

**REPRESENTING MIGRANTS AND REFUGEES
AS “OTHERS” IN THE ROMANIAN ONLINE MEDIA**

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Abstract

The article analyzes the Romanian media’s headlines coverage of the 2016 refugee crisis. The sample used in the study included all the articles identified in the online media that dealt with the refugee crisis and were published between June 2015 and October 2016. Our results showed that the vocabulary used in the headlines was very simple, without internal variations. Also, the articles included in our sample had appealed less to “primary defining terms for the situation”, being as such less normative in approaching the topic of interest and more emotional in their approach to the issue.

Key-words: refugees, migrants, mass media, discourse, representation

1. Introduction

The increase in immigration and large arrivals of refugees in the summer of 2016 in the European Union was reported extensively throughout the European and international media. Though much debate occurred around how English language news had covered the refugee crisis, little attention was given to the Romanian context.

We aim to analyze the Romanian media’s headlines coverage of the 2016 refugee crisis. News framing is the way in which journalists shape and contextualize events within a familiar frame of reference, following some latent structure of meaning. Audiences are thought to adopt these frames of reference, which leads to the adoption of certain inferences, ideas, judgments and contrasts about issues (McQuail, 1987: 495, 454). Media framing research acknowledges the impact of word choice within news reports on public opinion. This has an even stronger impact on society when the word choice is related to various groups within society, as these word choices and framing impact social hierarchies. Kenneth Burke’s theory of identification and division reflects this, as the words chosen to identify social groups create a form of identification, joining similar people together. This process of identification with others leads to eventual societal division because as similarities are identified, differences are also identified, and groups are formed (Steimel, 2009: 59).

The sample used in the study included all the articles identified in the online media that dealt with the problems of the refugee crisis and were published in the time-frame of June 2015-October 1st 2016.

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We explore the ways in which words were chosen for the headlines of the Romanian articles covering the refugees' crisis. The main research question the present article aims to answer is: "What were the syntactic methods used in the online Romanian media articles' headlines to frame the refugees and migrants in 2015 and 2016?"

2. Theoretical framework

As starting point in the present article we have chosen the general theory of "the media framing" of a certain subject, topic or issue. Gamson (1989: 157) defines frame as: "...a central organizing idea for making sense of relevant events and suggesting what is at issue".

It is generally considered that the frames are used in mass media because they have the capacity to highlight certain elements and perspectives, thus increasing the chances for certain interpretation schemes to be selected and evoked from among many others. As Sieff emphasizes, (2003) the repetitive character by which the frames are presented to the public gradually shapes the way in which a certain topic or subject is perceived. In other words, the more frequently a certain topic is framed in a certain approach, the more probable it becomes for people and the public in a larger sense, to adopt that perspective on the matter.

In the present case, out of the numerous perspectives on "framing", we have chosen Entman's classic model (2004) – the so called "cascade model of frames" – since we consider that this one has as its main advantage the fact that it accounts for a diversity of framings (of the elites, the mass media or the public) and for the existence of a necessary feed-back among them (which also serves as a basis for the evolution of a problem framing in time).

According to the specialized we can talk about a variety of typologies for different types of framing. Out of these, we will only mention the following:

1. The distinction between episodic and contextual framing (Iyengar, 1991): "Episodic framings" tend to concentrate on the individual, emphasizing the individual explanations, whereas "the thematic framings" focus not only on the individual level but also on aspects connected to the general social level and implicitly on social explanations. Sotirovic (2003) describes the individual explanations as being those which concentrate on the involved actors' personality, moods or motivational contexts, whereas the social explanations are those which highlight the situational forces and the circumstances of a process or event.

2. The distinction between the macro level and the micro level at which the framing applies (Scheufele, 1999). As a macro construct the term "framing" refers to the procedures used by journalists and other communicators to present the information in a manner which should match the fundamental schemes used by their audiences (Shoemaker and Reese, 1996). For journalists, framing does not mean trying to distort news but attempting to reduce the complexity level of a certain topic, if we consider the restrictions related to the organizational routine in a media institution (Gans, 1979). In other words, "frames" become a precious tool for presenting relatively complex topics in an efficient and accessible manner for a profane audience, because they use the cognitive schemes the audience already possesses. As a micro-construct, framing describes the way in which people use the information and characteristics connected to the presentation of certain information referring to some issues and topics at the very moment they form the impressions related to these (topics and issues).

The discourse surrounding refugees and migrants is associated, in general, with border protection, security and terrorism (Hightower, 2015: 337). As Mihelj (2004: 178) pointed out, the identification and division of refugees and migrants as culturally different and the "other" further perpetrates the negative associations with these individuals and hinders their ability to integrate into the host society. Bradimore and Bauder (2011: 641) called this process a "process of othering" and they assumed that news framing had created division pairs when referring to the refugees (Steimel, 2009:p. 67). This "othering" occurred as a result of whose voices were presented in news coverage.

Greenberg and Hier (2001: 565) pointed out that newsmakers have privileged positions in public discourse as they structure the points of access that enable readers and viewers to articulate viewpoints and realities by choosing which voices are presented and how positions are framed. In general, studies showed very little representation of refugee or migrants perspectives in news coverage. Rather they (e.g. the refugees and the migrants) were presented as objects of the legislature and government reaction (Leudar, Hayes, Nekvapil and Baker, 2008: 200).

3. Methodology

The analyses dedicated to media frame identified the following steps involved in the framing research (Semetko and Valkenburg, 2000):

1. First, we identify a problem or an event (Entman, 2004: 23–24). A frame in communication can be defined only in relation to a certain event, a certain issue or a certain political actor.
2. Secondly, if the purpose is to understand the way in which the frames from the message influence public opinion, then the research should concentrate on a specific attitude – for example, the attitude towards the issue “X” (Feldman and Zaller 1992; Iyengar, 1991).
3. Thirdly, we identify inductively an initial multitude of “frames”/ “framing” for a topic or an issue. Gamson and Modigliani (1987: 144; 1989: 7) suggest even the analysis of the frames produced by different actors and elite organizations related to the topic of interest in order to make a “list” of “existing cultural frames at a certain moment” in the elite’s discourse.
4. Finally, once an initial multitude of frames has been delimited, we choose the sources for the content analysis (Tankard, 2001: 101; Dimitrova et al., 2005; Nisbet et al., 2003: 48) and this one is performed for delimiting and studying these frames.

Taking into account the “exploring” character of the present study, we have chosen a different path, based on the methodological “triangulation”. We have used the following main research methods:

A. The methodology used by van Dijk (van Dijk and Kintsch, 1983) for identifying the characteristics of the macro-structures present at the level of the texts, which contained information about the Romanian migrants from the European Union. More precisely, we started the present analysis from van Dijk’s hypothesis (1988: 228) according to which the tendentious and “full of stereotypes” character of a title is especially applicable to all information and discourses which presuppose social and political attitudes, variable and contradictory. At this level of the analysis, we have worked strictly on samples containing the titles of the articles published in the Romanian press and referring to that topic.

In our option, we took into account the fundamental characteristics of the news titles, as they were presented in van Dijk’s analysis of racism reconstruction in the Dutch press (van Dijk and Kintsch, 1983):

1. The titles and the subtitles sum up the content of the text in an expression or sentence – starting from here, they are considered to be the main form of the macro-structure of the text (or the majority of the most important information in a text).
2. Schematically and at semantic and organizational level, the title represents the identifying “label” for all news.
3. Because the title is on top of the macro-structure hierarchy, it will generally express the information which is best remembered by the readers.
4. The main position attributed to the title also signals which information is probably the most important in the models constructed by media in relation to a certain situation.

5. Due to the fact that the situation models transmitted by the news producer (or journalist) are necessarily subjective, the title should also be subjective or at least it should have this tendency.

B. The methodology proposed by Gee (1999: 133-134) for identifying the articulation modalities of the social differences in interviews. We have considered that we can talk of two main mechanisms used in framing the titles as the main empirical material of our study:

1. Expressing the causality-situation in which we have chosen to analyse the use of the syntagms designating the causal relationships: “therefore”, “so that”, “given that”, “hence”, “because”, “on account of”, “whereas”, “consequently”, “so as to”;

2. The framing of the subordinating discourses, which is commonly known as “quoting the sources” – this time we have analyzed the use of the syntagms in the constructions: “state/ to state”; “statement”; “presuppose/ to presuppose”; “to say/ say”.

The sample studied in the present case, which allowed applying the methodological triangulation previously mentioned, was made of articles published on the topic of migrants and refugees in relation to crime in the European Union. The period of time we have chosen to analyse was June 2015 – October 2016. We have not used any sampling procedure for the media materials, so that we could analyze all the articles published in the respective period. In order to select the articles included in the sample we have searched on Google using the key-words “refugees” and “migrants” plus “crime” and we have included in our sample all articles that resulted in the first ten pages of Google search. The final sample had a volume of 162 articles published in the Romanian online media during the above-mentioned period of time. For data analysis we have used the SPSS statistical package. In the article we shall present both some descriptive statistics of the results and the qualitative analysis of Romanian article headlines for media coverage of the refugees’ crisis.

4. Analysis of the results

As our data showed, the pace of publishing articles on refugees and migrants was rather constant (around one or two articles being published each day). In the meantime we have noticed that 12.4% (20 articles) of the entire sample of articles were published in three days – that is, between 27 and 29 August 2015 (See in this respect Figure 1 bellow).

Figure 1. *Dynamic of articles published on migrants and refugees (June 2015 – October 2016)*

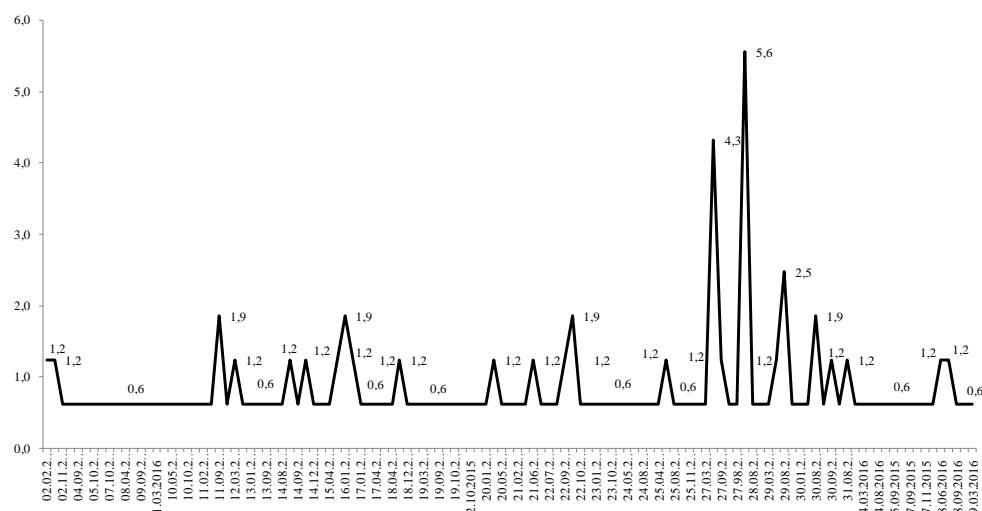
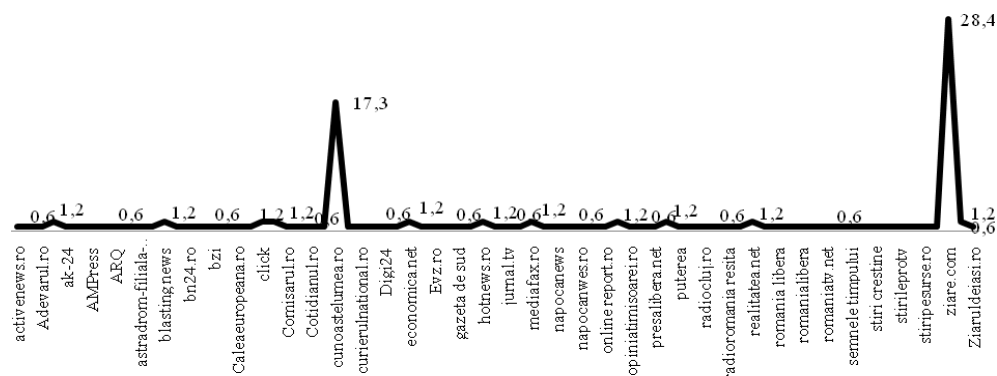


Figure 2. Type of Romanian media in which the articles on migrants and refugees were published



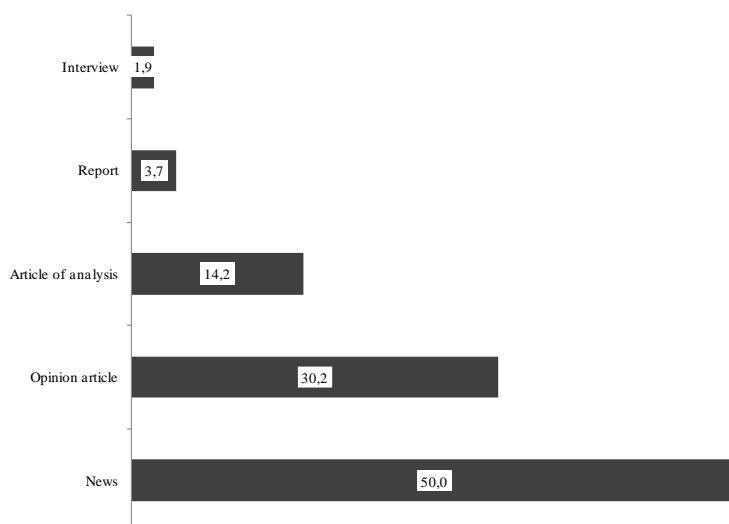
When we took into consideration the specific Romanian online media where those articles were published we noticed that, in general, a website or a newspaper published between one or two articles on this topic. At the same time, as our data pointed out, 28 articles (17.3%) were published on the aggregate website “Cunoastelumea.ro”, while 46 of them (28.4%) were published on other aggregate websites – “Ziare.com”.

Figure 3. The names of Romanian online media where the articles on migrants and refugees were published



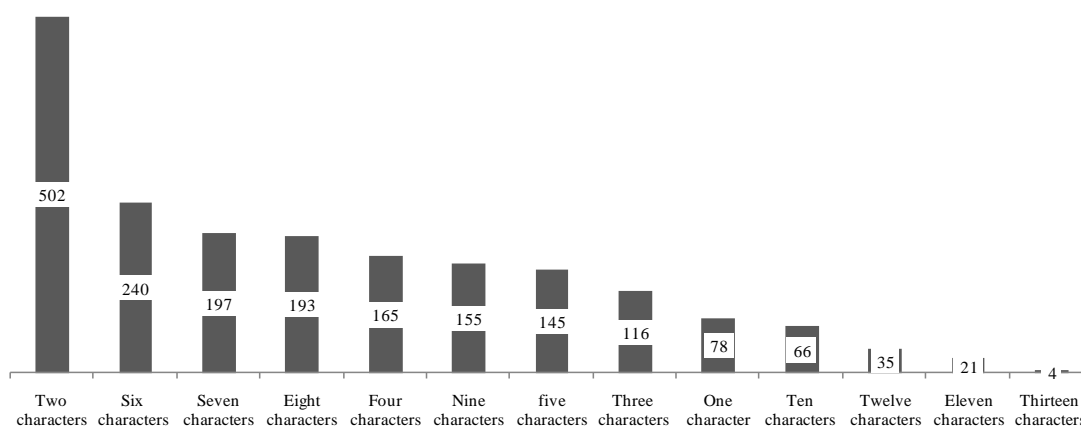
Our data showed that half of the entire sample (N=81; 50%) was made of news covering the issues related to refugees and migrants, while one third of the sample we analysed (N=49; 30.2%) was made of opinion articles. Articles of analysis had covered in a lesser degree the topic of refugees and migrants (N=23; 14.2%) and there had been only six reports (3.7%) and three interviews (1.9%) covering the issue (See in this respect Figure 4 from below).

Figure 4. *Types of articles on migrants and refugees published in the Romanian online media*



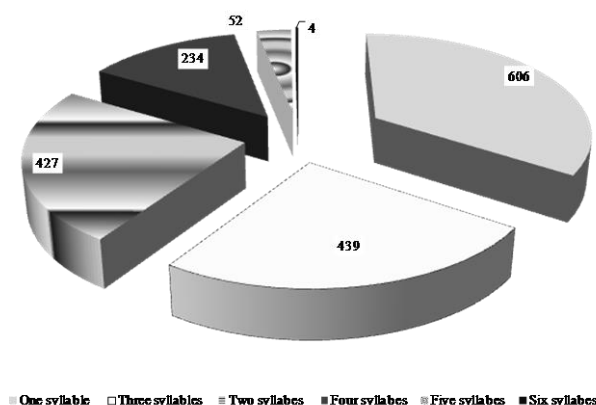
The analysis of the types of words used in the articles' headlines showed that one quarter of the sample (N=502; 26.2%) were words composed of only two characters, and 12.5% (N=240) were words composed of six characters. Also, the number of words composed of more than two characters was rather small in the entire sample (N=60; 3.1%). (See Figure 5 in this respect).

Figure 5. *Number of characters of the words used in the articles' headlines on migrants and refugees*



When we counted the syllables per words used in the headlines included in our sample the data showed that 34.4% (N=606) were words made of one syllable, 24.9% (N=439) were words made of three syllables and 24.2% (N=427) were words made of two syllables. The number of words made of more than four syllables was smaller – 16.5% (N=290) (See Figure 6 in this respect).

Figure 6. Number of syllables count for the words used in the articles' headlines on migrants and refugees



When we focused on the occurrences for the words “migrant” and “refugee” within the articles’ headlines we found that “refugee” and “refugees” were used 38 times (2.9%), followed by “immigrant” and “immigrants” which appeared 28 times (2.1%) in the sample considered. The nouns “migrants” and “migrant” occurred 20 times (1.5%) in the headlines we have analysed (See Table 1 in this respect).

Table 1. The frequency of use for the words “migrant” and “refugee” within the articles’ headlines

Word	Frequency (N)	Percentage (%)
Refugee/Refugees	38	2.9
Romania	30	2.3
Immigrant/Immigrants	28	2.1
Germany	25	1.9
Violence/Violences	21	1.6
Migrant/Migrants	20	1.5
Crisis	16	1.2

A specific characteristic of the articles’ headlines refers to the abbreviated style of those titles’ composition. This aspect was true especially for verbs of existence as predicated in a sentence – “to be”, “to exist” – and the personal pronouns – “they” (See Casette 1 in this respect):

Casette 1 – Examples of abbreviated titles included in the studied sample

[They] Have illegally passed the Romanian border
[There were been] 6.3 million refugees in 2015
[There is] Pedophilia, wilderness, misery and fierce battles in the refugees’ camps
[There have been] Violences in the refugees’ camps
[There has been a] Siege of Muslim refugees’ at Hungary’s borders.

We have presumed that, generally speaking, the place of the words “refugee” and “migrant” as generic term(s) will be in a significant proportion (of 25% - 35%) that of the grammatical subject in a headline. In our assumption, this is an important position that can produce the headline’s impact, due to the fact that it is a position which would draw the reader’s attention from the beginning.

The analysis of the way in which the headlines were composed indicated that, indeed, in the great majority of cases (over 50% of the total sample), the words “refugee” and “migrant” occupied the position of a subject in a sentence. At the same time, those words have also been in the semantic place as a part in a subordinate sentence, especially in the case where the headline focused on the local people who had entered into contact with the migrants and refugees (See Table 2 in this respect):

Table 2. *The semantic places of the words “refugee” and “migrant” in the headlines of the articles – Examples*

Subject	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The Syrian immigrants arrived in Romania - The immigrants started a Hell in Greece! - The migrants were caught while they attempted to enter Romania - The refugees were involved in a new sexual assault - Dozens of immigrants were caught at the Romanian southern borders
Subordinated part of the sentence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - One German and four Romanians were sued for trafficking with Syrian migrants -The islamists are recruiting migrants from the refugees’ centers - A Romanian couple was attacked by immigrants - The German authorities recognized that they cannot control over 60.000 immigrants

We also analysed the ways in which linkers that designate causal relationships (“hence”, “because”, “due to”, “as”, “whereas”, “therefore”) were used in the articles’ headlines. Our data showed that the causality relationship was expressed inside the considered headlines for 42 times (3%). As Gee had pointed out (1999: 133) we can assume that the rather small frequency of the use of these linkers in the total sample could indicate a more syntactic method of composing the press materials. It can be assumed, as such, that the causality relationships were not emphasized out of all the components that compose them in the headlines we have included in the sample (See in this respect Table 3 below).

Table 3. *The frequency of the use of the linkers denoting causality relationships in the articles’ headlines*

	Frequency (N)	Percentage (%)
Due to	17	1.3
As	6	0.3
Whereas	2	0.1
Therefore	17	1.3

As regards the analysis of the words designating the quoting of the sources (“to state” / “states” / “statements”; “to assume” / “assumes” / “assumptions”; “to say” / “says”), our data indicated that they were used only in three cases (each of them once) throughout the entire sample of headlines (See Table 4 in this respect).

Table 4. Words (verbs and nouns) indicating *the reconstruction of the social identities by “framing” the subordinated discourses within the articles’ headlines*

	Frequency (N)	Percentage (%)
“To state” / “states” / “it is stated” / “statements”	1	0.05
“To assume” / “assumes” / “assumptions”	1	0.05
“To say” / “to be said”	1	0.05

If we consider the perspective adopted by Cohen (1972) on the “primary defining terms” for a reconstructed situation through printed media products we can notice their minimal use in the entire period of time with reference both to refugees and migrants.

We are, as such, dealing with a composition type for the articles’ and news’ headlines which seemed to be more interested in marking out the existing narrative connections inside the general topic of the article to the detriment of a more formal, normative one. The headlines had put a minimal emphasis on the “logical” relationships between the acts and the events covered within the articles and news.

5. Conclusions

Media framing of refugees has been explored with relation to numerous refugees' and migrants' situations in various countries, but the results of these studies have been mostly negative. In many cases, the word choice and coverage of refugees in news media portrays refugees as criminals (Leudar, Hayes, Nekvapil and Baker, 2008: 195; Bradimore and Bauder, 2011: 647; Greenberg and Hier, 2001: 571; Steimel, 2009: 58). Refugees and asylum seekers are frequently portrayed through hostility themes, described as potential lawbreakers, bad parents, and a "scrounge" on the host community (Leudar, Hayes, Nekvapil and Baker, 2008: 195). Often, the media in the host community reflects concerns about the economic and health risk posed by accepting refugees and migrants, due to the possibility of demands for long-term welfare and health care from an already overburdened state (Greenberg and Hier, 2001: 571).

Coming back to the question we have been aiming to answer in the present article ("What were the syntactic methods used in the online Romanian media articles' headlines to frame the refugees and migrants in 2015 and 2016 ?") we can summarise our findings as such: It is obvious that the journalistic routine procedures were influenced not only by the topic in itself (the issue of the refugees and migrants in the European Union) but especially by its preeminence in a given period.

The headlines of the articles from the analyzed period purposefully used a vocabulary focusing on key-words; also, we registered a reduced variety of the vocabulary used in their construction.

Moreover, we can say that the appeal to "sources" as a typically journalistic procedure was very specific. Thus, the articles included in our sample appealed less to "primary defining terms for the situation", being thus less normative in approaching the topic of interest.

The headlines we have analysed paid little attention to the logical structure of the causal trajectory in explaining the social fact covered in relation to migrants and refugees.

Meanwhile, our analysis has several limitations, the most important one being the fact that we have focused our inquiry only on headlines and not on the entire media material available for the period June 2015- October 2016. In a subsequent stage of the analysis it remains to be seen if the construction of the migrants and refugees as actors had conferred to them *a priori* a position of passive subordination as compared to other actors.

In our opinion, the concepts analysed within the presentation are topical and relevant as the European Union continues to address the humanitarian crisis they are faced with, and can help to provide future guidance to the news media faced with covering such a crisis.

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