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The Language of War: Lexicon, Metaphor, Discourse

Il linguaggio della guerra: lessico, metafora, discorso

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WAR Metaphors and Agency

The Case of the COP27 News Coverage

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the role of WAR metaphors in conveying agency and responsibility within climate discourse, specifically in the context of COP27. Using a corpus of *The New York Times* articles and editorials from October to December 2022, the article analyses linguistic metaphors and frames and the extent to which metaphors can influence perceptions of climate action. The methodology involved using WMatrix 5 to extract words related to the source domain of WAR. The results show that WAR metaphors effectively convey the urgency to act against climate change, representing it as a violent force that especially affects vulnerable nations. The WAR frames assign different levels of agency to groups of social actors. Nations categorized as *poor* are depicted as the most affected by climate events and requiring external assistance while developing countries are portrayed as active participants in fighting climate change. Developed countries are framed as vaguely responsible and committed to future actions rather than immediate measures against climate change. The study shows how WAR metaphors can shape perceptions of agency and global responsibility in climate discourse.

Keywords: climate change; Conference of the Parties; metaphors; news discourse; war metaphors.

1. INTRODUCTION

Several studies in the field of discourse analysis have explored the linguistic strategies used in climate change discourse, recognizing that the language employed is central to shaping public's perceptions of climate

change and promoting climate action (e.g., Nerlich, Koteyko, and Brown 2010). Metaphors are often analyzed in discourse for their framing effect, defined as their capacity to highlight specific aspects of the item described, while downplaying others (Entman 1993), which makes them a particularly effective persuasive device in political and media discourses (e.g., Musolff 2004, 2016; Semino 2008; Ferrari 2018). Research on climate change discourses across different genres has revealed multiple discursive effects in metaphor use. Metaphors in scientific texts seem to serve an informative function, explaining complex issues in a more relatable way (Deignan, Semino, and Paul 2019). In contrast, metaphors seem to perform an argumentative function in climate science-policy discourses (Shaw and Nerlich 2015; Augé 2023). Metaphors in news media are found to support both pro and skeptical arguments on climate change, showing that metaphors can be used to express different attitudes and beliefs about the item described (Atanasova and Koteyko 2017; Augé 2023).

Specifically, several studies have found that WAR[1] metaphors are frequently used to express the urgency of global climate actions (Shaw and Nerlich 2015; Atanasova and Koteyko 2017; Flusberg, Matlock, and Thibodeau 2017). WAR metaphors are used to emphasize the urgency of the situation and suggest the need for limited corporate and personal carbon use and waste (Stoddart, Tindall, and Greenfield 2012). They can be quite effective in conveying the importance to act rapidly, as they emphasize the negative aspects of climate change, making people feel the immediate need for action (Asplund 2011). The fight against climate change is often framed in terms of a battle or war that needs to be won (Flusberg, Matlock, and Thibodeau 2017; Kurz and Prosser 2021). However, WAR metaphors can also imply that a war against climate change can easily be won when forces are deployed, which is a hope that cannot always be fulfilled in long-term crises (Semino 2021).

Furthermore, WAR metaphors in the context of the climate crisis raise important questions about agency and responsibility in the climate change debate. Companies may background their responsibilities to climate change, by representing themselves as passive suppliers responding to consumers' demand, as in the case of energy companies (Supran and Oreskes 2021). Such discourses may obscure companies' interests and lack of clean energy policies (Stoddart, Tindall, and Greenfield 2012) while emphasizing the blame on individual consumers' choices. The use

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[1] Small caps are used throughout the article to refer to the conceptual level of interpretation of metaphors, in line with conventions in metaphor studies.

of metaphors in discourse, particularly those related to conflict, is pervasive in reporting on politics, economics, and technology (e.g., Boylan, McBeath, and Wang 2021; Nguyen and Hekman 2022).

News reports help to raise public awareness about the urgency of climate change and shape audience opinions about the possible relation to environmentally friendly behaviors (Happer and Philo 2016). For this reason, news reports on climate politics are crucial, as they inform the public about the discussions and decisions made at climate politics events such as the Conferences of the Parties (COP). The Conferences of the Parties (COP), an integral constituent of the international body established under the auspices of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), serve as a forum where representatives from each member state convene to deliberate and evaluate progress on climate change issues. News coverage of COPs can attribute responsibility by favoring in-groups, portraying them as having less responsibility, and downplaying out-groups, emphasizing their blame in climate change (Post, Kleinen-von Königslöw, and Schäfer 2019). This can sometimes lead to clear divisions among nations, as some countries can be portrayed as more responsible than others for climate change (Christoff 2010). In this context, WAR metaphors can specifically contribute to the delineation of two juxtaposed groups of social actors, effectively constructing an 'us versus them' narrative (Kellner 1995). This binary opposition can establish an in-group (us) and an out-group (them), thereby attributing responsibility and blame to specific groups of social actors (van Dijk 1998).

Agency refers to the ability to be perceived as responsible for an action, shaped by grammatical constructions and particular ways of representing responsibility (Dreyfus 2017). Different portrayals of agency in climate discourse can influence how actions are perceived. These portrayals can emphasize or downplay the power of an action and clarify or obscure who is responsible for it, potentially creating in- and out-groups making and depicting certain actors as guilty or innocent, and assigning credit or blame accordingly (Vincent Reid 2022, 235). Agency has been studied from different angles: from transitivity to causality and responsibility (e.g., Vincent Reid 2022), grammatical categories of active/passive (e.g., Dreyfus 2017), impersonalization and vagueness (e.g., Merkl-Davies and Koller 2012) or social agency (e.g., van Leeuwen 2008).

To investigate agency in the context of climate change, this study focuses on COP27, as it represents a significant event in climate politics where responsibility can be strategically attributed. The 27th COP, held in Sharm El-Sheikh, Egypt, from November 6 to 20, 2022, concluded

with the decision to create a Loss and Damage fund to aid countries most affected by climate change. The analysis examines how agency is distributed within WAR metaphorical frames through active/passive voices and referential vagueness and explores metaphors' functions in discourse – namely their discursive implications. Specifically, it addresses the following research questions:

(i) What are the most recurrent linguistic metaphors in news discourses surrounding COP27?
(ii) What functions do WAR metaphors perform in such discourse?
(iii) How are social actors represented within the WAR frame, and how are agency and responsibility for climate change distributed across these representations?

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

The objective of this study was to investigate the role of WAR metaphors in conveying agency and responsibility within news discourses surrounding COP27. To explore these aspects, a corpus of news articles and editorials on the 27th United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP27) was compiled to examine how social actors were depicted within WAR frames and how agency was attributed. Specifically, the analysis focused on the news coverage of COP27 in *The New York Times*, a widely read newspaper in the United States, due to the country's status as a major emitter of greenhouse gases (World Resources Institute 2022). The corpus included all articles and editorials on COP27 published in *The New York Times* from October to December 2022. The resulting *New York Times* COP27 corpus (NYT_COP27) consisted of 145,564 tokens.

To recognize metaphors, a corpus-based (Tognini-Bonelli 2001) and source-oriented approach was used. The software WMatrix 5 (Rayson 2008), which employs the UCREL Semantic Analysis System (USAS), was used to extract all word types and multi-word expressions belonging to semantic domains related to the source domain of WAR. Semino *et al.* (2018, 66) analyzed violence-related metaphors and provided a list of USAS tags that can potentially lead to VIOLENCE and WAR metaphors: G3 (Warfare), A1.1.1 (General actions, making), A1.1.2 (Damaging and destroying), E3– (Violent/angry), S8+ (Helping), S8– (Hindering), X8+ (Trying hard). Words and multi-word expressions from these semantic tags were extracted and their concordance lines were closely examined to find linguistic metaphors, with the context set to 150 in WMatrix.

Linguistic metaphors were identified using an adapted version of the Metaphor Identification Procedure (MIP) (Pragglejaz Group 2007). Specifically, contextual and basic meanings for each lexical unit were determined using the *Longman Dictionary*[2] in line with Steen *et al.* (2010). A lexical unit was considered metaphorical if its contextual meaning contrasted with its basic meaning, indicating an indirect comparison between two conceptual units. Single words and phrasal verbs were treated as single lexical units.

Once the lexical realizations of the source domain of WAR and VIO-LENCE were recognized, metaphors were interpreted referring to the Conceptual Metaphor Theory (Lakoff and Johnson 1980) to identify the types of social actors represented within the frames and how these were represented. To analyze the functions of these metaphors, their discursive context of use was interpreted referring to the concept of frames, considering the implications and entailments of the metaphorical patterns. This included examining the participants' roles and attitudes in scenarios suggested by the metaphors (Musolff 2006, 2016, 2022). For instance, within the WAR frame, participants may be framed as positive actors (e.g., allies) or negative ones (e.g., enemies), influencing how social actors might be perceived. This refers to the framing effect of metaphors, defined as their ability to highlight certain aspects of a perceived reality while downplaying others, thereby promoting specific problem definitions (Entman 1993).

After recognizing the linguistic metaphors, a qualitative exploration was conducted focusing on the social actors represented within the metaphors' target domains and their agency, partly drawing on Merkl-Davies and Koller (2012). Specifically, a triangulation of qualitative aspects related to agency was considered.

Firstly, the qualitative analysis considered referential vagueness, meaning if the actors were made vague by means of collective and vague personal pronouns (e.g., Merkl-Davies and Koller 2012) or specific ways of representing social actors within the metaphorical frame. In the case of social actor representation, the analysis qualitatively explored two categories of van Leeuwen's (2008) framework for social actors representation, namely *passivation* and *activation*. *Activation* occurs when social actors are represented as the active, dynamic forces in an activity, passivation when they are represented as passive, either undergoing the activity or as being the receiving end of it (van Leeuwen 2008, 33). This can be

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[2] Retrieved from https://www.ldoceonline.com/ [15/06/2024].

achieved by grammatical participant roles and transitivity. For instance, in the sentence **Factories** *are emitting large amounts of carbon dioxide* the social actors represented (*factories*) are activated, as they are framed as dynamic forces, responsible for the activity of *emitting* carbon dioxide. In the sentence **The atmosphere** *is being polluted by carbon emissions from factories*, "the atmosphere" is passivated, as it is represented as undergoing the activity, or at the receiving end of pollution. The factories, while still the source of the emissions, are now a secondary part of the sentence, and the atmosphere, which is being affected by the emissions, is brought to the forefront.

The investigation also explored how grammatical constructions, such as the passive voice, affected the perceived responsibility in statements, drawing on Dreyfus (2017). Accordingly, in the active voice (where the subject performs the action), responsibility was interpreted as maximized, as the subject directly performs the action. In the passive voice with an agent, responsibility remains clear but is less direct as the focus shifts to the action or its recipient. The passive voice without an agent further reduces responsibility by omitting who performed the action. The middle voice, which presents an event without attributing it to a specific agent, minimizes responsibility the most by suggesting the event occurred without a clear doer (Dreyfus 2017, 375).

The results section is divided into two parts. The first part shows a quantitative overview of the metaphor occurrences identified in the corpus. The second part qualitatively explores how nations are depicted as passive and active agents in war scenarios.

3. Results

3.1. *Quantitative overview*

Climate change discourse often employs war metaphors to convey the urgency of contrasting environmental impacts (e.g., Flusberg, Matlock, and Thibodeau 2017). The results confirm that war metaphors are extensively used in the dataset. The analysis identified 125 metaphor occurrences in the field of war and conflict. *Table 1* provides a quantitative overview of conflict-related lexical units, with the number of metaphor occurrences and their grammar functions, referred to as part of speech (POS).

Table 1. – Metaphor occurrences in the field of war and conflict.

LEXICAL UNIT	N. OCCURRENCES	POS
aggressively	2	adverb
attack	1	verb
barrage	2	noun
batter	14	verb
brutal	2	adjective
bullet	2	noun
claw	1	verb
combat	4	verb
defend	7	verb
defense	5	noun
fight	30	noun
fight	30	verb
fight back	2	verb
grapple	3	verb
hit	11	verb
resist	6	verb
struggle	2	verb
wipe out	1	verb

The data shows the presence of an extensive range of lexical units associated with fight contexts, occurring with different POS. Among nouns, *fight* occurs most frequently (30 times), while others like *defense* (5) and *barrage* (2) appear less often. For verbs, *fight* is equally frequent (30), followed by *batter* (14), *hit* (11), and *defend* (7). Other verbs, such as *resist* (6), *combat* (4), and *grapple* (3), are moderately frequent, while *claw*, *wipe out*, and *attack* each occur only once. Adverbs and adjectives, such as *aggressively* and *brutal*, both appear twice. Several social actors could be identified within the WAR frame. These actors include human beings as well as metonymically used terms such as nations, organizations, countries, institutions, and individuals like politicians or activists.

The data in *Table 1* indicate a marked preference for verbs (e.g., *combat*, *defend*, *resist*) over other POS categories. Among these, verbs

indicating outward aggression, such as *batter*, *attack*, and *combat*, occur frequently with a total frequency of 19 occurrences. Conversely, verbs with a defensive or reactive function, such as *defend* and *resist*, are less frequent (7 and 6 occurrences respectively), suggesting that the discourse may prioritize active confrontation over defensive stances.

The quantitative overview confirms the frequency of WAR metaphors in climate change discourse, with a strong emphasis on action-oriented language, particularly combative verbs. Specific social actors emerge as playing a key role in the WAR frame, with countries emerging as particularly significant. The following discussion explores how these actors are represented, both specifically and generically, alongside other entities such as organizations, institutions, and individuals such as politicians and activists.

3.2. *Representations of nations within the WAR frame*

As previously mentioned, several social actors are identified within the WAR frame. These are represented through terms such as *nations*, which can be specified (e.g., *Madagascar*), genericized (e.g., Ø *countries*), or pre-modified by adjectives (e.g., *poor countries*, *polluting countries*). The social actors represented in the target domains also include *organizations*, *institutions*, and individuals such as politicians or activists. In the metaphorical frames, climate change and its consequences are also portrayed as agents, representing nonhuman forces. In this context, the participants in the frame seem to be quite vague and human responsibility for climate change is backgrounded.

Passivation and activation appear across various metaphorical frames, particularly those employing violent verbs that assign agency through active and passive voices. In the WAR frames, climate change is portrayed as an aggressive external force attacking nations and regions, especially in the Global South. This section first examines cases of passivation, where social actors are depicted as passive recipients, and then explores activation, where they are represented as active agents.

WAR metaphors in the dataset are frequently expressed by means of violent verbs such as *hit*, *batter*, *combat*. These verbs typically represent climate change or its consequences as active agents inflicting damage on nations or regions. Several nations, countries and geographical areas are passively represented in these WAR frames. For instance, *Madagascar* and *Jordan* are depicted as passivated social actors, along with more

genericized references to *nations* or *countries*, *poorer nations*, *Africa* and *African countries*, and *the Global South*. These groups are represented as victims of climate disasters, as illustrated by examples using the linguistic metaphor *hit*:

(1) *"Climate change is really **aggressively hitting** Jordan in the last two years," said Motasem Saidan, a former water minister and professor at the University of Jordan.*

(2) *African countries are among the hardest **hit** by climate change.*

(3) *Madagascar and Mozambique were **hit** by a series of exceptionally strong storms.*

Such metaphors effectively convey the severity of climate change, emphasizing the need for immediate action. In example (1), climate change is represented as hitting Jordan over the last two years. This representation frames climate change as a vague active agent, physically attacking Jordan, represented as a passivated social actor being hit. While the quote (speaker: Motasem Saidan) specifies climate change as a driving force, it lacks an explicit human agent, which may obscure direct responsibility. This aligns with the diplomatic language often used in contexts such as COP27, where broad, non-specific expressions are favored to uphold norms of international cooperation and avoid assigning direct blame.

In example (2), *African countries* are passivated and represented as generic entities hit by climate change. This passivation of African countries frames its social actors as passive recipients of climate attacks, reducing their agency. Example (2) focuses on the effect (African countries being hit hard) rather than on the agents responsible for causing the effect and does not provide information on who or what is responsible for the climate change that affects them. African countries are depicted as passivated victims of climate change impacts, suffering from external forces. Similarly, in example (3), *Madagascar and Mozambique* are passivated social actors portrayed as hit by the consequences of climate change.

This tendency to passivize the least developed countries[3] and portray them as being hit by some consequences of climate change is a common trend in the dataset and is expressed by means of various lexical realizations. Let us consider the concordance lines of the linguistic metaphor *battered*.

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[3] These labels are based on the categorization provided by the United Nations Statistics Division (2023) which classify world economies into developed, developing, and least developed countries solely for statistical purposes.

1	/The New York Times The coastal town of Mananjary, in eastern **Madagascar**, was	**battered**	by *cyclone* Batsirai in February. Madagascar's climate crisis As world leaders
2	Ms. Mottley and her team say those institutions are failing to help **countries** being	**battered**	by *climate change* . Oftentimes, the interest rates are higher for poor countries
3	island nation off the southeast coast of **Africa** has been strangled by drought and	**battered**	by *cyclones* and *tropical storms* that have only become more powerful in a
4	istitution are fully engaged in efforts to curb global warming and assist **poor nations**	**battered**	by increasingly *severe droughts* , *fires* and *storms* . "We are approaching the
5	ding generals turned Karthoum into a war zone, two university students navigated a	**battered**	Toyota through the chaos and saved at least 60 desperate people. A Safe Have

Figure 1. – Concordance lines of the metaphor "battered".

In *Figure 1*, *poor nations*, *the southeast coast of Africa* and *the town of Mananjary in Madagascar* are represented respectively as being *battered* by different consequences of climate change such as *droughts, fire and storms* (line 4) or *cyclone(s)* (lines 1 and 3). Poor nations are represented as passive actors in the WAR frame and as generic victims hit by the consequences of climate change. Poor nations generally overlap with the United Nations Statistics Division (2023) label of least developed countries. *The coastal town Mananjary* – which is a metonymical reference used to refer to the town's infrastructure and part of its inhabitants – is represented as passively hit. *Cyclone Batsirai* is framed as the specific cause of the event and the broader causes (e.g., climate change, human activities) are backgrounded. Similarly, in line 3, the *southeast coast of Africa* is personified as being *strangled* by drought and *battered* by cyclones and tropical storms. The passive voice reduces direct responsibility attribution, and the agent is represented as passively experiencing the action. Africa's personification seems to be quite effective in creating a possible emotional response as it indirectly compares Africa to a person being strangled by the consequences of climate change. In this metaphorical frame, climate change is the perpetrator of violent actions against developing countries. This tendency can also be found in different lexical realizations.

For instance, the linguistic metaphor *wipe out* is used to describe the actions of specific consequences of climate change, as in the following example:

(4) *The storm ultimately **wiped out** a quarter of the economy of the Bahamas, according to the Inter-American Development Bank.*

In example (4), the tense represents an active voice with an agent, where the storm is the active agent performing the action of wiping out a *quarter of economy in Bahamas*. In this case, the developing country of Bahamas is represented as a passivated social actor, victim of climate change. In this example, responsibility is maximized but is attributed to a nonhuman agent, the storm. In contrast, the economy of Bahamas is represented as a passive victim in the fight against climate change. While such framing is typical of the diplomatic language commonly found in this corpus (as illustrated by the examples), it shifts the focus toward the role of the storm rather than addressing the causes of climate change.

In the corpus, nations are also represented as active agents. In some cases, countries are portrayed as performing damaging actions in

response to the effects of climate change or defending themselves against its consequences. As already observed, *climate change* and its consequences are framed as active agents attacking nations and regions. However, nations and geographical areas are also represented as active agents. Several regions, including *Asia*, *Africa*, *Latin America*, *the Caribbean*, *the South Pacific*, and *the Global South*, are depicted as actively fighting climate change. Specified countries, such as *Malaysia*, and *Nepal*, are similarly represented as taking action. Furthermore, unspecified countries are framed as active agents with expressions such as *polluting countries*, *poorer countries* and *vulnerable communities*.

Specifically, developing countries are portrayed as leading a fight against climate change and against typical production systems which exploit natural resources for profit, as in the following example:

(5) *"Brazil is ready to resume its leading role in the **fight** against the climate crisis," Mr. da Silva told supporters in his victory speech on Sunday. "We will prove once again that it's possible to generate wealth without **destroying** the environment."*

In example (5), two linguistic metaphors are recognized: *fight* and *destroying*. Both involve violent scenarios; the former specifically refers to war scenarios, while the latter refers to the act of destroying the environment. Within the FIGHT metaphor, Brazil is framed as having an active role in the fight against climate change. In the case of the linguistic metaphor *destroying*, the personal pronoun plural *we* is the agent of the action of destroying. However, the personal plural pronoun does not specifically address individual social actors but is used to collectively refer to, probably, Brazil. It is not entirely clear whether it refers to the Brazilian government or the Brazilian people as a whole. Hence, the social actors within the metaphorical frame seem to be left quite vague, making the responsibility for climate change not particularly transparent. Both metaphors imply active human agency, as human beings or human organizations are represented as the active agents of violent actions.

The verb *fight* is used quite frequently to claim a fight against climate change, and within this fight, different actors are framed. Poor countries are represented as fighting against climate change and as needing support from other actors in this fight, while developed countries – often specified by means of various modifiers (e.g., *polluting*, *Western*) – are represented as failing to fight against climate change. Furthermore, wealthier developing nations, such as Brazil tend to perform a more

active role in the frames. Let us consider the following examples for the verb *fight*:

(6) *World leaders said the World Bank and the I.M.F. needed to be radically overhauled to help poorer countries **fight** climate change.*

(7) *"Now, we will **fight** for zero deforestation in the Amazon," he said. "Brazil and the planet need a living Amazon."*

Example (6) portrays *poorer countries* as requiring assistance from Western nations to combat climate change. The phrase *help poorer countries fight climate change* positions these nations as passive actors, dependent on external support to address the crisis. In contrast, example (7) highlights Brazil's active commitment to climate action, with the statement *Now, we will fight for zero deforestation*. The use of the collective personal plural pronoun *we* indicates Brazil's self-declared agency in the fight against deforestation, highlighting the country's commitment to preserving the Amazon. Furthermore, in example (6), the term *poorer countries* is used as a broad, unspecified label, which conveys referential vagueness. While both examples feature nations actively addressing climate change, poorer countries are depicted as having a more passive role, reliant on external help, in contrast to the more active role attributed to Brazil.

In contrast, *polluting countries* are represented as failing to fight against climate change, as in the following example:

(8) *In Washington on Tuesday, Mr. Tshisekedi, the Congolese president, said "hundreds of human lives lost" should have been avoided, had polluting countries respected their commitment to **fight** climate change.*

Example (8) uses a FIGHT metaphor where *polluting countries* are represented as not having respected their commitments to fight climate change. Hence, responsibility for climate change is attributed to polluting countries. Polluting countries are represented in the active voice and as active agents in deteriorating their commitment to fight against climate change. Nonetheless, polluting countries are further represented as vague entities, making it unclear whether the term refers to developed nations or wealthier developing countries, as the reference lacks specificity and does not provide clear attribution to particular actors.

Metaphors are also used in the dataset to refer to climate justice and climate politics and to describe political relations among countries. These metaphors often highlight the role of developed nations more explicitly, as in the following examples:

(9) *"Westerners take it for granted that people in the global south, if they're badly **hit** by some climate-change event, will **attack** fossil fuels."*

(10) *Biden stressed a renewed U.S. commitment to **fighting** climate change.*

In example (9), the Global South is represented both as a passive victim, in the case of the metaphor *hit*, and an active agent, in the case of *attack*. A representative from the Global South criticizes Westerners for assuming that, if severely impacted by climate events, countries in the Global South would retaliate against fossil fuels. The actors in this metaphorical frame are vague, with *Westerners* broadly referring to people in Western countries and the *Global South* serving as a general term without specifying particular nations. In contrast, Example 10 highlights the *renewed U.S. commitment* to fighting climate change. However, this metaphor focuses on commitment rather than direct action, suggesting leadership without immediate, on-the-ground involvement. This framing highlights the responsibility of developed nations, especially the U.S., to lead in climate action, reinforcing the power dynamics where developed countries set the agenda but are not necessarily the ones most actively engaged in addressing climate change. In fact, developed countries are often framed as making – or failing to make – commitments rather than taking direct, immediate action.

Poor nations are represented as defending themselves in a fight against the consequences of climate change, metaphorically framed as enemies. Let us consider the example of the linguistic metaphor *barrage*:

(11) *Mr. Biden has failed to make good on an earlier promise by the United States to contribute to a fund to help poor nations that are **struggling** from a **barrage** of floods, fires, drought and heat waves for* […].

The noun *barrage* is described in the Longman dictionary as "the continuous firing of guns, dropping of bombs etc., especially to protect soldiers as they move towards an enemy". Hence, the *barrage of floods, fires, drought and heat waves* is described as the force acting upon the poor nations. The disasters are the active agents causing the suffering, implying they have the power to act (*struggling from a barrage*). In this metaphorical frame, a specific scenario is implied where one of the parties within the WAR is trying to defend itself through continuous attacks. This metaphor is used to emphasize the struggling situation that poor nations are in contrasting the consequences of climate change.

In conclusion, the analysis reveals that poor nations, in particular, are often represented as passive victims of climate change, being *hit* or

battered by extreme weather events. These nations are depicted as suffering from the immediate impacts of climate change, with agency often downplayed. On the other hand, developing nations are occasionally framed as active agents in the fight against climate change, taking leadership roles or defending their resources (e.g., Brazil). In contrast, developed nations are frequently shown making commitments to combat climate change, but not necessarily engaging in direct action.

4. Conclusions

This study explored the functions of war metaphors in news discourses surrounding the 27th United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP27). Specifically, it examined how metaphors can frame agency and responsibility for climate change on a corpus of articles and editorials on COP27 in *The New York Times*. As regards the first research question, war metaphors occur quite frequently in the dataset, with 125 occurrences identified. The most frequent metaphors are verbs, especially those suggesting aggression, such as *fight*, *batter*, *hit*, and *combat*, which collectively emphasize active confrontation. Nouns such as *fight* and *defense* also appear frequently, but the discourse tends to prioritize aggressive language over defensive or protective terms.

The study shows that war metaphors perform several discursive functions in the context of news discourse surrounding COP27 (RQ 2). They effectively communicate the severity of climate change, highlighting the immediate need for action, as underlined by previous studies on different genres (e.g., Shaw and Nerlich 2015; Atanasova and Koteyko 2017; Flusberg, Matlock, and Thibodeau 2017). They frame climate change as an immediate and severe threat, highlighting the need for aggressive action (e.g., *Climate change is really aggressively hitting Jordan*). Linguistic metaphors such as *hit*, *destroy*, *wipe out*, and *batter* personify climate change and frame it as an active, violent actor inflicting damage on various social actors, mainly poor countries or regions in the Global South. Furthermore, these metaphors also explain the consequences of climate change in a more relatable way (e.g., *the storm ultimately wiped out*).

Agency is attributed to non-human agents or vague human actors through personal pronouns or collective representations of social actors (e.g., *poor*, *developing* and *polluting countries*) (van Leuween 2008) (RQ 3).

This reflects a tendency toward diplomatic language, where direct attribution of blame is avoided. Shaw and Nerlich (2015) and Atanasova and Koteyko (2017) similarly noted that metaphors in climate discourse support specific arguments and can be used to legitimize particular opinions. This was particularly evident with metaphors shaping geographical regions and nations' roles within the fight against climate change.

Nations and geographical areas are represented quite differently. Poor nations are represented as victims of a climate crisis caused by vaguely named *polluting countries*. Developing nations are portrayed as taking a more active role in addressing climate change, tackling the issue directly, while poorer countries are depicted as requiring additional support in their efforts. Hence, the COP27 coverage not only highlights the urgency of climate action but also creates nuanced roles within the WAR frames with different levels of agency. Developing countries are depicted as active participants in the fight against climate change, while poor countries are generally portrayed as more passive – either as victims of climate 'attacks' or as engaged in efforts to combat climate change but needing external support. In contrast, developed nations are represented as active agents, either making or failing to fulfill commitments to address the crisis. These frames delineate responsibility, sometimes shifting blame or credit between vaguely represented groups of nations (Christoff 2010; Post, Kleinen-von Königslöw, and Schäfer 2019). Poor nations are vaguely represented as victims, with collective terms like *we* and *poorer countries* lacking specificity. This consistent portrayal may reinforce the idea that climate change is an issue affecting only poor countries, whereas it is, in fact, a global crisis that impacts everyone. Developed countries are depicted as responsible for climate change and failing to fulfill their commitments to fighting it. Hence, the WAR metaphors were used to attribute responsibility for climate change to developed countries, although these were vaguely represented through various linguistic expressions which collectivized the social actors responsible for the climate events (van Leuween 2008).

In the case of non-human actors, climate change and its consequences are frequently represented as abstract, non-human agents causing destruction, which can downplay the role of human responsibility. This framing tends to shift the focus from human activities contributing to climate change and its effects. For instance, several WAR metaphors frame countries as passive victims rather than identifying the human activities driving climate change. While this approach is common in

diplomatic language, where direct responsibility is typically avoided, it may lead to a lack of clarity about who is accountable.

In conclusion, while the study provides valuable insights into the use of war metaphors in climate change discourse, particularly in the context of the COP27 news coverage, it has some limitations. The analysis is a case study, and hence, the corpus is limited in size and perspectives. The analysis primarily focused on English-language media, potentially overlooking other cultural and linguistic contexts and only focused on one single newspaper. Additionally, while the dataset presents many instances of reported language, an in-depth analysis of this aspect was beyond the scope of the investigation. Future research could expand the dataset to include diverse cultural perspectives and integrate dialogic aspects in the analysis, providing a comprehensive investigation of how metaphors are dialogically mediated, reinterpreted or recontextualized in secondary reports.

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