

Research Paper

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The flood of refugees in our heads: metaphorical framing of refugees in german newspaper discourse

A qualitative content analysis

Abstract: The number of people fleeing to Europe increased dramatically in 2015. Each day, countless reports on the refugee issue were published prominently on every channel. The media played a crucial role not only in providing information to the insecure public and to policy makers, but also in framing the arrivals.

Previous studies have examined the way refugees are depicted in the media discourse of host countries, indicating that media systematically discriminate against these minority groups and deem them as a threat to the majority group. Decisive for this study was the assumption that metaphors – as it often is the case in reporting – must have been part of the media discourse on refugees in 2015. Figurative language types such as metaphor are powerful devices in framing societal issues and shaping public discourse. Based upon Lakoff and Johnson's Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT), and against the background of framing theory, this study explores whether metaphors used in the refugee issue have the power to establish prejudiced opinions towards refugees, depending on their meanings and implications.

To analyze how refugees were being represented through metaphors in the German newspaper discourse during the peak of the events in 2015, a qualitative content analysis of five German national daily mainstream newspapers was carried out.

The survey found that in addition to the omnipresent water metaphor, seven other conceptual metaphor themes were repeatedly used. The CMT-based interpretation showed that these metaphor themes were discriminating,

portraying refugees as a common threat, creating a strong differentiation between an in-group and an out-group, or are even stripping the refugees off their humanity.

1. Introduction and Outline of the Study

One million. This number was quoted over and over again in the German media discourse during summer and fall of 2015. It refers to the more than one million people seeking asylum in Europe that year after fleeing their home countries (Almstadt 2017: 187). People fleeing to Europe is not a new phenomenon at all. However, the number of refugees and migrants dramatically increased in 2015, with a significant proportion fleeing war-torn Syria, the so-called Islamic State, or a lack of prospects after years of violence in countries such as Iraq and Afghanistan. This led to a historical high of a total of about 890,000 people seeking asylum in Germany during that year. This posed an immense challenge for politics, society and the media – the topic of refugees quickly captured the attention of Germany (Hemmelmann, Wegner 2017: 4).

Due to scale and speed of the events, as well as the lack of familiarity with the topic, policy makers and the public largely depended on the media to make sense of the developments and to take action. The media played a crucial role not only in providing information, but also in framing the arrivals: The events were soon to be referred to widely as »Europe's refugee crisis« (Georgiou 2017: 4).

It is the politicians who decide under which circumstances people fleeing to Europe will be allowed to stay and live their lives. But it is the media, and especially still the print media, that decide which images of refugees prevail in public (Almstadt 2017: 185). Previous studies have shown that portrayals of immigrants and refugees in many Western countries have become increasingly negative and systematically discriminatory over the past few years (Esses, Medianu and Lawson 2013: 530). Journalists are predominantly depicting them as threats to the security, economy, and hygiene of the majority group in the host countries (Abid, Manan and Rahman 2017: 121). The results of various studies also indicate that the mass media coverage can have considerable impact on how native citizens think about integration and immigrants. Furthermore, findings show that the negative coverage of ethnic minorities can lead to less willingness to support collective action (Bos et al. 2016: 106).

The perspectives used by journalists to describe a topic impact attitudes towards immigrants, but most importantly, it is these attitudes, that then influence political behavior such as voting (Scheufele 2008). And it has been quite clear in Germany, after the election in 2017, that populist anti-immigration parties are gaining in popularity (Der Bundeswahlleiter 2017). The mood in Ger-

many concerning refugees throughout 2015 shifted from careful tolerance to ecstatic humanitarianism, to fear and securitization (Georgiou 2017: 8). Thus, analyzing the media coverage of the refugee crisis is critically needed for understanding immigration attitudes and the political shift in Germany.

One way to analyze media coverage is through looking at metaphors. Language is never completely neutral and value-free. Figurative language types such as metaphor, hyperbole, and irony are powerful devices in framing societal issues and shaping public discourse. The persuasive power of metaphor has been acknowledged since ancient times (Burgers, Konijn and Steen 2016: 410). Lakoff and Johnson (1980) recognize metaphors as a central device in human thought, stating that metaphors can be employed as rhetorical tools to transport persuasive messages and create attitudes toward certain topics. In their seminal work *At War With Metaphor*, Steuter and Wills (2009) state that metaphors used by journalists may lead to the dehumanization of an entire group or race of people through an unconscious transformation in our minds that eventually may even result in justifying war and genocide. Consequently, we need to pay close attention to the patterns of metaphor at work in our public discourse.

The 2015 refugee situation in Europe motivated the overarching research question for this thesis: »How are refugees being represented through metaphors in the German newspaper discourse during the peak of the events in 2015?« Answering this question may help to understand what prevailing image of refugees was created by the media. The results may allow an interpretation with regard on how metaphorical framing of refugees can influence the audience through priming and how this framing may have influenced the political development as well as support for and attitudes towards refugees in Germany. The underlying motivation is to reveal hegemonic power structures and values in the coverage about refugees. Ideally, the results would also offer guidance for journalists striving to produce more neutral content using objective language.

In order to explore how refugees are constructed in news discourse, a qualitative content analysis of five German national daily print newspapers was conducted. Given the timeliness of the topic there are no studies investigating this specific question. There exist various studies about the representation of refugees in the media and in newspapers in particular. However, they have either been conducted before the events in 2015 or they did not focus on metaphors as linguistic framing devices or they did not refer to Germany. Now, this study brings together all of these factors.

2. Theoretical Framework: Conceptual Metaphor Theory

Metaphors as framing devices

The linguistic framework evaluates how the connection between language and thought becomes evident through the concept of metaphor, based on Lakoff and Johnson's (1980) Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT). Lexicalization of semantic content is never neutral. Words convey denoted as well as connoted meanings. The words used to communicate the message of a text frame the story in direct and unavoidable ways (Hansen 1998: 113).

This is particularly the case in the way how people are named in news discourse. Of course, journalists must provide names for the people – whether individuals or a group of people – in the events they report. Naming always involves choice and the choice can have significant impact on the way in which people are viewed. We all possess a range of identities, roles, and characteristics at the same time. They could all be used to describe us accurately but not with the same meaning. By choosing one social category over another, one is automatically excluded from the other equally accurate alternatives (Richardson 2007: 48–50).

Now, if metaphors are being used as a text's referential strategies, it becomes even more important to look at the different explicit and implicit meanings of these naming options, as the power of figurative language devices has been acknowledged since the days of ancient Greece (Burgers et al. 2016: 411).

Using metaphors to report on an event necessarily implies a process of simplification. Metaphor has long been regarded as unique to poetry and literary language, but was often dismissed as largely decorative. However, a shift in thinking about figurative language started in the late 1970s and 1980s. This shift has been labeled the cognitive turn (Burgers et al. 2016: 412). The cognitive turn opened up the possibility to see metaphors as being more than only linguistic means, but as playing an important role in forming thought itself. Scholars began to understand metaphor as an essential aspect of cognition. They found that far from only being decorative or elaborating an idea, metaphor enters and influences all our lives (Steuter and Wills 2009: 5).

EA groundbreaking new view of metaphor that challenged all the aspects of the traditional theory was developed by Lakoff and Johnson (1980) in their seminal work *Metaphors We Live By*. In their Conceptual Metaphor Theory, the authors made a compelling argument for the centrality of metaphor to our everyday thought and showed that metaphor is ubiquitous in language use. This, they claim, is because people make use of some concepts to understand, talk and reason about others. They argue that our experience of the world is structured, not just described, by these conceptual systems of ours. They further claim that most of our conceptual systems are essentially metaphorical. Consequently, metaphor

in language reflects conventional thought structures in our minds. At the same time, metaphor can actively influence the thought it articulates.

Conceptual versus linguistic metaphor

In the cognitive linguistic view, metaphor primarily means conceptual metaphor, as opposed to linguistic metaphor. A conceptual metaphor with the form A is B is always realized through a linguistic expression (Kövecses and Benczes 2010: 33).

Lakoff and Johnson (1980: 7–9) give us the following example to get an idea of how metaphorical linguistic expressions can give us insight into the metaphorical nature of our conceptual system structuring our everyday thoughts and actions:

- You're wasting my time.
- How do you spend your time these days?
- This will cost me an hour.
- I've invested a lot of time in her.
- You're running out of time.
- Is that worth your while?
- This gadget will save you hours.

These sentences all describe the abstract topic of time through the more concrete topic of money. They are linguistic metaphors expressing a cross-domain mapping in thought – usually from a more concrete source domain to a more abstract target domain. The thought patterns underlying these linguistic expressions are called conceptual metaphors. In this example, all the metaphorical expressions are manifestations of the conceptual metaphor time is money. The relationship between metaphorical thinking and speaking is often described saying that linguistic metaphors realize conceptual metaphors.

A conceptual metaphor consists of two conceptual domains, in which one domain is understood in terms of another. A shorthand way of capturing this view of metaphor is: *conceptual domain A is conceptual domain B*. These two domains a conceptual metaphor consists of, are differentiated into a source domain and a target domain. In the example above, the source domain is money – the more concrete and physical conceptual domain from which we draw metaphorical expressions to understand another more abstract conceptual domain. The target domain in the given example is time – the conceptual domain that is understood through the source domain. In other words, the conceptual domain that we try to understand is called the target domain, and the conceptual domain that we use for this purpose is the source domain. Target domains typically include abstract concepts as in life, arguments, love, theory, ideas, while source domains

typically include more concrete concepts as in journey, war, building, food, and plants. Some other conventional conceptual metaphors underlying our conceptual system would thus be, for example, that we think of life in term of journeys, of arguments in terms of war, of theories in terms of buildings, and of ideas in terms of food, just to name a few (Kövecses et al. 2010: 4).

However, conceptual metaphors do not only consist of a source domain and a target domain. They also need a set of systematic correspondences between the source and the target for A to be understood as B. These correspondences are often referred to as mappings. Basically, ideas and knowledge from the source domain are mapped onto the target domain. To know a conceptual metaphor is to know the set of mappings that applies to a given source-target pairing. It is these mappings that provide much of the meaning of the metaphorical linguistic expressions that make a particular conceptual metaphor manifest (Kövecses et al. 2010: 14).

Lakoff and Johnson see great significance in conventional metaphors, which they find to be ubiquitous in language. Conventional metaphors are especially powerful, as they do not attract readers' attention as being metaphorical. (Kövecses et al. 2010: 46). Even though we may not be aware that we are using metaphors all the time, they provide a framework for understanding abstract topics. Metaphor is central to thought and therefore to language.

Because of its connection to our thoughts and knowledge, its simplification and emotional aspect, metaphor is a powerful linguistic tool. Especially, because when a metaphor is emphasizing some aspects while hiding others, it is doing this implicit and the consequences are not immediately accessible to the reader. And yet, the way a metaphor is used to frame events can be motivated by political dispositions and ideology (Pinelli 2016: 136 f.). Therefore, Lakoff and Johnson emphasize the significance of conventional metaphors that are no longer even recognized as such but begin to seem natural instead.

If metaphor is as crucial to our thinking and as pervasive and persuasive as CMT suggests, we need to pay close attention to the patterns of metaphor at work in our public discourse. Consequently, metaphors should not be accepted uncritically, their inferences should be made explicit and challenged.

3. Research Questions

Derived from the theoretical framework and previous studies, three sub-questions were posed to help answer the overarching research question, »how are refugees being represented through metaphors in the German newspaper discourse during the peak of the events in summer 2015?«

The central claim of CMT is that metaphorical linguistic expressions reveal underlying conceptual metaphors in our thought. As illustrated in the example

about the conceptual metaphor time is money, there are a variety of linguistic expressions for each conceptual metaphor. Thus, when looking at a news text, we need to determine the underlying conceptual metaphors of the linguistic expressions by structuring them into the main underlying themes. Consequently, the first research question is: »RQ1: What linguistic metaphor expressions were used to refer to the refugee issue and what are the main underlying conceptual metaphor themes?«

This question aims at listing all the metaphorical expressions used in the given investigation period to portray individual refugees, the group of refugees or the refugee issue. To answer this question while making the process transparent and reproducible, a content reduction was conducted, based on Mayring's approach to qualitative content analysis. To do this, the previously extracted expressions had to be structured. However, following the principle of openness, rephrasing of categories or an inductive formation of so far unknown further categories was also possible (Mayring 2014: 97). Some of the metaphor categories in the classification were already deductible from previous research. At the same time, it was expected that not all the conceptual metaphor themes found in previous studies would be encountered in this analysis, as it focused on mainstream media. The categories for the main underlying conceptual metaphor themes, which were formed deductively, were: Water, Natural Disaster, Military, Disease, Animal.

Previous studies have shown that the mood of citizens and politicians, as well as the media coverage concerning refugees shifted during the events of 2015. Furthermore, it has been shown that metaphors may be ideologically and politically motivated and can be used to subtly transport a certain ideology or create a certain image of the subject in question. In addition, previous studies found that metaphors about refugees are used more often in a negative context than a positive one. In order to analyze the underlying motivations of journalists in using metaphors in the coverage on refugees, and to possibly reveal hegemonic power structures and values in the coverage about refugees, the circumstances under which metaphors were being used, were analyzed. This led to the second research question: »RQ2: What are the contextual circumstances under which metaphors were used?«

For this purpose, the tenor of each analyzed article was registered in another reduction. A simple estimate of the articles as positive, negative or neutral would have been too subjective. Therefore, the tenor was coded through the thematic context of the articles. To do that, the articles were classified into three categories according to their focus: humanitarian stories, domestic stories, and EU policy. In these categories, each article was evaluated as positive, negative, or neutral towards the refugee issue. Articles in the category EU policy for example were coded as positive if they focused on the good cooperation of EU members during the refugee issue. They were coded as negative if, for example, they pictu-

red the EU refugee policy as failing or focused on difficult negotiations between the EU members. Articles were coded as neutral if they focus on objective facts only. Additionally, to fully evaluate the contextual circumstances under which metaphors were used, the source of each metaphorical linguistic expression found in the text was coded. Here, four different categories of sources were identified: The first category was quotes, e.g. when the newspaper was quoting a metaphorical expression from another actor, such as a politician. The second category was personal opinion, when the metaphorical expression was clearly recognizable as a personal opinion of an author or a recipient. The third category was reflection, i.e. the metaphorical expression was cited in an article to reflect upon its linguistic usage. And if none of the above applied and the metaphorical expression was simply used in an article without attribution, specification, or personal opinion, the newspaper itself was coded as the source.

Furthermore, because CMT holds that metaphor is central to thought, and therefore to language, we must ask, what do the linguistic metaphorical expressions that were found and the circumstances under which they were found, tell us about the underlying thought patterns? Simple descriptive statistics were applied to evaluate the first two questions to interpret the results gained from these two questions qualitatively within the scope of the third research question: »RQ3: What implications do the main metaphor themes have?«

The focus of the qualitative interpretation was on the last question, which built upon the results of all the preceding questions to finally answer the overarching research question.

4. Method

Lakoff and Johnson's CMT is a good a basis for uncovering cognitive structures through the analysis of linguistic models. However, they do not provide an approach for determining conceptual metaphors in discourse (Schmitt 2005: 358).

Most researchers interested in the use of metaphor in news discourse focus on very specific conceptual metaphors and search corpora for lexical items that have been pre-identified as interesting. Another approach that attempts to cover a wider range of observations is a small corpus–big corpus approach. In that approach, first all metaphors in a small sample are identified and then a larger corpus is searched for further evidence. However, since there are likely metaphors in the big corpus that have not been identified in the small corpus, some metaphors would be missed (Krennmayr 2014: 534).

Instead, this study strived to capture all metaphorical language that exists in the corpora. This poses certain difficulties. Since automatic metaphor identi-

cation by means of computer programs still lacks precision, metaphors must be identified by hand. This, however, is a laborious process. On the one hand, it places a limit on the amount of data that can be coded. On the other hand, it allows for the necessary precision (Krennmayr 2014: 534).

There are a number of approaches proposed by different researchers to determine conceptual metaphors in discourse (Abid et al. 2017: 124). This research used a refined version of the *metaphor identification procedure* (MIP), which was originally developed by the Pragglejaz Group (2007). The refined version, called MIPVU was established at the VU University Amsterdam by Steen, Dorst, & Herrmann (2011). This group of metaphor scholars created an explicit and reliable method for identifying metaphorically used words in spoken and written language. For each lexical unit in a corpus, the procedure establishes whether its use in the particular context can be defined as metaphorical. Thus, it requires a word by word manual analysis. MIPVU assumes that metaphorically used words in discourse disrupt semantic coherence through the introduction of an alien conceptual domain. In this study, the corpora were scanned for lexical units causing such disruptions. For each of those lexical units, it had to be determined if it had a more basic meaning in other contexts than the one in the given context. If it did, and its contextual meaning contrasted with the basic meaning but could be understood in comparison with it, the lexical unit was marked as metaphorical (Steen et al. 2011: 25 f.). The procedure of MIPVU only focuses on determining whether words in contexts convey metaphorical meaning. It does not make claims as to whether the author intended the words to express metaphorical meanings.

For the purpose of this research, data were collected from five popular national daily German print newspapers: *Frankfurter Allgemeinen Zeitung* (FAZ), *Süddeutsche Zeitung* (SZ), *Die Welt*, *die Tageszeitung* (taz), and *die BILD-Zeitung* (BILD).

Apart from BILD, the chosen print newspapers are high-brow quality newspapers. However, BILD, a tabloid newspaper, was included in the sample, as well, as it has long been the most widely read newspaper in Germany. In fact, looking at paid circulation for national daily newspapers in Germany in the first quarter of 2018 shows that BILD had the largest circulation by far: BILD (circulation: 1.7 million; readers: 9.3 million), SZ (circulation: 352,573; readers: 1.3 million), FAZ (circulation: 239,946; readers: 760,000), *Die Welt* (circulation: 164,415; readers: 660,000), taz (circulation: 50,519; readers: 207,000) (Statista, 2018).

The chosen newspapers stand for a broad spectrum of political perspectives in Germany. According to Kepplinger (1998), the five newspapers can be positioned along a liberal-conservative-continuum as follows: taz, SZ, *Die Welt*, FAZ, BILD. taz is considered as far left. SZ can be considered as left-liberal, while *Die Welt* and FAZ are considered further right along the spectrum, as right-liberal. Die BILD is located at the conservative end of the continuum. Thus, an influence of the editorial lines of the chosen newspapers on the metaphors used in the coverage can

be examined as well. The newspaper articles were collected from a press archive at the University of Leipzig. The unit of analysis was each news article. The criterion for selecting a news article was that the article must contain the German word for refugee (Flüchtling/Geflüchtete/Flihende) including modifications, synonyms and plural, in their title, subtitle or are otherwise treating the refugee issue as the main topic of the article, to be coded. Visual additions and picture captions were not included into the analysis.

The topic of refugees has never again been covered as prominently as from August to November 2015. Each of the selected national daily print newspapers published at least three, often more, articles each day concerning the refugee issue. To have a manageable sample, the sample was based on content considerations. A cluster sample was created around the seven most relevant key events defining the refugee issue in summer and fall 2015:

- August 26th: Dublin agreement is suspended for Syrian refugees;
- August 31st: Merkel gives her speech *Wir schaffen das/We can do this*;
- September 6th: Refugees are allowed to enter Germany without border controls;
- September 13th: Germany closes borders;
- October 15th: Stricter asylum laws are passed;
- November 5th: Agreement on reception facilities for faster asylum processes;
- November 29th: Cooperation plan between EU and Turkey is determined.

Usually, there is a time span of six to 24 hours between the actual event and media coverage, which is why the coverage one and two days after said events were analyzed. In case of an issue of a newspaper not being published on one of these days due to Sundays or holidays, the next issue published after that day was chosen instead. The key events were taken from a timeline provided by the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung (Adenauer Campus 2016).

5. Results

A cluster sample was created around the seven most relevant key events defining the refugee issue in summer and fall 2015. This led to 14 dates between August 27th and December 1st on which the issues of each the

five newspapers were to be analyzed. From the resulting 70 newspaper issues analyzed in total, 429 articles were identified to cover the refugee issue, thus contained criteria to be selected for the sample. The most articles about the refugee issue during the investigation period in absolute numbers were found in the *SZ* (111 articles), followed by *Die Welt* (104 articles), *FAZ* (96 articles), *taz* (91 articles), and *BILD* (27 articles).

In the 429 articles analyzed, 226 metaphorical expressions concerning the refugee issue were found in total. To illustrate how often the different newspapers were using metaphors about the refugee issue in relation to their articles published about the refugee issue, the metaphor density was calculated. The metaphor density was highest in *FAZ*, with 84 percent and 82 metaphors found in 96 articles. It was second highest in *Die Welt* (69%), followed by *BILD* (51%), *SZ* (34%) and *taz* (23%). For the overall sample, this resulted in a metaphor density of 53 percent.

The 226 linguistic metaphor expressions found in the sample were structured into their underlying conceptual metaphors. During this process, eight different metaphor fields were identified. Five categories had already been formed deductively before the analysis, namely »water«, »natural disaster«, »military«, »disease«, »animal«. In addition to those five – which were all confirmed in the sample – the three categories »goods«, »crime« and »catastrophe« were built inductively.

Table 1

Conceptual Metaphors

| | Water | Military | Animals | Goods | Natural disaster | Crime, disease, catastrophe |
|-----------------|-------|----------|---------|-------|------------------|-----------------------------|
| Metaphors found | 166 | 23 | 13 | 12 | 7 | 6 |
| Proportion | 73% | 10% | 6% | 5% | 3% | 3% |

Number of metaphors categorized into their conceptual metaphor fields

An overwhelming majority of 168 metaphorical expressions (73%) fell into the conceptual metaphor field »water«. Table 1 shows the number and percentage of metaphors categorized into each of their underlying conceptual metaphors.

A closer look at the composition of the conceptual metaphor »water« showed that the most commonly used expression with regard to the refugee issue in this field but also in general was the metaphor of a stream or flow, with 120 mentions (e.g. Flüchtlingsstrom 10_16sz2, Massenzustrom 8_27welt4, Strom reißt nicht ab 11_6 welt6, Versiegen der Flüchtlingsströme 11_16faz4, Migrantenströme 10_16faz2, Flüchtlinge strömen 11_16welt6). The metaphorical expression of

a wave was second highest, with 29 mentions (e.g. Flüchtlingswelle 9_8faz5, Fluchtwelle 9_7faz6, Menschenwelle 12_1welt3, Immigrationswelle 9_15sz8, Wucht der Flutwelle 9_1welt5, zweite Welle 9_15welt10). Another image that was repeatedly found within the conceptual metaphor »water« is that of a dam or channel with 8 mentions (e.g. Flüchtlingsströme eindämmen 9_15welt2, Flüchtlingsströme kanalisieren 9_1sz5, Dammbbruch 9_7faz6, Migrationskanäle 10_16sz2). The metaphor of tides was mentioned 3 times (Flüchtlingsstrom abebben lassen 10_16welt8, verebben 8_28faz3). In addition to those repeated expressions, several other, more unusual, metaphors were found within the conceptual metaphor of »water« (e.g. Stöpsel auf die Flasche kriegen 9_14welt6, Rohrbruch 9_2faz3, Sogwirkung 9_7faz4).

The other conceptual metaphors consisted of more individual, diverse expressions that were harder to categorize. However, the most common ones and some examples are discussed here for a better understanding.

The conceptual metaphor of »military« included metaphors such as fortress (Festung Europa 9_15faz1), defense (Flüchtlinge abwehren 10_17faz6, Abwehr gegen Flüchtlinge 8_27sz4), weapons (Migrationswaffen 11_6welt1), assault on (Flüchtlinge stürmen den Zug 9_1sz2, stürmen die Grenzen 9_1welt2) or fighting (bekämpfen 9_1faz7, Kämpfer 8_27faz1).

The conceptual metaphor of »animals« consisted of metaphors such as jungle (hausen im Dschungel 9_1welt8), hole up (verkriechen sich 9_15welt12), coop up (eingepfercht 9_1faz8), swarms (Flüchtlingsschwärme 9_1welt4, Menschen Schwärme 9_1faz6), ticks (Zecken 9_7faz8).

Under the conceptual metaphor of »goods« fell metaphors such as utilize (Flüchtlinge verwerten 9_1faz10), deliver (Verfrachtete 8_27welt3), haggle (Feilscherei um Flüchtlinge 9_7sz4) backlog (Kette von Rückstaus 9_15sz4), or set-screw (Stellschrauben 10_16sz4).

The conceptual metaphor of »natural disaster« was verbalized through metaphors such as flood (Wucht der Flutwelle 9_1welt5, überflutet 9_15faz3), or high water (Hochwasserdämme sollen uns schützen 9_2faz3). With the exception of a single fire metaphor (Europa ist von einem Feuerring umgeben 9_15faz3), the category »natural disaster« in this sample can also be considered a sub-category of the »water« category.

6. Interpretation

Generally, there seems to be a connection between the political orientation of the newspapers and their usage of metaphors considering the density of metaphorical expressions and the severity of the chosen metaphor themes. Newspapers located further right along the liberal-conservative continuum (*BILD*, *FAZ*, *Welt*)

were found to have a higher metaphor density than the ones further left (SZ, *taz*). Analyzing the tenor of the articles confirmed the findings of previous studies that most metaphors found in articles had a negative tenor. However, one must consider that the majority of the articles had a negative tenor towards the refugee issue, anyway. Only *taz* published metaphors in articles with a positive tenor to a large extent, as well. This allows the interpretation that different usage patterns and motivations for the usage of metaphors exist throughout the media. *Taz* is a far-left medium supporting refugees and their rights. A possible explanation could be that *taz* was using the metaphors in its articles to underline how unjustly negative refugees were viewed by politicians and society during the refugee issue. Just to give an example, in one article, *taz* was harshly criticizing the politics of isolation in Europe and is calling Europe Festung (9_15taz5) to illustrate the difficulties that come up with Germany closing its borders in contrast to other media who are using this metaphor in a rather positive context.

Furthermore, a look at the sources of metaphors can help to understand what purpose journalists were using the metaphors for: Quotes and reflections – the two sources where the newspaper is not the original source of the metaphor – were found more often in the two liberal newspapers. This indicates that the two more liberal newspapers at least may not want to be seen as the originator or main source of the metaphor or want to avoid being held accountable for – however, they are still publishing them. The fact that each paper at least once published an article reflecting upon the usage and impact of metaphors in the refugee issue shows that journalists were aware of the possible dangers of metaphors.

The fact that the WATER metaphor was highly used across the different media, even the liberal ones, suggests that this metaphor was already established in everyday language. This process of naturalization, when metaphors are no longer even recognized as such, is what Steuter and Wills (2009, p. 4) warn against.

It is important to notice that the WATER metaphor *per se* can be either positive or negative. Water can be life-giving or life-threatening. It is still not completely controllable and measurable by humankind. However, the specific metaphorical expressions and the context they were used in, tend to support the negative side of the water metaphor: A wave is a sudden natural force that cannot be stopped by humans. A stream is something big, powerful and endlessly moving, a flood is something big, unwelcome, and uncontrollable as well. Thus, the WATER metaphor favors the perception of refugees as an unwelcome, dangerous disaster or an uncontrollable, overwhelming, unstoppable mass. It renders refugees – human beings, individuals in need of help – into an anonymous mass without a face.

Overall, what meanings and implications did the main metaphor themes have? All the metaphor themes found have in common, in addition to involving opposites, that they were portraying refugees as a common threat that is over-

straining Europe. Secondly, they were rendering individuals into a homogeneous mass. Instead of giving them the opportunity to speak about their experiences, they were no longer perceived as actors at all. Thirdly, the metaphor themes were dehumanizing and subhumanizing the refugees and thus excluding them from the human in-group.

This framing conceptualized the refugees coming to Europe as a threatening phenomenon. Images of crime, disease, natural disasters, and water masses suggest that refugees are not something in need of protection but something that Europe has to protect itself from. Military metaphors even transport the message that we are in a fight with refugees. What these figures of language tell us, is that refugees are not victims but a threat. Instead, Germany and Europe are the victims of the situation – in danger of being flooded and invaded. A clear distortion of the facts, since the refugees were the ones fleeing from war.

Being confronted by such a threat, Europe and Germany were invoked to defend and save themselves. The conceptual metaphors used in the coverage even supplied instructions on how to do so (Flüchtlingsströme eindämmen_{9_15welt2}, Massenzustrom kanalisieren_{9_15faz9}, Stöpsel wieder auf die Flasche kriegen_{9_15faz12}, Flüchtlinge abwehren_{10_17taz6}, Grenzen wie Hochwasserdämme_{9_2taz3}, Festung Europa schützen_{8_28welt1}, Flüchtlingsströme umleiten_{9_2welt2}, Zustrom drosseln_{9_14welt3}, an der Front bekämpfen_{9_1faz2}). Transferred to politics, this implies a politics of isolation and deportation. Consequently, a strong image of a national identity and the other is created.

To summarize, negative metaphors referring to the refugee issue were found in all of the analyzed mainstream media, with a stronger representation in the more conservative newspapers. What stands out is that in contrast to the other conceptual metaphor themes, the water metaphor was used consistently by all the media to such a high degree that it seemed to have become established in everyday language. We must understand that such figures of speech do not only exist on the right side of the political spectrum anymore. They have found their way into everyday language. In other words, the public debate during the events in 2015 was ruled by language that does not really allow much empathy for refugees and a solidary refugee policy.

7. Conclusion

»The nature of society is measured in part by the kind of metaphors it induces or allows...by our metaphors you shall know us.« (Barnes 1992: 12)

Metaphors have the power to structure our perceptions. Their repeated use in media discourse can establish prejudiced opinions. The water metaphor turns

refugees into a faceless mass. The military metaphor renders refugees into a dangers and animals, while other metaphors render them inhuman, when in fact, those people fleeing to Europe are humans – men, women, children, mostly victims of a war that is not their war, in need of help and shelter. They are individuals with a story, with dreams, hopes, and wishes. In contrast to the conveyed metaphors, Europe is not a boat that sinks or a fortress that cannot take in any more human beings at a certain point.

The starting point of this research was the premise that metaphors, as often in immigration debate, must have been part of the media discourse on refugees in 2015. And the assumption that those metaphors, depending on their meanings and implications, could potentially have the power to establish prejudiced opinions of the readership towards refugees. In order to verify this assumption, a qualitative content analysis of five national daily newspapers was carried out and the metaphors were interpreted according to the CMT. The survey showed that the omnipresent water metaphor and, in addition, seven other conceptual metaphors were used frequently. These metaphor themes had a discriminating effect, creating an in-group and out-group, or even stripping the refugees off their humanity.

In particular, this research has clearly demonstrated the problem of missing awareness among journalists and the public about the power of figurative language. Metaphors should never be accepted uncritically. Moreover, they are often not even recognized as such and then, through naturalization, find their way into everyday language, our thought patterns, and through them into our attitudes, behavior and political mood.

Consequently, we need to pay close attention to the patterns of metaphor at work in public discourse. Metaphors that systematically reduce others only create enemy images and move us closer to seeking solutions in violence. Additionally, by reducing others, we reduce ourselves, as well. Through critical awareness of metaphor's functioning, one can choose to challenge this process. It is difficult to evade from the evaluations connected to language use, but at least – whether journalist, politician, or citizen – we can reflect our own language usage, and question whether certain phrases or figures of speech are stigmatizing or discriminating against groups or individuals.

As the refugee issue is entering a new phase, media are facing a new challenge. And politics, organizations, and research need to support media in these efforts. What is needed for a successful integration of the refugees now, is a policy that is not founded on the fear of the other. Less dehumanization, discrimination, and isolation could benefit not only the refugees. Host societies could start to open up to the idea that they have much to gain from the flood of refugees in their heads that is coming to their shores to seek a new life.

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