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Constructing Immigrants: Portrayals of Migrant Groups in British Newspapers, 2010-2012

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Abstract

Immigration remains one of the most salient policy issues in the UK, especially among members of the public, the national media, and political leaders. Although some previous work has examined specific instances of media coverage as evidence of media coverage influencing public opinion, there has been little effort at linking systematic and comprehensive analysis of a large amount of news reporting over time to research into public attitudes towards migration issues. This paper uses quantitative corpus linguistic methods to analyse a large dataset of about 43 million words of text that appeared in 20 national UK newspapers from 2010-2012. It finds that newspapers used different sets of words to describe immigrants, migrants, asylum seekers, and refugees—and that these words varied depending on the type of newspaper under examination. Furthermore, we find preliminary evidence that these media portrayals, emphasizing asylum seekers while largely ignoring other groups like international students, match public perceptions of who migrants are. Finally, we find considerable overlap in the kinds of words used to describe migrants and immigrants, whereas language around refugees tends to be more distinctive.

Keywords: media, immigrants, asylum seekers, refugees, Britain, corpus linguistics

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Introduction

Since the early 2000s, immigration has been one of the most salient political issues in Britain (Page 2009, Duffy and Frere-Smith 2014), gaining extensive attention in the media as well as well as from political leaders and members of the public. Negative media coverage of migrants and asylum seekers is widely believed to influence and perhaps cause negative public opinion toward immigration (see e.g. Threadgold 2009, Crawley 2005). Numerous studies have examined episodes of media coverage of immigration in rich detail, often turning up evidence of negative and selective portrayals of immigrants or asylum seekers. Larger scale, quantitative research has reached similar conclusions, revealing depictions of migrants as "fleeing, sneaking, and flooding" into Britain (Gabrielatos and Baker 2008), and more generally a discourse that mostly presents a negative stance toward refugees, asylum seekers, immigrants, and migrants (Baker et al. 2008). But few researchers have systematically documented how the British media cover migration. Crucially, none have linked such systematic findings to research on public opinion beyond the simple association between negative coverage and negative attitudes.

In this paper, we provide a comprehensive portrait of the ways in which a key element of the British media—its national newspapers—have discussed immigrants and asylum seekers in the period of the present coalition government. By using newly-developed linguistic techniques, we are able to distill millions of words of news coverage, finding which words consistently appear as modifiers of these four key target words—"immigrants," "migrants", "refugees," and "asylum seekers", and which words likewise appear in close proximity to these target words and potentially inform readers' understandings of immigrants and the immigration issues facing Britain.

Public opinion research informs the questions we ask of our database (or "corpus") of British newspaper coverage. In particular, we focus on the ways in which media coverage constructs immigrant categories in ways that diverge from the reality of immigration in Britain—or at least in ways that emphasize some groups of immigrants while downplaying or ignoring others. Recent work has shown a considerable divergence between the characteristics of immigrants that are actually coming to Britain and immigration as perceived by most members of the British public. Asylum seekers (as well as "illegal immigrants") are focal points of public perceptions while international students are largely invisible, yet students far outnumber asylum seekers in recent arrivals, and as a contributor to the "net migration" statistics that have been central to political debate and policy-making in recent years (Migration Observatory 2011, German Marshall Fund 2013). And these perceptions may well be consequential for public support for restrictions on immigration: preferences for reduction in immigration flows are significantly more common among those who say that when they normally think about immigration they have asylum seekers in mind (Blinder 2013). In short, as Cornelius and Rosenblum (2005) put it, the distinction between "real and perceived" is often crucial to understanding public opinion toward immigration. If this is the case, then a richer understanding of how these perceptions are created is crucial to understanding public opinion, and in turn a politics of immigration in which policy-making and political manifestos are responsive to a largely hostile public.

We contend that mass media coverage provides a crucial building block for constructing these socially shared understandings of immigration. Further, we argue that a necessary precursor to understanding the media's role in this process is to develop a convincing and comprehensive portrait of actual media portrayals of immigrants and immigration. It is beyond the scope of this study to demonstrate that media portrayals play a causal role in creating public perceptions of immigrants. However, our findings demonstrate how the British press has helped to construct the concept of "immigrants," providing some of the raw materials that citizens may use to create their own perceptions. Our approach aims primarily at a "bottom-up" depiction of the language used most consistently by newspapers in this context, in order to create an accurate and comprehensive descriptive portrait. However, we are guided in addition by three specific questions with particular relevance in a context where perceptions of immigrants shape policy preferences that in turn influence political campaigns and policy-making.

First, we look into similarities and differences in the portrayal of the non-UK born in Britain when known by various labels: immigrants, migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers. Second, we ask whether the media portrayals that we observe align with conceptions of immigration that are most common among members of the British public. Finally, we ask how portrayals differ across newspaper types, divided into tabloids, "mid-markets", and broadsheets. Together, the answers to these questions shed light on the role of the British press in providing the tools for members of the British public to construct the perceptions of immigrants that inform their attitudes and shape their conceptions of the impact that immigrants have on the British economy, polity, and society.

1. Press Portrayals of Migration

Most prior work on British press portrayals of migrant groups has used in-depth analyses of particular episodes of coverage to arrive at overall judgments about the tone of coverage, and particularly political or ideological approaches to migration that are embedded in media texts. For example, Bowskill, Lyons, and Coyle (2007) present findings from an analysis of about 250 UK newspaper articles on integration, as well as a subset of 42 articles on Islamic faith schools, concluding that this media discourse privileges the dominant in-group and promotes assimilation even at the expense of minorities' rights. Gedalof (2007) examined government documents plus a year of articles in the right-leaning mid-market newspaper the *Daily Mail*, arguing that these texts employ stereotypical images that circumscribe immigrant women into limited roles. Innes (2010) shows another particular, negative portrayal of a certain sub-group of immigrants—in this case, finding asylum seekers and refugees painted as a threat to Britain's security, through close reading of a selection of articles from British tabloid and mid-market newspapers (*the Sun, Daily Express, and News of the World*). Meanwhile, Finney and Robinson (2008) find a wide variety of portrayals of asylum seekers in Cardiff and Leeds in 72 articles from newspapers in Yorkshire and South Wales; Rasinger (2010) finds negative themes including portrayals of migrants as a threat in *Cambridge Evening News* coverage in 68 articles from 2006 to 2008; Catto, Gorman, and Higgins (2010) use a collection of 220 articles in six major Scottish newspapers (1 January 2004 to 1 April 2008) to analyse how migration was covered in relation to debates about healthcare in Scotland, concluding that migrants were increasingly being portrayed as threats to the National Health Service.

Although revealing, tthese findings are limited in several ways. By using mostly qualitative techniques like Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) or manual content analysis, these studies argue that newspapers tend to express largely negative views of migrants through article content and word choice, which may well inform political debate and public opinion. However, the methods used are necessarily selective, and not always in explicitly justified ways. The means of selecting which media texts to study, for example, vary in both explicitness as well as comprehensiveness. Furthermore, the limited scope of the data collected, whether in terms of the short time periods under analysis or the small number of publications included in the sample, mean that answering questions about the overall state of the UK press on this issue is impossible.

1.1 Contributions of Corpus Linguistics to Study of Migrant Portrayals

Methods drawn from the field of corpus linguistics have been used to study media portrayals of migrant groups in ways that overcome these methodological limitations (Baker *et al*, 2008; Gabrielatos and Baker, 2006; Gabrielatos and Baker, 2008; Khosravinik, 2009). These methods enhance traditional content analyses by enabling researchers to handle large amounts of data to reveal textual characteristics that are not immediately apparent upon a surface reading. Practically, they remove the high time costs associated with hand-coding thousands of articles by accommodating a comprehensive database of all major publications across several years of coverage. In this approach, quantitative measures are supplemented with qualitative readings that can clear up ambiguous meanings and provide further insight on how particular words are most often used (Pollach 2011, Baker et al 2008). Furthermore, by relying on regular statistical features of the dataset to identify salient features like consistent

portrayals of migrant groups, these methods are more transparent and replicable than approaches that rely on detailed individual reading and interpretation. While it could be argued that the particular thresholds for determining whether a finding was statistically significant or not were arbitrary, corpus linguistics demands that they be clearly and consistently applied across an entire corpus (Baker 2006).

Finally, more than most other approaches, corpus linguistic methods are able to allow findings to emerge from the data, minimizing the role of researchers' expectations in shaping the results. As explained further below, part of our aim is to present a comprehensive description of the language that British newspapers have used in description and discussions of immigrants in recent years.

1.2 Research Questions

In addition, we focus on three particular questions with importance for the relationship between media coverage and public attitudes toward, and perceptions of, immigrants in Britain. First, are immigrants, migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers equivalent terms, or are there differences in how they are portrayed? Public attitudes often conflate asylum seekers with immigrants, and thinking of asylum seekers as typical immigrants is associated with a stronger desire to reduce immigration (Blinder 2013). Further, there is a history of political contestation over the distinction, or lack thereof, between asylum seekers and immigrants or migrants, particularly 'economic migrants'. Gabrielatos and Baker (2008) note a *Daily Mail* editorial making the case explicitly that "most asylum-seekers are economic migrants, rather than people fleeing persecution," while a *Guardian* editorial makes the opposite case in an argument for robust protections for refugees. Public opinion reflects these, with widespread support for the principle of accepting refugees co-existing with widespread skepticism about the motives and legitimacy of actual asylum seekers in Britain (Duffy and Frere-Smith 2014).

Earlier media coverage often conflated refugees/asylum seekers with immigrants/migrants (Gabrielatos and Baker 2008). If past trends have continued, then, we would expect to find a high level of similarity in the language used to describe foreign-born arrivals in Britain, whether they are labeled as immigrants, migrants, refugees, or asylum seekers. This would be reflected in a shared terminology surrounding each of the four terms, as prior research has found. However, there is reason to revisit and update findings on this question. Recent political discussions have revolved around government changes to legal pathways for immigration for the purposes of work, study, and family, and more recently attempts to reduce the illegal or irregular migrant population. It may be that the current policy-making environment has led to media portrayals that reflect the distinctions between refugees and asylum seekers on the one hand and immigrants (or migrants) on the other hand. In addition, prior research examines press coverage during the late 1990's and early 2000's when asylum seekers comprised a much larger share of international in-flows to Britain. If coverage bears much relationship to actual immigration flows, then it should be more difficult to portray immigration to Britain largely in terms of asylum seekers and refugees.

Second, we ask whether media portrayals are consistent with findings on how members of the British public most commonly perceived "immigrants". Recent research has shown that members of the British public hold selective perceptions of

"immigrants" as a category, and that these perceptions may have major consequences for policy preferences. Public attitudes toward immigration may actually represent views toward a few salient sub-groups of immigrants, notably including asylum seekers, labour migrants – particularly the "low-skilled" (Hainmueller and Hiscox 2010), permanent migrants, and so-called "illegal immigrants" (German Marshall Fund 2013, Ford 2013). Other sub-groups of migrants such as international students contribute considerably to net migration statistics and thus have been targeted in restrictive policy changes in Britain, yet are rarely cited by members of the public when asked who they normally think under the label of "immigrants" (Blinder 2013). If these public perceptions derive even in part from how media have portrayed migrants, we would expect to find images of asylum seekers, labour migrants, and illegal or irregular migrants featuring prominently in the British press, while immigrants as students or family members will be less prominent,

Finally, a third key question refers to differences among elements of the press. It is widely believed by many political actors that the British tabloid and mid-market press play a major role in engendering hostility to migrants (Crawley 2005, Innes 2010). Prior research has suggested that British conservative press may have played a role in shaping public expectations of the economy (Sanders, Marsh and Ward 1993), with its tabloid press perhaps even contributing to a large gap between perceptions of the economy and actual economic performance in Britain compared to other countries (Duch and Stevenson 2011). But is the British tabloid press truly distinct in its portrayals of immigration? Prior research has found a proliferation of negative terms as keywords in tabloid coverage of immigration, as opposed to broadsheets (Gabrielatos and Baker 2008). But again, this finding is well worth revisiting, both because media rhetoric may change but in this case for methodological reasons as well. Prior findings may have been partly determined by an analytical approach geared toward finding differences; thus, we employ a different set of tests that are more open to finding what newspapers have in common as well as pinpointing what divides them. In fact, we find that the language that tabloids use to discuss immigration is prevalent in broadsheets and so-called 'mid-markets' as well, suggesting a broader consensus on key terms than previously thought.

2. Data and Methods

2.1 Data Sources and Collection

To investigate these questions, we constructed a "corpus" of items appearing in national British newspapers and mentioning immigration. The corpus captures, as far as possible, every mention of the terms IMMIGRANTS, MIGRANTS, REFGUEES and ASYLUM, as well as the related words and phrases DEPORTATION and ILLEGAL ALIEN, in the selected newspapers' coverage. The resulting corpus includes over 58,000 newspaper items containing about 43 million words appearing in 20 national UK publications from 1 January 2010 to 31 December 2012.

Table 1. National UK Tabloid and Broadsheet Titles Included in the Study

Tabloids	**Mid-Markets**	**Broadsheets**
The Sun, The Sun on Sunday	The Express The Sunday Express	The Times The Sunday Times
Daily Mirror Sunday Mirror	The Daily Mail The Mail on Sunday	The Guardian The Observer
Daily Star Daily Star Sunday		The Independent The Independent on Sunday
The People		The Daily Telegraph The Sunday Telegraph
		The Financial Times

The newspapers selected appear in Table 1 according to categories based on the model of 'popular, mid-market, quality' publications as used by the Audit Bureau of Circulations (ABC). Popular newspapers refer to those titles that historically featured 'red tops' on their front pages. 'Midmarket' titles are those that featured black-colored titles at the top, and aim for a mix of entertainment news found in tabloids as well as traditional reporting found in the quality press. In the UK, only the Express and the Mail fit this category. The list includes only national British publications.

Items were found by searching the NexisUK newspaper database using the following query string: refugee! OR asylum! OR deport! OR immigr! OR emigr! OR migrant! OR illegal alien! OR illegal entry OR leave to remain AND NOT deportivo AND NOT deportment. The '!' character indicates that words beginning with those letters are also captured in the search. The exclusions were needed because 'Deportivo' is a Spanish football club, while 'deportment' refers to etiquette. Excluding these terms filtered out numerous items that would have had nothing to do with immigration or refugees. Also, the search avoids explicitly searching for 'migration' because of the risk of retrieving unrelated articles involving environmental affairs (e.g., such as animal migration) or technology (e.g., data migration). 'Migrants', on the other hand, is not a relevant term in either of these topics. Highly-similar items as determined by NexisUK were filtered out of the results. This approach relied on the precedent and experience of Gabrielatos and colleagues (Gabrielatos 2007, Baker et al. 2008).

2.2 Analysis: Corpus Linguistic Methods

In broad terms, corpus linguistics (CL) is a computational approach to content analysis that can be integrated into either qualitative or quantitative research designs. Its methodological strengths lie in its ability to be coupled with other analytical techniques—including those discussed in this report—to shed light on textual data. Choosing to conceptualize Hsieh and Shannon's (2005) treatment of theory-building and empirical observation as two ends of a continuum, Pollach observes that CL "always analyses corpus data both quantitatively and qualitative in order to explain and interpret patterns rather than just count them…address[ing] the association of textual patterns either with other textual patterns or with contextual patterns" (2011:

4). It “start[s] with the examination of relative frequencies and emerging statistically significant lexical patterns in the corpus and sub-corpora” (Baker *et al*, 2008: 277). One characteristic of text that is particularly salient for linguists is *collocation*, or the higher chance of two words appearing together within a pre-determined span of words.

Our study emphasizes the analysis of collocates, particularly those associated with the terms ‘immigrants,’ ‘migrants,’ ‘refugees,’ and ‘asylum seekers.’ Collocates are those words that appear near one another across a number of texts, more often than would happen by mere chance (Stubbs 1995, Sinclair 1991). By looking at the words that are especially likely to appear with a target word, researchers can detect patterns of language use that convey how a word of interest is used. When a target word is MIGRANTS, for example, collocations indicate the words and concepts that are associated with migration in newspapers’ writings. Collocation thus offers "a way of understanding meanings and associations between words which are otherwise difficult to ascertain from a small-scale analysis of a single text" (Baker 2006: 96). To ensure that collocations are real, consistent patterns, rather than coming from a particular researcher’s intuition or from an atypical usage, corpus linguistics assesses them in a large body of text, using statistical tests for significant associations. This process allows researchers to quantify the strength of a relationship between two words (Hunston 2007, McEnery and Hardie 2012).

Two statistical criteria were used to determine whether a collocation represented a significant relationship worth reporting. First, to be judged as an annual collocate, a pair of words had to display a Mutual Information (MI) Score of at least 5.0 within that year’s subcorpus. Second, it had to have a log-likelihood score of at least 6.63 in the same period. For the precise mathematical details of each test, see Pollach (2011).

It is known that MI can overvalue associations involving infrequent or rare words, making these collocations seem more important than they actually are (Xiao and McEnery, 2006). Meanwhile, the log-likelihood test shows the statistical significance of a possible collocation. Generally, corpus linguists agree that using a combination of measures to assess the strength of collocations minimises the risk of relying entirely on one technique (Lindquist, 2009).

In a further step, since these annual results could be susceptible to fluctuations around specific events, we focus on consistent collocates, or “c-collocates” (Gabrielatos and Baker, 2008). These are words that met the above criteria, and also were statistically significant in every separate year of the corpus. Certain events may generate unusually large amounts of coverage for a short period of time. These short-term changes in coverage might be interesting in their own right, such as coverage of nationality and ethnicity in relation to the 2012 London Olympics. But our interest is in examining how migrant groups were regularly portrayed over a longer period.

We present analysis of collocations at two different levels. The first examines words appearing within five words of the target word in either direction. This level of analysis is suggestive of a general association between words. In the case of this report, collocations with IMMIGRANTS, MIGRANTS, REFUGEES and ASYLUM SEEKERS indicate the language that consistently appears when these groups are mentioned. Prior work suggests an optimum window of ten words, for a balance

between capturing enough words for meaningful analysis and limiting the results to reflect meaningful relationships (Baker, Gabrielatos, and McEnery 2013). Of course, the choice of five words on either side is arbitrary: an analysis could legitimately use a window of four or six words on either side.

The second level focuses exclusively on the 'L1 collocate', the word appearing immediately before the word of interest. Figure 1 shows how these two forms of analysis relate to one another. The ten word window considers any word appearing in the depicted range as a collocate of the target word, which in this case is TARGET. Analysis of the L1 collocate, meanwhile, is confined to words appearing in the position immediately before the target word, depicted as L1 in Figure 1. Focusing on the L1 position hones in on words used to directly describe immigrants, migrants, refugees and asylum seekers. As the analysis below demonstrates, the L1 collocate will often be an adjective modifying the word of interest, as in 'economic migrants' or 'Iraqi refugees'. In a large corpus with millions of words, collocates in the L1 position can show patterns in the words used to describe immigrants, migrants, refugees and asylum seekers. Taken together, these two levels of collocation analysis provide considerable indication of the language that British newspapers have used in the last three years in conjunction with immigrants, migrants, refugees and asylum seekers.

Figure 1. Collocations and Their Relationship to a Target Word

L5	L4	L3	L2	**L1**	**TARGET**	R1	R2	R3	R4	R5

Of course, sole reliance on quantitative identification of c-collocates in the ten-word window may still miss the context of the larger sentence. Equally, analysis of collocations in this study does not account for negation (the use of 'not' to reverse the meaning of a sentence) as well as the attribution of a claim (whether a claim is merely reported, or actually stated by an author). As a supplement, we manually inspected and analyzed concordances of certain words, to disambiguate usages by showing precisely how a word is functioning. A concordance is a line-by-line listing of every appearance of a particular word in a corpus, in the context in which it appears. This is facilitated by corpus linguistic software (Kilgarriff et al. 2004, Scott 2012), which highlights a particular collocation while displaying a certain number of words around that collocation.

2.3 Normalisation of Results and Selection of Example Sentences

When comparing frequencies of collocations as they appear in two different contexts, such as tabloid versus broadsheet coverage, it is misleading to report the raw figures if the two sets of coverage have different amounts of text. This is especially apparent in our study, as Table A1 shows that the broadsheet sample contains more than three times as many items as either the tabloid or mid-market samples. Therefore, it is important to normalize the collocation frequencies to enable comparison across differently sized datasets. Typically, corpus linguists would normalize their results in terms of occurrences per 1,000 or 1,000,000 words. However, since tabloid articles are considerably shorter than broadsheet articles, using this convention would understate the relative frequency with which a word appears in broadsheets, and overstate it in tabloids (Gabrielatos and Baker 2008). Therefore, we chose to normalize the collocation results per 1000 items, for each publication type dividing the number of instances of a given collocate by the number of articles and then

multiplying by 1000. The resulting figure tells us how many times a given collocate occurs per 1000 items.

For example, if both a tabloid and a broadsheet ran a story using the word DEPORTATION once, but the broadsheet story was twice as long as the tabloid's, then the typical 'number per million words' measure would suggest that tabloids use DEPORTATION twice as often as broadsheets. But on a given day the readers of each newspaper's migration story would see each word mentioned once. Thus, arguably, normalising by number of items rather than words is more appropriate here: it avoids overstating how often a c-collocate appears in a tabloid publication relative to its overall coverage (Gabrielatos and Baker 2008). A single appearance of DEPORTATION in a broadsheet article thus counts the same as a single appearance of DEPORTATION in a shorter tabloid article (or in an even shorter letter-to-the-editor), even if the broadsheet article has more words.

To illustrate the key findings in this report, we included examples of collocation patterns that were drawn from the corpus. However, one of the challenges associated with this task involves selecting sentences that are typical for a particular collocation. To accomplish this, we used GDEX, a system that scores collocations based on how typical, informative and intelligible they are. Originally developed to automatically separate out 'good examples' of how a word is used which would be most appropriate for dictionaries, it applies a series of rules and weights to rank sentences that feature a collocation. These examine a variety of characteristics, including the length of the sentence, the rarity of the words in the sentence and whether the collocation in question is the main subject. The precise details of the rules are contained in Kilgarriff et al. (2008), while a fuller discussion of what 'good' dictionary examples look like can be found in Atkins and Rundell (2008). GDEX proved useful in the context of this report for its ability to quickly identify typical and informative examples of major collocation patterns in our corpus. The examples provided in this report were all highly ranked by the GDEX formula. However, their presence is only to serve as illustrative examples of results from the analysis of collocations.

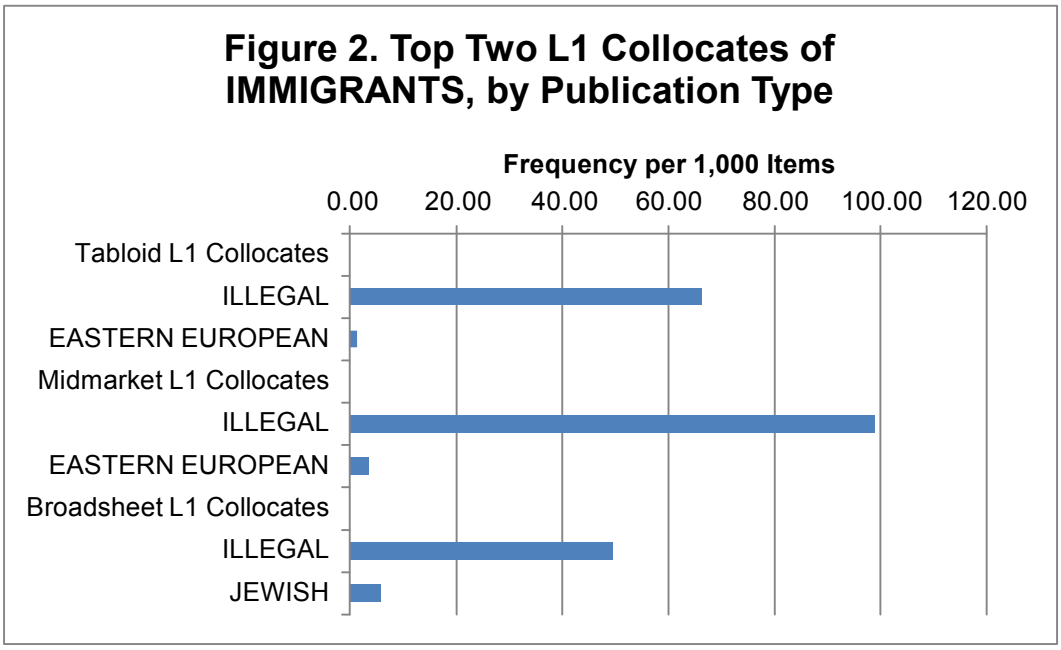
3. Results: Most Prominent Modifiers

As described above, our analysis involves two aims. First, we wished look at the data from the "bottom-up," seeing what collocations emerged from the analysis as numerically frequent or telling in other ways. Even at this stage, some selective attention is inevitable—corpus linguistic analysis can produce very long lists of key words and collocations, each of which could be followed up with more detailed analysis of concordances. To a large degree, however, our choices here are led by the results. As our main aim in this section is to answer the broad descriptive question of how migrant groups are portrayed in the news, it makes sense to initially focus on the most common words and patterns that emerged from the analysis. By this criterion, two results stand out: (1) the predominance of ILLEGAL as a modifier for IMMIGRANTS; (2) FAILED as a modifier for ASYLUM SEEKERS. In addition, we note (3) the consistent presence of one set of metaphorical words—those related to water—that is used to portray migrants.

3.1 ILLEGAL as a Modifier of IMMIGRANTS

Presenting results for IMMIGRANTS first, we found that ILLEGAL is the leading L1 collocate across all three types of newspapers (tabloid, mid-market, and broadsheet).

As Figure 2 shows, ILLEGAL occurred far more often than the next most frequent L1 collocate in each of the three categories of newspapers.



This L1 collocation was most frequent in the mid-markets. The normalized rate of 98.96 means that the phrase ILLEGAL IMMIGRANTS appears in almost 10% of mid-market items in the corpus (99 of every 1000), compared with 5% in broadsheets and 6.6% in tabloids.

To be clear, this does not necessarily mean that ILLEGAL was the most common word appearing immediately prior to IMMIGRANTS in the corpus, but rather the most frequent L1 collocate. Common grammatical words such as articles or prepositions may be very frequent, but would not show up as collocates because they are no more likely to appear immediately before IMMIGRANTS than they are to appear anywhere else in the corpus.

> The issue of **illegal** immigrants has been a problem for years. (Tabloid)
>
> About 20 tenants squeezed into outbuildings were found to be **illegal** immigrants. (Tabloid)

Table 1 shows that even looking at a broader sweep of words within a five words on either side of IMMIGRANTS, the prevalence of ILLEGAL still stands out. The normalized rates show that the word ILLEGAL appears within five words of IMMIGRANTS in about 10% of mid-market items in the corpus (100 of every 1000). For broadsheets and tabloids, this is closer to 5% and 7% respectively, but still considerably more often than any other c-collocate.

Table 1. C-collocates of IMMIGRANTS, 2010-2012

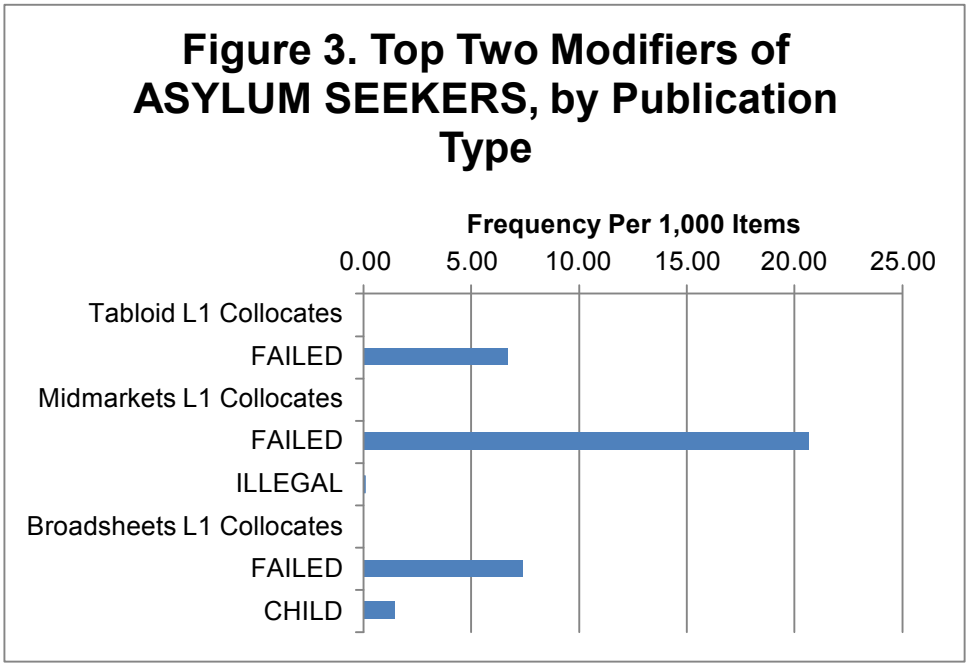
Tabloids		**Midmarkets**		**Broadsheets**	
C-Collocate	Normalized	C-Collocate	Normalized	C-Collocate	Normalized
ILLEGAL	67.25	ILLEGAL	100.57	ILLEGAL	51.71
INTO	11.86	BRITAIN	23.42	BRITAIN SON	7.82
MILLION	7.15	NUMBER	15.20	CHILDREN	7.25
NUMBER	6.98	MANY	14.92	JEWISH	6.58
STAY	6.11	EU	12.65	NUMBER	6.56
EU	5.76	AMNESTY	10.58	AMNESTY	6.03
THOUSANDS	5.76	MILLION	10.01	EUROPEAN	4.79
COMING	5.23	EASTERN	8.12	GENERATION	4.38
STOP	4.27	THOUSANDS	8.12	EASTERN	3.80
SEEKERS	3.14	EUROPE	7.84	AFRICAN	3.66
EASTERN	2.70	BENEFITS	6.99	MILLION	3.55
TERRORISTS	2.70	SEEKERS	6.70	THOUSANDS	3.53
WAVE	2.35	JOBS	6.52	BORN	3.31
SUSPECTED	2.27	INFLUX	5.57		3.28

Aside from the political controversies around this very phrase, it is worth noting that immigrants with legal status far outnumber those without it, according to the best estimates of the size of both types of migrant populations (Gordon et al. 2009). Of course, newspapers are not obligated to reflect migration statistics in the way they design coverage. However, this pattern is of interest in light of research on British attitudes to immigration, in itself and in comparative context. The British public are particularly ill-disposed to immigration in comparative context, and are notably preoccupied with "illegal" immigration German Marshall Fund 2013; Migration Observatory 2011, Blinder 2014). This preoccupation has been reflected in new enforcement efforts such as the recent, much-criticized "Go Home Vans" and most recently the Immigration Bill still being debated as of this writing, which seeks to make it more difficult to live in Britain as a migrant without legal status in the hopes of encouraging departures and discouraging visa overstaying.

3.2 FAILED as a Modifier of ASYLUM SEEKERS

Like "illegal" immigrants, asylum seekers are very prominent in public perceptions of immigration in Britain, relative to their small proportion in recent migration in-flows (Blinder 2013). Past studies show negative language surrounding asylum seekers, including common use of terms such as "bogus asylum seeker" or "illegal asylum seeker" which are technically nonsense terms, since the act of seeking asylum cannot itself be illegal (Gabrielatos and Baker 2008). However, there is a relationship between asylum seeking and illegal or irregular immigration status, since asylum seekers who have their claims rejected may stay in Britain without legal permission.

Given this background, it is perhaps not surprising that FAILED emerges from our corpus as the most common L1 collocate of the phrase ASYLUM SEEKERS. As Figure 3 shows, FAILED has a similarly prominent position in the words relating to ASYLUM SEEKERS as ILLEGAL has with respect to IMMIGRANTS, although it is not used quite as frequently.



As shown in Figure 3, few other words met our standards of statistical significance and strength of relationship (Mutual Information Score). Among these candidate words, FAILED was much more common than the others, appearing as often as 20.68 times per 1000 news items in the mid-markets, and about 7 times per 1000 in tabloids and broadsheets, while no other word appeared as an L1 colllocate even twice per 1000 items in any of the three newspaper types. Whereas Gabrielatos and Baker find FAILED as a keyword distinguishing tabloid from broadsheet coverage in an earlier period, we find that in recent years FAILED has been the most common L1 collocate for ASYLUM SEEKERS across all three newspaper types.

Further investigation using concordance analysis found that FAILED often appeared in the context of discussions of enforcement and legal status.

> The UK Border Agency needs to deal with a raft of missing foreign criminals, **failed** asylum seekers and illegal immigrants. (Tabloid)
>
> The report finds students whose visas have expired are regarded as a 'low priority' by the agency compared to illegal immigrants and **failed** asylum seekers. (Mid-market)
>
> It is one of 13 secure centres set up to hold foreign national prisoners, **failed** asylum seekers and migrants who overstay. (Broadsheet)

Mid-markets and broadsheets also used ILLEGAL to describe asylum seekers, despite past criticism of this usage (Gabrielatos and Baker 2008), although this usage was not very common, occurring in less than 1 in 1000 mid-market items and in about 2.2% of items in broadsheets.

In keeping with these uses, we see further evidence for enforcement-related themes in conjunction with ASYLUM SEEKERS when we widen our view from L1 collocates

to c-collocates within five words on either side of the target. As shown in Table 4, a number of consistent collocates refer to legal status or enforcement measures: ILLEGAL and CRIMINALS in mid-markets; DETENTION, ILLEGAL, DEPORTATION, and PRISONERS in mid-markets. Some of these terms were fairly uncommon, but still registered as significant collocates, indicating that they were significantly more likely to be used in proximity to ASYLUM SEEKERS than elsewhere in the corpus.

Table 4. C-Collocates of ASYLUM SEEKERS, 2010-2012

Tabloids		**Mid-markets**		**Broadsheets***	
C-Collocate	Normalized	C-Collocate	Normalized	C-Collocate	Normalized
FAILED	7.06	FAILED	21.34	FAILED	8.21
IMMIGRANTS	2.27	IMMIGRANTS	6.70	REFUGEES	3.28
		ILLEGAL	6.04	MIGRANTS	2.37
		CRIMINALS	5.57	IMMIGRANTS	2.01
		MIGRANTS	3.87	DETENTION	1.71
		NUMBER	3.21	CHILD	1.60
		STAY	3.12	THOUSANDS	1.52
				ILLEGAL	1.24
				TREATMENT	1.21
				DEPORTATION	1.05

3.3 Numerical and Metaphorical Language

Finally, language related to numbers or quantities—as well as metaphorical language referring to water—was prominent in portrayals of IMMIGRANTS. Table 2 illustrates how words like THOUSANDS, NUMBERS, and MILLION regularly appear near mentions of this group. Examples illustrate that the numerical framing of immigration often involves portraying immigration as a problem – in these cases, associated with illegality and lack of security.

> The Commons Home Affairs Select Committee found a 'shocking' lack of supervision led to controls being relaxed too frequently, letting in **thousands** of immigrants unchecked. (Tabloid)
>
> If you are one of the **hundreds of thousands** of illegal immigrants who has managed to enter Britain, however, you will know the truth: that the UK border is just a facade. (Mid-market)
>
> Security agencies believe **thousands** of illegal immigrants are using the ID cards or passports, which the gangs say are rented from European Union citizens. (Broadsheet)

Meanwhile, terms relating migration to fluid, such as INFLUX and WAVE, stand out as the only metaphorical language to appear consistently in portrayals of immigrants in the corpus. While the rest of the c-collocates in Table 1 above have more literal connections to migration—even when picking out negative alleged consequences of migration (BENEFITS, JOBS, TERRORISTS, SUSPECTED); when reaching for metaphorical language to describe migration, terms relating to fluids still appear to be the leading choie. Linguists have argued that fluid metaphors further dramatize a concern with the quantity of immigrants entering the UK (Gabrielatos and Baker

2008), or relate migration to natural disasters such as tidal waves and floods (Charteris-Black 2005). The continued use of the fluid metaphor, then, continues to reinforce the construction of immigration as a mass phenomenon, and one that, like a flood, cannot be easily controlled and can lead to disastrous consqeuences.

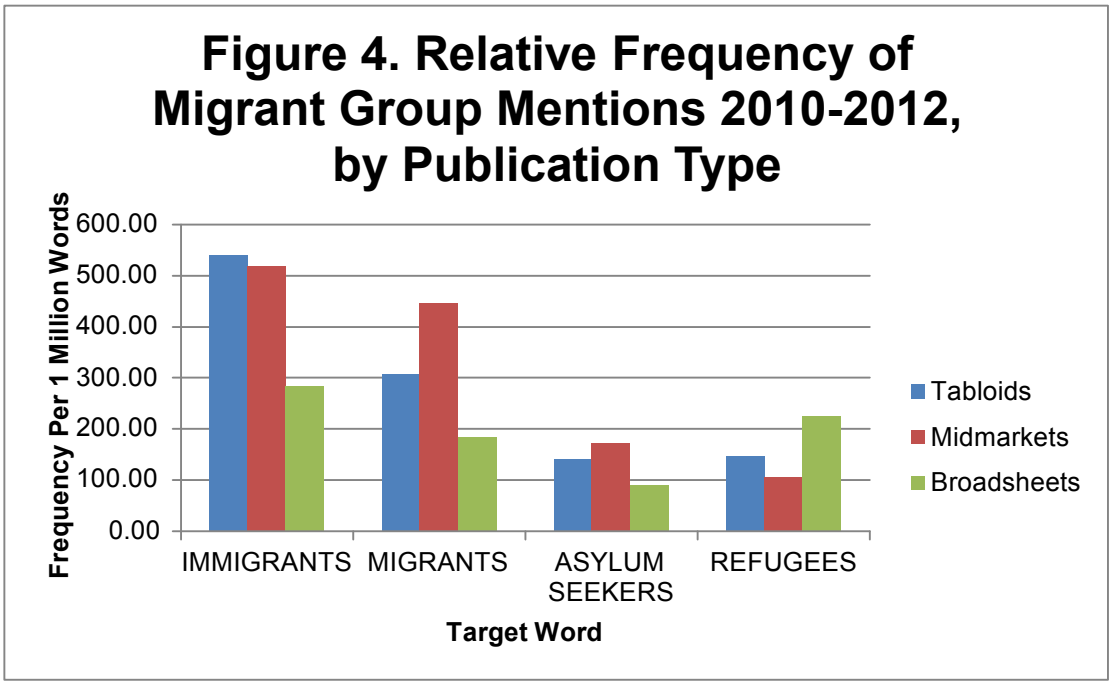
4. Comparing Migrant Policy Categories with Newspaper Portrayals

The "bottom-up" results in the section above show that dominant collocates of immigrants and asylum seekers, and the prevailing metaphors for immigration, suggest a highly negative view of immigration. Next, we turn attention to the ways that newspaper portrayals of these migrant groups compare to the broad policy categories currently in use by the UK government: asylum, work, family, and study. If, as the literature on public attitudes suggests, members of the British public actually have certain groups in mind when asked about 'immigration' in general, then to what extent do these match with the coverage in national newspapers? This section draws upon selected results from the full collocation analysis to examine some of the differences among each group.

4.1 Overview of Coverage by Migrant Group

Figure 4 gives an overview of the relative frequency that IMMIGRANTS, MIGRANTS, ASYLUM SEEKERS, and REFUGEES were mentioned in each publication type subcorpus over the 2010-2012 period. These results are normalised and displayed in terms of frequency per 1 million words. This enables comparison across the publication types, which are differently sized. For example, the broadsheet subcorpus is about six times as large as the tabloid subcorpus. Therefore, only reporting the raw frequencies would be misleading.

There are several important observations to note from this data. First, IMMIGRANTS were the group most mentioned in total coverage, as well as a percentage of tabloid and midmarket coverage. Meanwhile, ASYLUM SEEKERS were the least mentioned both in raw frequencies as well as a percentage of total coverage. Next, explicit mentions of all groups except REFUGEES declined year on year. This was also the case with each publication type with few minor exceptions in coverage of REFUGEES and a small increase in broadsheet mentions of IMMIGRANTS from 2011 to 2012 (although this still resulted in a slight decrease in the share of broadsheet coverage that year).



This reveals that, at least in explicit mentions, ASYLUM SEEKERS as a group received the least amount of coverage despite being highly salient for the public.

4.2 Migration for Asylum Reasons

Examining the coverage of refugees and asylum seekers shows that these groups are described using dramatically different sets of terms. As seen in Figure 3 and Table 4 above, asylum seekers but not refugees are described as FAILED, and are also associated with IMMIGRANTS, with ILLEGAL (in the mid-markets) as well as being DESTITUTE and VULNERABLE (in the broadsheets). Yet, the terms surrounding REFUGEES, especially in tabloids and mid-markets, are distinct: no single consistent L1 collocate stood out as a modifier for REFUGEES across the three publication types, as Table 5 shows. Across the 2010-2012 period, the only modifier used consistently by tabloids to describe refugees was FLEEING, but this usage was uncommon relative to L1 collocates of other target words, with only .35 appearances per item, similar to the rate in broadsheets. Meanwhile, broadsheets made much greater reference to the origins of refugees (AFGHAN, IRAQI, SOMALI, AFRICAN, BURMESE). The greater range of international news in broadsheets could account for this observation, with relatively frequent mentions of PALESTINIAN REFUGEES in coverage of events in the Middle East, for example.

Table 5. Modifiers of REFUGEES, 2010-2012

Tabloids		**Midmarkets**		**Broadsheets**	
L1 Collocate	Normalized	L1 Collocate	Normalized	L1 Collocate	Normalized
FLEEING	0.35	JEWISH	2.46	PALESTINIAN	6.50
		WAR	0.38	JEWISH	3.77
				AFGHAN	1.90
				IRAQI	1.82
				SOMALI	1.79
				AFRICAN	1.32
				BURMESE	0.83
				GERMAN	0.58
				GENUINE	0.52
				FLEEING	0.36

In contrast, JEWISH REFUGEES, occurring in both mid-markets and broadsheets, seems to refer to UK residents whose ancestors fled from the Nazis, or from other instances of persecution, as shown in examples from mid- markets:

> My parents came to Britain as immigrants, **Jewish** refugees from the Nazis. (Tabloid, Mid-market, and Broadsheet)
>
> This simple statement goes to the heart of what drives his remarkable generosity: his origins as the son of **Jewish** refugees from Russia. (Mid-markets)

This phrase spiked in usage when Labour leader Ed Miliband used it in a major speech on immigration that was widely covered in the press – his speech is the source of the first example sentence listed above. However, JEWISH appeared with REFUGEES in other instances in the corpus, otherwise it would not be a consistent collocate from 2010 to 2012.

Looking at the broader window surrounding mentions of REFUGEES adds additional collocates, as shown in Table 6. This includes mentions of organisations dealing with refugees directly such as the UN. Analysis of uses of HIGH, as found in the broadsheets, shows it occurring in mentions of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees. Also, mid-market and broadsheets' use of JEWISH tended to occur in the context of Jews escaping the Nazis, or other historical references to Jewish experiences. Quantity terms such as THOUSANDS, as well as location words like BORDER, also appeared in the tabloids and broadsheets, but were not as prominent in mid-market coverage of refugee stories. CAMP appears in the list for tabloids and broadsheets, but not in mid-markets, which atypically had an even shorter list than tabloids in this case.

The discourse around the word REFUGEES is much more international in nature, with c-collocates including CAMPS, the UN, WAR and a number of specific geographical terms. REFUGEES are not described frequently as FAILED. This would be nonsensical, as refugee status implies success in the process of seeking asylum (but Baker and colleagues (2008) have shown that nonsense constructions, such as "illegal asylum seeker," have at times been common currency in British newspapers). Rather,

refugees are depicted as FLEEING and, in the broadsheets, are associated with numerous countries of origin. Thus, the word REFUGEES rather than ASYLUM SEEKERS appears most associated with international crises. Meanwhile, ASYLUM SEEKERS are more likely to be associated with people in Britain seeking refugee status, and often with being unable to attain that status.

Table 6. C-Collocates of REFUGEES, 2010-2012

Tabloids		**Midmarkets**		**Broadsheets***	
C-Collocate	Normalized	C-Collocate	Normalized	C-Collocate	Normalized
FLEEING	3.75	FROM	12.09	THOUSANDS	7.88
CAMP	2.97	ASYLUM	3.40	BORDER	7.44
FLED	2.70	JEWISH	2.93	PALESTINIAN	7.11
ASYLUM	2.53	UN	1.61	FLEEING	6.03
THOUSANDS	2.53	WAR	1.61	FLED	5.32
HELP	2.44			HIGH	5.15
BORDER	1.83			RETURN	4.77
				UN	4.49
				ASYLUM	4.30
				ACROSS	4.16

These differences might seem to reflect a real distinction between asylum seekers and refugees: if the terms are used according to their technical definitions, asylum seekers are applying for international protection and thus aiming to become refugees, while refugees have already been determined worthy of protection. On the other hand, it is notable that the very same people might be depicted in one way when FLEEING war-torn areas or residing in CAMPS far afield (when identified in the news as refugees), and then very differently when arriving in Britain (and identified as asylum seekers). These differences do not follow the technical definition, in which refugee status is conferred on successful asylum seekers. As Gabrielatos and Baker (2008), this technical version suggests the opposite sequence from that implied by dictionary definitions, in which people fleeing from dangerous situations are refugees, who might then become asylum seekers by applying for asylum in another country. Newspaper usage appears to continue to reflect the common language or dictionary definition rather than the official definition currently in use in the policy process in Britain. In recent examples, people fleeing the violence in Syria have been widely known as refugees while leaving the country or living in temporary camps; the term "refugee" does not await a successful asylum application in a new country.

4.3 Migration for Work Reasons

Closer inspection of the language used around IMMIGRANTS and MIGRANTS revealed that, while some words like ILLEGAL were still salient for both groups, work-related terms appeared more often alongside MIGRANTS. This suggests a different context for MIGRANTS than for IMMIGRANTS, where economic terms did not appear as collocates. Table 7 displays the most frequent modifiers of MIGRANTS by publication type:

Table 7. L1 Collocates of MIGRANTS, 2010-2012

Tabloids		**Midmarkets**		**Broadsheets**	
L1 Collocate	Normalized	L1 Collocate	Normalized	L1 Collocate	Normalized
NON-EU	4.62	ILLEGAL	15.49	ECONOMIC	7.69
ILLEGAL	4.54	ECONOMIC	13.98	ILLEGAL	6.83
ECONOMIC	3.58	EU	6.80	SKILLED	5.18
EU	2.79	NON-EU	6.52	AFRICAN	3.42
EASTERN EUROPEAN	1.31	SKILLED	4.25	NON-EU	3.14
EUROPEAN	0.52	AFRICAN	3.59	EU	1.49
		EASTERN EUROPEAN	3.49	EASTERN EUROPEAN	1.38
				POLISH	0.77
				UNDOCUMENTED	0.58
				EUROPEAN	0.50

Inspection of example sentences revealed that 'economic migrants' can be used in a variety of ways. In mid-markets, some usages differentiate economic migrants as less worthy of entry than other categories such as asylum seekers or students:

> They are **economic** migrants not asylum seekers. (Mid-market)
>
> In recent years however, it's clear a substantial number – probably tens of thousands a year are **economic** migrants seeking a back door into the UK. (Mid-market)

Other portrayals of economic and skilled migrants link these groups with valued and needed talents:

> They make an enormous contribution to society and, in the case of talented **economic** migrants, bring skills which will be essential in restoring the country to financial health. (Mid-market)
>
> Both temporary **skilled** migrants and genuine students are vital for the UK economy, but the UK Borders Agency needs to be better resourced to track them coming in, keep track of them while they're here and, importantly, record when they leave. (Broadsheet)

Broadsheet coverage also referenced economic migrants alongside challenges for immigration control, particularly the issue of ascertaining the reason for migration:

> The designation was introduced to weed out bogus colleges set up solely to sponsor **economic** migrants. (Broadsheet)
>
> This resulted in a huge influx of **economic** migrants, many claiming to be political refugees, initially settling in Germany but eventually in the UK. (Broadsheet)

Expanding to the ten-word window for collocates reveals additional economic and policy terms, also not seen in the language around IMMIGRANTS. As seen in Table 8 below, JOBS and BENEFITS are also c-collocates of MIGRANTS, in the tabloid

and mid-market subcorpora. Inspection of the concordance for BENEFITS confirms that in this corpus, BENEFITS refers to the seeking or receipt of monetary payments from the state, rather than some conception of the advantages brought by migration. Broadsheet discourse also includes JOBS but at a lower frequency, and did not include BENEFITS as a c-collocate:

> Home Secretary Theresa May has binned the original version drawn up under Labour, which taught migrants about **benefits** and human rights laws. (Tabloid)
>
> There will be fresh rows about Britons losing **jobs** to migrants - and more pressure on services. (Mid-market)

Table 8. C-collocates of MIGRANTS, 2010-2012

Tabloids		**Mid-markets***		**Broadsheets***	
C-Collocate	Normalized	C-Collocate	Normalized	C-Collocate	Normalized
EU	10.82	EU	25.31	EU	8.90
BRITAIN	7.24	BRITAIN	22.10	ECONOMIC	8.35
NON	6.54	ILLEGAL	17.00	ILLEGAL	7.58
NUMBER	6.28	UK	16.53	SKILLED	6.47
ILLEGAL	5.15	ECONOMIC	14.83	BRITAIN	5.92
JOBS	4.36	NUMBER	12.46	NUMBER	5.37
HERE	4.10	JOBS	10.20	NON	5.26
ECONOMIC	3.92	BENEFITS	9.63	EUROPEAN	4.27
EUROPEAN	3.05	NON	9.25	AFRICAN	3.94
BENEFITS	2.97	THOUSANDS	9.16	EUROPE	3.91
BRITS	2.88	EUROPE	7.74	EASTERN	3.17
MILLION	2.62	EASTERN	7.27	JOBS	3.03

4.4 Migration for Family and Study Reasons

Words related to family migration were relatively infrequent. Broadsheet and midmarket coverage of IMMIGRANTS did include mentions of SON, CHILDREN, and DAUGHTER as seen in Table 2 above. But concordance analysis showed that these mentions were often recalling the ancestry of present-day British-born people rather than migrants. Meanwhile students, or words related to study, were not consistently associated with any migrant group across the three year period. Although words like STUDY and STUDENTS did occasionally collocate with IMMIGRANTS and MIGRANTS in selected years, it was neither regular nor consistent over the 2010-2012 period to justify selection as a c-collocate. Yet, according to official government data, however, international students were the most common type of immigration to Britain during the period covered by our corpus, and family migrants were a larger share of new immigrant arrivals than asylum seekers (Migration Observatory 2013).

These findings (4.1-4.4) suggest a mismatch among press coverage, public perceptions, and actual migration flows. This finding is important preliminary support for the notion that media (and other) discourses of immigration in Britain have contributed to public opposition to and concern over immigration, by shaping public

perceptions of immigrants' identities, characteristics, and reasons for immigration.

Media attention has focused on illegal immigration, failed asylum seekers, and labour migration, while terms associated with common forms of migration for family unification or for formal study did not appear nearly as frequently. Meanwhile, public perceptions mirror these priorities, despite their mismatch with actual immigration flows in recent years. Public opinion surveys and analysis have shown that members of the British public are far more likely to view asylum and work rather than family and study as typical reasons for immigrants to come to Britain (Blinder 2013), and that illegal immigration looms large in perceptions of and opposition to immigration (Blinder 2014, German Marshal Fund 2013).

This of course does not demonstrate that media coverage has a causal role in these public perceptions, but it demonstrates that there is a plausible case to made that public perceptions pick up on common media portrayals. Moreover, these constructed views of who immigrants are may have important consequences for attitudes and policy preferences. Much opposition to immigration is actually directed toward "illegal" immigration (German Marshall Fund 2013, Blinder 2014). Meanwhile, the perception of asylum seekers as a typical migrant group is strongly associated with a desire for less immigration to Britain, although those who perceive migrants as workers are less likely to prefer reductions to immigration (Blinder 2013).

5. Overlap in Language Surrounding Each Migrant Group

In more general terms, it is possible to examine the extent of overlap, overall, in the sets of terms collocated with each of the four target groups in the study. Examining the overlap of collocates of target words with each of the others shows that immigrants and migrants are the most closely related by this measure, with migrants sharing nearly half of the collocates of immigrants (32/65). (This is revealed by reading across the rows.) For IMMIGRANTS, these 32 shared collocates represent more than a third of its total of 94 collocates.

Table 9. Extent of Overlap Among Migrant Group Collocates

	IMMIGRANTS	**MIGRANTS**	**ASYLUM SEEKERS**	**REFUGEES**
IMMIGRANTS		34.0%	8.5%	14.9%
MIGRANTS	49.2%		10.8%	18.5%
ASYLUM SEEKERS	36.4%	31.8%		18.2%
REFUGEES	16.7%	14.3%	4.8%	
REFUGEES (non-broadsheet)	18.2%	18.2%	9.1%	

At the other end of the spectrum, REFUGEES shares fewer collocates than the other three terms share among themselves. Only 17% of the collocates of REFUGEES are shared with IMMIGRANTS, and only 14% with MIGRANTS. Even more surprisingly, REFUGEES overlaps hardly at all with ASYLUM SEEKERS, as less than 5% of the collocates of REFUGEES are also collocates of ASYLUM SEEKERS. Looked at from the opposite perspective, beginning with the (larger) set of collocates of ASYLUM SEEKERS, these overlap more with IMMIGRANTS and MIGRANTS than asylum seekers.

Returning to the actual lists of collocates shows the nature of these differences. The terms surrounding REFUGEES, especially in tabloids and mid-markets, on the other hand, are much more international in nature. C-collocates include CAMPS, the UN, WAR and a number of specific geographical terms. Refugees are depicted as FLEEING and, in the broadsheets, are associated with numerous countries of origin. Thus, the word REFUGEES rather than ASYLUM SEEKERS appears most associated with international crises. Meanwhile, ASYLUM SEEKERS are more likely to be associated with people in Britain seeking refugee status, and often with being unable to attain that status. Asylum seekers, but not refugees, are described as FAILED and associated with IMMIGRANTS in all three publication types, and with ILLEGAL (in the mid-markets). In other words, ASYLUM SEEKERS are portrayed more like IMMIGRANTS or MIGRANTS than like REFUGEES.

It is also worth noting that press coverage would appear to be moving in the direction of greater distinctions among the four target words. In Gabrielatos and Baker's earlier work, the proportion of overlapping c-collocates was much higher, including MIGRANTS sharing 79% of its c-collocates with IMMIGRANTS. Comparing our results to Gabrielatos and Baker's reveals a decline in overlap nearly across the board, with only one increase: the share of c-collocates of ASYLUM SEEKERS that overlapped with MIGRANTS. Furthermore, REFUGEES shared fewer c-collocates with the other three terms. Thus, the distinct vocabulary surrounding refugees suggests a change since the late 1990's and early 2000's.

This may reflect increasing consciousness of the distinctions between refugees and asylum seekers, and also between refugees/asylum seekers on one hand and immigrants/migrants on the other hand. This is certainly a grey area, as refugees and asylum seekers do figure into UK immigration statistics and fit official definitions of migration to the UK if they stay in the country for at least a year. However, most immigrants and migrants are not asylum seekers or refugees. Increasingly, British press coverage seems to reflect this by using more distinct vocabularies to describe each, though this is truer for refugees than asylum seekers.

6. Differences among Newspaper Types

British newspapers can be divided into tabloids and broadsheets, but a more complete market segmentation includes "mid-markets" as a separate category. Dividing newspaper into these categories, we an increasingly wider set of L1 collocates and c-collocates for each target word. While broadsheets are generally larger and the category includes more newspapers, this cannot explain the differences between mid-markets and tabloids, since the mid-market category includes just two newspapers in the corpus.

The distinction is critical in studies of media impact on public attitudes and perceptions of migrants, given the nature of the British national print media. British newspapers' news sections, as well as their opinion sections, generally reflect a consistent, often ideological editorial line. Several newspapers are known for negative or critical coverage of migration and migration policy; although these include titles across all three types, it is generally thought that tabloids and mid-markets pursue the most consistently critical line. Perhaps even more important, circulation is much higher among the tabloids and mid-markets, meaning that direct influence of media on public perceptions is more likely to come from these sources, all else being equal.

Returning to the results it appears that tabloids employ a narrower, specialized vocabulary to describe each of the target words in the corpus. To the extent that the L1 collocates of IMMIGRANTS are distinct from the words used in the rest of the corpus, it is only in the use of the word ILLEGAL and to a lesser degree words indicating European or Eastern European origins. These terms were shared in the mid-markets and broadsheets, but these publication types added additional terms as well. This pattern was essentially repeated for the other three target terms as well. Tabloids' descriptions of MIGRANTS were in terms of illegality or European (or non-European) origins. Mid-markets used a similar set of terms (as L1 collocates) but added SKILLED and AFRICAN, while broadsheets used all of these plus additional words indicating national or regional origins, or additional categories such as TEMPORARY and URBAN.

Regarding ASYLUM SEEKERS, the broadsheets included the terms used in tabloids and mid-markets as part of a longer list of modifying words, although fewer than for IMMIGRANTS and MIGRANTS. Broadsheets used the modifiers DESTITUTE and VULNERABLE and REFUSED as an alternative to FAILED. However, these three modifiers all occurred in less than 1% of broadsheet items. With respect to REFUGEES, the results were slightly less consistent and even the most frequent L1 collocates were used much less often than those associated with the other target words. Nonetheless, the results above showed that broadsheets used many more terms than tabloids and mid-markets, and that these terms often reflected particular national origins. Presumably broadsheets' greater attention on the whole to international news plays a role in this, and may do so in the case of the other target words as well.

Thus, it appears that at least by this measure, neither the tabloids nor mid-markets use a distinct set of words to describe migrants. The same common words appear in the broadsheet newspapers as well. The broadsheets differed by introducing new words and concepts, but not by discarding the words used in tabloid or mid-market coverage: rather, broadsheet coverage presents a wider set of vocabulary that includes tabloid and mid-market language to portray these migrant groups.

This conclusion does not rule out the possibility that tabloid and mid-market coverage is a distinct driver of negative perceptions of immigration. While broadsheets do seem to use much of the same language to portray immigrants and refugees, they also provide an alternative lens at times. The appearance of SKILLED in the broadsheets' c-collocates is particularly noteworthy, as publics in Britain and elsewhere are far more positively disposed toward immigration if it involves highly-skilled workers—or, for that matter, high-achieving students (Hainmueller and Hiscox 2010, Ford 2013).

7. Conclusions

The analysis above attempted to capture key features of British press coverage of migration from 2010-2012. We looked for frequent or unusual patterns that emerged "bottom-up" from analysis of consistent collocations. We also focused attention on three key questions relevant to the role of the media in constructing images of immigration that become available for members of the British public, for whom attitudes toward immigration are strongly related to perceptions of who immigrants are.

We found that the most common portrayals cast immigrants and asylum seekers in a very negative light. ILLEGAL IMMIGRANTS and FAILED ASYLUM SEEKERS emerged as the dominant phrases in the corpus, while water or fluid terms—arguably associated linguistically with mass quantities (Gabrielators and Baker 2008) and with natural disasters (Charteris-Black 2005)—constituted the only metaphorical language used consistently conjunction with immigrants in the corpus.

Further, we found preliminary support for the idea that media discourse has constructed migrants in the same terms that we see in public perceptions of who immigrants are. Asylum and work appear prominently in the corpus while family migration and international students are virtually invisible. Moreover, asylum seekers continue to be portrayed in language that overlaps considerably with the language surrounding immigrants and migrants, although the newspapers—particularly broadsheets—seem to have developed a distinct vocabulary around refugees.

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