7 Conflict and categorisation

A corpus and discourse study of naming participants in forced migration

Charlotte Taylor

7.1 Introduction

This chapter contributes to the discussion of “Text in conflict” by discussing rhetorical strategies employed in naming people involved in forced migration and by investigating naming preferences in the British newspaper The Times over 200 years. The chapter aims to show how naming choices produce ideation, which then perpetuates the particular conflict situation, and how casting light on naming choices and de-naturalising them may hold potential benefits for tackling conflict in the area of anti-migration discourse.

Conflict is present in this study in a number of guises given the focus on participants in forced migration. First, the people involved in migration processes are frequently moving due to physical threat of conflict in the area that they have left. Second, in many countries across Europe (and beyond), people who move across national borders are increasingly becoming the target of conflict in that moment of transition. In particular, they have become the focus of a right-wing populism, which manifests itself in nationalistic and xenophobic beliefs and rhetoric (see Wodak et al., 2013). Third, and of particular relevance from the linguistic perspective, the names that are given to these people, as a result of the second conflict, are themselves the subject of a discursive struggle.

To take an example of the latter, when the Al Jazeera news network changed its style guide to note that “migrant” would not be used when “refugee” was applicable (Malone, 2015), its decision became an important news story in its own right, prompting multiple opinion pieces in other news media both aligning with and attacking Al Jazeera’s stance. Thus, the naming itself became a controversial and newsworthy topic. This controversy was reflected in the comments below the article on the Al Jazeera website in which, as illustrated in Table 7.1, readers made multiple references to the right word or term and commented on what to call people who are forced to move. Often these moves involved offering alternative terms to those discussed in the original article (“refugee” and “migrant”), ranging from sympathetic (“victim”) to derogatory (“animals”, “terrorists”, “infestation”, “invaders”).

What this shows is that conflict about naming is not a merely “academic” practice, or the product of so-called “political correctness”, but a negotiation which takes place continuously, and sometimes aggressively, in everyday life.
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7.2 Categorisation

In this section, I address why names matter and how the kinds of categorisation that are inherent in naming choices reflect and encourage conflict.

7.2.1 Framework for addressing conflict

The framework used in this study combines corpus linguistics and (critical) discourse studies (Baker, 2006; Mautner, 2016; Partington et al., 2013). From the corpus linguistic side, we gain the ability to examine large numbers of texts and, in so doing, to develop a different perspective on the data. As Fairclough (1989, p.54) observes regarding the exertion of power by the media, “A single text on its own is quite insignificant: the effects of media power are cumulative, working through the repetition of particular ways of handling causality and agency, particular ways of positioning the reader, and so forth”. What corpus linguistics can offer is a way of tracking this cumulative nature and this is particularly relevant in the analysis of collocation. Collocation is a fundamental notion within corpus linguistics, and the underlying concept is perhaps best summed up by Firth (1957, p.11), who famously stated that “you shall judge a word by the company it keeps”. The Firth quote is important because it sums up not just how we understand collocation (the relationship between words), but why we are interested in collocation: knowing which words tend to go together can tell us more about the contextual meanings (including evaluative potential) of the lexical item we are particularly interested in. In this case study, this involves the kinds of associations that swirl around the different choices available for naming people who are forced to move across borders.

The (critical) discourse studies perspective, the other half of a corpus and discourse study, offers both a theoretical and methodological contribution to the framework. One of the goals underpinning critical discourse studies (CDS) is to deconstruct and denaturalise hegemonic discourses so that they can be seen as viewpoints and ways of interpreting/representing a reality, rather than simply “common sense”. When we name groups of people, we are not applying a label to a pre-existing group but are actually creating groups based on our interpretations of what holds them together or sets them apart from others. The non-naturalness of names is a logical consequence of conceptualising discourse as founded on choice.
This foundation has underpinned work in the area from the beginnings of critical linguistics, as in Fowler’s (1991, p.4) claim that “there are always different ways of saying the same thing, and they are not accidental alternatives. Differences in expression carry ideological distinction (and thus differences in representation)”. Thus, in the following section, I explore why naming choices matter, with particular reference to naming people who move.

7.2.2 Why do names matter?

Tajfel and Turner (1979) propose a three-part description of how we construct our social identities. In the first stage, “social categorisation”, we identify (construct) categories of people. The second stage involves “social identification”, in which we position ourselves within a category. The third stage involves “social comparison”, in which we start to compare our group (the “us” group or in-group) with other groups; as part of the identification process, these comparisons are often unfavourable to other groups (the “them” groups, or outgroups). In part, this model helps to conceptualise why it is that the creation of groups – the process of categorisation – is so closely interwoven with conflict. The importance of naming choices is addressed in Mautner (2016, p.156), whose corpus analysis of the labels “unemployed” and “hard-working” illustrates that “the way labels […] are used reflects social attitudes, perspectives and categorisations. And the labels, in turn, shape the way in which social structures and relationships are perceived”. Thus, the principal reason why names matter is that they fulfil the central role of discourse in both reflecting and shaping perceptions of social realities.

Using the corpus and discourse framework taken in this chapter, we can consider how this assertion about the dialectical nature of naming has been addressed through both the components of (critical) discourse studies and corpus linguistics. Starting with the former, social categorisation is the area that has greatly attracted attention. Although foremost in discursive psychology (e.g. Potter, 1996), this can be traced back to Bordieu’s (1991, p.223) claim that “The act of categorisation […] exercises by itself a certain power” and, from critical linguistics, Fowler’s (1991, p.94) interpretation of groups as socially constructed phenomena. Fowler (1996, p.4) claims that:

Critical linguistics insists that all representation is mediated […] it challenges common sense by pointing out that something could have been represented some other way, with a very different significance. This is not, in fact, simply a question of ‘distortion’ or ‘bias’: there is not necessarily any true reality that can be unveiled by critical practice, there are simply relatively varying representations.

In van Leeuwen’s subsequent work on social actors, participants and how they are named becomes a central focus of the analysis of representation. In the case of the naming choices analysed in this chapter, they are instances of “categorisation”. As van Leeuwen (2008, p.40) explains, “Social actors can be represented either in terms of their unique identity, by being nominated, or in terms of identities and functions they share with others (categorisation), and it is, again, always of interest to investigate which social actors are, in a given discourse, categorised and which nominated”. More specifically, the naming choices examined here are instances that straddle an interesting divide in types of categorisation: functionalisation and identification. According to van Leeuwen (2008, p.42), “Functionalisation occurs when social actors are referred to in terms of an activity, in terms of something they do” and “Identification occurs when social actors are defined, not in terms of what they do, but
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in terms of what they, more or less permanently, or unavoidably, are”. However, crucially, van Leeuwen (2008, p.42) goes on to note that “classification categories are historically and culturally variable. What in one period or culture is represented as ‘doing’; as a more or less impermanent role, may in another be represented as ‘being’; as a more or less fixed identity”. And indeed, this is what occurs with labels associated with migration; in some cases, these refer to temporary states, to things people do; in others, the label is applied to the group permanently.1 So, “immigrant” might refer either to someone who has recently completed an act of immigration or to an individual within society who is permanently marked as “other” to a native population.

With reference to corpus linguistics, the interest in collocation, the kinds of words that go together, has led to a highly specific focus on connotation, which helps to provide evidence of the extent to which meaning is not simply referential and denotational and to show that the alternative choices available will carry alternative sets of associations and evaluations. Key concepts in this area are “semantic preference” and “discourse prosody”.2 Semantic preference is understood as the tendency for a lexical item to collocate with semantically related words (Stubbs, 2001). For instance, Baker (2006) notes that “refugee” has a semantic preference for quantification in the British press as it is often pre-modified by numbers (e.g. “thousands of refugees”). Discourse prosody is a closely related concept that refers to patterns “found between a word, phrase or lemma and a set of related words that suggest a discourse” and which “focuses on the relationship of a word to speakers and hearers” (Baker, 2006, p.87). For example, Baker et al. (2013) found two discourse prosodies or patterns of use surrounding “Muslim community” in the British press. In the first, it co-occurs with negative emotion words such as “antagonise”, “offensive”, “upset”, “uproar”, “resentment” and “anger”, and constructs the Muslim community as “having the potential to be offended” (Baker et al., 2014, p.126). In the second, the Muslim community are presented as “separate from the rest of Britain”. This is referred to via phrases such as “non-assimilation”, “driving a wedge”, “too little understanding” and “simmering conflict” (Baker et al., 2014, p.127). As Mautner (2016, p.161) summarises, “Taken together, then, semantic preference and discourse prosody show us what kinds of social issues a particular lexical item is bound up in, and what attitudes are commonly associated with it. Importantly, collocational patterns are not merely instantiated in text, but also cling to the lexical items themselves”. This last point is important in understanding how conflict may be engendered in the media, the topic of this chapter. Collocations, and thus the evaluations that surround lexical items, are register-specific, and so what is found in one set of similar texts may not necessarily hold for another – this is, after all, how communities show their shared understandings. If a particular media source uses certain lexical items with a consistent set of collocates and thus connotations, then for their audiences those associations will “cling” to the lexical items even when they are encountered in texts elsewhere. This is the means by which so-called “dog-whistle politics” works – a speaker may use words whose meanings are seemingly neutral, yet which communicate a negative message to a target community (see, for instance, Coffin and O’Halloran, 2006).

7.2.3 Previous research on naming migrants

The importance of naming (van Leuwen, 1996) within the contested area of migration discourses has been highlighted by O’Doherty and Lecouteur (2007, p.10), who follow Potter (1996) in assuming that “every description is a construct and constitutes an action that can be ascertained only by investigating the context in which the description occurs” and,
Furthermore, that “In light of this, one might also expect that racist practices and discourse may be more easily masked and justified through the use of categorisations”. Thus, when addressing the issues occasioned by language choice, it is not only key to challenge the labels, but also to interrogate the categories that have been brought into being by the naming choice. From a corpus and discourse perspective, the most influential study in this area is the Lancaster group’s ESRC-funded work on refugees, asylum seekers, immigrants and migrants (RASIM – see, for example, Baker at al., 2008; Gabrielatos and Baker, 2008). As it is beyond the scope of this chapter to provide a comprehensive overview of all such research, below, I briefly summarise the principle rhetorical and persuasive patterns that have been identified in how migrants are named in public discourse. These include the avoidance of legitimising terms, the construction of polarisation and blurring of categories.

The first strategy noted is the avoidance of legitimising terms where they could be used. In many ways, this is what the Al Jazeera decision, discussed previously, was concerned with. Using “migrant” where the term “refugee” was applicable meant that the people being described were being denied a label that denotes their legal status. Under the 1951 Refugee Convention (UN General Assembly), a “refugee”, who is accorded rights by the convention, is defined as someone who “owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality, and is unable to, or owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country”.

Research has shown how this avoidance occurs and indeed is deliberately implemented. In the Australian context, Rowe and O’Brien (2014) show how a political leader (Abbott) avoids legitimising terms such as “refugee” in favour of “boat people”, and Hodge (2015, p.125) describes how an Australian Immigration minister “instructed departmental and detention centre staff to refer publicly to asylum seekers as ‘illegal arrivals’ or ‘illegal maritime arrivals’”. The avoidance of terms that legitimate the presence of migrants has also been noted as a recurrent feature of media reporting elsewhere. For instance, Taylor (2014) reports that where “refugee” is used in the UK press it very rarely refers to those people with refugee status in the UK, instead describing displaced people in other parts of the world, such as Sri Lanka. In other words, alternative, less legitimating terms (such as “immigrant”) are used for refugees in the UK itself. Goodman et al. (2017) also investigate the UK press and show how the description of the humanitarian crisis in Mediterranean countries was briefly affected by the publication of a shocking photo of a drowned baby. In the immediate aftermath, the papers moved to prefer the naming choice “refugee”, acknowledging the suffering and rights of the people involved, before moving back to the label “migrant”, which obscures those rights.

The second strategy that has been noted across different contexts of migration discourses is that of creating binary opposition through naming choices. Pickering (2001) highlights the binary nature of naming choices with the use of pre-modifiers such as “genuine” versus “non-genuine” and “legal” versus “illegal”. This also extends to terms such as those discussed above, where “refugees” are opposed to “migrants”. This creation of (false) binary opposites is a rhetorically efficient move because, by dividing the group, one portion can be dismissed as “undeserving”, and the speaker may even be able to position themselves as protecting the “deserving” group by enacting harsh policies against the “undeserving” group (see also Van Dijk, 1997).

This is demonstrated by Rowe and O’Brien (2014), who found that “genuine” and “illegal” groups of migrants were constructed in parliamentary discourse. This binary and oppositional language is not a simple reflection of real-world facts. As Rowe and
O’Brien (2014, p.179) note, “Despite it not being illegal to arrive in Australia without a valid visa and subsequently apply for asylum (Pedersen et al., 2006), IMAs [Irregular Maritime Arrivals] were continuously depicted as ‘illegal’ in the parliamentary debates in 2011”.

Similarly, in Lynn and Lea’s (2003) investigation of readers’ letters in British newspapers regarding asylum seekers, one of the principal strategies identified regarded “differentiation of the other” with references to “bogus” and “genuine” applicants. They liken this to the well-known “I’m not racist, but …” strategy as speakers are able to show themselves as aligning with one part of the group while attacking the other component. A key part of this division is also that of ratio between the two parts; in most cases, the rhetorical device assumes that the “deserving” component is much smaller than the “undeserving”.

Moreover, as Goodman and Speer (2007) show, this may then allow the speaker to argue that the whole group should be treated with suspicion so the “deserving” can be carefully distinguished from the “undeserving” (see the conflation strategy discussed below). An instance of this rhetoric would be a claim that all people arriving through non-regular routes should be detained to discourage and identify those who are “undeserving” – or indeed the creation of a “hostile environment” that will affect everyone.

The strategy of polarisation is also frequently linked to the previous one insofar as the polarisation or creation of a binary opposition relies on one label acknowledging rights while the other does not (e.g. the recent pair of “refugees” vs “economic migrants”). Furthermore, we should note that these divisions into binary groups are by no means “natural”. Alternatives are always available. For instance, as Goodman and Speer (2007, p.180) point out:

Other ways of categorising asylum seekers could be in terms of those who have fled a country in which the British army is involved and those who have not, or in terms of those who have come from ex-British colonies and those who have not. Each of these classifications would paint a very different picture of what an asylum seeker is; in particular, they would focus on the factors causing asylum seekers to leave a country, and not on the legitimacy of their claim to be here.

Alongside this creation of opposition in the choice of names for describing people who move, a blurring of the terms has been observed. Again, this is illustrated by the Al Jazeera decision. One of the reasons why “migrant” is a rhetorically useful naming choice for those constructing arguments against migration is that it blurs different groups of people and yet the speaker can claim to be innocently using it as an umbrella term. Where binary oppositions are created it is often the case that the term used for the “deserving” group is more specific than the “undeserving” (e.g. “refugee” vs “migrant”); having constructed an opposition, the speakers may then re-assign the “deserving” back into the vaguer negatively connoted term.

Goodman and Speer (2007) present a comprehensive overview of the strategies discussed here with reference to British media discourse. They show how “the categories ‘asylum seeker’ and ‘immigrant’ are conflated so that asylum seekers come to be presented as economic or illegal immigrants” (Goodman and Speer, 2007, p.176). O’Doherty and Lecouteur (2007, p.10) also identify this strategy in their study of discourses around migrants in Australia, concluding that:

It is to be expected that as different categorisations such as “illegal immigrants”, “detainees”, and “boat people” are used in apparently interchangeable ways over
time, an increased blurring may occur between such terms. This cumulative blurring between categorisations could be viewed as constituting the formation of an additional large, vague, and unnamed categorisation, encompassing all associated smaller category labels.

If the coexistence of these polarisation strategies (usually denying legitimacy of claims) and blurring of categories seems illogical, it is. The rhetorical devices aim to be convincing, not logically lucid. This is why a linguistic analysis can also help deconstruct the creation of conflict in these discourses of migration. First, we can draw out the ways in which these othering strategies create conflict. Second, we can deconstruct the rhetoric by bringing out the inadequacies of logic, rather than solely addressing the content to which there may be more resistance (see also Faloppa, 2016).

7.3 Methodology

The methodology used in this chapter combines tools from corpus linguistics and (critical) discourse studies. This combination of large-scale corpus analyses with detailed discourse analysis (e.g. Baker, 2006; Baker et al., 2008; Partington et al., 2013) is a well-established approach and has been particularly well-used in the investigations of discourses in the media. However, it is only in recent times, largely thanks to the construction and availability of new corpora, that historical investigations have become increasingly possible. As such, the research in this chapter follows the work of McEnery and Baker (2017), who set out a frame for historical investigations of naming choices in their study of the language surrounding prostitution in the 17th century. The integration of historical data to the investigation of discourse is particularly important if we again consider the cumulative nature of meaning – if meaning is language in use, then we need a long view to see the emergence of particular discourses (and the suppression of alternatives). Moreover, and of particular interest to the discussions of conflict in this volume, I see the analysis of historical data as a potential means of subversion. First, because it allows us to move away from a simplistic assumption that frequency of mentions are driven by real-world events alone: by showing how shifts in frequency of mentions of migrants in the press do/do not match up with frequency of actual movement, we can investigate what really constructs the newsworthiness of particular groups. Second, we can compare the actual contemporary representations with the present-day shared recollections of how particular groups were treated (see, for instance, Kushner [2006] on how Jewish migrants were talked about at the time of arrival in the 1940s and now).

One of the key contributions of a corpus and discourse approach is that it can tell us about actual language use. To take an example relating to the topic of this chapter, if we look at the terms “immigrant” and “emigrant” in the Oxford English Dictionary, we find that “immigrant”, with the meaning “One who or that which immigrates; a person who migrates into a country as a settler” was first recorded in 1787, and “emigrant”, with the meaning “One who removes from his own land to settle (permanently) in another” was first recorded in 1754. Thus, it would appear that terms emerge contemporaneously in the mid-late 18th century and this would seem to support a common-sense view that they are simply a relational pair of antonyms indicating the movement of the people as seen from the same deictic centre (“emigrants” move away from here, “immigrants” move towards here). However, if we look at the actual use, even at simply the level of frequency, a rather different view appears. Figure 7.1 displays the frequency of the related nouns “immigration” and “emigration” in the UK-based The Times newspaper over the time period 1785 to 2005.
From this, we can see that what is clouded in the OED information is actual usage. The reference to movements in the nouns “immigration” and “emigration” show that although they entered the language at a similar point in time, the uptake was in no way equal. “Emigration”, in the newspaper data, is largely a 19th-century term while, in direct contrast, “immigration” belongs firmly to the 20th century.

The corpus used in this study, Times Online, was created at the University of Lancaster, using the OCR (optical character recognition) files made available by the British Library. The corpus covers the period 1785 to 2011 and the current size is c. 10.5 billion words. It was analysed through Lancaster’s CQPWeb interface (Hardie, 2012).³

7.4 Naming choices

In the discussion of the case study, I present a range of names that are found to be used for people who have been forced to move in the The Times over the period from 1800 to 2000 (these were identified manually in a previous stage which looked at a large number of possible terms identified from previous studies and the collocation analysis of verbs relating to human movement, and then checked in the corpus to see which were actually used). The names identified encompass a range of naming sub-categories such as “refugee”, which refers to forced migration across the entire period, and “émigré”, “boat people” and “evacuee”, which underwent a short period of semantic broadening before contracting to a historical reference, as well as names that appear only in specific periods, such as “asylum seeker”; and names that are used across the period but not consistently to refer to forced migration, such as “emigrant”.

7.4.1 Overview of naming choices

As Figure 7.2 shows, there has been considerable movement in the choice of terms for describing migration over the period. The increase over time is noticeable, and this is likely to be influenced by both textual (the size of the newspaper has increased in recent times) and contextual factors (rates of immigration/emigration), in addition to cultural and political
shifts that dictate the newsworthiness of migration. In the following subsections, I investigate how these terms are used and who they refer to in the different time periods.

### 7.4.2 Stasis and shifts in meaning

Two terms that occur across the entire time period, although both showing a decline in the most recent time period, are “refugees” and “emigrants”, as isolated in Figure 7.3.

While “refugees” refers quite consistently to forced migration, the term ‘emigrants’ has undergone a process of semantic change, and indeed readers might be surprised to see it in

![Figure 7.2 Raw frequency of migration-related terms in The Times, 1800–2000](image)

![Figure 7.3 Raw frequency of “emigrants” and “refugees” over time](image)
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Table 7.2 Collocates of “emigrants” in *The Times*, 1800–2000

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>French</th>
<th>Lift</th>
<th>The</th>
<th>Of</th>
<th>France</th>
<th>returned</th>
<th>Are</th>
<th>country</th>
<th>return</th>
<th>To</th>
<th>from</th>
<th>All</th>
<th>That</th>
<th>Were</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1800</td>
<td>Intending</td>
<td>Carry</td>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>To</td>
<td>Number</td>
<td>vessels</td>
<td>The</td>
<td>Of</td>
<td>The</td>
<td>Out</td>
<td>sailed</td>
<td>sent</td>
<td>Irish</td>
<td>who</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1850</td>
<td>Intending</td>
<td>Young</td>
<td>Canada</td>
<td>From</td>
<td>out-patients</td>
<td>Attending</td>
<td>Of</td>
<td>Of</td>
<td>British</td>
<td>For</td>
<td>Hospitals</td>
<td>From</td>
<td>Out</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1900</td>
<td>AUSTRALIA</td>
<td>To</td>
<td>CANADA</td>
<td>FROM</td>
<td>intending</td>
<td>countries</td>
<td>FLOW</td>
<td>REMITTANCES</td>
<td>Fares</td>
<td>to</td>
<td>FARES</td>
<td>JEWISH</td>
<td>British</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1950</td>
<td>Slawomir</td>
<td>Irish</td>
<td>the</td>
<td>of</td>
<td>revealing</td>
<td>Zealand</td>
<td>America</td>
<td>play</td>
<td>Russian</td>
<td>Italian</td>
<td>nation</td>
<td>British</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>Irish</td>
<td>the</td>
<td>the</td>
<td>of</td>
<td>revealing</td>
<td>Zealand</td>
<td>America</td>
<td>play</td>
<td>Russian</td>
<td>Italian</td>
<td>nation</td>
<td>British</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

a discussion of forced migration. As mentioned above, “emigrant” may be considered the counterpart to “immigrant”, with both indicating movement as seen from the perspective of the speaker (towards and away from). However, even a relatively brief overview of the collocates of “emigrants”, as displayed in Table 7.2, shows that the meaning is more complex (items for further discussion are marked in bold). All collocates in this chapter are calculated using log likelihood and a 5 left/right span (minimum frequency of 5). Where space is limited, only the strongest are presented.

Regarding nationalities, we see that “British” only emerges as a salient collocate from 1900. Prior to that, the nationality collocates are “France”, “French” and then “Irish” and “Australia”. While it could be argued that the latter pair does relate to the deictic centre of the newspaper, as these two countries were held in a colonial relationship with Britain, this is more difficult to argue for “France” and “French”. Here two things seem to be occurring. First, news reporting at that time reflected the point of view of the person sending the news report. Second, the use of the term “emigrants” at that time indicates an affective deixis; the speaker sees the French emigrants as close to their cultural centre.

In the later time periods, collocates relating to nationality and religion such as “Irish” and “Jewish” indicate how the sympathetic term, “emigrant”, has become historicised. The migrants described are not primarily contemporary emigrants, but those who moved in the past, as illustrated in Table 7.3.

Table 7.3 Sample co-occurrences of “Irish” and “emigrants” with time references (from *The Times*, 2000–2009)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Time Reference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>carried</td>
<td>destitute Irish emigrants to North America during the potato famine in 1848</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Irish, Scottish and English mines the careers of Irish emigrants at the beginning of the 20th century</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Irish, that middle-class Irish emigrants during the reign of Queen Victoria had on Victorian London.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>impact of middle-class Irish emigrants on 19th-century British culture.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The third point to note is the presence of “sent” in collocates from the three earlier periods. The examples show how these items point towards the use of “emigrant” as a term for forced migration in these time periods:

7.1. “This Institution has sent out as emigrants, or otherwise provided for 361 criminals” *(The Times* 1858)

7.2. “The whole number of orphan emigrants sent out in the course of the year was 1,600” *(The Times* 1858)

7.3. “The proper selection of emigrants […] they should be entirely free from any mental of bodily defect likely to impair their usefulness as settlers” *(The Times* 1850).

Indeed, what emerges from this early period is a use of “emigrant” describing those moving away from the UK, which echoes the contemporary discourses of immigration in the UK. For instance, in Example 7.4 we see the economic resource frame:

7.4. “At the same time, the efforts making to provide an efficient amount of emigrants for the Australian colonies give unqualified satisfaction” *(The Times* 1852).

From this brief investigation moving from collocates into concordance lines, we see that “emigrant” shifts in meaning over time and needs to be included in the discussion of labels for forced migration with reference to those early periods. Furthermore, the term is not consistently used to indicate an “us” group in either geographical or affective/evaluative senses.

One way in which this kind of finding can be used in challenging contemporary xenophobia (an area of conflict) is by showing how terms change their connotations and thus do not carry “natural”, unvarying meanings. Furthermore, showing how British “emigrants” were involved in forced migration may allow us to establish connections between the “us” and “them” groups of resident populations and newcomers in the UK.

7.4.4 Avoidance of semantic broadening for sympathetic terms

One of the most salient patterns noticed in the historical newspaper data concerns the way in which certain naming choices, such as “émigré”, “boat people” and “evacuee”, are tied to particular time periods in terms of both frequency and meaning. For reasons of space, here I focus on the latter two terms. Both of these indicate people involved in forced migration and therefore, in theory, should be available for use from the time they enter the language to the present day. However, as Figure 7.4 shows, this is not what occurs; in both cases, there is a sharp peak that steadily falls away.

In order to find out why this occurs, we have to go below the level of frequency. Once again, the first step here is the investigation of collocates. Table 7.4 shows the strongest collocates of “evacuees” in the period 1940 to 2000.

One constant across the collocates is the focus on child participants (underlined in the collocates). We can imagine how this close association with young people is likely to indicate that this is a sympathetic term for forced migrants. From 1970 onwards, we notice the presence of items such as “war” and “wartime” (in bold). Examination of the concordance lines shows that these do not refer to contemporary wars leading to forced migration but refer more specifically to the Second World War (1940s). In this context, the evacuees are usually children who were moved from urban centres in the UK to supposedly safer, often more rural, locations. Alongside this, the collocate “are” from the early decades drops
away while “were” continues into the later time periods (both in bold), again indicating that “evacuees” is used in connection with historical events. Rather like the use of “emigrants” with “Jewish” in contemporary data, what we have is a pattern of historicising the naming choice. “Evacuees” has increasingly become tied not just to temporary forced migration, particularly of children, but more specifically of British children during the Second World War (hence the use of “surviving”, too, in the 2000s collocates).

We can test the specificity of this label by examining which nationalities other than “British” collocate with “evacuees”. Two instances are “Chernobyl” and “Bosnia”, used in 1980 and 1990 respectively. These indicate the potential for the term to be opened up to describe other groups. However, in 2000, the only geographical items refer to the US
(“Houston”, “Hurricane Nina”), and, interestingly, closer examination shows the terms here did not predominately refer to children, again suggesting the potential for application to a wider set of forced migrants. This indicates that in contemporary usage, when there is a subsequent semantic broadening of the term away from the specific group of British children in Second World War, it refers to a group close to the “us” group of the speaker (the affective deictic centre); in this case, the US. In this regard, we might note the absence of countries such as Afghanistan or Iraq – areas where we know there has been large scale forced migration which was intended to be temporary – in the more recent time period.

Moving on to the naming choice “boat people”, there is a similar pattern of the term emerging at a defined moment in time and then dropping away, as seen in Figure 7.4. If we examine the collocates, as shown in Table 7.5, it is clear that the term is strongly associated with a specific event, that of the forced migration of people from Vietnam following the Vietnam War in the 1970s (in bold in the table). Once again, we have a sympathetic term (see collocates like “plight”) that has become historicised. The dominant collocates even in the more recent period refer back to a past event.

In the 1990s collocates, there is evidence for some semantic broadening of the term to describe other groups of forced migrants who, as a result of conflict, have to migrate across sea (“Cuban” and “Haitian”, underlined in the table). This would indicate that a once-sympathetic term can be extended to participants other than those originally described (although it is noticeable that these are still not people moving to the UK).

This broadening initially appears to continue into the 2000s collocates with “Afghan”, but closer inspection, as shown in Table 7.6, demonstrates that actually, this occurred only in a short space of time between August and November of 2001.

Thus, in effect, the collocates show that the scope of “boat people” seems to contract back down to the historical referent in the last dataset. An important exception to this is indicated by the collocate “Australia”. In contrast to the UK, the term “boat people” has

| Table 7.5 Collocates of “boat people”, 1970–2000 |
|---|---|---|---|
| Vietnamese | Vietnamese | Vietnamese | Vietnamese |
| refugees | are | are | are |
| MORE | Hong | Kong | repatriation |
| that | repatriation | Vietnam | camps |
| camps | refugees | Hanoi | influx |
| refuge | plight | Cuba | detention |
| return | refugee | who | arriving |
| repatriate | repatriate | return | back |
| | | | |

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gone through semantic broadening in the Australian context and is now used pejoratively to refer to forced migrants travelling to Australia (see previous discussion). One possible explanation for the mismatch between the British and Australian usage is that Australia was a destination country for the Vietnamese refugees in the 1970s and they were portrayed unfavourably there in some press discourse at the time. Therefore, the semantic broadening is facilitated because it does not involve a shift in evaluation. For the British press, the reporting of the first group of forced migrants described as “boat people” was sympathetic.

In the UK press data, it is used nearly exclusively in the year 2001 to report on changes in the Australian context, as shown in Example 7.5:

7.5. “Court reverses Australian ban on boat people” (The Times 2001).

The concentration in 2001 is particularly interesting as this indicates that it is after this period that the nascent semantic broadening ceases.

In terms of absence, we might note that collocates in the 2000s do not include terms such as “Mediterranean”, although even at that point there was a pattern of forced migration involving travel by boat to European countries. Thus, it seems that sympathetic terms such as “boat people” and “evacuees” initially show potential for semantic broadening but then become fossilised and the application of them to name contemporary refugees is avoided. In terms of addressing the conflict at the textual level, it may be that showing how these fossilised terms are actually alternatives that could be used can function as a means of raising awareness of the scope for different ways of talking about migration. Furthermore, contrasting past, sympathetic reporting with contemporary critical reporting (even as indicated by the different naming choices) could be a way of opening up discussion about how people are being discursively constructed at the present time, a way of destabilising assumptions of “naturalness”.

### 7.5 Conclusions

In the case study examined here, I believe that it is the historical dimension that holds subversive potential by allowing us to examine, and indeed exhibit, the ways in which the labels or naming choices that are used for migration in our contemporary period are not the only labels available, nor in some way immutable and “natural”. For instance, we have seen how even the term “emigrant” previously referred to forced migrants. To the linguist, the fact of language change is an obvious one, and yet the lay debates around labels for people who have to move rely on a logical base that assumes (or at least asserts) the opposite. Therefore, there is scope for using the illustrations of change as a way to critique the underpinnings of such arguments.
Perhaps one of the roles of the linguist in reducing conflict can be that of critiquing the rhetorical fallacies and flaws inherent in arguments that are not constructed from a logical base. In a way, there are two audiences for such work: the first being those who drive discourses in more overt ways, such as mass media producers, and the second being their consumers (us!). We may want to challenge the first group where we see conflict being created in text and to raise awareness in the second group who may become unconscious reproducers of hostile discourses. Indeed, a key feature of discourse prosody, discussed earlier, is that users of the language often replicate the evaluative environments unconsciously. Raising awareness of language among those who have in a sense “inherited” a hostile discourse may help denaturalise that discourse, while addressing the flawed logic in the assumptions around language use can potentially make such interactions less conflictual, allowing discussions to develop.

Part of our work as linguists interested in conflict in text is destabilising assumptions about language in order to show that names do have “real-world” implications and that they are choices. One stage of this destabilisation might be using public engagement activities to show how apparently straightforward terms, such as “emigrant”, have changed in meaning and to link this to how other terms might have changed too. Understanding that British “emigrants” have not always been affluent people making a choice to move, may also help illustrate the shared ground between historical and contemporary forced migration, perhaps leading to a reduction in polarisation between “us” and “them”, a recurrent source of conflict.

As we have seen, labels used to describe people who move are not static, “factual” assessments, and corpora can provide empirical evidence and thus arguments for this. We have seen how some labels, such as “evacuees” and “boat people”, resist semantic broadening in the newspaper data. These naming choices represent unchosen options in contemporary data. This is salient to discussions around naming choices as it provides a concrete challenge to the assertions of the type “I call them x because they are x” and a response to the question of “What else would I call them?”. If we aim to deescalate conflict, such as the polarised debate around migration, then these kinds of language examples can be employed to raise awareness of the ways in which language use is a choice. The historical data can inform our discussion of contemporary usage and be used in addressing the conflict around and within the discourses.

Notes
1 This has been addressed explicitly in Italy in another instance of public debate about naming choices over the use of *immigrato* (noun formed from past participle, indicating identification) or *immigrante* (noun formed from present participle, indicating functionalisation).
2 There is substantial disagreement over the naming and precise identification of the latter. See also “evaluative prosody”, which focuses more specifically on the favourable/unfavourable attitudinal associations and “semantic prosody”. The terms used here are chosen simply for their higher frequency in discourse literature.
3 I am very grateful to the University of Lancaster-based ESRC Centre for Corpus Approaches to Social Science (CASS) for allowing me access to The Times corpora while I was a visiting researcher there in 2016–2017.
4 At the time of writing, it is not possible to investigate the relative frequency of the terms which would take into account the size of the paper in different time periods.
5 The collocates “Uganda” and “Finnish” do not counter this trend as they are part of proper names. “Egypt” refers to British refugees expelled from Egypt. Similarly, the people moved from “Tristan de Cunha” were considered part of a British “us” group.
6 “Hong Kong” and “Malaysian” refer to the same event as destinations for the migrants.
References


