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Language of COVID-19: Discourse of Fear and Sinophobia
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April 28, 2020

The Editor
Social Science and Humanities Open

Subject: Manuscript for Special Issue on COVID-19

Dear Editor,

This is to certify that the manuscript "Language of COVID-19: Discourse of Fear and Sinophobia" submitted for publication in Social Sciences and Humanities Open" is an original work by me. I have duly acknowledged the work or works of others used in writing this manuscript. The manuscript submitted for publication has not been previously published, is not currently submitted for review to any other journal, and will not be submitted elsewhere until this journal makes a decision.

The study investigates the impact of the language used to report about COVID-19 in perpetuating the discourse of fear and eventually raising anti-Chinese sentiments. The manuscript consists of 6739 words. The study provides a comprehensive introduction and background to highlight gaps required to be filled. The study is well-grounded in the data presented and literature/theories while focusing on the underlying research design and findings of previous researches.

Sincerely,

Muhammad Shaban Rafi (Ph.D. Linguistics)
Assistant Professor and Chairman
Department of Linguistics and Communications
University of Management and Technology
Lahore, Pakistan

Language of COVID-19: Discourse of Fear and Sinophobia
Muhammad Shaban Rafi
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Bionote
Dr. Muhammad Shaban Rafi is an Associate Professor and Chairman at the Department of Linguistics and Communications, University of Management and Technology, Pakistan. He has been a faculty fellow at George Mason University, USA, for two-year. He has received a vast Post-graduate research experience from Cardiff University, UK, National University of Singapore, University of Oregon, USA, and George Mason University, USA. His research interest lies in language, media, and discourse. He has publications in journals of national and international standards. Presently, he is the chief editor of Linguistics and Literature Review (ISSN: 2409-109X). He has presented his papers as a keynote speaker in several national and international conferences.

April 28, 2020

The Editor
Social Science and Humanities Open

Subject: **No Conflict of Interest**

Dear Editor,

This is to certify that the manuscript "Language of COVID-19: Discourse of Fear and Sinophobia" submitted for publication in Social Sciences and Humanities Open" is an original work by me. I am the sole author, and I do not have any conflict of interest with an individual or/and institution. The study is well-grounded in the data presented and literature/theories while focusing on the underlying research design and findings of previous researches.

Sincerely,

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Language of COVID-19: Discourse of Fear and Sinophobia

Abstract

The study investigates the impact of the language used to report about COVID-19 in perpetuating the discourse of fear and eventually raising anti-Chinese sentiments. In the first phase, the data was based on the narrative, descriptions, and memoirs published in "The New York Times" since the outbreak of the coronavirus. In addition to this, a purposive sample of 30 male and female university students was also selected to record their lived experiences of COVID-19. The discursive themes were explored by codifying the qualitative data. In the second phase, I designed a questionnaire to investigate the significant value and correlation among the discursive themes. One hundred and three male and female university students of various demographic backgrounds responded to the survey. Findings reveal that the infection has promoted bizarre linguistic forms about the public sphere and social life that generates the discourse of fear. The discussion of fear portrays as ingroup vulnerability and outgroup threat that boil down into nationalism and Sinophobia. The structural equation model shows that there an impact of the language of COVID-19 on the discourse of fear and Sinophobia. The study recommends the use of neutral and contextual language that might act as a vaccine to control the spread of fear and racist feelings.

Keywords: Language of COVID-19, discourse of fear, the discourse of panic, nationalism, Sinophobia

Introduction

Since the outbreak of the novel Corona Virus Disease-2019 (henceforth COVID-19) outside the mainland of China, people were bombarded by media with frightening images of deaths, long queues in front of hospitals, pharmacies, grocery stores, and doctors with hazmat suits among other things. Newspapers portrayed through the overuse of the discourse of fear that COVID-19 is pervasive and just around the corner. The public spaces and famous squares without which a city is regarded as an assortment of houses were recurrently labeled as 'ghost town.' Journalist uncovered COVID-19 stories along with quite disturbing images of people thronging malls to store food and items of daily use just in case. People had gathered at the major international terminals waiting for repatriation flights when various countries sealed the borders. Newspapers portrayed a kind of chaotic discourse in COVID-19 hit countries. The world, in many ways, was built on the conversation of fear through millions of articles published in large-circulation newspapers. Journalists reported stories on day-to-day life, politics, economy, sports, showbiz, health, and so on through the lens of COVID-19.

The world-leading newspapers covered that the virus had upended normal life in all the continents apart from Antarctica. The major cities such as Wuhan, Rome, Madrid, Berlin, Seoul, London, New York, Washington, Sydney, among others were so quiet that people could hear morning and evening chorus of birds (review, e.g., Manderson & Levine, 2020). Instead of citizens, security personnel and animals were moving in the middle of the empty streets. People wrapped in masks

crept out of their windows and were shouting at the top of their lungs to invite other human voices or to sign together from their segregated balconies for their psychologically exhausted friends as argued by Peters (2020) that the panic buying for staying at home slips easily into a siege of mentality. Teachers, including myself, were busy in virtual classes and conferences during the lockdown. The Internet was a ground zero beyond the public sphere. Journalists presented the modern world as under 21st-century siege. They reported a strange silence from once-bustling squares, public plazas, beaches, fairgrounds, restaurants, movie theaters, tourist centers, train stations, and airports. Shocked with a fear of catching up with the virus, people suspended funeral ceremonies for weeks.

Albeit China was the epicenter of COVID-19 at the onset, soon it moved to Europe, America, and elsewhere where almost everything was a lockdown, and the metaphor of 'No' overwhelmed over our day-to-day life. The guidelines for dos and don'ts for citizens that took the grammatical forms of imperatives for strict adherence to the lockdown, e.g., stay home, stay safe, and stay hydrated. The Italian government announced "Restate a casa" means "Stay at home". The governments opened up e-help desks and directed mobile phone operators to replace the standard ringback tone with messages informing the citizens of precautionary measures that can prevent them from contracting the virus. The workers in all industries were sent on paid or unpaid leave. The less developed and developing countries got more concerned about deaths because of hunger than the epidemic, as noted by Abi-Habib and Yasir (2020). The reports of suspension of business activities and flights created a hysteria for fear buying people. As it was the case elsewhere, people in Pakistan, especially the lower working class, feared that the government would leave them to feed themselves during the crisis.

The worst coronavirus hit countries' intensive crisis care units reported an exponential surge in the cases and decided to move non-coronavirus patients in intensive care to other regions. The hospitals, particularly in the USA, Italy, Spain, and the UK were found in an extraordinary position and forced to think not to treat very old patients and to send home coronavirus caused pneumonia patients. In Pakistan, the provincial governments established isolation centers in Expo centers and Schools without enough medical facilities. The hardest choice that doctors faced who would be saved? Who would not be? A feeling of being powerless against the infection took its toll on health workers who were tested positive and died, as reported by Minder and Peltier (2020). To overcome the poverty of infrastructure and resources, the government of Pakistan created a 'tiger force' to mobilize youths to visit door-to-door to create awareness about the infection.

Experts suspected the religious sites in Iran, Iraq, Israel, Italy, Spain, Saudi Arabia, and elsewhere of the spread of infection. They were closed down for the visitors. These sites became the target of vilification and scorn because they were supposed to be a source of comfort in the time of suffering. People started assuming that the holy water was not a hand sanitizer, prayer was not a vaccine, and public safety should be based solely on scientific evidence (c.f., Ferraresi, 2020; Sang-Hun, 2020; Reedman, 2020). To counter this, some religious scholars in Pakistan came up with their theory and linked COVID-19 with God's wrath and discontent with people. In a way, they tried to prove that GOD belongs to them, and HE has created the evil virus to teach people a lesson who were distracted. They appealed religious scholars and fear-stricken people from all

sects to recite *Adan* (call for prayer) in the loudspeakers other than the regular times of *Adan* to please God and to save them from the virus. So, they tried to put the fear of God into the hearts of people amid the fear of COVID-19.

Kovecses (1990) argued that "as fear increases, its physiological effects and behavioral reactions increase" (p.73). newspapers identified anxiety and depression among children and older people – who were the most vulnerable. People were getting psychologically busted while being in isolation. Sadly, there were reports of increasing divorce rates and domestic violence. The very technique to protect people from the virus was perversely impacting victims of domestic violence. Paradoxically, millions of those who were either homeless or living in extreme poverty, keeping off streets, was nearly impossible for them. Amid the economic sanctions on Iran, Jalali et al. (2020) highlighted how the virus had spawned fright for the people with disabilities. So horrifying story was covered by Minder and Peltier (2020) of older people who were abandoned and dead in Spain retirement homes amid the coronavirus threats shocked the world.

According to an estimate, millions of stories, along with the coronavirus updates, were published by numerous high circulation international newspapers, which created the discourse of fear that raised anti-China and anti-Chinese sentiments. Playing with his eugenicist tendencies, Trump created a neologism 'Chinese virus' (c.f. Sheth, 2020). *The Jutland Post*, published a cartoon by replacing the five stars of the Chinese national flag with pictograms of the coronavirus. *The Wall Street Journal* noted, "China is the real sick man of Asia". *Courrier Picard* headlined the tragedy as "Yellow Alert". *Der Spiegel* described that CIVID-19 was made in China. In the same vein, *The Washington Times* conceived that the virus was China's secret biological weapon. *Foreign Policy* linked the global spread of the infection with the Belt and Road Initiative. Many newspapers, especially *Daily Mall* and *The Sun*, ascribed the virus with Chinese eating bats, snakes, and dogs. At present, newspapers are awash with the language that might promote cliched thinking instead of a moral support to 1.4 billion people of China among others who were facing the epidemic, and creating conditions under which all people are treated equally through the discourse of morality and affirmative language (c.f., Habermas, 1983 cited in Finlayson, 2005; Foucault, 2003).

The commentary, as mentioned above, warrants that the discourse of fear and social exclusion overwhelms news reports (see, e.g., Altheide & Michalowski, 2016, and those cited therein). Cap (2017) argues that the threatening vision and anticipation appeal to the public as long as they are considered personally consequential. Also, people tend to change their behavior when supported by institutional mandates. How fear of infection fed xenophobia, and social exclusion (for reviews, see Briggs 2005; Manderson & Levine, 2020 and those cited therein) demand scholarly study to explore: (a) what kind of linguistic structure is deployed by journalists while reporting about COVID-19?, (b) Whether or not the language of COVID-19 generates the discourse of fear and Sinophobia?

Methodology
The Data
This is a mixed-method research. The qualitative data was based on reports published in "The New York Times" since the official announcement of the virus in China in December 2019 until April

2020. The rationale behind the selection of this newspaper was it's a wide readership across the world. The paper published stories on the virus from the perspective of its correspondents situated in various countries. I selected purposively the stories for this study that covered the disease. Most of the reports were written by correspondents who were initially based in the virus hit countries. In a way, they embedded their lived experiences while covering the stories. Undoubtedly, the reports were from ethnically diverse correspondents, and they unfolded various topics through the lens of COVID-19. It was, however, natural for them to use codeswitched and cultural connotations along with their transliteration.

Figure 1 indicates that the reports were in the form of narratives, descriptions, and memoirs. The graphic images were also embedded to amplify the news; however, they were considered only meaning-making codes, which I excluded from the data because my primary focus was on the language deployed to report about COVID-19 and its impact on the discourse of fear and Sinophobia. Specific topics such as the spread of the virus, ban on healthy life, pressure on health care, economic slowdown, the lockdown of schools, and security emergency helped to draw excerpts and commonly emerging themes from the data.

Thirty university students volunteered to participate in the qualitative study. They were staying and studying from home. They were from different areas of Pakistan; however, most of them from Lahore, the capital city of Punjab, Pakistan. They narrated their lived experience about COVID-19 and the words and neologisms which they added to their vocabulary amid the outbreak. They emailed their responses to the researcher in the word file.

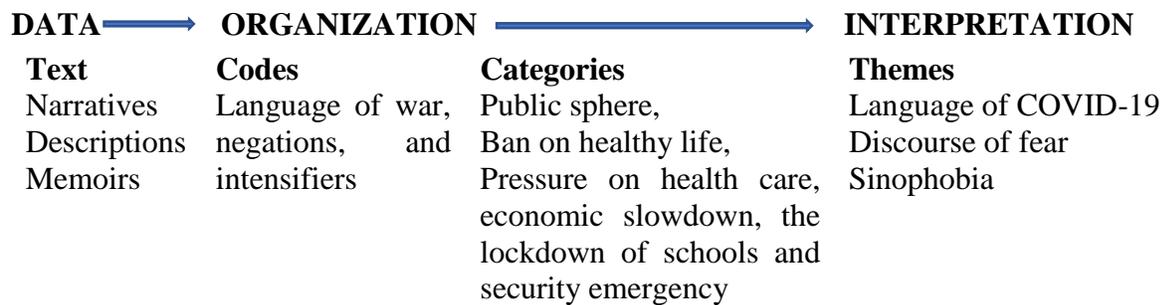| **DATA** →	**ORGANIZATION** ────────→		**INTERPRETATION**
Text	**Codes**	**Categories**	**Themes**
Narratives	Language of war,	Public sphere,	Language of COVID-19
Descriptions	negations, and	Ban on healthy life,	Discourse of fear
Memoirs	intensifiers	Pressure on health care, economic slowdown, the lockdown of schools and security emergency	Sinophobia

Figure 1. Faceted classification of data organization and analysis

Likert scale questionnaire was designed (please see the appendix) based on the discursive themes: language of COVID-19, the discourse of fear and Sinophobia, that emerged from the qualitative data. The survey included 18 affirmative statements, six statements for each variable, to investigate the impact of an independent variable (the language of COVID-19) on dependent variables (discourse of fear and Sinophobia). Moreover, all the statements were shuffled in the questionnaire to reduce the likelihood of predictable responses. The data also included demographic information (age and gender) to investigate the statistical difference in the perception of male and female students of various age groups.

Four Postgraduate students of linguistics participated in a focused group study to improve the face and content validity of the questionnaire. Cronbach Alpha value 0.823 shows that the survey was reliable to administer on a large scale. One hundred and three male and female university students of various age groups (18-22, 23-27, 28-32, 33-37, 38-42, and 43 and above) responded to the

questionnaire. All of them were pursuing their Undergraduate and Postgraduate degrees in the area of linguistics from a large private university situated in the metropolitan city of Lahore, Pakistan. The purpose of selecting the participants with the linguistic background was their better understanding of linguistic forms used in the survey than any other cohort of the population. The participants were attending online classes from their homes from different parts of Pakistan. They filled the online survey and returned it to the researcher.

The researcher informed the participants that the data collected from them would be used solely for this study. They were given assurances regarding confidentiality, security of information, and authorized access; that is, the information that might identify their names and institutions was never to be disclosed while interpreting the data. On the other hand, the data I selected from the newspaper was publicly available, and it was not subject to ethical approval. I signed up an account on "The New York Times" for access to the electronic version of the articles on the novel virus from the most hit countries.

Analysis

I interpreted the qualitative data through discursive themes: language of COVID-19, discourse of fear, and Sinophobia. Figure 1 shows that these themes were surfaced by codifying the data extracted from the newspaper and the lived experiences of the participants. The focus of my interpretation was on headlines, subject matter, and lexical constructions that were primarily used by journalists to persuade readers. Dijk (1999) argues that the lexical and rhetorical styles persuasively formulate a journalist's opinion, newspaper discourse, communicative situation, and group membership.

There is a fair chance that the social and cultural realities the journalists were part of, the newspaper discourse and political affiliation might have influenced their linguistic choices to structure Sinophobia as noted by van Dijk (1999) that "the broader social context and culture may impinge on the choice of words" (p.211). To brand a journalist or newspaper as racist is not the aim of this study because he or she is strongly connected with a complicated system that influences the press in many ways. Hence, he or she may not be solely blamed for promoting Sinophobia. However, I have tried to keep the analysis free from these biases to bring truism at the forefront. Moreover, I analyzed the lived experiences of the participants as metonymic linguistic construction of the discourse of fear and Sinophobia. The word-cloud was generated through Pro Word Cloud to demonstrate the most recurrent lexicons in their narratives.

The quantitative data was managed and analyzed through the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) and Analysis of Moment Structure (AMOS). Independent sample t-test and one-way ANOVA were measured to find a statistically significant difference between gender and among various age groups. I calculated multi regression to investigate the impact of the language of COVID-19 on the discourse of fear and Sinophobia. Moreover, Structural Equation Model was measured through AMOS to study the model fit.

Language of COVID-19 and Discourse of Fear

As illustrated in figure 2, a few specific lexicons, e.g., silent, empty, and vulnerable, were frequently used in the newspapers to report about the shuttered public sphere in the virus hit

countries. A strange silence and emptiness at city squares and streets once tourist's favorite spots now as 'ghost towns' were noted by various reporters.
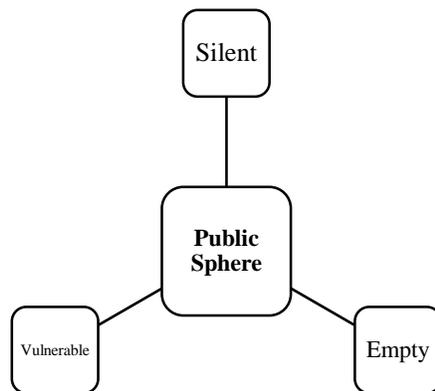

Figure 2. Discourse of fear in reporting about Public Sphere

Horowitz in [1b] personified the silence of once the bustling capital city of Italy with alpine mountainside. Furthermore, he quoted in [1d] Pope Francis's speech, "we find ourselves afraid and lost under the thick clouds that are hovering over our squares, streets, and cities. We live as if in seclusion". No visits from the outside and no going out." Furthermore, Horowitz elaborated that the virus had taken over lives and seized Vatican City. Minder and Peltier [1a] drew a grim picture of Spain as there was no civilization – the streets were empty, and shops were shuttered. In the same vein, an American journalist, Kimmelman, drew the vast emptiness in [1c] at Time Square, London, and the Place de la Concorde in Paris, which used to be crowded before the spread of infection. Turkewitz [1e] reported from Columbia sprawling and high-altitude capital Bogota that streets were left deserted, and cacophony was hushed by the virus. She symbolized silence and emptiness with leaves crinkled under the feet of a few solitary dog walkers in Bogota. Albeit the lockdown was partial yet total silence was reported from certain corners across the globe.

[1]

   a. Spain, on Lockdown, Weighs Liberties Against Containing Coronavirus by Minder and Peltier, March 15, 2020
   b. My Life on Italy's Coronavirus Frontlines, and in Quarantine by Jason Horowitz, March 19, 2020
   c. The Great Empty by Michael Kimmelman, March 23, 2020
   d. 'We Find Ourselves Afraid.' The Pope Confronts Coronavirus by Jason Horowitz, March 27, 2020
   e. Bogotá's Cacophony Is Hushed by Virus as Congested Streets Empty Out by Julie Turkewitz, March 30, 2020

These reports, among others, covered stories to draw as if the usual certainties have gone. Our lives have been transformed and adapting to new realities of the world, which is taken over by COVID-19, and it is so rampant that we might get infected if we dare to step outside our homes.

The reporters highlighted soldiers were called in many countries to ensure the safety, the security of citizens, help build field hospitals, bury the dead in mass graves, and punish the offenders of the corona regulations (Peters, 2020). Such news primarily added to the discourse. The word, fight was deployed as there was a war going on. Many compared the crisis with the ravages of World War II, and others pulled out anecdotal references that the virus has been recycling throughout the human history and killed millions of people. So, do COVID-19.

The calmness in public spaces contrasted with what doctors and nurses said a 'tough fight' within the hospitals. The metaphor of 'overwhelmed' to portray a pressure on hospitals. Horowitz and Kirkpatrick [1f] noted that hospitals in 'the hardest-hit regions' in America, Italy, Britain, Germany, France, and China remain 'overwhelmed'. Journalists used the phrase 'on a war footing' to report about the health care system of Northern Italy and New York. Similarly, Minder and Peltier [1g] pointed out that the grim situation had left 'frontline' health care professionals [2b] 'overwhelmed' and pleading for more equipment, doctors, nurses, and ambulance crews. Even health workers who were treating patients without protective gear contracted the contagion and died [1g]. The journalists designated the virus as an armed attack (c.f., Spadaro, 2020). They used the allegory of 'war' and 'fight' to describe the struggle against the illness by hospitals. They synonymized healthcare workers with the frontline soldiers against the invisible enemy. It was like being at the war of rhetoric. BBC Newsnight presenter Emily Maitlis (April 9, 2020) criticizes the misleading language used in the coronavirus crisis. The health workers might not succeed just being hailed frontline soldiers and wartime heroes without the required medical supply.

[1]

    f.   Dip in Italy's Cases Does Not Come Fast Enough for Swamped Hospitals, Jason Horowitz, and David D. Kirkpatrick, March 23, 2020.

    g.   Virus Knocks Thousands of Health Workers Out of Action in Europe by Raphael Minder and Elian Peltier, March 24, 2020

All the countries announced a list of dos and don'ts to restrict the movement of citizens during the lockdown. Part of the guidelines was to adhere to social distancing than to social cohesion that they have been living their life with and needed more than ever. People were frightened and psychologically exhausted to hear invariably about the words, e.g., social distancing, physical distancing, and social isolation. Peltier [2a] reported from Madrid that the lockdown had divided families. He argued that people are alone, and they are dying alone. One of the participants [2e] expressed, "I am in a cage and learning new ways to live." Another showed, "I am in lockdown within a lockdown." My parents banned me from leaving the premises of their home.

[2]

    a.   'We Are in a Cage:' Spanish Town Lives Under a Lockdown Within a Lockdown by Elian Peltier, March 31, 2020
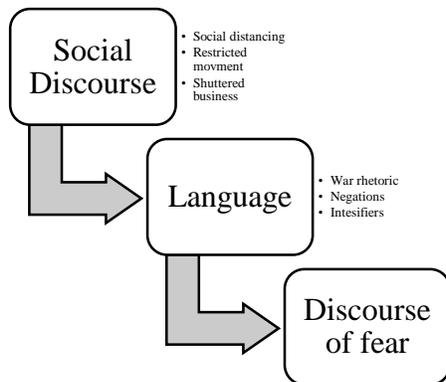
Figure 3. Language used to narrate social discourse and the discussion of fear

The style of negation to portray social dialogue was so widespread as the infection. May [2b] described the experience of doctor parents of social isolation, "There's no more hugging, no more kissing." Manderson and Levine (2020) noted that there was a shift in the culture of meeting and greeting. The phrase, 'social distancing' had taken over a healthy life. Povoledo [2c] expressed a disruption in the life of homeless people through the metaphors of negation, e.g., 'no charity', 'no food' 'no shelter', and 'no access to washrooms'. She [2c] employed a superlative degree, including other journalists, to narrate the situation as 'the most fragile' and 'most exposed' member of the population. Similarly, Abi-Habib and Sameer [2d] used adjectives and adverbs to amplify the situation of laborers who were stranded by the lockdown in India. They reported their breach of the lockdown as 'the biggest migration' in India's modern history. Furthermore, they used the intensifier 'drastically' to inform about the increasing pressure on the government. People can't walk the streets, and if it remains like this, the situation will explode," Instead of hedges, they used verbs and adverbs to forecast the dire consequences as they know about the future. Figure 3 illustrates linguistic properties, e.g., negation, adjectives, and adverbs, that the journalists have overwhelmingly deployed to describe COVID-19.

[2]

    b. No More Hugging, No More Kissing.' At Home in Hong Kong with 2 Frontline Doctors by Tiffany May, February 20, 2020

    c. Rome's Homeless Don't Have the Luxury of Staying Home by Elisabetta Povoledo, March 24, 2020

    d. India's Coronavirus Lockdown Leaves Vast Numbers Stranded and Hungry, by Maria Abi-Habib and Sameer Yasir, March 29, 2020

The participants who were under the vigilance of their COVID-19 obsessed parents had to follow a new set of rules strictly [2e-2g]. Most of the participants narrated that their parents were keeping them exhausted psychologically by repeatedly enquiring whether they had washed their hands, used hand sanitizer, and taken vitamins to boost-up their immunity. Parents mostly, if not always, regurgitated imperative structures, e.g., wash your hands till 20 seconds, use hand sanitizer, stay hydrated and stay home, and stay safe. Most of the participants said, "they feel so powerless and frightened." They have unfolded some engaging narratives in [2].

e. Nowadays, conversation with my parents has changed to a great extent. My parents were never worried about my outings, but now they don't even let me step outside. They were never conscious whether I have washed my hands or not, but soon after every hour, my mama confirms whether I have washed my hands or not. There was a time when I never bothered to buy sanitizers and masks, but now, I have purchased a pack of masks and even sanitizers. I am in a cage and adapting to new ways of life.

f. My parents are so much panicked, and they said, "these are the signs that the day of judgment coming." They have strictly prohibited from shaking hands and advised to maintain social distance, wear masks and gloves all the time.

g. My father is always talking about COVID-19 with so many details and sloppy analysis.

Furthermore, figure 4 shows the lexicons such as COVID-19, social-distancing, fear, and panic, among others, in the descending order that has overwhelmed the narratives of the participants. The word cloud is a factual illustration of how reporting on the virus has taken over the life of the participants. The linguistic expressions, e.g., social distancing, individualism, nationalization, restriction, war analogies, and so on, were utilized abandonedly by journalists to report about the pandemic. We have heard about social cohesion, multiculturalism, globalization, freedom, and peace almost for the whole of our life from the stalwart of morality, but the pandemic has forced the world to invent binary lexicons for safety reasons at the cost of general fear and panic. Paradoxically, such words, though ethically disapproved in normal circumstances, were used temporarily to support new guidelines to streamline diametrically opposite way of living during the pandemic outbreak. Spadaro (2020) has equated the situation with the violation of fundamental human rights.

The study strongly recommends to replace the psychologically frightening lexicons, as demonstrated in figure 4 and elsewhere with neutral and contextual word to guide people for peaceful coexistence. The expressions such as social distancing and psychical distancing, are problematic. I fear, in the long run, there might be significant implications of these words. They may cause to increase in divorce rate, domestic abuse, and damage family system beyond our control. There are reports published in high circulation newspapers for a surge in domestic violence in the USA and an increasing divorce rate in China amid COVID-19. The pandemic has changed the sexual life trajectory of couples who fear that they might lose the immunity system and possibly contract the infection (c.f. Hussein, 2020).

The study recommends the use of candid and neutral words, e.g., "covdistancing' which signifies keeping distance in any way. At the same time, you go out for groceries or sit with a group of people for a crucial meeting or lineup, but this does not necessarily mean to distance your immediate family members who are neither asymptomatic nor COVID-19 patient. Similarly, the use of war lexicons must be replaced by the medical language to respond to the crisis. People can only be saved by the power of the health system and providing factual information but, of course, not through war rhetoric. Also, the increasing use of the intensifiers such as adjectives and adverbs amplifies the discourse of fear. These forms may be replaced by affirmative language to show people empathy and cooperation to combat the disease, as supported by Peters (2020), that

empathy is a prerequisite of a healthy world. Countries like Pakistan, which are far behind the West in the health care system, must use the power of language to appeal to people to take precautionary measures that could stop the spread of the virus.

Figure 4. Word-cloud in the narratives of the participants

The participation in the public sphere that existed in the bustling squares, public plazas, beaches, fairgrounds, restaurants, movie theaters, Coffee houses, Salons, tourist centers, train stations, and was restricted to homes by the law and enforcement agencies. The language of COVID-19 overwhelmed newspapers that furnished frightening thoughts into the heads of people. The public sphere was declined to people beyond specific means of survival. People's opinions were primarily controlled by the discourse of fear to justify the language used based on an exponential increase in the number of deaths, pressure on the health care system, and economic recession. The words, as shown in figure 4 and elsewhere, were inserted into the head of people through textual resources succumbed to the overhasty seduction of generalization that Chinese were behind the spread of the virus.

In Pakistan, people who traveled from Iran, Saudi Arabia, Europe, China were blamed by people as carriers of the virus. More precisely speaking, especially those who returned from Iran and Saudi Arabia after performing their religious rituals, were directly blamed for the spread of infection. Since the virus leaked from China, people expressed anti-Chinese sentiments in many ways. How the discourse of fear leads to Sinophobia is fundamental to analyze the second research question. Whether or not the language of COVID-19 generates the discourse of fear, and Sinophobia?

Sinophobia

I have shown here that language use and communication play a crucial role in the stereotypical production of positive ingroup and negative outgroup (review, e.g., van Dijk, 1993). There was [3a-3d] a use of lexical and rhetorical styles, hyperboles, and parallelism that could be reasonably associated with anti-Chinese sentiments. This is particularly true in all forms of COVID-19 discourse, as supported by van Dijk (1999). There is scholarly evidence that ethnic and racial minority groups have always been discriminated against by the press as a problem if not a threat

during the crisis. I have tried to reveal linguistic forms that are exploited by journalists to legitimate anti-Chinese sentiments.

Since the outbreak, the Chinese were linked with the virus by the participants. Motoko Rich [3a] covered stories about Sinophobia in the world. The State Department announced travel advice to all Americans, "don't travel to China." Airlines from many countries temporarily suspended flights to the Hubei province of China. Japanese hashtag # Chinese don't come to Japan got viral on social media. Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippine, Russia, Vietnam, among others, closed business with Chinese. The information that the virus created in the secret laboratory of China and the Chinse Red Bull drink contains virus was so rampant on the social media. Krause et al. (2020) expressed his fear that there was a surge in misinformation (review e.g., Pulido et al., 2020) as the virus was marching through the word. People started avoiding malls that were popular among Chinese and succumbed to the seduction of oversimplified judgment.

Hannah Beech [3b] disclosed the experience of a Thai taxi driver who nominalized a Chinese customer intuitively for infecting him with the virus. One could wonder how did he know that was the Chinese customer who gave him the virus. The taxi drivers who were giving a ride to foreign customers in various counties were making an overhasty generalization. In [3c], Tiffany May identified Hong Kong student through certain ethnic events happened in Italy. She got 'hard long stares' when she was at Bologna airport. Furthermore, the writer narrated how she was discriminated at the police station while filing a report against her stolen wallet and wanted to open a bank account because she was from the zone of infection. Similarly, Cao Li described the experiences of Chines [3d] who faced racist remarks in the virus hit countries.

We can notice the use of biased phrases in the title of each article that demonstrates the verbal ploys such as metaphors (e.g., coronavirus, anti-Chinese sentiment, the face of coronavirus, and a slap in the face), alliterations (spread, so, sentiment, student, and shunned), articles (e.g., the face, a slap, and a Hong Kong student) primarily to catch up readers' attention about a surge in anti-Chinese emotions. The deep meaning in the first article reflects a raise in Sinophobia. Among others, Hannah Beech in [3b] formed a biased title by nominalizing Chinese in the parenthesis and asserting the implied meaning that people are helping Chinese, but they are infecting them. The third one, quite intrinsically, demonstrates that the Chinese are behind COVID-19. The last one, 'A slap on the Face', narrates how badly Chinese were treated outside the mainland China by the people. The lexical and rhetorical styles employed to unfold the lived experience of Chinese who were victims of racist remarks were broadly creating hatred against the Chinese. Some of these expressions were also parroted by some world leaders and subsequently copied by the press. The finding is constant with Zheng, Goh, and Wen (2020), who found an increase in misleading and discriminatory media reports after the outbreak. There is a fair chance when such information invariably routs through the press, some members of the public may mistakenly believe in avoiding Chinses or in attacking them in worst cases (Zhao, 2020; Yong, 2020).

[3]
   a. As Coronavirus Spreads, So Does Anti-Chinese Sentiment, Motoko Rich, January 30, 2020

    b. He Drove Her (Chinese) to the Hospital. She Gave Him the Coronavirus, Hannah Beech February 28, 2020

    c. 'The Face of the Coronavirus': A Hong Kong Student Shunned in Italy, Tiffany May, March 2, 2020

    d. 'A Slap in the Face': Chinese Readers Share Their Coronavirus Stories, Cao Li, March 4, 2020

Figure 5 shows a good partial correlation (r=0.61) between the language of COVID-19 and the discourse of fear that is correlated (r=0.39) with Sinophobia. Overall, the p-value of Chi-square and the indices indicate a good fit of the structural equation model. The multi-regression analysis predicts a statistically significant impact of the independent variable (the language of COVID-19) on the dependent variables (discourse of fear and Sinophobia) with a 95% confidence interval. The study has found that there is no significant difference between the perception of male and female university students of various age groups (18-22, 23-27, 28-32, 33-37, 38-42, and 43 and above). Hence, we can note that the language deployed by newspapers to describe COVID-19 has created unarguably the discourse of fear and raised anti-Chinese sentiments.
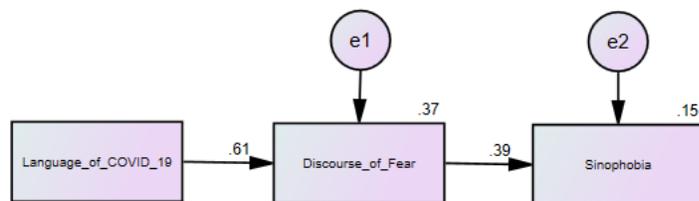
N=103 P (Chi-square) = 0.968> 0.05, RMSEA=0.000<0.05, GFI= 1.000, CFI=1.000>0.95, CMIN/DF=0.002<0.05

Figure 5. Structural Equation Modelling the impact of language of COVID-19 on the discourse of fear to perpetuates Sinophobia

Conclusion

The newspaper reports on the novel virus involve millions of readers who daily confront the language that reflects in many ways the opinions of journalists than what people simply think about. Though most of the reports were from the third person's perspective, the language was revealing as if the normal life has upended, and everything got topsy-turvy. The war rhetoric, negative expressions, and intensifiers were used by journalists to narrate the public sphere, social life, health care, and economy. The culture of meeting and greeting was taken over by bizarre linguistic forms, e.g., social distancing, physical distancing, and social isolation. The virus shuttered the way we had organized our world to live, and brand-new guidelines evoked how to live, behave, travel, work, and study (review, e.g., Sibony, 2020). People began to override their rational impulses and move towards irrational responses of fear, panic and hatred created most probably at a subconscious level. They suffered from a cliched thinking of positive self and negative others. The discourse of fear gripped on people to submit to the pseudoscientific theory

(c.f. Krause et al., 2020), among others, that the virus was leaked from the Chinese laboratory as emphasized by Manderson and Levine (2020). COVID-19 is such a massive crisis and demands the language that could bring social cohesion, cooperation, maintenance of ethnic equality than to vilify a nation to achieve political milestones.

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Appendix

Questionnaire

Dear Participant,

This survey aims to explore the "Language of COVID-19: Discourse of Fear and Sinophobia". Your response will be used solely for this research. I, as a result of this, assure you of confidentiality, security of information, and authorized access to the data. The information that might identify you will be masked.

Thank you very much for your participation.

Demographics

Age

18-22 ☐ 23-27 ☐ 28-32 ☐ 33-37 ☐ 38-42 ☐ 43 and above ☐

Gender

Male ☐   Female ☐

Questions

1= strongly disagree 2= disagree 3= not sure, 4= agree 5= strongly agree

		1	2	3	4	5
1.	I get frightened to read in newspapers about the spread of COVID-19.					
2.	I find Newspapers using tentative language or hedges (e.g., may, might, seem, and so on) to tone down a story on COVID-19.					
3.	I hesitate to eat or order Chinese food since the outbreak.					
4.	I think Chinese are from the zone of COVID-19.					
5.	I get psychologically exhausted while reading and hearing about COVID-19.					
6.	I find the language of war (e.g., enemy, fight, battle, and so on) to report about COVID-19 in newspapers.					
7.	I think COVID-19 is a Chinese virus.					
8.	I find newspapers creating hypertext while covering stories on COVID-19.					
9.	I mostly think as if I can contract to COVID-19 when I am outdoor.					
10.	I find Newspapers employing negation markers (e.g., no, do not, will not, and so on) to report about socialization and the public sphere.					
11.	I think Chinese are carrying COVID-19 when I find them around.					
12.	When I read more about COVID-19 in newspapers, I think China is a horrible place because they have the virus.					
13.	Most of the time, I talk about COVID-19 with my family and friends.					
14.	I turn away or/and get conscious when I see a Chinese around since the outbreak of COVID-19.					

15.	I find the language of fear in newspapers about COVID-19.					
16.	I mostly think as if I am vulnerable to COVID-19.					
17.	COVID-19 has changed my lifestyle in a lot many ways.					
18.	I find Newspapers deploying strong expressions (e.g., the most fragile, the most exposed, pressure has increased drastically, and so on) to amplify fear about COVID-19.					