# Discourse on immigration in the USA: A comparative analysis of president' Donald Trump's speeches and articles in two American newspapers
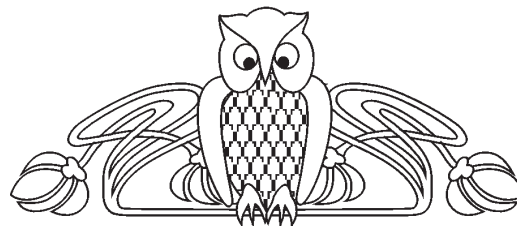
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**Abstract.** The article is dedicated to the discourse analysis of the themes raised in the American media when reporting on immigrants. The study attempts to gain an understanding of the existing public attitudes towards refugees and the problem of immigration. We used a mixed research approach combining discourse analysis, framing analysis and corpus linguistics to examine 151 articles over the 12-month period of 2018.

**Keywords**: immigration, immigration discourse, representation of immigration, media coverage, immigrant stereotyping, political discourse

### Дискурс иммиграции в США: сравнительный анализ речей президента Дональда Трампа и статей двух американских газет

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**Аннотация.** Статья посвящена дискурсивному анализу тем, поднимаемых в американских СМИ при освещении вопросов, касающихся иммигрантов. В исследовании делается попытка понять существующее отношение общества к беженцам и проблеме иммиграции. Смешанный исследовательский подход, сочетающий анализ дискурса, анализ фреймов и корпусную лингвистику, применялся для изучения 151 статьи за 12-месячный период 2018 года.

**Ключевые слова:** иммиграция, иммиграционный дискурс, репрезентация иммиграции, освещение в СМИ, стереотипизация иммигрантов, политический дискурс

The issue of immigration is a complicated hot-button topic for the whole world today. This paper represents one of a series of occasional articles produced as one part of Immigration Research Programme. In the series of articles, we aim at providing the results of the research of immigrational issues of relevance to English-speaking, German- and Russian-speaking countries. The main aim of the research is to compare media discourse on immigrational issues in these countries in order to inform migration practitioners. We assume that each country will have its own set of issues discussed. We hope that a detailed investigation of media coverage on the mentioned topic will be helpful in better contextualising current attitudinal tendencies as they reveal skyrocket immigrational process.

In recent years researchers have focused on critical discourse analysis which proves to be effective for studying how language is engaged with social and political issues. Scholars try to reveal how media texts shape public opinions and how strong is their impact on people's attitudes to any important political issue. Allen proclaims that an important relationship exists between the nature of media coverage, public opinion and policymaking [1]. Aluthman supports this point of view [2].

Our work is aimed at the study of discourse that structurally reflects and consolidates the existing public attitudes to the problem of immigrants and immigration. The analysis of the language constituents of immigration discourse will reveal the implicitly expressed meanings of such realities of modern society as immigration, as well as monitor the current state of this social phenomenon. We will try to identify and measure the role of media in shaping the public view. This paper's main focus started from the hypothesis that despite the fact that the majority of people rely on mass media for information, the role of them in defining public opinion is still paramount. As the media play an important role in the country's political dialogue, we think it is necessary to have a comprehensive portrait of this discussion.

The concept of immigration, being a complex issue, has drawn the attention of a great number of researchers who analyzed this phenomenon from different perspectives. The studies on immigration are mostly carried out by scholars specializing in economy, demography, sociology, law, geography. Ewing, Jones, Penn Wharton, McMahon carried out the concept of immigration.

Immigration discourse has been studied from different perspectives in various contexts of mass-media, political speeches, and debates. The pioneers in studying the discourse of immigration were Teun van Dijk and Ruth Wodak. Linguists Berry, Garcia-Blanco, Moore, Lawlor, Tolley Eberl, Meltzer, Heidenreich, Fielder, Catalano, McAuliffe, Wilson, Weeks, Kosho, May, Krotofil, Motak have been trying to figure out how the immigrational processes influence social component of human population.

The issue of immigration is a burning topic for the US public. We took into consideration governmental level, i.e. president Trump's weekly addresses to the American nation in 2017–2018 and the mainstream of two U. S. newspaper coverage of immigrational issues. We researched 49 articles from *Washington Times* and 102 articles from *The New York Times* that dealt with the problem of immigration over the 12-month period of 2018. We used each newspaper's archive as a distinct corpus. The key-words for the search were 'immigration' and 'immigrant' as well as the words that stem from 'immigration'. The newspapers were chosen since their open access. Secondly, we have chosen these two cities because of the existed polar attitudes towards immigrants. *The New York Times* is the newspaper of the city which, with the highest percentage of immigrants in the US, is declared to be the friendliest city to immigrants, besides this newspaper demonstrates "significant influence on political discourse and variation in political standpoint" [3, p. 2].

*Washington Times* mostly supports Donald Trump's anti-immigrant rhetoric and platform. The method we use is framing analysis with the help of which we established a number of allocations presented in the press coverage and president's addresses to the nation.

**The Analysis of President Donald Trump's Political Language**

The term immigration is very popular for US political discourse nowadays as the problem of immigrants is one of the burning issues for American society. There is a considerable corpus of linguistic research that has identified existing metaphors prevalent in American society. It must be underlined that metaphors are regarded as a means of expressing new knowledge being one of the means of linguistic creativity [4]. Cotrău, Cotoc, Happer, Philo, Hart, Tereškinas consider that the dominant group of metaphors representing immigrants as DISASTER, THREAT reveal negative stereotyping and show that negative representations are prevalent. Though there is a great number of researchers who claim that much news and media coverage portray immigration positively, the review of these works was made by Allison J. Steinke [5].

Let's consider first how the image of an immigrant is being formed by the head of the state Donald Trump. Discursive strategies of US President in his speeches of 2016 were already examined by Quinonez where she came to conclusion that Trump and conservative media are perpetuating a discourse of racism in America [6]. In this article we analyzed his speeches in 2018. Donald Trump places immigration at the forefront of his agenda. But the current president of the USA faces

difficulty in persuading the Congress to take up his strict immigration policy: deporting undocumented immigrants, repealing birthright citizenship, building a wall. His type of discourse can be considered to be strategic in forming public opinion. The negative status of immigrants represents his "complex systems of governance through language" [7]. Thus, the basic concept in Trump's and his administration's rhetoric about immigrants is the concept of THREAT. In the post on the official website of the United States government *whitehouse.gov* the lexemes 'secure our borders, protect American workers, advance the safety' identify the enemy and represent 'unlawful entrants' as being dangerous and destructive for American society. The modal verb 'must' at the beginning of the message implies the necessity of the action. The use of present tenses of verbs 'is committed, supports' makes compliment to the current administration and the president himself. Then the tense switches to future 'will advance' which states the future protection. See the example:

(1) *The United States must adopt an immigration system that serves the national interest. To restore the rule of law and secure our border, President Trump is committed to constructing a border wall and ensuring the swift removal of unlawful entrants. To protect American workers, the President supports ending chain migration, eliminating the Visa Lottery, and moving the country to a merit-based entry system. These reforms will advance the safety and prosperity of all Americans while helping new citizens assimilate and flourish* [8].

Analyzing Trump's weekly address to the American nation issued on March 10, 2018 we may highlight the main concepts connected with immigrants. They are the following:

1. Criminality (the word 'criminal' was used nine times in this speech):

(2) *Yet, lawless sanctuary jurisdictions are nullifying federal law, obstructing immigration enforcement, and releasing thousands of criminal aliens into U. S. communities to prey on innocent victims* [9];

(3) *The State of California is sheltering dangerous criminals in a brazen and lawless attack on our Constitutional system of government. Every state in our Union is subject to the laws and Constitution of the United States – including California. Yet California's leaders are in open defiance of federal law. They don't care about crime. They don't care about death and killings. They don't care about robberies. They don't care about the kind of things that you and I care about* [9].

2. Crime (the majority of violent crimes are connected with illegal immigrants, namely nine different crimes were mentioned by Trump in his speech):

(4) *In other recent cases, New York authorities released illegal aliens who were previously charged with assault, criminal possession of a weapon, pos-*

*session of poisonous drugs, and strangling a person – in each case, New York officials had refused to turn these dangerous illegal aliens over to ICE or notify ICE about their release with enough time for them to be safely arrested* [9];

(5) *Just this week, the city of Denver refused ICE's request to turn over a criminal illegal alien charged with vehicular homicide for killing another driver in a horrific hit-and-run* [9];

(6) *Sanctuary jurisdictions are the best friend of smugglers, gang members, drug dealers, human traffickers, killers, and other violent offenders* [9].

Thus, illegal immigrants are stigmatized for just illegal presence on the territory of the country and they represent a security concern. The enumeration of so many types of crimes in one sentence illustrates an emphasis to the dangerousness of the existed situation.

3. Threat (Trump gives great importance to the lexeme 'safe' which was used four times and which conveys the idea of threat and danger):

(7) *Protecting the safety and well-being of American Citizens is my highest duty as President. Yet, lawless sanctuary jurisdictions are nullifying federal law, obstructing immigration enforcement, and releasing thousands of criminal aliens into U. S. communities to prey on innocent victims. It's absolutely terrible* [9];

(8) *It is time to end the bloodshed brought about by reckless sanctuary policies – and it is time to save American lives and American cities* [9].

Analyzing his other Weekly Addresses to the nation concerning immigrational issues in the period 2017–2018 we discovered that when describing immigrants, the most often used term is 'illegal'. See the examples:

(9) *Unfortunately, Democrats in Congress not only oppose our efforts to stop illegal immigration and crack down on Sanctuary Cities – now they are demanding amnesty as a condition for funding the government, holding troop funding hostage and putting our national security at risk. We cannot allow it* [10].

(10) *Illegal immigration affects the lives of all Americans. Illegal immigration hurts American workers; burdens American taxpayers; and undermines public safety; and places enormous strain on local schools, hospitals, and communities in general, taking precious resources away from the poorest Americans who need them most. Illegal immigration costs our country billions and billions of dollars each year* [11].

Thus, Donald Trump shapes immigrants mostly in terms of threat and fear as he treats them as dangerous criminals. In his speeches, immigrants have the stigma of criminality and are defined as a threat to national security. The above-mentioned lexis used by the current US president is aimed at justifying his punitive approach to immigration policy based on militarization of the border, deportation and incarceration.

## Representations of Immigration in Two American Newspapers: the Washington Times and the New York Times

The closer look at two American newspapers unfolds the following results. We assume that modern newspapers do not publish articles which are opposite to their readers' views. Usually media reflects what their audience think, so existing public attitudes are reflected in these two newspapers. The survey conducted by Pew Research Center in summer, 2018 found that most Americans (69%) feel sympathy to unauthorized immigrants, most Americans express positive views of undocumented immigrants when it comes to their impact on crimes and jobs (Pew Research Center 2018). Thus, the analysis can help to identify which city is friendlier to immigrants.

The language of numbers (millions, caravans) and security (threats, illegality, crimes) are most common in *Washington Times*. The most frequent modifiers of immigrants are 'illegal', 'criminal', 'massive'. Immigrants are perceived as invaders who come caravan after caravan to the US. The usage of attributes with connotation of 'mass' can justify the governmental politics to detent immigrants. So, Trump's methods can be considered competent and reasonable. The newspaper tends to mention the rising number of illegal immigrants:

(11) *Professors at Yale University have roiled the immigration debate with a new study calculating there are between 16 million and 30 million illegal immigrants in the U. S. – as much as three times more than most demographers figure.*

*The professors' model looked at estimates of how many people came illegally, and how many people likely left, and concluded there are a lot more people who arrived than the 11 million suggested by traditional estimates. The model says the most likely figure is double that, at about 22 million.*

*If true, the numbers would mean U. S. officials have done a poorer job of catching illegal immigrants than imagined, and that one out of every nine people living in the U. S. is here illegally.... He added: "When they came up with this number they should have stepped back and said we've got a problem, it doesn't pass the kind of prima facie approach of what seems possible"* [12].

In the following article the main concepts connected with immigrants are threat and crimes. Such coverage presents immigrants as villains and residents as victims. So, people's reaction is highly negative. It surely evokes the wish to defend themselves:

(12) *"The smugglers, traffickers, and criminals understand our legal loopholes better than Congress and are effectively exploiting them to their advantage," Ms. Neilsen said Wednesday. "This president fully understands the threat this poses to Americans and has been crystal clear since the beginning of his administration that we will protect our borders and our sovereignty"* [13].

Most articles point out the ineffectiveness of laws and as a result the increased criminality. In most articles immigrants are portrayed as being the source of the problems. In October *Washington Times* published an article with negative perceptions where the consequences of the refugee crisis are illegal immigrants' fault:

(13) *President Trump on Monday warned that a soft stance on illegal immigration risked subjecting the United States to the same kind of refugee crisis that is roiling Europe. ... For those who want and advocate for illegal immigration, just take a good look at what has happened to Europe over the last 5 years. A total mess! They only wish they had that decision to make over again, the president tweeted* [14].

Besides, the problems connected with immigrants cost money and immigrants are seen as troublemakers. The following quote is eloquent:

(14) *While the two sides argue over methods and motives, it's taxpayers who are shelling out to cover the costs.... HHS paid more than $1.4 billion last year to accommodate nearly 41,000 UAC in its shelters. They stayed an average of 41 days, which means taxpayers paid about $670 a day for each child. The cost of holding someone in a federal prison – a comparison some immigration activists make to the UAC situation – is just $85 a day* [15].

Some articles assume the problems of immigrants and acknowledge that the blame lies with the government in power. The responsibility is often attributed to the specific group of people or governmental agency, in most cases attention is drawn to the lack of an effective immigrational law, for example:

(15) *Sen. John Cornyn of Texas, one of the Republicans' chief negotiators in the current immigration debate, said the fatal crash should be a wake-up call. "People are dying as a result of criminals taking advantage of the porous nature of the border, and we need to stop it," Mr. Cornyn said. "A lot of that has to do with improving our border security. And it's not just about barriers. It's about technology. It's about personnel and creating the systems that are necessary to stop more of that"* [16].

Chris Crane, president of the National ICE Council also puts the spotlight on the president and his administration:

(16) *"With the right strategy and leadership, we can stop illegal immigration, but dynamic changes are needed within ICE, and the president has to get us the enforcement elements we're asking for in legislation,"* he said [16].

Reporting on demonstrations supporting immigrants *Washington Times* sounds neutral, gives mere facts. Such articles can be assessed as neither favourable nor unfavourable. The research does not show that *Washington Times* is fully negative towards all immigrants, the newspaper contains some articles

which connote positive attributes to legal ones. This is the example of the article taken from *Washington Times* which shows positive attitude to immigrants as they fuel American economy, farming to be exact, as they represent low-cost but professional labour:

(17) The fear of deportation is one many migrant workers share, but they're not alone. Farmers nationwide – including in Iredell – worry about losing the low-cost labor that helps their farms thrive. That's why they're fighting immigration-law changes that threaten much of their workforce.

*The latest U. S. Department of Labor Agricultural Worker's Survey found that one-third of the nation's agriculture workers are from Mexico, and half are not authorized to work in this country.*

*Linda Andrews, national legislative director for the N. C. Farm Bureau, said the lack of domestic labor has been an issue in the agriculture community for years. Migrant workers have helped fill the gaps* [17].

On July, 1 *Washington Times* published an opinion of Stephen Moore, a columnist for *Washington Times*, an economic consultant with *Freedom Works* who points out that not all immigrants are beneficial, but there are skilled immigrants whose contribution to overall productivity is seemed to be out of the question, but also this refers only to legal immigrants:

(18) *Not all immigrants are beneficial and sure there are bad apples in the bunch – just as is true of the population of American citizens as a whole. But the benefits of immigration are surprisingly large – mostly because most immigrants are risk-takers who come to the United States between the ages of 16 and 40 – so they tend to be at the start of their working years or at the peak of their earning years.*

*We also know that the more skilled the immigrants, the larger their contribution to overall productivity and the bigger their lifetime net-tax payments – i.e., the more they reduce budget deficits.*

*The most definitive voice on this came from the prestigious National Academy of Sciences, which concluded positive economic effect of immigration* [17].

As we see, the cited opinion is rather inspirational and emphasizes positive sides of the immigration phenomenon.

New York is considered to be a sanctuary city that provides much assistance and sympathy to immigrants. The humanitarian point of view is complemented by the authors who call for more effective immigration policy. It supports a more tolerant attitude towards immigrants. Our research proves the results announced by Michael S. Boyd who came to the conclusion about 'institutionalized liberal perspective of the debates about immigration' expressed by newspaper *The New York Times* [18].

The most frequent modifiers for immigrants in *The New York Times* are 'undocumented people' and 'undocumented immigrants'. So, the current vocabulary which is used for presenting immigrants is

rather contradictory, with the president and *Washington Times* opting for the term "illegal" and *The New York Times* preferring "undocumented". Braedon Lehman cites Kristine Clancy [19] showing that 'undocumented' and 'illegal' convey different meanings, he illustrates that the usage of the term 'illegal' demonstrates "an increased likelihood to support restrictive immigration policy" and the term 'undocumented' "doesn't imply that the immigrants themselves are illegal", it is not dehumanizing or derogatory to immigrants [20]. Besides the attribute 'undocumented' is often used with the word 'people', which correlates with positive and humanizing opinions, where as this collocation is impossible with the attribute 'illegal'. See the examples from *The New York Times*:

(19) *The strategists worry that Republicans' foreboding immigration message is far more personal to most voters than the more modulated position of Democrats, whose push to protect the young immigrants known as Dreamers and to ensure humane treatment of undocumented people does not, in many cases, affect voters themselves* [21];

(20) *Usually, undocumented immigrants in the area were held at the Northwest Detention Center, a private facility operated under a contract with Immigration and Customs Enforcement* [22].

We observed the evidence of publishing articles which tend to be rather sympathetic and positive to immigrants. Mostly they present immigrants as victims who need support and sympathy. Our research drew on 48 immigration-related stories, interviews with representatives from governmental organizations in *The New York Times* which portraits a rather sympathetic attitude towards undocumented people:

(21) *There were 174 women. Many of them had come to the United States with their children, some as young as 5. A majority were from the violence-racked Central American countries El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras; others had traveled from as far as China and the Democratic Republic of Congo. All of them sought asylum. Some of them, after crossing the Rio Grande, spent their first night in the United States shivering in their damp clothes on Mylar sheets in the sprawling processing center in McAllen, Tex., nicknamed the hielera, or icebox* [22].

In October 2018 *The New York Times* cited the Washington office Representative Pramila Jayapal, an Indian-American woman who came to the USA at theage of 16 and who was the first to be elected to the House. She belongs to liberal politicians who bend more to social-justice movements. She makes the problems of immigrants one aspect of failing governmental policy. The article contains rather emotive lexis representing sympathetic approach to immigrants:

(22) *Jayapal sat and listened to the women for nearly three hours. Then, outside the prison, she spoke into an aide's video camera. After vowing to help return the separated children to their parents,*

*Jayapal set her sights on ICE. "I am going to do everything I can in my power," she said, "to stop funding a rogue agency at the Department of Homeland Security"* [22].

The research shows that *New York Times* produces mostly positive coverage on immigrants. This newspaper uses quite positive and sympathetic language, including more stories about women and children, personal stories about their life in the US. To highlight the sufferings of immigrants in *The New York Times* articles, words with powerful evocative connotations like 'fair, compassionate, support' are widely used:

(23) *While President Trump shuts down the federal government over his obsession with keeping immigrants out, New York stands strong in our support for immigrant communities, Mr. Cuomo, a Democrat, said in a statement. "These actions will help keep immigrant families together and take a critical step toward a more just, more fair and more compassionate New York"* [23].

In the following example the discursive construction of 'Us' and 'Them' is being realized. The opposition of 'Us' (native Americans and immigrants) and 'Them' (president and governmental agencies) is evident:

(24) *Their concerns about illegal immigration, and the crime statistics that the president pointed to, are echoed by many Americans. "Americans have long believed that immigrants are more likely than natives to commit crimes and that rising immigration leads to rising crime," the National Academy of Sciences wrote in a 2015 study. ... He has branded many illegal immigrants as "murderers and thieves" who want to "infest our country." ... They don't want to talk to the angel moms* [24].

So, the research shows that *The New York Times* designs public attitudes as favourable to immigrants, personal stories published in this newspaper prove that they are not criminals, and that they are beneficial for American society.

This paper has analyzed the discourse on immigration in the head of state's speeches and in two American newspapers. The research shows that media coverage of these two newspapers divides opinion. Two opposed discourses have been described in the article. Negative immigrants' representation is the core feature of the president's discourse. This study is in line with our previous research [25]. The analysis also revealed *Washington Times* in negative coverage of immigrants. A strong tendency to criminalize illegal immigrants is found in the articles of this newspaper. It is also a prevalent view for the head of the country. *Washington Times* supports the president and points out the need of taking up a strict immigrational law which can provide more efficient control measures. This discourse is opposed by a more liberal approach expressed by *The New York Times*. The effort to provide a positive conception of immigrants is manifested by this newspaper, where the articles on immigration are closely inter-twined with notions of justice, human rights, respect and empathy. The necessity to integrate immigrants into American society and the need to react on immigrants' needs are the prevalent notions for *The New York Times*.

These two contradictory approaches to immigrants show that a negative point of view is not yet rooted in American society maybe because such massive immigration is still a recent phenomenon.

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