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## Discursive construction of refugees, migrants and asylum seekers in British and American news sources

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### Abstract

This paper focuses on the discursive construction of refugees, migrants and asylum seekers in British and American liberal and conservative press in September 2015. The combination of corpus-based approach and CDA was used to proceed the data. The results indicate that in September 2015 migrants, refugees and asylum seekers were presented in a positive light. No crucial differences in representations in different sources were found, although conservative news sources tend to create a slightly more negative representation of people coming to Europe than liberal ones.

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*Keywords:* Asylum; refugees; migrants; corpus; discourse analysis

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### 1. Introduction

This article analyses the discourse of the European refugee crisis. Particularly, it studies the representation of migrants, refugees and asylum seekers in British and American liberal and conservative press.

Refugees, migrants and asylum seekers have been the focus of a number of studies. Van Dijk (1988, 2005) conducted a research of ethnic minorities in the press, van der Valk (2000) analysed the representation of ethnic minorities in the discourse of the French parliament; Baker and Mc Every (2005) analysed British mass media discourse of refugees, using a combination of corpus-based approach and CDA. The latter was followed by

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Gabrielatos and Baker's paper (2008), which used the same method to analyse the construction of refugees and asylum seekers in the British press over a large period of time. These studies demonstrated a negative stance taken by mass media and politicians towards ethnic minorities coming to their countries. However, as discourse is affected by international events, we may expect some changes in the representation of migrants, refugees and asylum seekers.

We consider that analyzing mass media is the best way to understand the agenda of a given society. Nowadays it is a well-known fact that mass media play a pivotal role in the structuring of people's world view. They project attitudes, opinions and stereotypes, thus shaping people's perception of the situation (Fairclough, 1989).

A significant number of individuals is exposed to news every day. News is on the radio, on TV, on the Internet, people see headlines even as they simply walk on the street. The population of any developed country continuously encounters news. Printed and online versions of newspapers are being read extensively, news blocks are being watched by millions. For instance, the average number of primetime viewers of Fox Channel News is estimated at 1.829 million [1], BBC News averages at 4,9 million viewers per night, while twitter posts of BBC World News were shared 2,9 million times in 2015 [2].

One may argue that not everyone watches the news or reads the news. However, even those people inevitably come in contact with it when they discuss it with their friends and colleagues, who are news readers or viewers. In such discussions word choice is imposed on speakers by news reports, as people use the same words as they read or heard in news. According to Fairclough (1989, p. 50), "the constant doses of 'news' which most people receive each day are a significant factor in social control, and they account for a not insignificant proportion of a person's average daily involvement in discourse."

Thus we can conclude that news plays a vital role in the formation of modern society. In order to understand the processes in progress in a community we should analyse news coverage and reveal its bias.

The research question of this article is to consider the discursive construction of migrants, refugees and asylum seekers in the media and to trace any differences in the representation of them in American and British liberal and conservative press. This study identifies main topics related to discussion of refugees, migrants and asylum seekers and focuses on the semantic prosodies created in news reports when describing migrants, refugees and asylum seekers, it then contrasts the data collected from British and American liberal and conservative news sources against each other.

CDA and corpus-based approach were employed to reach the aims of this study.

The relationship between discourse and society is rather complicated. As Fairclough (1989, p. 56) puts it: "discourse – language as a form of social practice... language is a part of society, and not somehow external to it. Secondly, language is a social process. And thirdly, language is a socially conditioned process, conditioned that is by other parts of society." Discourse affects society (that is, people who live in a given society), imposing on them linguistic behavioral patterns. At the same time, it is also structured by the society, as it feels the influence of non-linguistic aspects of life. However, we are not doing a full-fledged discourse analysis of news items collected for this study. We draw on notions belonging to CDA, such as topics and semantic prosody (see "Method" for definitions).

Corpus analysis allows us to examine a significant amount of texts and to gain statistical data of language use and common collocations. However, statistical data are clearly not enough to understand the changes in society, that is why we need to employ CDA to understand how language affects and reflects them.

## 2. Data and method

The data were collected through an online interface of news sources by way of the following research query: *refugee\* OR migrant\* OR asylum\* OR crisis\**.

Data were collected from 4 types of sources: British conservative and liberal sources, American conservative and liberal sources. The news sources analysed are: the Daily Mail, the Guardian, FOX News, ABC News accordingly. When choosing the source, we were governed by three principles: firstly, the news items must be available online, secondly, the news items must be free of charge, thirdly, the news items must come from popular sources with significant readership. While different sources give different figures, on average foxnews.com is visited by 65 million people monthly, abcnews.go.com provides content to 36 million people monthly, theguardian.co.uk has 42 million online visitors [3] and daily mail has 23 million online readers [4]. Hence, a truly large number of people is

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