Research Article

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Discursive metaphorical representation of COVID-19 pandemic in Kenya's newspaper headlines

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Abstract
This study aimed to address the dearth of knowledge regarding the portrayal of the COVID-19 pandemic in Kenyan print media, focusing specifically on newspaper headlines. Employing Van Dijk's Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and Lakoff & Johnson's Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT), the research examined 39 headlines from *The Standard* and *The Daily Nation* newspapers, applying inferential statistics via STATA version 15. Van Dijk's categorization of texts into micro and macro levels and Lakoff and Johnson's assertion that our ordinary conceptual system relies heavily on metaphors underpin the methodology. The analysis combined CDA with Pragglejazz Group's Metaphor Identification Procedure (MIP) to uncover that the majority of metaphors in these headlines constructed COVID-19 pandemic in Kenya in a grim light, associating it with war, death, and bondage. While these metaphors serve as cautionary messages, they fall short in capturing the proactive measures employed to combat the pandemic. This study's significance lies in its fusion of insights from CDA and CMT, shedding light on how media language exposes cognition and ideology while also revealing the media's influence on public perception of the pandemic.

Keywords: CDA, COVID-19, metaphors, newspaper representation, pandemic

Public Interest Statement

In Kenya, the media's portrayal of the COVID-19 pandemic remains largely unexplored. This research addresses this gap by dissecting how Kenyan newspapers metaphorically depict the pandemic in their headlines. Analyzing samples from The Standard and The Daily Nation, we employ Critical Discourse Analysis and Conceptual Metaphor Theory. Our findings expose pervasive metaphors associating COVID-19 with war, death, and bondage, framing the pandemic negatively. While these metaphors serve as societal warnings, they overlook the proactive measures taken. This study's significance lies in its fusion of CDA and CMT, revealing the media's role in shaping public perception and highlighting language's power in exposing cognitive biases and ideologies.

1.0 Introduction

Pandemics like SARS, HIV/AIDS, Ebola, cancer and swine flu have had a profound effect on humanity (Kiran & Mahmood, 2019; Mercier & Wilson, 2019; Miyawaki et al., 2017; Moodley & Lesage, 2020; Olanrewaju et al., 2022). COVID-19 outbreak is the most recent pandemic that continues to ravage the world. According to WHO, in the Chinese city of Wuhan, COVID-19 was first discovered in December 2019. It caused a severe outbreak in several Chinese cities and spread to countries around the world, including Thailand, the Republic of Korea, Japan, the United States, Philippines and Viet Nam, among others. The epidemic was classified as a public health emergency of worldwide significance on January 30, 2020 by the WHO's International Health Regulations Emergency Committee (PHEIC). Furthermore, the WHO named this unique corona virus disease COVID-19 on February 19 and declared it a pandemic on March 11, 2020. On February 14 and February 25, 2020, respectively, Egypt and Algeria reported the first COVID-19 cases in Africa. More cases of COVID-19 were confirmed in African nations at the end of February and the beginning of March 2020.

On March 12, 2020, Kenya reported its first case of COVID-19. On March 5, 2020, the patient, a Kenyan national of African heritage, returned to Nairobi from the United States of America via London, United Kingdom (U.K). Silas & Odhimbo (2020) records that after the outbreak of COVID-19 was reported in Wuhan China, most of the countries seemed to be so distant. It was first noted as just a rumour that lacked any authenticity and therefore many people did not take it seriously. However, the rumour slowly faded as the truth was unveiled; other countries like Italy, South Africa and USA were also hit hard and the pandemic rapidly spread worldwide.

COVID-19 pandemic has not only captured the attention of the people globally but it has also hampered a lot of activities in equal measure (Osisanwo, 2022). COVID-19 was declared a public health emergency of international concern by the WHO on January 30, 2020. On April 19, 2020, there was a hike of COVID-19 recorded cases. This implied that the virus was spreading faster within a short time. COVID-19 was thus described by WHO as an infectious disease caused by a newly discovered corona virus, and observed that mild to moderate respiratory illness as some of the noted signs and symptoms.

COVID-19 has been dubbed one of the world's biggest killer diseases, in comparison to cancer, HIV/AIDS, Ebola, SARS and swine flu. Its impact was highly felt: schools were closed, lockdowns were imposed in most of the countries, government and private organizations were closed and hence most people lost jobs. As a result, scientists such as epidemiologists, virologists and WHO did a lot to combat COVID-19 through medical interventions and even vaccine development, and other measures like social distancing and use of masks (Chiang & Duann, 2007; Ophir, 2019).

However, the issue of pandemics should not be confined to natural sciences. They have a humanistic dimension. Humanities and social sciences have a role to play in studying pandemics. Language is central

to all human endeavors and cuts across the whole spectrum of human life (Banga & Suri, 2015). The way language is used by various institutions and social actors influences the way people think and respond to issues (Van Dijk, 2009).

Metaphors and rhetorical tropes are used in exposing people's attitudes or biases; they deepen our understanding of issues Richardson, 2007). Media fundamentally uses language. They don't use it neutrally. Scholars such as Nawaz et al. (2013, Cohen-almagor (2016) and Carvalho (2016) have observed that media are not objective. How they influence people's views need to be investigated. The use of metaphors by media will help us to see how they influence people's attitudes. Authors like Fairclough (2008) and Richardson (2007) have asserted that metaphors expose ideologies by the media. Therefore, it is important to study how the Kenyan media particularly newspaper headlines used metaphors to construct COVID-19. This study thus aims to examine Metaphorical representation of COVID-19 pandemic in Kenya's newspaper headlines.

Literature Review

Habwe and Ndung'u (2020) analyzed the utilization of war metaphors in President Uhuru Kenyatta's speeches regarding COVID-19 in Kenya. They found that these metaphors were used for various purposes, including issuing warnings, disseminating information, and instilling hope. Their study aligns with our use of Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT) to comprehend metaphors in the context of COVID-19. However, it differs from our research as it exclusively focuses on war metaphors in presidential speeches, whereas our study encompasses a broader examination of metaphors in newspaper headlines.

In addition, Ndivo and Kaberia (2020) investigated impoliteness strategies in the utterances of President Uhuru Kenyatta and Health Cabinet Secretary Mutahi Kagwe during their COVID-19 updates. Their study explored nonverbal aspects of communication, revealing confrontational and coercive language used towards the audience. Additionally, their research highlighted the stigmatization and victimization of COVID-19 survivors resulting from the officials' utterances. This study is relevant to our research as it delves into linguistic elements in the construction of COVID-19 discourse. However, it differs in terms of data sources, focusing on televised updates, social media posts, and internet memes, whereas our study centers on newspaper headlines.

Further, Sasala et al. (2022) employed Conceptual Integrated Theory (CIT) to explore metaphors surrounding the COVID-19 pandemic in Lukabaras, a Bantu language spoken in western Kenya. Their study revealed metaphors that likened COVID-19 to a person, an animal, and an object. These metaphors predominantly carried negative connotations, portraying the pandemic as an enemy causing insecurity and danger. This research is pertinent to our study as it offers insights into the usage of metaphors to represent the pandemic and highlights the influence of cultural perspectives on abstract concepts. However, it differs from our research by focusing on Lukabaras and employing CIT, in contrast to our investigation of Kenyan newspaper headlines using CMT and CDA.

Moinani and Barasa (2021) also examined the impact of word choices by government officials on public attitudes and behavior during the COVID-19 pandemic. Their study emphasized the role of language in shaping societal perceptions and behaviors, particularly how framing the pandemic as a war led to mistrust and resentment among the public. While their study and ours share a common interest in language's role in shaping perceptions, our research extends beyond government language to encompass various media sources, with a specific focus on newspaper headlines. This broader approach allows us to gain a more comprehensive understanding of how the pandemic is constructed and its implications.

The reviewed studies provide valuable insights into the use of metaphors, language framing, and linguistic elements in the discourse surrounding the COVID-19 pandemic. While each study offers unique perspectives and methodologies, our research adds to this body of knowledge by specifically examining

the discursive metaphorical representation of COVID-19 in Kenyan newspaper headlines, employing the lenses of Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT) and Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) for a comprehensive understanding of media's role in shaping public perception.

2.0 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study employs Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) approach and Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT)

2.1 Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA)

This study was guided by Van Dijk (1993) CDA. In CDA, the critical stance is essentially a social reality, in both senses of the term, one meaning crucial or significant, and the other implying "change" (Fairclough, 2006). Ideally, we want to "change" our social reality, particularly if it is dehumanizing and oppressive, into a more favourable state. It is certainly plausible to argue that meaning is not singly constructed; it is multidimensionally constructed and above all, it is flexible (Van Dijk, 2016). It is subjective and sometimes socially constructed. Understanding the silent and unseen meaning of a text may vary from one individual to another. CDA therefore, tries to unmask what is hidden.

Van Dijk (2016) defines CDA as an approach that allows researchers, learners and teachers to look at the elements of texts, both the micro and macro levels. At the micro linguistic level, it analyses the grammatical structures of texts. At the micro linguistic level, CDA analyses linguistic properties beyond grammatical structures such as the denotative and connotative meaning of words and their metaphorical functions, authors' stances, hedges and other related elements.

The micro level examines both sentence and word level. At sentence level, a researcher may look at every aspect that has been topicalised in every sentence or what has been placed at the beginning of each sentence to show what it entails. The research may also look at who is doing what to whom, that is, agent-patient relationships in the discourse, as well as who may have the most authority and influence. It may also look at why those agents may have been left out of sentences, such as when the passive voice is used.

Connotations of lexical terms and phrases as well as the text's formality or informality, level of technicality and their meaning for the other participants in the same text, can be considered at the lexical and phrase level. The use of vocabulary to convey degrees of certainty and attitude, as well as whether or not the required audience of the text would share the views expressed, should all be considered in the text. This study sought to examine metaphorical representation of COVID-19 pandemic in Kenya's newspaper headlines.

2.2 Conceptual metaphor theory (CMT)

According to Lakoff & Johnson (2003), metaphors are "pervasive in everyday life; not just in language but in thought and action." This therefore means that metaphors, contrary to what most people believe, are not just devices for poetic imagination and rhetorical flourish. They further note that, humans' ordinary conceptual system is fundamentally metaphorical in nature. It is through language that our conceptual systems become evident or manifested. The two propose that since our conceptual system is largely metaphorical, then our thinking, our experiences and our actions are a matter of metaphor.

Lakoff and Johnson give several examples of what it means for metaphorical concepts to structure our experiences, our thoughts and our actions. They say "the essence of metaphor is understanding and experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another" Lakoff illustrates this using several metaphors reflected in our everyday language e.g., *argument is war*, time is money etc. In the case of "time is money," we have the concept of 'time' and then the conceptual metaphor is "time is money."

They note that in contemporary English, time can be conceptualized as money in some of the following way: "how do you spend your time these days?" "the flat tyre cost me an hour." "I have invested

a lot of time in her." "you need to budget your time." "you do not use your time profitably." Lakoff and Johnson note that this conceptualization has arisen in modern industrialized societies. We therefore act as if time is a valuable commodity since it has become customary to pay people by the hour, week or year; we have hourly wages, yearly budgets, etc. we therefore act as if time is a valuable commodity or a limited resource, and see it as something that can be spent, budgeted, invested, saved and time is money! Time is a limited resource. These are metaphorical since we are using our everyday experiences with money, limited resources, and valuable resource conceptualizes time. To be able to interpret metaphors, you should be able to perceive the semantic mapping from the source to the target domain e.g. "time is being mapped on the domain of money." Time is conceptualized in terms of money. Within the (CMT), a metaphor like "time is money" is represented as image schemata with the notion of money relating to the schema of commodity. Importantly, Lakoff and associates note that the systematicity that allows us to understand metaphors for example, comprehending time in terms of money, tends to hide other aspects of the concept. In other words, we see the concept in only one way. Other aspects that are inconsistent with the metaphor are hidden. To conceptualize politics as war, is to hide other aspects of politics such as exchange of ideas and freedom of expression. CMT is important in this study because it gives important insights into how newspapers deploy metaphors in their headlines to conceptualize and construct COVID-19

3.0 Method

This study was conducted in Kenya. The corpus for this study is drawn from the two major newspapers in Kenya: *The Daily Nation* and *The Standard*. According to Media Council of Kenya (MCK, 2022) survey report on status of the Media in Kenya, these two newspapers have the widest readership. The headlines from these newspapers published from March 2020 to December 2020 were selected. The study is confined to this period because it was the time the positive COVID-19 cases kept on fluctuating. Further, this period is comprised of first and second waves when high numbers of COVID-19 were recorded. Headlines from the two newspapers bearing COVID-19-related information were therefore purposively sampled and analysed to the point of saturation. Thus, purposive sampling procedure was applied and a sample of 39 newspaper headlines bearing COVID-19-related information were selected. The research data was analyzed through Van Dijk's (1993) CDA approach of media text analysis. Other CDA approaches by Fairclough (2013) and Wodak et al. (2009) were also used in the analysis whenever necessary. Further, the data was subjected to statistical analysis using the Statistical Software for Data Science (STATA) version 15 inferential statistics such as frequencies and regression.

3.1 Metaphor identification procedure (MIP)

The headlines were analyzed using the MIP (Pragglejazz Group, 2007). The selection and analysis of data was done using CDA. Metaphors were identified as follows using MIP:

a) Headlines of *The Daily Nation* and *The Standard* newspapers were read to establish a general understanding of the meaning.

b) Lexical units were identified in the headlines.

c) The status of the meaning of the lexical units was established. Decision was made if they had a basic meaning related to our way of thinking, experience or action, or if they were more concrete.

d) If the lexical unit was considered to have a more basic contemporary meaning in the other texts and contexts and if the contextual meaning could be understood in comparison to this, then the lexical unit was regarded metaphorical.

4.0 Results and Discussion

4.1 Metaphors used in construction of COVID-19 pandemic

COVID-19 has been constructed both literally and metaphorically in Kenya's print media. Semantically, words operate at two levels: the level of denotation (literal level) and the level of connotation (Richardson, 2007). Metaphors carry various connotations. Words like *COVID-19, corona, cases, cure and COVID-19 patients* are used at the literal level. However, in several other cases, COVID-19 has been discursively constructed metaphorically. One of the concerns of this study is looking at metaphorical representation of COVID-19 pandemic in Kenya's newspaper headlines. Below is a discussion of the various metaphors that have been used to construct the disease in *The Daily Nation* and *The Standard* newspapers' headlines.

4.1.1 The war metaphor

The findings in this study reveal that the metaphor *COVID-19 is war* is the most dominant in the two newspaper headlines. This is in keeping with findings of other researchers concerning the representation of pandemics (Chiang & Duann, 2007; Joye, 2010; Trčková, 2015). In the current study, COVID-19 is metaphorically constructed as war using various lexical items, for instance, *rescue, fight, strike, hit, beat, havoc, save, conquer* and *crises*. Moreover, some lexical items like *fight, hit* and *rescue* are repetitively used in the headlines from both newspapers. This repetition serves to reinforce how dangerous the virus is to the people. Also, when the media repeatedly uses similar patterns of image and language, these patterns seem to appear both familiar and natural (Steuter & Wills, 2008). Consider the following examples:

NHS 2: Corona *havoc*

NHS 3*:* Inside plan to *conquer* corona

NHS 5: Freeze taxes to *save* Kenyans, MPs tell Uhuru

NHS 6: Uhuru *rescue* plan

NHS 15: Pandemic *hits* home

NHS 16: Corona virus cases *hit 59*, Nairobi tops list

NHS 17: How I *beat* COVID-19

NHS 20: How virus has *hit* households

NHS 27: Survival for the fittest: creative things companies are doing to *beat* COVID-19

NHS 28: How police are killing COVID-19 *fight*

NHS 29: *Heroes* and *villains* in COVID-19 *fight*

NHS 30: *Crises* that shaped Kenya

NHS 35: How *crisis* is messing up our children

NHS 39: It's decision time on corona *fight*, economy

NHD 4: Coronavirus: how to *rescue* the economy

NHD 28: Virus *fight* in *crisis* over *strike* threat

NHD 31: *Fighting* COVID-19: picture of a total lockdown in Eastleigh

In the *COVID-19 is war* metaphor, lexical items from the domain of war, for example, *conquer, beat, fight* and so on form a systematic way of thinking and experiencing the pandemic. As Lakoff and Johnson have noted, we don't just view COVID-19 as war. We feel we can win or lose the war against the pandemic. We conceptualize it as an opponent; an army, an assailant that we can attack and who can attack us. An opponent we can defend ourselves against. We are also conditioned to feel we can strategize against COVID-19. Therefore, the *COVID-19 is war* metaphor not only influences the way we think but also the way we act against the pandemic.

To see *COVID-19 as war* generates what Lakoff and Johnson call a network of entailments: there is an enemy jeopardizing the health, economy, education and other aspects of our lives. This further gives the government licence to impose measures on the populace including closure of institutions among others. This war metaphor in the headlines, therefore, legitimizes forcing people to make sacrifices. In war times, the law can be suspended and unprecedented measures taken as already argued. The government, for example, imposed a night to dawn curfew that came into effect on March 27, 2020. In Kenya's history, curfews resonate with war and conflict. In October 20, 1952, the British colonial government declared a state of emergency to counter the Maumau uprising. A night to dawn curfew was part of the containment measures taken by the colonial government. A similar curfew that lasted a month was imposed after the aborted coup attempt by Kenya Air Force officers in August, 1982.

Let us now examine the way some of these headlines use these lexical items to conceptualize COVID-19 as war: The word "fight" in headlines NHS 28, NHS 29, NHS 39, NHD 28 and NHD 31 is used as a noun. A fight can be a confrontation between individuals or between armies. The headlines, therefore, imply that COVID-19 is an assailant, an aggressor who must be fought using all resources. This kind of a metaphor emphasizes the danger posed by the virus to the populace. "Fighting" in NHD 31 is a metaphor for action and process of defeating coronavirus. It serves as an appeal to the people and medical practitioners to observe prudent COVID-19 protective strategies to win the challenge against the virus. This is in support of de la Rosa (2008) who asserts that the use of war metaphors as rhetorical and persuasive device in reportage of SARS is important in enhancing global battle against the disease.

The words "crises" and "crisis" in headlines NHS 30 and NHS 35 have also been used to construct COVID-19 pandemic. In headline NHS 30; "*Crises that shaped Kenya*", COVID-19 as a metaphor of war is compared to other crises that have affected the country, for example, ethnic clashes that occurred after the elections of 1992, 1998 and 2007 are examples of instability caused by war. Moreover, in 1982 there was a coup d'état in Kenya where the army attempted to overthrow the government of President Moi. In all cases, lives were lost and people were displaced. Comparing COVID-19 with these crises, thus, is a way of highlighting how serious and devastating it is. These two headlines also construct COVID-19 as if it were a human being which accentuates its power and force. Richardson (2007) has talked about naming and reference. He says that the way things are named in news discourse can have a significant impact on the way in which they are viewed since readers tend to scramble to read them. Gary & Raj (2018) also add that journalists can try to influence their readers through naming, for example, the word "crisis" in the headline "NHS 35: How *crisis* is messing up our children" might elicit feelings of disintegration, disruption, danger, desperation and hopelessness. Therefore, the way newspapers refer and name entities is important in unmasking their ideological standpoints.

In addition, the metaphorical terms "rescue" and "save" in NHS 6, NHD 4 and NHS 5 respectively are synonyms. These lexical items suggest that people are in a war situation. This war, as noted earlier, is COVID-19. Newspapers, thus, imply to the readership that people are being delivered or liberated from the deadly COVID-19 pandemic since they are already in danger.

4.1.2 Personifying COVID-19

Lakoff and Johnson (2003) observe that the most obvious ontological metaphors are those where the entity is further specified as a person. We are thus able to comprehend non-human entities in terms of human motivations, characteristics and activities. Personifying COVID-19 gives it force and agency. Here are examples from the headlines:

NHD 39: COVID tears apart Kenyan families

NHS 10: KCPE, KCSE delay fears as COVID-19 disrupts calendar

NHS 35: How crisis is messing up our children

NHS 47: How corona is robbing Kenyans of their culture

In the above headlines, COVID-19 is personified but the metaphor is not simply *COVID-19 is a person*. It is much more specific: *COVID-19 is an adversary*. This, first, provides us with a way of thinking about COVID-19 and also suggests how we can act against it. We are made to conceptualize an enemy that can tear apart, disrupt, mess up our children and rob us. The metaphor thus provides a framework for action. Readers, for example, accept that the government has a justification to take severe measures like lockdowns, compulsory wearing of masks, closure of schools and arrest of those who refuse to comply. There was, for example, an outcry that the police were abusing power in arresting people deemed to have defied COVID-19 protocols.

All the actions attributed to COVID-19 pandemic in these headlines are negative and implying an overwhelming power of the pandemic to change our lives. This is supported by the study undertaken by Sarjono & Bram (2021) who found out that the negative metaphors are used to emphasize the danger of coronavirus. According to them, "the representation of coronavirus in the mass media headlines has negatively affected people's lives by raising their worry and fright of the danger of the virus." Generally, human beings and other creatures tend to naturally tear things apart. The word "tear" in headline NHD 39, thus, literally means destroying something with force. This kind of personification, therefore, equates COVID-19 virus to a very destructive person.

Similarly, headline NHS 47 talks about how COVID-19 is robbing Kenyans of their culture. A robber is typically perceived by most people as an adversary who is capable of harming, destroying, or even attacking them. COVID-19 is, therefore, constructed or represented as a formidable enemy to our lives. What does this imply for Kenyans when newspapers construct COVID-19 as a powerful enemy who can rob? Robbery connotes illegality, force, violence and death. Thus COVID-19 is represented as "an enemy of the people and their progress." Such headlines therefore create the urgent need in the readership to feel that they are under attack. This is clear proof that journalism has power to shape issues (Richardson, 2007).

The lexical item "messing" in the headline NHS 35 has unequivocally negative semantic load. Furthermore, a verb with negative polarity contributes to heightening the sense of urgency and crisis (Krzyżanowski, 2008). The choice of the word "messing" is used to 'accuse' the disease of interfering with perhaps the economic, cultural, political and educational sectors of the country. Another word sounding equally ominous is "disrupt" in headline NHS 10. The word "disrupt" is not only mentioned explicitly but also implied in the semantics of the verb to interrupt or impede. COVID-19 is therefore conceptualized as an invading army and as an uncontrollable natural force that can disrupt the country. In all these headlines (NHD 39, NHS 10, NHS 35 and NHS 47), the virus is represented as a particularly malevolent being with the intention of destroying or killing the populace.

4.1.3 The metaphor of death

In the following headlines, COVID-19 is discursively constructed as death:

NHS 9: Agents of *death*

NHS 27: *Survival* for the fittest: creative things companies are doing to beat COVID-19 (*this headline has not used the conventional 'of' preposition used in this phrase. It may not be clear whether this is a problem of grammar or a special way of framing the message*).

NHS 36: The *deadly* chain of transmission

NHD 7: How Kenyan's are courting *death*
NHD 14: Stop dancing with *death*
NHD 37: Virus puts schools on a *deathbed*

Directly or indirectly the above headlines map COVID-19 to the domain of death. To say, for example, 'Stop dancing with death', is another way of saying that *COVID-19 is death*. Lakoff and Johnson contend that the essence of a metaphor is experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another. Headlines like these, thus, make readers feel, think and believe that anyone infected with the virus will die. There is no question that this conceptualization of COVID-19 leads to pessimism, despair and hopelessness to those that are infected. These headlines may also create fear and worry to readers who are not infected. They may however serve as a warning to the readership to take protective measures against the virus.

As noted earlier, however, such headlines hide other aspects of COVID-19 that are inconsistent with the metaphor. Conceptualizing COVID-19 as death hides the fact that there were millions of people worldwide who survived the pandemic. Indeed, many healed without even going to hospital; many lives were also saved through emergency measures. According to Worldometer as of April 24, 2023, reported cases of COVID-19 in Kenya were 343,005; there were 337,294 recoveries and 5,688 deaths. Thus, 98.3 % of those infected had recovered while less than 2% died. This reality is masked by the semantic mapping of COVID-19 to the domain of death.

Words, as Van Dijk (2009) has noted in his Socio-cognitive model of CDA affect how we think and how we view the world. For a newspaper headline to choose one metaphor than another contributes in shaping our world view. This view is corroborated by Richardson (2007) in what he calls *naming and reference*. Calling COVID-19 death, for example, has far reaching implications in the way we view the pandemic.

In the headline NHS 27: 'survival for the fittest,' the word 'survival' is connotatively used to imply that only the healthiest and strongest will survive COVID-19. Put differently, the rest will die. This headline is a case of intertextuality since it is drawn from Darwin's theory of evolution. According to the Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English and the online Collin's Dictionary, the phrase 'survival for the fittest' means only the strongest and most successful people or things continue to live while the others die or fail. Thus, once again, COVID-19 is indirectly mapped to the domain of death.

As demonstrated earlier, the assertion that only the strongest or healthiest can survive the pandemic is not supported by the available data on COVID-19. Medical interventions such as vaccination, good nutrition, use of indigenous treatments and containment measures continue to save many lives. Clearly, there is enough empirical evidence to show that it is not just the fittest who survive COVID-19.
Words, as Van Dijk has noted in his social cognitive model, affect the way we think and how we view the world. For a writer to choose one word rather than another contributes in shaping our world view (Van Dijk, 2009).

4.1.4 The metaphor of imprisonment/ bondage
There are headlines that tend to represent COVID-19 as imprisonment or bondage, for example:
NHS 1: The corona *lockdown*
NHS 11: *Lock* Kenyan's home
NHS 21: Capital city is *isolated*
NHS 26: Doctor's tale of life in *quarantine*
NHS 38: *Social distancing?* What *social distancing?*
NHS 41: It's *freedom* for now but what next

NHS 42: Kenya stares at return to *lockdown*

NHS 45: To *lockdown* or not: what governors will tell Uhuru today.

NHD 16: *Lock* us up, Kenyans say

NHD 30: Why virus hotspots face total *lockdown*

Words such as '*quarantine*,' '*lockdown*' and '*social distancing*' have been borrowed from the western press. These are the effects of globalization where the centre of the universe is seen to be the west and its institutions, thus, these terminologies of confinement are largely borrowed from the western press and UN agencies like WHO. From the perspective of CMT, we see semantic mapping where COVID-19 is conceptualized as prison or bondage. This kind of mapping is likely to structure our experiences, our thoughts and our actions. These headlines force the reader to see the notion of disease as relating to the schema of bondage. This makes the readership to feel they have lost their freedom. This may therefore cause depression, anxiety, trauma and fear to the readership. Equating the virus with prison life by the newspapers is meant, perhaps, to lay emphasis on the need for the safety by the readership. However, as Lakoff and Johnson note, this systematicity allows us to comprehend metaphors in only one way. By so doing, other aspects of the concepts are hidden. To conceptualize COVID-19 as prison or bondage hides other aspects of the pandemic.

For example, during the lockdown, certain practices were adopted to allow people live normally. It was during this time that the idea of *telehealth* emerged, for example, platforms like Zoom were used for remote patient visits, people also realized that it was possible to work from home which has become the norm in some institutions. This idea of prison or bondage is reinforced by the phrase *social distancing* in headline NHS 38. The phrase may not be appropriate because people who were dislocated physically were actually not socially disconnected during the COVID period. In Kenya, for example, online platforms became the norm of connecting with family, friends and fellow professionals. In fact, many universities and institutions began offering on-line instruction during this period. This singular presentation of COVID-19 using metaphors of imprisonment is consistent with what Van Dijk (2009) describes as exclusion in the representation of reality by the media. Van Leeuwen (2008) notes that this exclusion often has an ideological angle.

The word *lockdown* as used in headlines NHS 1, NHS 42, NHS 45 and NHD 30 is a prison terminology that literally denotes the confinement of people in their own rooms, homes or areas as a security measure after or amid a disturbance or pandemic. On the other hand, the practice of a *quarantine* as highlighted in headline NHS 26 specifically involves isolating people or groups of people who may have come into contact with a communicable disease but are asymptomatic from others who have not been exposed so as to arrest the possibility of the spread of the disease. The two terminologies are examples of prison jargons that are meant to deprive people their rights of movement. The newspapers are, thus, constructing COVID-19 as slavery or bondage. The two terminologies are also a product of choices made by the media both globally and locally. Thus, the words that one chooses have serious implications cognitively (Van Dijk, 2009).

4.1.5 The metaphor of COVID-19 as a dangerous animal

We also have headlines that discursively construct COVID-19 as an animal that can bite. Consider the examination of the following headlines:

NHS 19: Noisy politicians go mute as virus *bites*

NHS 31: School holiday extended to June as COVID-19 *bites*.

The fiercest and most dangerous wild animals such as the lion, the buffalo and the leopard lie under this

category. Insects like wasps, gnats, bedbugs and cockroaches are also not exceptional as they have a tendency of biting people. Lakoff and Johnson argue that to interpret metaphors, one should be able to perceive the semantic mapping from the source to the target domain. Headlines like NHS 19 and NHS 31 above map COVID-19 to the domain of an animal that can bite. To put it simply, COVD 19 is an 'animal that bites.' To paraphrase Lakoff and Johnson, this conceptualization arises from the knowledge and experience people have that pandemics can hurt people physically or lead to loss of life. Dangerous animals may prove hazardous to humans through attacks, poisoning after their flesh has been ingested, envenoming and causing allergic reactions. An animal that bites has the same potentialities. People are aware that animals that bite can cause injuries, infections, death, leading to pain, discomfort, distress and grief. Clearly, such a conceptualization is a warning to Kenyans to come to terms with the danger posed by the virus. The research reveals that the news headlines frequently used the word 'biting' to effectively draw the audience's attention to the unusual situations caused by the outbreak of the disease. In addition, it is meant for the readership to comprehend the wildness and fierceness of corona virus. Yet this rigid one on one mapping of COVID-19 to an animal that bites lives no other alternative of thinking or conceptualizing the pandemic. A virus that is construed as a dangerous animal is given overwhelming power over humanity; however, there are pointers that this may not entirely be the case.

At the time these headlines appeared, there were very proactive measures that were being taken locally and globally: measures that mitigated the power of the 'biting'. There was, for example, research going on both locally and globally to contain the virus. There were also health practitioners advising people on how to observe proper nutrition to combat the virus. Online evidence shows there was research going on at the time in the social and physical sciences to deal with COVID-19. In fact, there was collaboration between Kenyan and Oxford University researchers to evaluate the effectiveness of ChAdOx1 Ncov-19 vaccine that was being developed in Kenya. These are facts that are clearly not captured by the metaphors in these headlines. These silences can be interpreted as a discursive strategy by the media to frame COVID-19 in a particular way. Thus, other alternatives of viewing COVID-19 are ignored, filtered or backgrounded (Van Dijk, 2017).

The majority of metaphors in the examined newspaper headlines focused on war, constituting 43.5% of the total, whereas the lowest proportion was attributed to depicting COVID-19 as a dangerous animal, accounting for merely 5.1%. Metaphors of war occurring at the highest frequency in the two newspaper headlines was in line with the study conducted by Castro (2021). She argues that the newspaper headline writers tend to frequently use war metaphors since they are very important in; preparing the population for hard times, showing compassion, concern and empathy, persuading the citizens to accept their behaviour and ensuring their acceptance of extra ordinary rules.

However, these results contradict the findings obtained from Laongpol's (2021) study that highlighted metaphors of death as the most frequent. The different results between the present study and the previous studies could be attributed to the context under investigation. The context of Laongpol's (2021) study was in COVID-19- Related News Headlines from Native and Non-Native English Online Newspapers while the context of the current study is to investigate the discursive construction of COVID-19 metaphors in The Standard Newspaper headlines and Daily nation newspaper headlines. The distribution of other metaphors is shown in *table 1*

Metaphor	Frequency	Proportion	Std. Err.	[95% Conf. Interval]	
COVID19	2	0.051282	0.035782	0.012049	0.193268
Personifying	4	0.102564	0.049216	0.037273	0.252257
death	6	0.153846	0.05853	0.068183	0.311192

Bondage	10	0.25641	0.070834	0.139818	0.422475
war	17	0.435897	0.080441	0.284939	0.599753

Table 1:

Figure 1: A summary of metaphors

Regressing metaphors against newspaper headlines revealed a non-significant, negative coefficient (-0.007) at a 5% level of significance (p=0.412). This implies that employing more metaphors to construct the COVID-19 pandemic leads to a diminished understanding of the newspaper headlines among readers, resulting in reduced information absorption by the populace.

Metaphor	Coef.	Std. Err.	t	P>t	[95% Conf. Interval	
Headline	-0.00666	0.008028	-0.83	0.412	-0.0229219	0.009612
_cons	4.223583	0.412352	10.24	0.000	3.388079	5.059088

Table 2

5.0 Conclusion

The study examined how metaphors are discursively used to construct COVID-19 in Kenya's two leading newspapers. Through the MIP, metaphors were identified from headlines on COVID-19 from *The Daily Nation* and *The Standard*. The study reveals that in these headlines, five metaphors were dominant in constructing COVID-19. The pandemic is semantically mapped as war, death, bondage, adversary and a dangerous animal. Out of these negative mappings and construction, emerges a discourse of fear. The article argues that this discourse of fear may be positively interpreted as a way of warning the readership about the danger of COVID-19. To, for example, map COVID-19 to the domain of death, may encourage people to take vaccination seriously. Similarly, to construct the pandemic as war, an adversary or a dangerous animal, may convince people that it is in their own interest to take proactive and preventive measures against the pandemic.

The study has also demonstrated that this negative construction of COVID-19 rationalizes or legitimizes the imposition of unprecedented measures like lockdowns and curfews on the populace. People are, for example, made to accept that those who violate curfew guidelines can be brutalized or even killed by police as happened in Kenya. After all, we are in a state of 'war' and the law has been suspended.

Both CDA and CMT have one common orientation: discourse constrains us to view reality in a certain way, a way that is guided by the social structure and social conventions. CMT practitioners note that semantic mapping systematizes reality in such a way that we only experience something in one way. Thus, both theories unmask an ideological agenda where social conventions naturalize what is socially constructed. There is, for example, nothing natural in viewing COVID-19 as war. Yet, the repetitive mapping and construction of the disease as such forces us to see it as war. This mapping of COVID-19 to a single concept hides other aspects of the pandemic that are equally important. The study has unmasked the many positive measures and experiences that were hidden by these negative metaphorical conceptualizations. The findings, have for example, proven through available data that the metaphor *COVID-19 is death* is clearly misleading since so far, less than 2% of infected Kenyans have died. The study has also revealed that COVID-19 was not necessarily bondage since Kenyans still socialized and worked largely through online forums.

To sum up, the study has shown that the discursive construction of COVID-19 using metaphors forces us to largely conceptualize the pandemic in a negative way which legitimizes the way we think and

act against the pandemic. This has both positive and negative consequences for society.

This study has implication on theory as it has shown that integrating CMT and CDA allows us to interrogate both the cognitive and discursive aspects of metaphors. It, therefore, gives a new way of studying metaphors. The study also hopes to make a contribution in discourse, communication and media studies. This analysis will, moreover, benefit the medical field for it has shown that media discourse affects how we conceptualize diseases and the way we act against them.

The major limitation of this study is that it focused on Kenya's two mainstream newspapers which are also published in English. Yet, the media landscape in the country is much more diverse. Clearly, studies on alternative media, social media, and electronic media are highly recommended. There is also need to study media that disseminates information through indigenous Kenyan languages.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

Disclaimer Statement
This research article is one of the objectives within my master's degree thesis titled "Discursive construction of COVID-19 Pandemic in Kenya's Newspaper Headlines," which is currently pending examination within the Department of Humanities at the University of Embu. I am under the guidance of Dr. Cyrus Mugambi Ngumo and Dr. Lilian Kemunto Omoke as my supervisors.

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