

People in an underdeveloped world like Pakistan are not able to cope with the lockdown. However, developed countries can afford lockdown for a long period.

*'Things are different in Pakistan and other poor countries. Crammed in small houses and make shift accommodation, millions of families cannot protect themselves from the virus because they can neither keep a safe distance from each other nor do they have adequate water to wash their hands several times a day.'*

The lack of facilities as well as awareness among the individuals is also the major cause of the spread of coronavirus in Pakistan. The rapid spread of coronavirus may be possible even if the smart lockdown has been implemented. The phrase "*the global hospital*" creates the impression that the number of people infected through coronavirus is increasing so rapidly that the world has been turned into a global hospital. Moreover, it refers to the condition of other countries (such as Italy, Iran, the US and Saudi Arabia) as well.

*'Coronavirus has turned the global market into the global hospital'*

The developed countries '*notwithstanding some early warnings*' had shown negligence when there was an outbreak of the coronavirus. These countries later became the '*hub of pandemic*' affecting the entire world either in terms of social and economic life or in terms of health conditions.

#### ORIENTATION FROM GLOBAL TO LOCAL

The widespread coronavirus had an adverse effect on political and social life all over the world. As the current study focuses on the analysis of newspaper editorials published in February, March and April 2020 only, most of the realities about the outbreak of coronavirus have been ignored previously but *coming events cast their shadows before.*

*'Some foundational truths that are easy for us to ignore in March, April and May 2020 – but perhaps less so by June, July and August 2020.'*

A social change has also been observed in the newspaper editorials published in April. People have become socially isolated and quarantine themselves in their homes in Pakistan. The concept of social distancing prevails as the data revealed but we think that there is a need for physical distancing rather than social distancing. People do not meet each other on regular basis in offices and educational institutes. They are not supposed to attend religious or political events. In the text, the word 'social' is particularly used for keeping yourself socially at distance.

*"government orders to stay off the streets, to social distance and to protect others by placing themselves...This can be done by keeping the required social distance with each other and arranging the maximum..."*

Every time has its drums to beat. There are innovations and certain apparatuses that are adopted by people in a particular era. In the last few decades, the role of superpowers has been observed. They sometimes exercise power over underdeveloped countries and even over other developed countries. Often the superpowers adopt repressive strategies to hold strengths. The

superpower of the present time, supposedly, is the United States. The United States has adopted many repressive designs against many countries like North Korea and Iran. However, China has proved its strengths by successfully coping with the spread of coronavirus. The power of nature is above all the powers of the world. Even a tiny virus can acclaim its strength, as is evident through the current situation.

*When the most powerful in the world — say the US, the UK and those who lead Europe — thought they were in a different league, nature just unleashed a tiny microbe and brought them to their knees.”*

In some editorials, we found the reference of the blessings of God that people are blessed with many skills but they do not properly utilize them. People should use their energies and competencies in positive directions and should revise and revisit themselves in their day to day life matters.

*“humankind started crossing limits by inventing atomic weapons and other means of mass destruction such as chemical and biological weapons.”*

The only way to get rid of this unhealthy environment is a reversal of the existing lifestyle *which is comprised of environmental pollution, wars, armed conflicts and the use of deadly weapons, including chemical and biological ones.*

Some underdeveloped countries including Pakistan have faced many sanctions in recent few decades. However, self-reliance during this critical health crisis seems to provide new independent orientation to these countries towards their issues of the economy. This situation provides a *“perfect time for these countries to free themselves from great world powers”*. Moreover, the world is also reconstructing and reshaping the discourses of power after the spread of pandemic disease. We are living in the world of manufactured discourses where there is a social construction of reality.

With this new virus, there are varieties of new things that have been emerged such as *'learning new languages, learning how to play new instruments or learning how to cook' virtually'*

#### **CONTRIBUTION OF WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION (WHO)**

From the perspective of health, the current pandemic disease is raising anxiety among the masses because of the existence of uncertainties.

*It is normal for anxiety and stress to develop in an adult when there is uncertainty.*

People are becoming the victims of depression because of empty streets and working remotely. The individuals of a community have a deadly threat from the other members. Far beyond, the need of the individuals to be safe and physically connected, the need for affiliation is most important for the psychological fitness of the people. This need is at a halt in these critical times.

*The World Health Organization (WHO) is the only organization that is operating nationwide.* WHO has identified that coronavirus has hit the whole world badly and around seven million people may be the victim of this pandemic disease. WHO instructed people to take precautionary measures to avoid infection of coronavirus. Moreover, many international and national organizations are taking measures to stop the spread of the virus by improving health facilities.

Not only Pakistan, but other countries of the world are also facing this crisis of pandemic. The initial plan of the UK to fight coronavirus is to rely on herd immunity and intense social distancing. "Despite WHO's exhortation to 'test, test, test', the leadership remains ambivalent" due to limited resources of National Health Service (NHS), UK. On April, 10 the Yemeni government has reported its first coronavirus case. Five years of warfare has affected not only the economic stability of the country but also the functioning of the health ministry. "Ninety-three percent of the country's medical resources are impoverished". No proper attention has been paid to providing health facilities to the Yemeni people which may result in a low immune system. Medical specialists of WHO warned that coronavirus could spread faster in Yemen with more lethal results as compared to other countries of the world.

## CONCLUSION

In a nutshell, all the activities of human beings seem to halt due to the outbreak of COVID-19. The spread of pandemic disease badly affected social, political, educational and domestic activities all over the world. The language itself has been affecting perceptions and realities of life during this COVID-19 crisis. The representations of these realities regarding the COVID-19 phenomenon have been made through various forms of discourses including media discourse which is one of the most powerful tools to shape new behaviours and change the older ones. The major objective of the current study was to explore various thematic representations, made in Pakistani newspaper editorials, of the earlier phase (pre-vaccine/treatment) of COVID-19 phenomenon. To dismantle various themes related to coronavirus embedded in discourse, we analysed data from the newspaper editorials published in Pakistan in February, March and April 2020 in the mainstream newspapers of Pakistan: The Express Tribune, Dawn and The News. We identified the gradual spread of coronavirus throughout the globe and its worldwide effects month-wise. It is clear from the analysis that initially (COVIDCorpFeb), the main focus was on the origin and spread of coronavirus throughout the world. It was believed that coronavirus is originated from Wuhan, China. Print media started giving racist remarks against China. Chinese food and culinary habits were criticized. Moreover, criticism was made on limited medical facilities available in developed, as well as underdeveloped countries that failed to find the solution or vaccine for this pandemic.

In March 2020 (COVIDCorpMar) fear and anxiety among the masses were noticeable because most of the people quarantined/isolated themselves in their homes. Another cause of the creation of fear is the use of language related to the spread of coronavirus. Metaphors of war are used to communicate messages to the people such as *war*, *corpse*, *frontline*, *explode*, *battle* and *fight* which probably are not the healthy vocabulary to use in such a critical health crisis. People started to associate the virus with a particular location and ethnicity with a racist approach. The virus is named as *Chinese virus*, *Coronavirus* or *Hazaravirus*. *The discourse generated during the spread of coronavirus discloses the pervasiveness of racialization and discrimination in the minds of people. If we talk about the readiness of Pakistan to face this pandemic, the government and people of Pakistan are not ready to face this disaster.*

Furthermore, the lack of coordination between the federal government and the provincial government of Pakistan was also reported. In April 2020, we noticed that there are many conspiracies related to the spread of coronavirus were reported. China helped different countries such as Pakistan and Italy by providing medical help such as masks, ventilators, and gloves. We feel, both developed and underdeveloped countries have realized their strengths and weaknesses from health facilities to trading, political to social aspects of life, and from agricultural strengths to nuclear powers. People have started using technology to learn various skills such as the start of virtual educational classes by the world-renowned institutes, learning

new languages, learning how to play new instruments or learning how to cook. We delimited this research to the analysis of concordance lines of the selected words from Pakistani newspapers' editorials. However, there are many avenues to explore the data such as by analyzing the corpus through collocation analysis, corpus-based comparative analysis of newspapers of the same/different regions and sentiment analysis of media discourse.\*

\* The COVIDCorp of these three months (February, March & April) can be collected from the authors of the present study just through an email.

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