

# UNDERSTANDING DISASTER TERMS IN A PACIFIC RIM COUNTRY: THE CASE OF THE PHILIPPINES

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## ABSTRACT

A more holistic approach towards disaster risk reduction and management takes into account a “multicausal understanding of disasters” (Berg 2017). This holistic paradigm led to an increased involvement of the social sciences as well as the humanities in documenting and analyzing social and cultural factors that contribute to our general understanding of disasters and could be useful in formulating ways to reduce disaster risk and vulnerability and in developing new technologies useful for disaster response and mitigation. It also prompted academicians and practitioners to look into the asymmetries in the way that local communities prepare and respond to disasters.

A vital source of information for understanding how people in various communities view disasters is the language that they speak. Language could tell us how the speakers relate to their lived environments and how they see disasters based on their own understanding of the physical world. By utilizing conceptual metaphors (Lakoff & Johnson 1980), people are able to encode various types of disasters as they experience them and subsequently develop appropriate responses to such life events.

This paper highlights the importance of linguistics, particularly of language documentation, in the whole space of disaster risk reduction and management by showing how linguistic metaphors are utilized in lexicalizing disaster terms in selected languages of the Philippines— a country in the Pacific Rim and one of the most disaster prone territories in the world. The metaphorization of disaster terms ensures that the speakers of a language are able to frame a corresponding mental representation for each type of disaster, which in turn will aid them to react appropriately every time a disaster occurs. In addition, metaphorization is also necessary to characterize rare types of disasters (e.g. storm surge) and to manifest the people’s understanding of such phenomena. This study hopes to contribute to the literature about the importance of language documentation in analyzing human behavior vis-à-vis disasters, and in formulating policies that could both mitigate disasters and build resilience in local communities in the Philippines, and to a larger extent— in the Pacific Rim.

## REFERENCES USED IN THIS ABSTRACT:

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- Lakoff, George and Johnson, Mark. (1980). *Metaphors We Live By*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.