Corpus-Based Analysis of Ideological Bias

Corpus-Based Analysis of Ideological Bias presents research combining a range of corpus-linguistic techniques which are employed to analyse how migration discourse is (re)constructed in the contemporary British press. Two specialised corpora containing 1,000 news reports, editorials, and opinion pieces from five major national British newspapers were collected and annotated for this research. The event separating these two corpora is the 2016 referendum on Britain's membership of the European Union (EU). In its analysis, this book:

- employs both quantitative and qualitative analytical methods, with four case studies offering a broad perspective on how the topical socio-political issues of migration and asylum seeking are represented by left- and right-wing British newspapers;
- explores how newspapers reveal their political orientation and promote their political agenda by employing specific linguistic patterns and discursive strategies – in this case, in the representation of the key social actors within migration discourse;
- provides case studies that place a particular focus on the discourses surrounding European migrants and migration within the EU, which proved to be a very popular topic in the British press both before and after the 2016 EU membership referendum; and
- offers a comparative corpus analysis that seeks to ascertain whether media discourse regarding EU migration has changed in the wake of the referendum.

This book is a useful source not only for students of English, linguistics, and media studies but also for researchers in the fields of applied corpus linguistics, critical discourse studies, contemporary media analysis, and metaphor research.

Anna Islentyeva is a research associate and senior lecturer in sociolinguistics in the Department of English Language and Literature at the Freie Universität Berlin, Germany. Her scientific interests include semantics, conceptual metaphor, discourse analysis, and critical discourse studies. Anna is interested in research that places a special emphasis on the social aspects of language and examines ideologically relevant linguistic patterns in different types of discourses. Her current research projects address media discourses surrounding European migration following the EU referendum, as well as representations of Europe and Britain in the British media. Her recent publications include *The Europe of Scary Metaphors* (2019) and *The Undesirable Migrant in the British Press* (2018).

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Corpus-Based Analysis of Ideological Bias

Migration in the British Press

Anna Islentyeva

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Contents

<i>List of figures</i>	viii
<i>List of tables</i>	ix
<i>Acknowledgements</i>	xi
Introduction: language corpora and media discourse on migration	1
<i>The scope of research</i>	1
<i>European migration and asylum seeking: how the problem is constructed in the press</i>	2
<i>Major research goals and research methods</i>	5
<i>Structure of the book</i>	6
1 Ideology in the contemporary media: bias in the British press	10
<i>1.1 Approaches to discourse and key goals in critical discourse analysis</i>	10
<i>1.2 Media discourse as an instrument of power</i>	17
<i>1.3 The British press: political allegiances and ideological interests</i>	20
<i>1.4 Summary: discourse as a form of social practice</i>	26
2 Corpus-based discourse analysis: data collection and corpus construction	29
<i>2.1 Central principles in the study of language</i>	29
<i>2.2 Corpus linguistics as a methodology</i>	32
<i>2.3 Data collection, types of corpora, and newspaper corpora</i>	37
<i>2.4 Corpus linguistics techniques</i>	44
<i>2.5 Advantages of combining critical discourse analysis and corpus linguistics</i>	47

3	Discursive representations of refugees, asylum seekers, immigrants, and migrants (RASIM) prior to the EU referendum	53
3.1	<i>Introducing RASIM in media discourse</i>	53
3.2	<i>Quantitative analysis: frequency analysis and quantification techniques</i>	54
3.3	<i>Collocational analysis and typical contextual domains</i>	59
3.4	<i>Discursive representations of EU migrants in the British press</i>	65
3.5	<i>Asylum seekers and refugees</i>	77
3.6	<i>Summary: ideological differences in the use of RASIM terms</i>	86
4	Discursive representations of migrants after the EU referendum	90
4.1	<i>The EU membership referendum: political and media discourse</i>	90
4.2	<i>Quantitative analysis of the post-referendum corpus: shifting the focus</i>	91
4.3	<i>Collocational analysis and salient contextual domains</i>	96
4.4	<i>Discursive representations of EU migrants in the British press</i>	103
4.5	<i>Summary: the transformation of media discourse surrounding EU migration</i>	112
5	The English garden: a metaphor for English society	115
5.1	<i>The English garden metaphor and English national identity</i>	115
5.2	<i>The Telegraph editorial: the conservative ideal of a hierarchical society</i>	116
5.3	<i>Literary and cultural allusions and visual analysis</i>	124
5.4	<i>The Guardian opinion piece: subverting the English garden metaphor</i>	128
5.5	<i>Summary: the ideological basis of the English garden</i>	132
6	The metaphorical motif of war in the British press	135
6.1	<i>The semantics of war: the core sense of war and its definition</i>	135
6.2	<i>The semantic prosody of war and the construction of the metaphorical motif</i>	141

6.3 <i>The war motif in the British press: a quantitative analysis</i>	145
6.4 <i>Analysis of articles from left-wing newspapers</i>	152
6.5 <i>Analysis of articles from right-wing newspapers</i>	156
6.6 <i>Summary: politics is war</i>	161
Conclusion: principles of cohesion and evaluation in newspaper texts	163
<i>Theoretical and methodological implications</i>	164
<i>Major findings and results of the corpus-based studies</i>	167
<i>Outlook and further research</i>	169
 <i>Appendix</i>	 174
<i>Multi-cultivars</i>	174
<i>A passport to my lovely garden? Dream on, you wretched souls</i>	174
<i>Index</i>	177

Figures

3.1	Distribution of <i>migrant(s)</i> and <i>immigrant(s)</i> in the Pre-Referendum Corpus	56
3.2	Distribution of REFUGEE and ASYLUM SEEKER in the Pre-Referendum Corpus	78
4.1	Distribution of MIGRANT in the Pre- and Post-Referendum Corpora	94
4.2	Distribution of IMMIGRANT in the Pre- and Post-Referendum Corpora	95
4.3	Distribution of REFUGEE in the Pre- and Post-Referendum Corpora	95
5.1	Illustration by David Foldvari from <i>The Guardian</i>	132
6.1	Distribution of the lemmas from the source domain of WAR in the Pre-Referendum Corpus	149

Tables

1.1	Newspaper support for political parties in the UK general elections	21
1.2	Daily circulation figures for British national newspapers in 2013 and 2014	24
1.3	Daily circulation figures for British national newspapers in 2016 and 2018	25
1.4	Average monthly print and digital readership for November 2018 (in 1,000 copies)	26
2.1	Basic types of corpus annotation	35
2.2	Number of text types in each subcorpus of the Pre-Referendum Corpus (2013–2014)	42
2.3	Number of text types in each subcorpus of the Post-Referendum Corpus (2016–2018)	42
2.4	Total number of tokens in each subcorpus	42
2.5	Metadata for the Pre-Referendum Corpus	44
2.6	Metadata for the Post-Referendum Corpus	44
3.1	Raw frequencies of RASIM terms in the Pre-Referendum Corpus (2013–2014)	55
3.2	Normalised frequencies of RASIM terms per 10,000 tokens in the Pre-Referendum Corpus	55
3.3	Left-hand collocates attracted to MIGRANT in the Pre-Referendum Corpus	60
3.4	Left-hand collocates attracted to IMMIGRANT in the Pre-Referendum Corpus	62
3.5	Right-hand collocates attracted to MIGRANT in the Pre-Referendum Corpus	63
3.6	Right-hand collocates attracted to IMMIGRANT in the Pre-Referendum Corpus	64
3.7	Corpus-based definitions of <i>immigrant</i> and <i>migrant</i>	66
3.8	KWIC concordance for the construction <i>adjective + EU migrants</i> in the Pre-Referendum Corpus	67
3.9	Most frequent nouns appearing in the construction <i>noun + of MIGRANT</i>	69

3.10	KWIC concordance for the collocation <i>Romanian and/or Bulgarian migrants</i>	70
3.11	Left-hand collocates attracted to REFUGEE in the Pre-Referendum Corpus	79
3.12	Left-hand collocates attracted to ASYLUM SEEKER in the Pre-Referendum Corpus	79
4.1	Raw frequencies of RASIM terms in the Post-Referendum Corpus (2016–2018)	92
4.2	Normalised frequencies of RASIM terms per 10,000 tokens in the Post-Referendum Corpus	92
4.3	Normalised frequencies of RASIM terms per 10,000 tokens in the Pre-Referendum Corpus (2013–2014)	93
4.4	Most frequent left-hand collocates of MIGRANT in the Pre- and Post-Referendum Corpora	97
4.5	Left-hand collocates attracted to MIGRANT in the Post-Referendum Corpus (2016–2018)	98
4.6	Left-hand collocates attracted to MIGRANT in the Pre-Referendum Corpus (2013–2014)	98
4.7	Most frequent left-hand collocates of IMMIGRANT in the Pre- and Post-Referendum Corpora	102
4.8	KWIC concordance for the construction <i>adjective + EU migrants</i> in the Post-Referendum Corpus	104
4.9	Most frequent nouns appearing in the construction <i>(high)-skilled + noun</i> in the Post-Referendum Corpus	106
4.10	Most frequent noun collocates of <i>EU</i> in the Post-Referendum Corpus	107
4.11	Right-hand collocates attracted to <i>EU</i> in the left-wing subcorpus of the Post-Referendum Corpus	108
4.12	Right-hand collocates attracted to <i>EU</i> in the right-wing subcorpus of the Post-Referendum Corpus	108
6.1	Corpus-based definition of the word <i>war</i>	140
6.2	KWIC concordance for the collocation <i>war damage</i> from the BNC (1994)	143
6.3	KWIC concordance for the collocation <i>war damage</i> from the COCA (2008)	143
6.4	Absolute frequencies of the lemmas from the source domain of <i>WAR</i> in the Pre-Referendum Corpus (2013–2014)	149
6.5	Observed and expected frequencies of the <i>WAR</i> metaphor employed by the left- and right-wing press in the Pre-Referendum Corpus (2013–2014)	150

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To my parents

Introduction

Language corpora and media discourse on migration

The scope of research

The study of language use in the news media has come to be of central importance to a broad range of academic disciplines including media and communication studies, political studies, sociology, and linguistics. The increasing relevance of media language analysis can be explained by the omnipresence of the news media. The mass media serves as one of the primary and ostensibly most trustworthy sources of information for the public, even in this era marked by the increasing popularity of social networks. Furthermore, the media acts as a lens that is able to focus on specific issues while defocusing others, thus producing dominant discourses and constructing the identities of different social actors.

In social studies, there is an increasing demand for applied research that requires more empirically oriented discourse-analytical studies. This book represents a corpus-based linguistic analysis of the modern migration discourse produced by the British national press. The analysis combines methods developed in cognitive linguistics, specifically Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT) with Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). Each of these approaches offers a diverse set of tools for analysing the evaluative nature of meaning in newspaper texts; in combination, they provide a solid framework for interpreting ideological bias on both a structural and semantic level.

In contemporary linguistics, it is sometimes assumed that discourse-analytical methods are incompatible with corpus linguistics – the former applied to the study of individual texts (Lee 2008) and employed in the critical investigation of socio-political themes, and the latter chiefly focuses on the study of large bodies of electronically stored texts and is designed to facilitate searches for specific lexical and grammatical patterns (Baker et al. 2008: 273–276). This assumption is rather misleading (cf. Taylor & Marchi 2018); the use of corpora is rapidly becoming an integral part of linguistic analysis. Although the combination of corpus-linguistic methods with CDA is not a new practice, the overall number of such studies is rather low compared to the number of studies in corpus linguistics or CDA alone (Baker et al. 2008: 274). This book focuses on migration – one of the recurrent themes in the contemporary media – and seeks to fill the aforementioned methodological gap by providing a multi-level, corpus-based discourse analysis of 1,000 articles from

2 Introduction

five British national newspapers, thereby revealing how these two approaches to the study of media discourse can be interrelated and combined in various ways.

It should be emphasised that corpus linguistics is seen not as a branch of linguistics, but rather as a set of practices and methods. More broadly speaking, it is an *approach* to the study of language (Lee 2008: 87; McEnery & Hardie 2012: 6, 147), making *corpus-based linguistics* a more accurate term to use. Linguists who use corpora are just as interested as other linguists in key aspects of language like semantics, syntax, morphology, and language change (Lee 2008: 87). However, corpus linguists aim to achieve more *systematic* ways of studying language, one of which involves employing large collections of computerised texts and statistical methods. Indeed, the term *corpus-based approach* is used widely in corpus linguistics. McEnery & Hardie (2012: 6) refer to the differences between *corpus-based* and *corpus-driven* approaches, explaining that corpus-based studies employ corpora to explore a theory or hypothesis, whereas corpus-driven linguistics (Sinclair 1991, 2004; Tognini-Bonelli 2001) uses the corpus itself as the sole source of hypotheses about language. Linguists working within the corpus-based approach define corpus linguistics as a method. The difference between *corpus-based* and *corpus-driven* approaches is discussed in more detail in Section 2.2, and Section 2.5 introduces some other methodologies that combine discourse analysis and corpora.

Media discourse on migration is the focus of the research presented in this book. The term *discourse* – as a complex concept – is understood in various ways within the academic cultures of different countries. Generally, a distinction can be drawn between the *theoretical* approach to discourse which originated in France and the tradition of *empirically oriented* discourse research that was developed in the UK and the USA (Angermüller et al. 2014: 2). Chapter 1 will elaborate on a number of approaches to discourse analysis and outline the key objectives of CDA.

It is widely acknowledged that the contemporary mass media is central to the construction of discourses and the promotion of ideologies and value systems. The media is able to focus on particular issues while recontextualising others. The general public uses this mediated information as a source of knowledge about world events, and the mass media plays a pivotal role in terms of shaping public opinion. As a rule, the public does not always have direct access to primary texts such as governmental or parliamentary reports. Consequently, most primary texts and the values they promote are mediated via secondary sources such as news reports, editorials, opinion pieces, and other forms of media. Secondary texts act as a lens through which primary texts are reified, but may also be recontextualised (Koller 2004: 45). The central research question of this book involves how newspapers with specific political orientations apply various linguistic patterns and structures in their reporting in order to promote their political agendas.

European migration and asylum seeking: how the problem is constructed in the press

Immigration is a highly topical socio-political issue and the major theme that unites the 1,000 newspaper articles that were collected and annotated for this research.

These articles make up two newspaper corpora: one that contains 500 articles from the years 2013 to 2014, and another that contains 500 articles from the years 2016 to 2018. The event separating these two corpora is the referendum on British membership of the European Union (EU), held in the UK on 23 June 2016. Throughout this book, these two collections of newspaper articles will be referred to as the Pre-Referendum Corpus and the Post-Referendum Corpus, respectively.

Immigration and asylum seeking are among the most topical issues discussed in the British media, and, as such, attract a great deal of public attention in contemporary Britain. Hart (2010: xii; emphasis added) notes: “Immigration remains a *contentious* issue in the UK and one which is largely *fuelled* by the media”. Between 2005 and 2020, a number of bills restricting immigration and the right to seek asylum were passed before the UK parliament: The Immigration, Asylum and Nationality Act 2006; UK Borders Act 2007; and the Borders, Citizenship and Immigration Act 2009, among others. Moreover, immigration became one of the central issues in the 2005 general election campaigns of the political right (Charteris-Black 2006), while the 2010 and 2015 election campaigns of both the Conservative and Labour parties were centred around the issue of European migration. This issue was so pivotal, in fact, that the then prime minister and leader of the Conservative Party, David Cameron, made an election promise to hold an EU membership referendum.

Migration within the European Union (EU) and the UK-EU relationship are two topics that have attracted a great deal of public and media attention in Britain in the past 15 years. 2004 saw the most significant expansion of the EU in its history in terms of territory and population, with five Central and Eastern European countries (Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Slovakia, and Slovenia), three Baltic States (Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania) – collectively referred to as A8 countries or the EU8 – and two Mediterranean countries (Malta and Cyprus) joining the Union in that year (cf. Leonard & Taylor 2016). Free movement of people is one of the four freedoms of the EU, along with free movement of goods, services, and capital, and would naturally have applied to these countries, but due to concerns about migration from the newly acceded countries to the older EU states (EU15), some transitional restrictions were put in place for five years until 2011. Romania and Bulgaria joined the EU in 2007 as part of the so-called “Eastern enlargement”. Once again, the UK, along with a number of other EU states, imposed transitional employment restrictions on Romanian and Bulgarian workers – restrictions that were not lifted until 2014. The Pre-Referendum Corpus contains articles that focus on the end of these restrictions on Bulgarians and Romanians in January 2014. The enlargement of the Union and the increased mobility of its citizens within its member states made European migration to Britain one of the most hotly debated issues in the British media.

The mobility of EU citizens within the Union inevitably raised questions not only of *national identity* (Bayley & Williams 2012), but also of *British exceptionalism*, a concept that stands in opposition to the notion of a united Europe. Spiering (2015: 2) describes the UK-EU relationship as a continuously troubled one “marked by party divisions, media hostility, opt-outs and opt-ins, and persistent calls for an

4 Introduction

in-out referendum". This troubled relationship is deeply rooted in a perceived cultural division between two opposing entities. Spiering (2015: 3–5) points out that we are dealing here not with an essential quality of Britishness, but rather with a perception or a *constructed idea* of extra-Europeanness that is not eternal or innate; instead, the relationship is determined by strong cultural notions of differentness. The *Britain versus Europe* dichotomy is additionally complicated by the fact that different nations, the English, the Welsh, the Scottish, and the Irish, inhabit the British Isles, making them a multination state. In a way, Britain can be seen as a cultural unit: the nations that inhabit these isles have a shared history, a shared language, and shared values, but, on the other hand, being English or Scottish is not equivalent to being British. According to Braber's study (2009: 307), some Scottish people, for example Glaswegians, do not feel that "a sense of *Britishness* forms a strong part of their identity as [it] has *English* connotations" (emphasis added). Evidently, national identities are not fixed entities, but are *relational* concepts (Braber 2009: 308). Spiering (2015: 6) also asserts that national identities are relational; in order to define who we are, we need to distinguish ourselves from others. In their quest to forge their own unique identity, the English tend to define themselves against the Scots, the Welsh, and the Irish, and often claim to hold a special position within Britain. Immigrants and other ethnic and religious minorities represent another big out-group, followed by mainland Europeans, who function as "significant others in the English quest for the national self" (Spiering 2015: 6).

The labels *English* and *British* are often used interchangeably (cf. Spiering 2015: 4). In many cases, this is a conscious ideological decision made by an author who does not wish to maintain a clear distinction between the two groups. As mentioned previously, the English often claim to have a special position within Britain, which is why *English* is often used in a broader sense to denote or represent a certain cultural tradition that primarily exists in the form of *the English Language*, *the Queen of England*, *English breakfast tea*, *English weather*, and *the English rose*. In this context, Englishness is the essence of Britishness at the level of stereotypes. The pair *English/British* represents an element of the socio-historical tradition; a dichotomy that will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 5 with an exploration of *the English garden* as a cultural construct and ideological metaphorical motif. Building on questions of national identity and the constructed dichotomy *British versus European*, Chapters 3 and 4 will analyse media representations of Europeans, in particular EU migrants in the UK.

Finally, it was not only EU migration to the UK that gained public and media attention between 2013 and 2018. The growing number of people arriving in the EU from across the Mediterranean Sea raised serious concerns both in Europe and Britain. Ongoing armed conflicts in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Syria; human rights violations; and unstable political climates and social problems, along with environmental issues, have led to the constant movement of people and, as a result, to a growing number of forcibly displaced people, identified as asylum seekers and refugees. Since 2011, the number of asylum seekers and refugees worldwide has increased by 40 per cent. According to the United Nations High Commissioner

for Refugees (UNHCR), by the end of 2016, this number reached 65.6 million worldwide, which is the highest number since the Second World War. In 2016, which is often seen as the peak of the refugee crisis, the asylum seekers in the EU originating from Syria, Afghanistan, and Iraq constituted 50 per cent of the total number of those who applied for asylum in the EU.

The asylum issue, which is generally treated as part of a wider immigration issue, raises fundamental questions regarding the obligations that nation states have to non-citizens (Schuster 2003: 2). Those who claim to be *refugees*, but who have not yet been recognised as such, are referred to as *asylum seekers* (Schuster 2003: 3). It should be emphasised that in both political discourse and the media, it is often assumed that a group of asylum seekers consists of a very small sub-group of “genuine” asylum seekers – those who will ultimately be recognised as refugees. The rest of the group is thus considered to consist of a much larger contingent of “bogus” asylum seekers, who are referred to as economic migrants wishing to migrate, settle, and work in the host state (ibid.). Furthermore, much of the contemporary media and political discourse treats *all* asylum seekers as *economic migrants in disguise* and, as such, as a threat to the nation state that would receive them. As a result, European states try to filter economic migrants through the asylum process by using a definition of refugees that distinguishes between political and economic motives for flight (ibid.). However, distinctions between political and economic causes of migration, as well as differences between voluntary and involuntary migration, are difficult to ascertain. The linguistic analysis of the authentic data presented in this book aims to reveal the discursive ways these groups are presented in the contemporary British press.

Major research goals and research methods

Issues such as national sovereignty, immigration, free movement within the EU, border control, security, and the increasing number of asylum seekers, as well as the idea of national identity and British exceptionalism, all contributed to the decision to hold the EU membership referendum in 2016, which led to the UK’s withdrawal from the EU – commonly known as Brexit. The linguistic analysis of the two newspaper corpora featured in this book aims to trace the correspondence between these complex socio-political events and the media’s construction of the identities of the key social actors within migration discourse. This analysis pursues three key objectives in particular:

- 1 In Chapter 3, the focus is placed on the linguistic differences and similarities in the discursive representation of refugees, asylum seekers, immigrants, and migrants (RASIM) by left- and right-wing broadsheets and tabloids in years 2013 to 2014, on the threshold of the general election of 2015 and the EU membership referendum of 2016. The term RASIM was first introduced in Baker (2007) and later applied in Gabrielatos & Baker (2008), Baker et al. (2008), Taylor (2014), Islentyeva (2018) and others. From a linguistic perspective,

6 Introduction

- words pairs such as *refugee–asylum seeker* and *migrant–immigrant* are semantically related; there are, however, some subtle differences in their meaning that can be identified by means of a systematic corpus analysis.
- 2 Chapter 4 traces the transformation of migration discourse between 2016 and 2018, following the EU membership referendum. The focus is placed on the representation of European migrants, as the analysis aims to identify shifts in the representation of Europeans after the decision was made to leave to the EU.
 - 3 Chapters 5 and 6 analyse recurrent metaphorical motifs that are employed in migration discourse, with a particular focus on their evaluative and ideological functions.

A multi-method approach that includes two types of language data analysis – quantitative and qualitative – is employed in the case studies outlined in this book. In its broadest sense, the quantitative analysis of the newspaper corpora includes concordance and collocational/collexeme analyses, the extraction of ideologically relevant grammatical and metaphorical patterns from the corpora, as well as a statistical analysis that shows to what extent the findings are significant. The qualitative analysis involves contextual and intertextual analyses of the newspaper articles and serves as a further step in identifying the discursive strategies that are responsible for producing and reproducing ideology within a narrative. The ultimate goal of this book is to identify a set of systematic linguistic principles in the construction of dominant discourses, thereby revealing the nature of meaning in ideologically charged discourses on migration and asylum seeking by combining corpus linguistics with CDA. The case studies presented in this book aim to demonstrate how corpus techniques and discourse-analytical methods can contribute to a deeper understanding of the ideological processes at work.

Structure of the book

Chapter 1 introduces different approaches to discourse analysis, with a special focus on the key goals of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and critical discourse studies (van Dijk 1995, 2015). In CDA, discourse is primarily seen as a form of social practice (Fairclough 2015), while the socio-political order is largely (re)constructed through a range of discursive practices that are capable of shaping the attitudes and points of view of the general public. Chapter 1 elaborates on the concepts of *ideology* and *power* in line with CDA, establishing a vital link between power relations, language in general, and discursive practices within different genres of writing. Mass media is of great interest for critical investigation as it constitutes one of the public's primary sources of information. Chapter 1 focuses on the contemporary British print media and provides a brief historical overview of the five newspapers – namely *The Sun*, *The Daily Mail*, *The Daily Telegraph*, *The Daily Mirror*, and *The Guardian*. The articles from these newspapers serve as data for the corpora employed in the case studies featured in this book. A special focus is given to the newspapers' political allegiances and the concept of *ideological bias*.

Chapter 2 introduces the fundamental principles of modern language study, with a focus on the systematicity of analysis and frequency of occurrence as the two basic principles of corpus-based research (McEnery & Wilson 2001), and provides a brief overview of corpus annotation. Section 2.2 defines the key criteria involved in constructing a balanced language corpus and lists the general corpora that are employed as reference corpora in this research. Section 2.3 provides a detailed overview of the process involved in designing and constructing the two comparable newspaper corpora analysed in this book. Finally, Chapter 2 elaborates on key corpus techniques, such as concordance and collocation analysis, and illustrates the advantages of employing a mixed-method approach that combines CDA and corpus linguistics when studying discourses (Baker 2006; Baker et al. 2008; Taylor & Marchi 2018).

Chapter 3 focuses on media representations of refugees, asylum seekers, immigrants, and migrants (RASIM) in the period from 2013 to 2015, referred to as the pre-referendum period in the book. Frequency, concordance and collocational analyses help to identify the linguistic differences and similarities in the representation of RASIM by different British press outlets. The high frequency of the word *migrant(s)* indicates that European migrants were a main focus of attention in the British press prior to the 2016 EU membership referendum. Chapter 3 demonstrates how a systematic application of corpus linguistic methods can assist in identifying recurrent patterns that are employed in the representation of RASIM, with a focus on the differences between how left- and right-wing newspapers employ these words.

Chapter 4 compares the linguistic patterns and discursive strategies identified in Chapter 3 with the patterns employed in the post-referendum period (2016–2018) in order to ascertain whether media discourse regarding EU migration has changed in the wake of the 2016 EU membership referendum. In particular, the analysis aims to trace the differences and similarities between the representation of European migrants and migration within the EU after the 2016 referendum and compare these representations with the discourses constructed around EU migrants in 2013 and 2014. The comparative analysis thus brings to light the linguistic mechanisms that ensure that the ideologies promoted by different newspapers remain adaptable to the changing socio-political environment of contemporary Britain.

Chapter 5 represents a qualitative corpus-assisted analysis of two newspaper articles from *The Daily Telegraph* and *The Guardian*, both of which employ the English garden metaphor in their discussion of immigration and asylum seeking in the UK. The analysis identifies the different ways in which left- and right-wing newspapers use figurative language to discuss this complex socio-political issue. Chapter 5 also demonstrates the advantages of employing an approach that combines close reading with intertextual analyses (for example, referring to Rudyard Kipling's (1911) poem *The Glory of the Garden* and Jonathan Swift's (1729) *Modest Proposal*) and visual analyses (examining the accompanying photographs and illustrations). Chapter 5 concludes that the metaphor of the English garden is a politically charged figurative tool that represents the conservative ideal of a hierarchical society based on predominant values from Britain's imperial past.

Chapter 6 shifts the focus from the representation of social actors (Chapters 3 and 4) and society (Chapter 5) to the representation of the political processes in the British press. The recurring use of words like *attack*, *battle*, *defend*, *enemy*, and *fight* in reference to politics suggests that the semantic domain of WAR is systematically transferred onto the domain of POLITICS. The focus of the analysis is the evaluative function of metaphor (Charteris-Black 2004), which shows how the ideologically charged motif POLITICS IS WAR is employed in the representation of different political positions. In terms of methodology, Chapter 6 employs both qualitative and quantitative techniques. The latter includes identifying metaphors employed in the Pre-Referendum Corpus (2013–2014), subsequently extracting relevant words from the corpus and assessing whether these words are used metaphorically in the target domain. The quantitative analysis is complemented by a close reading of a selection of articles from the respective newspaper corpus.

The conclusion explains that the research presented in this book goes beyond a mere linguistic analysis in that it focuses on the complex relationship between language, the media, and politics in terms how meanings and identities are constructed in contemporary Britain. The conclusion provides an overview of the key findings, explains their significance for linguistic research, and highlights methodological innovations. The benefits of combining corpus-linguistic techniques and discourse-analytical methods are outlined in terms of how this mixed-method approach can help clarify the semantics of RASIM terms, as well as contribute to critical research on contemporary media discourse.

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- 1 A lemma represents a group of words related to the same base differing only by inflection, e.g., *refugee* and *refugees*, *refugee's* and *refugees'* are all part of the noun lemma REFUGEE.
 - 1 Years in parentheses beside Thatcher, Cameron, May, etc. indicate terms served as prime minister of the UK.
 - 2 The number in parentheses indicates the absolute frequency of occurrence of the corresponding collocate.
 - 1 The full editorial text is reproduced with the permission of Telegraph Media Group Limited (TMG).
 - 2 The full text of the opinion piece is reproduced with the permission of Guardian News & Media Limited (GNM).
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