

Do conservative British tabloids portray Ukrainian refugees more positively than Syrian refugees?

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Comparing depictions in the *Daily Mail* and the *Daily Express*

BACKGROUND

Since the 2022 invasion of Ukraine, some journalists and organisations have observed differences in treatment of Ukrainian refugees and other refugees (e.g., Esposito, 2022; Hundal, 2022). The UK has resettled both Ukrainian and Syrian refugees as a result of war - Syrians represented a refugee majority in the UK from 2010-2021 (Walsh, 2022).

Objectives

- 1 Do the *Daily Mail* and the *Daily Express* portray Ukrainian refugees more positively than Syrian refugees?
- 2 Analyse how Ukrainian and Syrian refugees are depicted.
- 3 Investigate factors that influence depictions and perceptions of refugees.

Importance of this research

- 1 Insight into tabloid bias.
- 2 Challenging prejudice, stereotypes and inequalities.
- 3 Understanding perceptions of refugees in British society.

METHODOLOGY

A critical discourse analysis (CDA) of four news articles from the *Daily Mail* and the *Daily Express*.

Middle-market, conservative British tabloids: High circulation = wide reach to society.

Two articles, March 2022: First reports - launch of UK Homes for Ukraine scheme for Ukrainian refugees; invasion of Ukraine reached headlines worldwide.

Two articles, September 2015: First reports - expansion of UK Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme for Syrian refugees; followed the death of a Syrian boy, Aylan Kurdi, pictures of whom reached headlines worldwide.

What is CDA?

A multi-level analysis of discourse within its wider social context, focusing on social inequalities and power relations. CDA looks at characteristics of texts, the context of the discourse, and the relations between discourse and society.

KEY FINDINGS

Three key themes:

1 Deserving/undeserving refugees and migrants

2 Britain/West as generous and compassionate

3 Problems/threats

Findings: Ukrainian refugees - text and language

122,000 Britons rush to take in evacuees

“generous Britons”
“seeking sanctuary”
(Both Lister, 2022)



Family: happy photo; names, ages, occupations stated

Choice of adjectives, verbs, numbers
Ukrainians = refugees/evacuees but also victims

Relatable to Britons/values

Britain = generous, compassionate, responsive

Deserving refugees

“ [Ukrainian refugees] will have full and unrestricted access to benefits, health care, employment ”
(Barrett, 2022)

Differences in tone of reports: funding/support for refugees

Findings: Syrian refugees - text and language



Images: chaos, dirt, single men

We'll open our doors to 20,000 Syrian refugees vows Cameron

“vulnerable new arrivals”
“tens of millions of pounds”

Undeserving refugees

Speech marks question refugees' vulnerability

Numbers: of people arriving, lack of money and resources

Migration = problem/threat

“ Town halls... warned they must not be left to 'pick up the pieces' after David Cameron threw open Britain's doors to 20,000 Syrian refugees ”
(Slack, 2015)

2022

Findings: discourse production and consumption

2015

- Politicians' voices
- No refugee voices
- Family like 'us'
- British generosity
- Power relations

Number of Homes for Ukraine registrations, Ukrainian family

Analysing the **context of the discourse** is important in CDA. e.g. What are the overarching narratives?

Lack of council resources, 2015 migrant 'crisis'

- MP voices
- Disclaimers, 'we'
- No refugee voices
- Refugees = threat
- Power relations

DISCUSSION

Ukrainian refugees: Portrayed more **positively, humanely**. However, they were also presented as **victims** who were being saved by generous Britons. Therefore, the depictions are not as simple as positive/negative.

Syrian refugees: Whilst presented as **victims** in the context of fleeing war, **not depicted as positively** as Ukrainians. Associated with the migrant '**crisis**' and local council **resource problems**.

What influences public perceptions?

Orientalism: Western discourses about the inferiority of the East (Said, 1978).

Aporophobia: Fear and contempt for the poor, including immigrants (Cortina, 2022).

Social identity theory: 'us' and 'them'. Bias towards those we can relate to, discrimination against those with whom we cannot (Tajfel and Turner, 1979).

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