Language
Discourse
& Society

Language, Discourse & Society

Language, Discourse & Society

A Journal Published by the Language & Society,
Research Committee 25 of the International Sociological Association

Thematic issue
« Migrants », « Refugees », « Boat people » and the Mediterranean Crisis: People in Words, Language Issues

This issue is guest-edited by

Frédéric Moulène, University of Strasbourg & University of Franche-Comté, France

Editorial Board

Language, Discourse & Society is an international peer reviewed journal published twice annually (June and December) in electronic form. The journal publishes high-quality articles dedicated to all aspects of sociological analyses of language, discourse and representation.

The editorial board will consider proposed articles based on clear methodological and theoretical commitment to studies of language. Articles must substantially engage theory and/or methods for analyzing language, discourse, representation, or situated talk.

Note for contributors:

Please check the website (http://www.language-and-society.org/journal/index.html), RC25 Facebook page (https://www.facebook.com/ISARC25/timeline?ref=page_internal) and RC25 newsletter periodically for the announcement of the new call for articles, and authors' guidelines.

For any information please feel free to email:
journal@language-and-society.org

Language, Discourse & Society

Contents

Volume 6, Number 1
June 2018

In "their" words and in "our" words: a comparison between European policies, media narratives and migrants' testimonies of landings in the Mediterranean.

Francesca Ieracitano[25] & Francesco Vigneri[26]

Abstract

The aim of the paper is to highlight convergences and divergences in the narrative patterns used by the Italian press and the migrants, through a comparison between the representations the main national newspapers made of the landings in Lampedusa in 2011, with testimonies and stories directly told by the survivors of the sea crossings in 2014. At the same time, we will use this confrontation as a key to interpret and analyse the recent EU migration policies, in order to understand whether and to what extent their narratives are closer to the media discourse on the migration phenomenon or to the narratives of its protagonists, the migrants. We used a methodological triangulation based on the content and frame analysis of the headlines and their reference to 311 articles about the landings in Lampedusa between February 15th and April 15th 2011. We gathered and analysed the narratives of direct testimonies of migrants landed in Sicily between the summer and autumn 2014. Lastly, we compared the results with the key principles in the European Agenda on Migration, approved in 2015. The results of this comparative analysis allowed us to notice how the European migration policies tend to shift towards the same directives used by the media in displaying the migration phenomenon, distancing themselves from the direct perception its protagonists – the migrants – have of their own experience, despite being the real recipients of such policies.

Keywords

[25] Corresponding author: Lumsa University of Rome Italy - f.ieracitano@lumsa.it
[26] University of Strasbourg and Lumsa University of Rome.

Introduction

In 2001, King and Wood argued that one of the three ways in which media may intervene in the collective experience of migration is the construction of the image that the host country has of migrants (King & Wood 2001: 1). This construction process is mainly made of words, discourses (Santa Ana, 2002), visual images and frames and it can impact the migrants' experience of inclusion or exclusion (King & Wood 2001), because they work on constructing an inclusive or exclusive approach in the public opinion, i.e. fixing stereotypes (Lippman, 1946), (Van Dijik, 1991).

The way in which media narratives frame landings, arrivals and the migrants' presence in the host countries has an important double role. Firstly, the media play a key role in creating social problems. This role mainly consists of presenting an issue to the public attention (Vasterman, 2005). Secondarily, in doing so, the media can orient and influence the host countries in the creation of migration policies and promote civic actions for the resolution of the social problem itself (Hubbard et al., 1975), (Terwal, 1996), (Sciortino & Colombo, 2004). In shifting from the first to the second point, the way the phenomenon is presented and the way the subjects of the matter are portrayed and addressed play a fundamental role (Van Gorp, 2005) (Altheide, 1997).

The migration to the Mediterranean shores has proved to be a social problem of great seriousness ever since the landings in Lampedusa in 2011 and 2013, the first one as a consequence of the Arabic revolutions in Tunisia, Egypt and, mostly, in Libya, and the second one as a result of the worsening civil war in Syria and the military dictatorship in Eritrea. In both cases, they represent significant moments in the history of migration in Italy, owing to: the unprecedented numbers of arrivals concentrated in a short period of time; high numbers of migrants dead during the sea crossing; the difficulty to manage the reception and relocation procedures with such a high number of migrants landed, which implied problems of co-existence between migrants and the hosting community.

From this moment onwards, the phenomenon has become a transnational social problem that resembles an authentic emergency, owing in particular to its scale (number of migrants landed: 62,692 in 2011, 42,925 in 2013[27], and of victims of wrecks[28]), its extent (number of European countries involved: i.e., besides Italy: France, Greece, Slovenia, Hungary, Bulgaria, Croatia and Romania, as well as non-EU countries such as FYROM, Serbia and Turkey[29]) and the level of attention it has gained among the media and the political agenda of both national and international governments. More specifically, the shipwreck off the coast of Lampedusa in October 2013, which caused the death of more than 360 migrants, contributed, owing to the high attention it gained in media agendas, to giving a greater visibility to the matter. It was the first one of such great importance to be documented all over the world (Belluati, 2014), (Szczepanik, 2016).

As far as politics are concerned, the emergency dimension of the phenomenon led to a redefinition of the reception policies and of the management of the emergency, both on a national and a European level. These policies first went through a strengthening of the

---

[27] Source: www.ismu.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/01/Sbarchi_serie-2011-2014.xls

[28] See: http://www.borderdeaths.org/?page_id=7, a research on the "Human cost of Border Control" by Spijkerboer et al. (2015), VU University of Amsterdam; see also: http://fortresseurope.blogspot.it/2011/05/mai-cosi-tanti-1510-morti-in-5-mesi-nel.html, from Del Grande's blog "Frotress Europe" on migrants dead in an attempt to reach Europe.

[29] Source: https://frontex.europa.eu/assets/Publications/Risk_Analysis/Annula_Risk_Analysis_2016.pdf

humanitarian dimension (especially in the immediate phase after the wreck) and then registered a greater attention to security matters – once the attention of the media on the tragedy was subject to a decrease due to the shift on the ever-growing quantity of arrivals[30].

In 2015, in particular, the issue of the landings and illegal arrivals went from being an almost exclusively Italian matter to a problem that involves the EU Institutions and the member states. These have immediately shown divergent ideas and promoted policies that would often be in contrast with what the EU institutions would recommend. This led to further restrictive policies[31].

With regard to the contexts of landings and arrivals, situations like the one in Lampedusa, especially due to their proximity to the points of departure for migrants in Libya and Tunisia, represent frontiers (Proglio & Odasso, 2017). In being so, they were the first to be exposed to and experiment various ways to manage the emergency and implement the security policies (Pogliano, 2016) such as the setting-up of a new model of first reception: the *hotspot[32]*.

Due to their condition of frontiers, they are highly subject to the media's attention. The media, in fact, have often used these contexts as a parameter to measure the migration situation in Italy and Europe, becoming real actors during the landing procedures, side by side with the law enforcement, even interfering with the reception operations (Ieracitano & Vigneri 2016).

What emerged from the analysis on the issue (Binotto et al., 2016) is that, due to organisational matters of security, the news can hardly give voice to the real protagonists, the migrants. This can only happen if they explicitly take the floor in riots and protests, which emphasises a "threat" frame. The personalisation of the story, instead, only happens through the media – it is not a direct story migrants tell, but the description of their experience through other witnesses' eyes: rescuers, doctors, volunteers or the journalists themselves. This tends, instead, to consolidate a pietistic portrayal (Ieracitano & Vigneri, 2016).

The risk is flattening the media's representation of the phenomenon of the landings on a triple narrative model. On one side, they present reports on the landings deprived of the migrants' fundamental point of view or their personal experience. Instead, there will be representations that merely involve the migrants: a mediated story about their experience that will often be part of – and reinforce – a pietistic frame (Chouliaraki, 2012). A third narrative model will counterpose the latter: the real voice of the migrants through violent actions and protests, whose frame of reference is the one associated with danger and threat (Chebel d'Appollonia, 2012).

64

---

[30] *Mare Nostrum* – the operation launched by the Italian government after the tragedy of October 3rd to rescue migrants in distress at sea – was replaced a year later by the EU naval missions with a stronger approach on security: *Triton* and *Poseidon*, coordinated by the European agency Frontex, aimed at the patrol of the central and eastern Mediterranean Sea, and *Eunavfor Med Operation Sophia*, a European Common Security and Defense Policy mission, aimed at the identification, seizure and destruction of the boats used for the smuggling of migrants in the central Mediterranean Sea.

[31] As an example: it is relevant to mention the opposition of Hungary and Slovakia to the scheme of relocation of the asylum-seekers who landed in Italy and Greece, and their appeal to the European Court of Justice; or the wall built by Hungary along the border with Serbia to keep the migrants away

[32] In 2015, the island's First Reception Centre became the first *hotspot* established by the European Agenda on Migration 2015. It is a new typology of centres for the immediate reception: a first medical screening and identification of the newly arrived through fingerprinting and the transmission of their fingerprints to the European database Eurodac. Such a model was then replicated in other similar contexts such as, in particular, the Greek islands in the Aegean Sea, exposed to flows of Syrian, Afghan and Iraqi migrants departing from the Turkish coasts.

In producing the social problem of migrations, the media's personalisation of the story risks orienting the public opinion and the political agenda towards some opposed solutions, in terms of legitimation and promotion of exclusive or inclusive migration policies (Moore, 2012). The use or misuse of some labels or a specific terminology related to the legal status of the incoming migrants can deeply affect this personalisation (Gross et al., 2007). As we know, for instance, defining "clandestine" migrants that have already been recognised as asylum-seekers or refugees, besides creating misinformation, does not favour the creation of an inclusive attitude towards the newcomers.

However, the biggest risk goes beyond the use of labels or the wrong use of legal terminology (Article 19, 2003). The lack of attention to the direct and exclusive experiences of the migrants leads to the creation of an image that, starting from the archetype and stereotype of the good and bad "migrant"[33] respectively – to which the often wrongful use of the terminology contributes: the "refugee" to be given hospitality against the "economic migrant" to push away[34] – produces social representations on which both national and European policies are built. Indeed, these policies turn out to reflect archetypical and stereotypical social and cultural representations, distancing themselves from the real situations they are intended to address.

The concept of the archetype of the good refugee evokes the ideal pattern (archetype) of the person in need, reinforced by the media images (Van Gorp, 2005). According to Szczepanik (2016: 32) "the 'refugee archetype' (is) a universal set of normative characteristics (such as poverty, passivity or helplessness, gender-related behaviour patterns) rooted in past geographical and historical contexts". As a consequence, the image of the economic migrant becomes a stereotype since it refers to a person that, not being in need of international protection, moves to Europe in mixed flows with refugees despite not having the same needs. This enhances in the collective consciousness the suspicion (Gatta, 2012) that he/she hides a deception aimed to abuse the EU social welfare and 'steel' the Europeans' jobs (Cerase & Santoro, 2018).

Starting from these assumptions, the aim of this article is to highlight convergences and divergences in the narrative patterns used by the Italian press and the migrants, through a comparison between the representations the main national newspapers made of the landings in Lampedusa in 2011, with some testimonies and stories directly told by the survivors of the sea crossings in 2014. At the same time, we will use this confrontation as a key to interpret and analyse the recent EU migration policies, in order to understand whether and to what extent their narratives are closer to the media discourse on the migration phenomenon or to the narratives of its protagonists, the migrants.

More specifically, the aim of this comparison is to investigate, through the analysis of the frames and terminology:

---

[33] The opposition between the archetype and stereotype of the good and bad "migrant" – recalled by M. Szczepanik who uses it in reference to the good and bad "refugees" (2016: 24) – is generally associated to the contraposition between the refugee running away from conflicts and the economic migrant often defined as "illegal/irregular" respectively. See also Akoka (2011) and Sayad (1999).

[34] This terminological difference is often used by media – as well as in the political discourse – to address migrants even before their legal status is defined from the judicial authorities, often in the light of their geographical origin, despite being a subjective acknowledgement to be established after arrival, not an inherent feature linked to one's own origin. Even the European policy of relocation by quotas among the EU member states is based on the country of origin.

- whether there is inconsistency between the narrations presented by the national newspapers and the migrants' testimonies and on what such inconsistency is based;
- whether and how this inconsistency is evoked in the narrative patterns of the main European migration policy: The 2015 European Agenda on Migration.

1. The migrants' experiences in the news about the landings: the theoretical context

As some research outlines, the way some social problems are presented can implicate preferences towards some policies instead of others (Altheide, 1976), (Reese et al., 2003), (Pacelli et al., 2014), depending on whether the media display the news using an individualistic or social explanation. If the public recognises personal responsibilities, instead of social ones, as the cause of criminal actions, poverty or illegal migration, it will less likely approve public actions aimed at improving the social situation, as these will be considered unjustified and unnecessary (Sotirovic, 2003). This is exactly what happens with the attempts of reframing the migration issue in Italy, with the anti-migration campaign promoted by the leader of the political party Lega Nord, Matteo Salvini. The campaign stresses the idea that migrants who land on Italian coasts are irregular migrants and/or potential criminals looking for better life conditions[35].

However, as the studies on the news-making show (Golding & Elliott, 1979), some social matters are rarely presented in the abstract, as the tendency to the personalisation of facts serves as a tool to catch the public's attention. Naturally, this poses risks. According to Sotirovic (2003), the excessive personalisation of the news, while catching the public's attention and diverting it from the real social causes of the phenomenon itself, leads to the discharge of the responsibility of the institutions. Despite being entitled to power, they personalise the narration as well and focus on the individual responsibilities.

A further risk is the use the media make of narrative structures, language codes and frames that, aimed at the personalisation of the news, activate a process of mystification of the subjects involved. In doing so, instead of allowing contextualising the individual actions, through shedding light into the dynamics that triggered such behaviours, the personalisation ends up harming the understanding of the phenomena itself (Boomgaarden & Vliegenthart, 2009), (Calvanese, 2011), (Cerase & Lai, 2016). It is thus a filtered, hetero-directed personalisation, which gives little voice to the subjects involved, unless it is to frame it within the double rhetoric of pietism and alarmism (Ieracitano & Vigneri 2016), the two main dimensions of the frame associated to the migration issue. In other words, cultural representations give rise to social representations (Moscovici, 2001) on the basis of which common actions, including those of the institutions, are taken.

As far as our object of study is concerned, many studies focused on the media coverage of the landings off the Mediterranean shores. However, most of them analysed specifically the frames the media used to portray the phenomenon (Bruno, 2015).

The results showed how the presentation of a structural phenomenon happens within the frame of the emergency. Such a frame can assume different variations that go from a pietistic representation of the landings, when the focus is on the sufferance endured by the migrants ("humanitarian crisis"), to an alarmist one, when the emergency then concentrates on the

---

[35] http://www.ilpost.it/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/matteo.salvini1.jpg

quantity of the arrivals and the number of migrants in the reception centres ("invasion"). Other studies highlighted how this double frame reflects in the dynamics of intercultural communication between operators and migrants (Ieracitano & Vigneri, 2016), where the interaction of the former seems to be influenced by the stereotyped image of the latter.

In particular, the research carried out by De Swert, Schacht and Masini (2015) showed how the media coverage of irregular migration and Lampedusa differs among the European countries. The number of arrivals covered by the European press is generally close to real-world figures; however, the Italian and the German news show larger peaks than the British, the Dutch and the Belgian ones, which are less affected by the real-world peaks (De Swert et al., 2015: 513).

The results underline a relative consistency of the media coverage on Lampedusa. Specifically, the scholars claim that the political problems, causes and solutions are across the board only eclipsed by the dramatic pictures of the humanitarian disasters that make Lampedusa so infamous. The study outlined that "The great bulk of news in all five countries (Germany, The Netherlands, Belgium, Italy, the UK) covered irregular migration and Lampedusa in a context of a 'humanitarian disaster' as the main problem behind the phenomenon" (De Swert et al., 2015: 518).

However, the authors underline how, in the Italian newspapers, the personal stories of the migrants themselves, while being so typical of the humanitarian drama coverage, are not very prominent if compared with the other countries (De Swert et al., 2015: 520). This is clear from the percentage of articles that contain direct testimonies of the immigrants. While in the Italian press the value is 7.8%, it is 22.3 in The Netherlands, 13.1 in Belgium, 18.0 in Germany, 23 in the UK out of 522 articles analysed (De Swert et al., 2015: 515). Therefore, the humanitarian dimension of the phenomenon of the landings is mainly based, in Italy, on the pietistic description of the migrants: a hetero-directed, mediated description, not based on their direct experience.

In our opinion, the absence or the low presence of these voices in the news coverage of landings have important consequences in influencing the public opinion on migration as a social problem, as the lack of reference to the reasons, experiences and aspirations of migrants does not allow putting into context the reasons that trigger the migration phenomenon itself.

Equally, the way the media often label the migrants through an incorrect use of the legal concepts linked to their status on the territory – in whose debate they cannot participate – like those of refugee, asylum-seeker, clandestine, can affect the legitimation of the social problem of migration. It can also affect the orientation of social policies towards inclusion or closure, leading to strengthening respectively the humanitarian or the security dimension.

This explains why in Italy, a country particularly exposed to migration fluxes, the media had to come up with tools that would grant a truthful presentation of the issue, through the production of a code of conduct – the "Rome Charter" – as an ethical reference for the coverage of the matters related to asylum and immigration. The Rome Charter acknowledges the fundamental role the media play in orienting and shaping the public opinion on migrants, especially with reference to their legal status, which determines the framing of the events.

The topics addressed in the above mentioned studies and the production of guidelines aimed to encourage a fair representation of migrants and of the migration issue, highlight the trend of the

Italian press to stress the representation of migrants from the hosting countries' perspective rather than through giving voice to the migrants themselves.

Interesting to the matter is the analysis carried out by Szczepanik (2016), who, starting from Malkki's research (1996), focuses on the tendency of the media to shape an abstract image, almost archetypical, of the refugee, that proves to be far from what the law states about the matter. From the media representations, the "good" refugee, according to the author's analysis, is usually a woman with children, therefore in need of acceptance and humanitarian aid. This image is in contrast with the one associated to the "bad" refugee, usually a man with no family that appears to be taking advantage of the aid and help offered by the hosting country[36].

As a consequence, "Individuals who do not possess the attributes of a 'good' or 'genuine' refugee are not only seen as undeserving protection but oftentimes it is also implied that they intend to abuse the system of social welfare" (Szczepanik, 2016: 26). In other words, the image of the refugee created by the media, according to Szkzepank's analysis, is based on what Malkki defines as the archetype of the refugee, a dehumanised, anonymous or sentimentalised subject (pietistic frame). By contrast, "any counterevidence, any story that challenges whom we are used to see as refugee" (Szczepanik, 2016: 30) is associated to the image of the threatening subject (alarmist frame).

This is what happens anytime the media narration focuses on what, in the newly landed migrants' behaviour, is perceived as "abnormal" – the use of smartphones, request of cigarettes, protests and other forms of dissatisfaction towards the reception services, etc.

As an example, when migrants become the protagonists of protests or insurrections inside the hosting centres, the tone and the terminology of the media narratives change (Ieracitano & Vigneri, 2016), contributing to the symbolic creation of an enemy addressed, in the main Italian newspapers, as "undesired", "riotous" or even "terrorist" (Ieracitano & Rumi, 2014) – in other words, the one who, being in need, has no right to rise up (Gatta, 2011).

Instead of paying attention to their point of view, this contributes to the consolidation of the stereotype of migrants (Stangor & Schaller, 2000 [1996]), (Dal Lago, 2006), seen as deceiving subjects (Gatta, 2012) who benefit from the hospitality, although they do not reflect the features of their archetypical image. As Cuttitta suggests, "although the migrants are often presented as the victims of the smugglers' criminal activity, in other cases, instead, the stigma of the criminality shifts onto them" (2012: 71). Such an approach contributes to the process of legal production of migrants' illegality (De Genova, 2004) typical of the migration control system: migrants are shown as inherently illegal subjects, although their illegality is largely the result of the migration policies themselves, which do not give alternatives to clandestine journeys. In our opinion, this approach is also perpetrated by the media, where low attention is given to the voice of migrants.

---

[36] The author uses the word "refugee" to refer indifferently to all the subjects arrived in Europe during the current migration crisis, regardless of their actual legal status. This status is, in fact, an acknowledgement given to the subject afterwards, only after their formal request for international protection and the judicial authorities' evaluation. However, we will use the opposition between "good and bad refugees" identified by the author to refer to the frequent opposition in the media and the European political debate between those who flee wars ("a right cause" to grant hospitality) and those who came "just" to improve their economic situations, the so-called "economic migrants", who need to be repatriated.

Moreover, in the mentioned studies related to the media coverage of landings, we identify a lack of sufficient attention to the inconsistency between the "mediated experience" (Thompson, 1995) of the phenomenon of the landings conveyed by the media and the "real experiences" as told by the actual survivors of the crossings.

2. Methodology

In our study, we used a methodological triangulation based on the content of the headlines and their reference to the articles about the landings in Lampedusa between February 15th and April 15th 2011, the most intense months of the landings on the island right after the Tunisian revolution. Afterwards, we gathered direct testimonies of migrants landed in Sicily between the summer and autumn 2014. Lastly, we compared the results with the key principles in the European Agenda on Migration, approved in 2015.

The intent is to understand whether the media narrations and the ones of the protagonists of the events show inconsistencies or different perspectives, anchoring to the archetype or the stereotype of respectively the good and the bad migrant.

As far as the media representation is concerned, the analysis was carried out on the main Italian newspapers chosen according to their distribution and their political-cultural orientation: *Corriere della Sera* (liberal), *La Repubblica* (progressive), *La Stampa* (moderate), *Il Giornale* (right- wing), *L'Unità* (left-wing), *Libero* (right-wing). The choice to focus the analysis on the front pages and the related articles allowed us to notice how the different headlines used the "Agenda effect" (McCombs &Shaw, 1972) and presented the landings emergency according to their typical editorial style. A data sheet was created with quantitative and qualitative variations (Berelson, 1952), (Losito, 1993), to analyse the content of the news and the modalities used to present the facts, even by the use of language codes and frames (Ieracitano & Rumi, 2014).

69

We created an analysis sheet divided in three sections: the first one dedicated to the content of the news (description of the protagonists and the events they went through, analysis of the causes and repercussions on the landings); the second one focused on the analysis of the language used (title of the article, terminology to address the protagonists and portray the landings); the third one based on the analysis of the frames used to look into the presence/absence of references to possible legislative solutions and/or in terms of recognition of the migrants' rights.

The monitoring allowed us to identify 311 front page headlines, together with the related articles. This led to noticing elements of consistency among the newspapers in the modalities used to present the matter, but also significant differences in the overview of the landing issue.

The migrants' testimonies are six. The limited amount of testimonies is motivated by the fact that they were spontaneously given by the migrants to the co-author, who was working as a linguistic-cultural mediator on behalf of the local health unit (ASP-06) during the landing operations in Palermo in 2014.

The role of linguistic-cultural mediator – an expressive and cultural intermediary between the migrants and the hosting social context – allowed the researcher to be in touch with the migrants' need to share their stories, which led to the creation of a privileged dialogue and therefore exposed him more directly to migrants' spontaneous tales

The testimonies given by the migrants at their arrival, during the triage and identification procedures at the dock, did not follow a uniform pattern because they emerged as informal dialogues. Moreover, being the very first occasion to share such a recent event, the testimonies would be genuine, without the influences that the regulatory procedures for the recognition of the status cause. Plus, the role of the researcher was disguised, as it would not have been possible to detect such information in the surveilled areas of the landings otherwise; the researcher would take brief notes of these informal dialogues and subsequently put them together right after the landing.

In our study, the decision to disguise the role of the researcher, despite the ethical concerns such an approach raises, is justified by scientific, ethical and logistical considerations.

From a scientific perspective the research concealment can "help reveal what lies beneath without altering the nature of reality", in particular when the subjects being studied are vulnerable, marginalized and stigmatized groups or individuals (Li, 2008: 111). From an ethical point of view, although the migrants were not informed about the use of their testimonies, the "potential social benefits of covert work often outweigh its ethical risks"; giving voice to marginalized and stigmatized groups of people, who are "made invisible and voiceless in our society (...) serve as advocacy to inform better policy and practice, ultimately bringing positive changes for people being studied" (Li, 2008: 111). In this regard, it should also be mentioned that, as provided for in the Rome Charter[37], the testimonies were anonymously treated, preserving the migrants' identity. Furthermore, due to the specific setting where the researcher acted as a linguistic-cultural mediator, the disclosure of the researcher's role would have hampered the mediation activity, which was crucial at that specific circumstance[38]. Therefore, the authors considered more ethical to preserve the role of the mediator in the interest of the migrants themselves than disclose the researcher's role to migrants, who might have felt uncomfortable in benefitting from the service and exposing their experiences and concerns.

The comparative analysis of these two typologies of content (the national newspapers and the migrants' testimonies) allowed identifying some interpretative categories (Van Gorp, 2005), useful to analyse the migration policies. More specifically, we analysed the main contents, frames and narratives of the current European Agenda on Migration approved in May 2015[39], to verify their closeness to either the media discourse on migration or to the migrants' own narratives.

The European Agenda on Migration represents the main European reference framework for both the EU and its member states to face the migration emergency. The decision to focus on EU- level policies, instead of national-level ones, is motivated by the direct impact such policies have on the way national governments – in this case Italy – cope with the migration crisis, significantly affecting their reception, asylum and return rules and procedures[40]. In particular, the 2015 European Agenda on Migration, approved as a consequence of the

---

[37] http://ethicaljournalisminitiative.org/assets/docs/068/223/47dfc44-3c9f7df.pdf
[38] The role of the linguistic-cultural mediator during the migrant landing operations was to facilitate the health assistance for the newly landed migrants, by making it possible for the medical personnel (doctors, nurses, psychologists, etc.) to properly evaluate their health conditions and treat them accordingly.
[39]   See:https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/homeaffairs/files/what-we-do/policies/european-agenda-migration/background-information/docs/communication_on_the_european_agenda_on_migration_en.pdf
[40] An example is the *hotspot*, a particular category of migrant first reception centres defined in the 2015 European Agenda on Migration, which were opened in Italy even before they were legally regulated at national level.

migration crisis emerged in 2011 and broken out in 2015, implied the immediate implementation of urgent measures with long-term effects aimed at both providing a more effective response to the crisis and committing the EU Member States to sharing the reception of refugees (relocation)[41].

The interpretative categories applied for the analysis of the European Agenda are: the migrants' status and the way they are labelled, the causes of their migration, the migrants' de-historicization and the de-contextualization of their choices and behaviours through the use of rhetoric sentences and metaphors (Van Gorp, 2005).

3. Protagonists in comparison: from the media to the real experiences

3.1. The media representation through the analysis of the Italian newspapers' language

The experience of the landings as told by the media is characterised by the specific terminological choices made in the examined headlines. The first aspect emerged from the analysis involves the words used to address the protagonists of the landings. The most used word is "immigrant", used 464 times on 311 articles, followed by "migrant", used 325 times. The frequent use of a neutral terminology to refer to the status of the migrants reveals the effectiveness of the Rome Charter. However, the use of an inappropriate terminology is still frequent, as demonstrated by the widespread use of the words "clandestine" (323 times) and, less used, "illegal migrant" (63) and "irregular" (30). This terminological choice is mostly typical of *Il Giornale* and *Libero* (right-wing oriented), where the use of "clandestine" shows up, respectively, 143 and 50 times.

The overall data show an on-going terminological confusion on the legal status of the migrants, which leads to a wrongful use of the words "forcibly displaced person" – *profugo* in Italian – (248), "refugee" (135) and "asylum-seeker" (31). Beyond the use of a more or less appropriate terminology, the reference to the legal status of the migrants is present 156 times in the 311 articles examined, while the reference to the ethnic/national belonging shows up 144 times; scarce or non-existent the references to religion (3) or personal data (8).

The analysis of the content showed the use of a terminology that insists on the emotional dimension, where migrants are addressed as "desperate" (59), "shipwrecked" (13) and "poor" (9). Such an emotional dimension contributes to strengthening the ethic-humanitarian interpretation in the reading of the facts. Other words to connote the protagonists are: "livestock", "damned", "disowned", "people with no name", "dispersed": words that highlight the ethic-humanitarian interpretation of the facts, shifting often towards pietism and recalling the archetype of the good refugee, as described by Szczepanik (2016).

However, the archetypical representation of refugees is opposed to a stereotypical representation characterised by two main features. On one hand, the stereotype is created by addressing the protagonists using their ethnic-national origin, rather than their legal status ("Africans", "North Africans"; "Libyans", "Tunisians", etc.); on the other hand, it materialises through the symbolic image of the enemy/invader with the use of words like "unwanted", "rebellious", "terrorist", "illegal", "invader". Within the representation of the landings, the archetype of the poor "desperate" migrant (or the "good refugee", to use Szczepanik's

---

[41] As a matter of fact, the appeals by Hungary and Slovakia against the relocation procedure, determined by the European Agenda on Migration, were rejected by the European Court of Justice in September 2017.

terminology) and the stereotype of the bad threatening migrant (the African foreign and criminal invader) coexist.

The analysis of the headlines outlined interpretative tendencies that can be divided into two semantic areas. Firstly, the lexicon used in the headlines contributed to identifying a first semantic field based on the tragedy, adopted in particularly by progressive, liberal/moderate and left-wing newspapers. It is enhanced in all its dramatic connotation by titles like "Migrants, apocalypse in the sea" (*La Repubblica*, 07/04/2011), "Hell Mediterranean, boat sinks: dead people and hundreds of dispersed" (*L'Unità*, 07/04/2011), "Hecatomb on the way to Italy" *(Corriere della sera*, 07/04/2011), "Massacre off Lampedusa: on the boat 300 immigrants" (*La Stampa*, 07/14/2011), "The great exodus from Libya. Humanitarian emergency" (*La Repubblica*, 02/03/2011).

Equally significant is the impact of the headlines focused on the consequences of the landings on the host countries. The terminology used in this case defines a semantic field related to the emergency, about which it is relevant to notice some differences. In some cases, it consists of a call for help addressed to the national and international institutions, to face the dramatic events; in some others, the emergency turns into a "foreign invasion" syndrome.

The call for help from an interventionist interpretation is exemplified by headlines like "A sea of desperate people invades Tunisia: 75 thousands at the border. The UN: a point of no return" (*La Stampa*, 02/03/2011), "The Pope: let the world help the Libyans" (*La Repubblica*, 07/03/2011), "Napolitano seeks for the EU's help" (*L'Unità*, 25/02/2011), "the UN to Italy: let the refugees in" (*Il Corriere della sera*, 23/02/2011). This shows the plurality of the institutional actors involved in a matter that has caught the public's attention not only for its dramatic nature, but also for a stronger request of intervention on a national and international legal basis.

The use of a lexicon that clearly recalls a situation of emergency proves to be even more significant, as it assumes the connotation of a real invasion and, indirectly, the impossibility to manage such a widespread phenomenon.

More specifically, the newspapers *L'Unità* and *La Stampa* show tolerant positions towards the landing phenomenon. On the contrary, the right-wing newspapers – i.e. *Libero* (64%) and *Il Giornale* (39%) – give more visibility to positions of intolerance, tightening up their editorial perspective towards the landings in Lampedusa.

Some headlines focus on the quantitative figures of the phenomenon, emphasising it: "Calm sea, the nightmare of the great invasion. After seven stormy days, 800 people landed in a few hours" (*La Stampa*, 03/03/2011), "100 thousand ready to land in Italy, Brussels warns" (*La Stampa*, 15/04/2011), "The island awaits the invasion, a non-stop landing" (*La Stampa*, 03/03/2011), "Lampedusa under siege" (*Libero*, 01/04/2011), "Collapsing Lampedusa" (*La Repubblica*, 30/03/2011). Others focus on the difficulty in facing the emergency: "Immigrants, the Regions in revolt. Berlusconi: it is a human tsunami" (*La Stampa*, 02/04/2011), "The clandestine invasion. Let's save the Italians" (*Il Giornale*, 29/03/2011), "Lampedusa: the number of the immigrants almost equals the inhabitants" (*Corriere della sera*, 23/03/2011), "They are too many, stop" (*La Repubblica*, 15/02/2011), "Immigrants, hell in Lampedusa" (*La Repubblica*, 28/03/2011).

The analysis of the variables examined so far allowed us to identify the key to interpret the Italian newspapers. On the whole, the examined headlines present the phenomenon of the

landings in terms of a problem that triggers social alarm (45%). This kind of framing is due to the willingness to face a situation that was labelled as a cause of a social alarm in the first place. The attempts of the Italian press for an interpretation aimed at finding solutions for the recognition of the migrants' rights is way less prominent (10%). The same happens with the articles that do not present any reference to expressed framing interpretations. This can be explained with the difficulty in addressing such a controversial phenomenon, like the one of the landings. However, the limited use of an interpretation that aims at the analysis of the causes that trigger the phenomenon (7%) demonstrates how one of the missing links in the representation of the migration phenomena is the attention to the reasons behind the matter.

The analysis of the frames on the different headlines demonstrates how the newspapers *Il Giornale* (51%), *Libero* (45%) *La Repubblica* (42%) and *La Stampa* (30%) use the social alarm as the prevailing key to interpretation. *L'Unità*, instead, appears to be more oriented towards problematizing the phenomenon from an interventionist interpretation, both on the legislative level (33%) and for the recognition of rights (22%). The exception represented by this newspaper demonstrates how the Italian press struggles to overcome a generally alarmist presentation of the news, to offer analytical/interpretative tools necessary to create a public opinion not exclusively focused on the emergency.

3.2. The migrants' stories through the analysis of direct testimonies

To analyse the migrants' stories, we used the expressions and explanations offered by the migrants themselves on their migration experiences (including the crossings and the landings), to understand how they define themselves and/or the other migrants. We analysed the way the interpretative comprehension of their status and their individual and collective condition develops, making a comparison with the expressions and explanations given by the press. Furthermore, we analysed the reference to other actors with an important role in the migrants' experience, together with the way migrants look at their own stories starting from the causes of their migration to their expectations.

73

Comparing the results of the analysis on the news content with what emerged from the 6 stories told by the migrants landed in Palermo, it is clear that the terminological choices made by the migrants to define themselves and address their fellows are mostly exemplified in expressions like "refugees", "migrants", but mostly "people". Within the same story, the three words interchange, but their use changes according to the specific phases of the events.

In particular, the expression "refugees" is used to describe the moment of the escape from the country of origin until the "meeting" with the smugglers. As a 40-year-old Palestinian man said: "The escape from Palestine (Gaza strip) to go to Sinai in Egypt happened through an underground tunnel of hundreds of metres we had to crawl through, guided by a man who is paid as a chaperon of the refugees, shedding some light all along the path"; "so many refugees, about to leave like us, did not make it". The words "migrants" and "people" are mostly used to indicate the phase of the crossing. According to an Ivorian woman: "one night, once I got to the port, the lady addressed a big boat full of Syrian migrants that had just left; the boat came closer and I saw the woman negotiate with some men (…). After a while, these people let me on the boat and there we set off".

An element that surely catches the attention is the use of the word "people" to refer to the inhuman conditions of the crossing. It creates such a strong contrast in the narration that it emphasises the process of de-humanisation the migrants are subject to. As a Ghanaian boy

recalls: "They literally threw other migrants from their boat to ours, not like people but objects". According to the Palestinian man: "a boat left shortly after ours and, presumably carrying hundreds of people, sank (…) all dead!". Another Palestinian man, a little younger, remembers that: "the boat was evidently too small to carry all the embarked people. However, the recovered people were dislocated in more than one boat".

The reference to the legal status is almost absent in their stories, if not in a couple of testimonies. In the first one, the Palestinian man talks about himself as a refugee and, in particular, as part of a group that shares the same destiny and status: "Many other refugees, who left like us, did not make it". A second testimony by a Sudanese man shows a great level of awareness about his own legal status as an asylum-seeker and the relative necessary procedures to obtain such recognition: "In fact, before leaving, I appealed to the UNHCR and I had been presenting my request for asylum in Europe for two years already".

Along with these two testimonies, the story of the young Palestinian man stands out. He seems to be disoriented in having to go through the bureaucracy of the landing and reception procedures, about which he has no knowledge. Nor does he seem to have any idea on which territory he needs to present his request for international protection. He asks the researcher/mediator for some clarifications, fearing the procedures of recognition might be an obstacle to his migration project. "Now that we are in Italy, I'd like to know some things. Where will they take us? How long will we stay in the centre? Is it true they will make us leave our fingerprints? I am asking because I don't want to stay here. Tell me, what country would you say is the best one in Europe?".

When talking about the travelling companions they met during the escape from their countries, the heard migrants express an estrangement that emerges from the different ethnicity. It recalls the mechanisms of in-group/out-group we create to draw a line between ourselves and the others. As the Ghanaian boy says: "on the boat, us black Africans were very few, just 3 or 4. Most of them were Arabs, but there was no hostility, nor did we have any fight or racist insults". The Ivorian woman says: "I ran to the desert (…). There I met a Libyan woman who spoke little English; at the beginning, I was a little suspicious (…) then I told her about me and she decided to help me. I did not know whether to trust her or not".

The sense of mistrust and estrangement towards those who share the same experience of the crossing is evident from the fact that any reference to relationships of solidarity and friendship is circumscribed to single individuals. An example is when the Palestinian man says: "(…) Luckily, there are some happy endings, like the story of that man who arrived with us. I'll show him to you as soon as I see him, so that you can take care of him (…)".

The reference to a sort of sense of "us" emerges while talking about the shared dangers and the extreme conditions of the crossing: "We started screaming seeking for help and many of us, already weakened by days without eating, started swallowing sea water (…). Luckily, we all survived, none of us died" (a Nigerian man) or: "It was so overcrowded we literally could not move, and from there the physical hurting you see now (…). We were treated very well (by a Turkish merchant) and they were so kind to us" (Sudanese man).

Although the birth of relationships of trust and mutual help with individual travelling companions is presented as unexpected and not obvious, when the stories start focusing on the present and the moment of the landing, the sense of loneliness prevails. The awareness that emerges from their words leads to reducing the importance of the relationships created during

the journey. As the Ivorian woman says: "I lost everything and everyone and I am by myself here, I am afraid (…). I was alone, I didn't know anyone on the boat (…). Then this boy (a young Ivorian man sitting on the triage area on her right) comforted me and encouraged me, telling me not to be afraid anymore. It was all so terrible. I lost my husband, my kids and two weeks ago my brother, too (…). And now we're here. But I lost everybody, my brother, I am alone (cries)". Similarly, the Ghanaian boy asks: "How is it going to be like here in Italy? What should I expect? What will happen to me? I have nobody here. I had my friends in Libya, but I am alone here. I just met Ali".

Besides the travelling companions, the stories told by the migrants contain references to other actors that intervene in their experience at different stages, from the escape from the country of origin to the crossing, until the arrival. In their narration, they mention institutional actors, like local governments, law enforcement, rescuers, merchants of various and different nationalities and European institutions, and smugglers, too.

In particular, the authorities and institutions of the countries of origin play an ambiguous role, especially when the story focuses on the escape and the migrants are caught by surprise for some behaviours. According to the Palestinian man: "We were given a fake Egyptian ID to show at the inspections (…). Actually, nobody ever checked us at all and I suspect that the Egyptian government has something to do with the whole organisation. Or, at least, the army, since the military, although seeing us, never stopped us". The ambiguous position of the local institutions is evident in their double role of saviours and persecutors, as we learn from the same testimony: "The boat, right after the departure, because of the rough seas, overturned, but, luckily, shortly after, the Egyptian coast guards rescued us and brought us back to Egypt. As soon as we were back on the land, the army arrested some of us and sent them to jail (…). At that point you don't have much choice: either jail, or the crossing".

The representation of the smugglers made by the migrants appears to be singular, especially if compared with the one offered by the press, which surrounded it with the symbolic image of the enemy. The protagonists of the landings describe them as businessmen that take advantage and steal from those in difficulty, while they address the militiamen and the local law enforcement as the real enemies: "We left on a rubber boat, running away. They (presumably the Libyan militiamen) started shooting at us, they shot the rubber of the boat that started deflating to the point it broke and I saw my brother drown" (Ivorian woman).

When talking about the smugglers, what is clear is that migrants were unaware of the travel conditions. Nor did they have any idea of what would happen next. To some migrants the smugglers were the valid alternative to the usually very late institutional aids. As a Sudanese man says: "Had I known how risky the crossing to Italy would be, I would have waited centuries for the international organisations to take care of me and my family. In fact, before leaving, I appealed to the UNHCR and I had been presenting my request for asylum in Europe for two years already. The vain wait made me decide to resort to criminal organisations to be able to come to Europe. They are fearless people, they take our money but they do not care about the people they deal with. I had been working two years to earn enough money to make me and my family leave, 3,500 dollars or so. The prices are crazy. They sometimes make differences whether you are by yourself, in that case you pay more. Big families have a discount on each person. Once they get the money, they do not care about our destiny. It sometimes happens that somebody changes their mind, but they do not get the money back".

The paradox that emerges from the testimonies is characterised, from one hand, by the great awareness on how the smuggling works, as they got to know it in detail, to the point they define it a real 'business': "I made contact with these people who work in the 'boats business'. For them, this is a real 'business' (he emphasises this word). You can always find them in the same spots in the city. You go there, you talk to them and pay the ticket. The ticket is expensive, let's say around 900 dollars. With the money they get, they buy a boat and as soon as it's ready and moored at the dock, we can embark to leave. But it is not immediate. It can take weeks and it's not even sure they let you leave. In my case, this was my second try and I ran out of all my savings. With the first money I guess I bought someone else a ticket. But I decided to try again, so I started working in business (…). So I went to the same spot and talked to the businessmen and I paid my ticket again" (Ghanaian boy).

On the other hand, such awareness is opposed to a sense of blame and incredulity in associating such a complicated mechanism with the inhuman and dangerous travel conditions it causes to the migrants. In some parts of the story, the migrants' attitude is the same as the one of an unsatisfied customer who pays for a service: "I wonder, with all the money these smugglers get (thousands of dollars per boat) from us escapers, why can't they provide us with at least something decent to eat and some water?" (Palestinian man).

A common feature of most of the examined testimonies is the reference to the causes behind the decision to emigrate. Regardless of the different ethnicity, the migrants' testimonies insist on the unbearable situation in their countries of origin as well as in Libya, to the point that going away was the only real way out. Regarding this aspect, another interesting element outlined from the narrations is that the description of the crossing and of the dangers they faced assumes connotations that are more neutral and less dramatic than the ones used to talk about the wars and the critical conditions both in Libya and in their countries of origin.

The emotional dimension, instead, is more evident in the analysis of the causes behind the migrations, as these testimonies show: "In Libya it was terrible! I went away from my village, in eastern Nigeria. I was threatened by Boko Haram, which had already murdered my father. They are killing everyone over there, they kill us, steal from us, rape our women. But I found another hell in Libya. They just shoot at you. I remember running, they would make us hurry, they would shout "go! Go!" (Nigerian man). "We were in Libya, we used to live in Tripoli. But it was unbearable: there is the war, a total war (…) I lost my kids there, two children, a boy and a girl, because of the bombs. I had already lost my husband years ago in Ivory Coast during the civil war in my country. That's why I escaped with my kids and my brother to go to Libya. Then, a few weeks ago, my brother and I realised we needed to go, we walked to Zwara" (Ivorian woman). "I stayed in Libya and then I decided to leave: it is total chaos over there, staying is too dangerous. People shooting, but mostly bombings, even in these months. They stopped recently and as soon as we could not hear the bombs anymore, we left the houses where we found shelter" (Ghanaian boy).

The dimension of the danger, the threats and the suffering are, in the migrants' testimonies, still central in the phase before the embarkation, while everything after that, however dramatic and inhuman, is told through the disorientation of the migrants who, having lost everything, need to start over from scratch by themselves.

On the contrary, the suffering dimension is evoked by the news particularly with regard to the crossing and the arrival, and is dramatized to the point of degenerating into a pietistic and humanitarian frame.

The media representation of the migrants, identified with the archetype of the "good refugee" (Szczepanik, 2016), is therefore the representation of a broken and incomplete story, circumscribed to the experience of the crossing, with no consideration of the whole migration process and its causes and, mostly, its human consequences. It is the representation of subjects that are deprived not only of their voice, but also and especially of information regarding such a fundamental part of their own experience: the reasons behind their own actions. As Malkki (1996: 378) recalls, migrants now become de-historicized subjects: "This de-historicising universalism creates a context in which it is difficult for people belonging to the refugee category to be approached to as historical actors rather than simple mute victims".

4. The political discourse through the analysis of the European Agenda on Migration

The same process of de-historicization is made in the creation of the main policies to manage the migration phenomenon in Europe. From the comparison between the media representation of the phenomenon and the testimonies of the migrants with regard to their own experience, we noticed some salient points, some prevailing directives of inconsistency followed by the media in distancing themselves from the self-representation of the migrants. In doing so, the media tend not only to de-historicize but also to level out – or to categorise imprecisely and in stereotypes – the migrants.

These directives offer interesting hints for the analysis of the language and the content of the main European policies. Specifically, we focused on the analysis of the frames and narratives used in the European Agenda on Migration of May 2015.

Despite noticing a higher accuracy in the legal distinction among the various statuses and a higher focus on the causes behind migration, even the European Agenda tends to uniform and depersonalise the migration phenomenon. Such a de-historicizing depersonalisation tends to lean towards the pietism and alarmism frames, as it happens in the media and differently from what emerged from the stories told by the migrants themselves. We therefore noticed the use of common narrative patterns between the discourse of the Italian press on migration and the one used in the European Agenda. It is common to find expressions that recall both the tragic nature of the phenomenon and the related urgency to handle its challenges effectively, especially considering its extent: "the plight of thousands of migrants"; "the pressure of thousands of migrants"; "the human misery"; "the human tragedy"; "high-volumes of arrivals"; "unprecedented pressure", and others.

The combination of a pietistic and emergency rhetoric finds its culmination in a double priority – reiterated both in the initial part on the immediate action and even later, when talking about the need of more comprehensive policies. Such priorities include the need of safety of the migrants in distress in the sea as well as that on the European borders, made possible by reinforcing the European border and coast guard (Frontex), the deployment of military tools to combat migrant smuggling, efficient policies of repatriation and cooperation with third countries to grant security at the borders. In this regard, the second paragraph of the section dedicated to the comprehensive policies is particularly emblematic: "Border management – saving lives and securing external borders".

As previously mentioned, we noticed a higher awareness of the numerous causes of the migration phenomenon and, beyond the immediate actions needed, particular attention is on the

management of the causes at its root. Some explicit references to the risk of generalisations, especially in the introduction, are present: "Every person's migration tells its own story. Misguided and stereotyped narratives often tend to focus only on certain types of flows, overlooking the inherent complexity of this phenomenon, which impacts society in many different ways and calls for a variety of responses".

However, the focus on the real causes is only limited to a subparagraph of the section and, in promoting enhanced cooperation with third countries to limit the need to emigrate, it seems to basically talk on behalf of the hosting societies, and to defend, therefore, primarily the interests of the Europeans. The following statement confirms this: "Migration should be recognised as one of the primary areas where an active and engaged EU external policy is of direct importance to EU citizens".

Even the legal difference between refugees and asylum-seekers on one hand (mentioned 28 times), and irregular migrants on the other (mentioned 26 times), is present when talking about the actions needed to make improvements to the European migration system. As far as the first category is concerned, these actions involve the implementation of quotas of asylum seekers and refugees for each member state – though regardless of the migrants' aspirations – whereas for the latter ("irregular migrants or those whose asylum applications are refused") swifter return procedures are encouraged and supported. This difference ends up emphasising the journalists' tendency to oppose the archetypical and stereotypical images of, respectively, the good and the bad migrants: the first ones, generally, refugees escaping wars, who deserve reception; the second ones, addressed as "irregular" or, in the media, "economic migrants", who need to be repatriated. This opposition, this "gap" created by such a differentiation, is then likely to be filled with xenophobia, rising in the public opinion as well as in the political landscape.

Lastly, however still present, the geographical context of the migrants (i.e. references to migrants' countries/regions of origin) is only limited; it is used, for instance, to describe the situation of the Syrian refugees in the Middle East or Turkey. The main regions are only mentioned, especially in Africa, where the EU intervened or needs to, through an empowerment of the actions aimed at countering the activities of migrant smugglers. Such a poor level of contextualisation highlights further convergence with media narratives, which, as noticed above, de-historicize the migrant by focusing on the crossing and the landing.

The discourses and narratives analysed are produced by different actors, who have asymmetric powers and roles in defining migration as a social problem. More specifically, the media narratives contribute to framing the landings phenomenon for an audience composed by the citizens of the European hosting countries as well as for their policy makers. The European Agenda on Migration, drafted in 2015 by the European Commission, offers EU Members States and their citizens EU-level solutions on the social problem of migration, using frame and narrative patterns that are close to those used by the media. The discourse of the migrants, refugees and asylum seekers follow counter-narrative patterns compared with the two previous ones, but do not rich out to the same audience as the media and the EU policies, which have different publics and powers. Therefore, despite being the main actors involved in this process, the narratives and discourses of the migrants are not able to affect the representation of their own experiences nor that of the migrants themselves, to whom those policies are addressed.

Conclusion

In the light of the focus on the landings in Lampedusa as a consequence of the crisis in Northern Africa and the Middle East, an important factor emerges from the analysis of the news: the explicit reference to migrants is rare in articles about landings, despite them being the real protagonists of such events. The headlines we mentioned in the analysis highlight the idea of threat associated to immigration on the whole, together with the attempt of generalisation of its protagonists.

In just a few cases the headlines refer to their legal status and, consequently, the causes/reasons behind the arrivals during the considered timeframe. However, the headlines that explicitly refer to the causes of the landings usually recall the idea of threat around the arrival of the "foreigner".

Whenever the headlines present an explicit reference to the protagonists' legal status, there is no intention to support the rights related to that specific status, but it is only functional to underline the disadvantages for the receiving country. Firstly, the newspapers characterised by a right-wing editorial line, in particular, tend to support the idea of a foreign invasion by mentioning the risk to disguise illegal immigration behind the reception of asylum seekers. This is clear in headlines like: "Not really asylum seekers, here they come the clandestine immigrants. Out of 16 thousand immigrants in Lampedusa, around 13 thousand are not Libyans, but Tunisians and, therefore, not entitled to international protection" (*Il Giornale*, 24/03/2011), "The clandestine bomb, send the fake refugees home! 80% of the immigrants do not escape war, they only want to get to Europe. Italy needs to send them away" (*Il Giornale*, 24/03/2011). Secondly, the idea of threat is supported by the stress on the great repercussions of the reception of the asylum-seekers and of immigrants on the Italian economic system.

Generally, the prevailing frame used by the Italian press is related to an alarmist presentation of the issue, independently from their political line. The left-wing newspaper *l'Unità*, where the humanitarian frame prevails, is the only exception.

By making a comparison between the media representations and the migrants' stories, some main discrepancies emerge. A first element is given by the terminology used by the media compared to the one used by the migrants to talk about their experience. The latter use the words "refugees", "migrants" or "people", which give their story the style of a report, whereas words like "desperate", "poor", "nameless people" used by the media add drama to the narration.

Moreover, one of the most important aspects emerged by our study is that the reference, however proper or improper, to the legal status of the migrants is not only used by the media to create the archetype of the good refugee or the stereotype of the bad illegal migrant. It is also used to define a social problem that burdens on the hosting country. The personalisation of the matter by the Italian press shifts between pietism/dramatization and emergency/alarmism causing the dehumanisation of the protagonists. This is not just due to the little space given to their own experience, but especially because the reference of the media to their legal status is usually related to the reception practices in the hosting society rather than to the reasons behind such events.

However, in the migrants' stories we do not find rhetoric that circumscribes them within the archetype of the good refugee. These are stories in which the objective dimension prevails over

subjectivity, as confirmed by the references to the context and circumstances they went through and that define the drama around a scenario that does not need self-pity.

By comparing the stories, we do not identify a collective sense of belonging. Each protagonist talks about their own story and not the experience of a group who shares a similar destiny or escapes the same persecutions. The sense of community is strictly related to the extreme conditions of the crossing. On the contrary, the Italian press builds the symbolic image of an ethnically, culturally and legally unified group – aware of the rights they are entitled to – through both the frames of the emergency and those of pietism. The uniformity given to the protagonists by the news is then destroyed by the individuality of each experience faced and told directly by each migrant, whose needs and expectations seem to vanish at their arrival, as their personal background is de-historicized both by the news and the policies.

The analysis of the relation between the media representation and the stories told by the protagonists allowed us to understand where the policies created to face the phenomenon seem to lean to. As in both the media and political representations the protagonists are de-historicised following the same trends – pietism and alarmism – and causing the depersonalisation of the migrants, it was possible to identify, in the main EU migration policies, a correspondence with the inconsistency between the media and the migrants' self-narration.

As in the media discourse, the text of the EU Agenda often resorts to expressions that highlight the dramatic dimension of migration, with regard, in particular, to the crossing of the Mediterranean ("the plight of thousands of migrants", "the human misery", "the human tragedy") and recalls the commitment to save the life of those in distress at sea. At the same time, the idea of alarm and invasion for the hosting societies is evoked by expressions like "the pressure of thousands of migrants"; "high-volumes of arrivals"; "unprecedented pressure", which stresses the need of security measures to combat irregular flows, up to making migration a specific component of on-going Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) missions.

Moreover, as it has already been noticed, references to migrants' geographical contexts of origin, however present, do not provide much clarification on the dynamics behind the decision to migrate; they are just mentioned mainly to provide a picture of the contexts on which the EU would focus its financial, operational and political efforts.

As a consequence, our outcomes highlight that the migration issue is in general presented from the perspective of the receiving societies and addressed in the interest of the EU citizens; migration therefore appears as a social problem to take charge of and the migrant is referred to as a de-historicized subject, framed as either a person in need risking his/her life to flee a war and therefore worthy of protection (pietism), or as an irregular comer/stayer who needs to be swiftly returned (alarm). In both case, too little account is taken of the migrant's perspective and very little is said about what is at the very root of his/her condition, as it is the case in most of the press articles we analysed.

The analysed data do not allow us to assume that the media affect directly the design of the European migration policy. However, the outcomes of our study give evidence that both the migration policies and the media tend to follow the same directories when presenting the migration phenomenon, distancing themselves from the direct perception of the migrants, despite these being the protagonists of the events narrated by the media and the real recipients of the policies themselves.

80

The migrants' representation offered by both the Italian press and the EU Agenda on Migration is that of de-historicized subjects. Consequently, the measures proposed by the Agenda are oriented only to the treatment of de-subjectivized persons who are reduced to two categories: a migrant in need of help (refugee/asylum seeker) and a migrant requiring surveillance (economic or irregular migrant).

References

Akoka, K. (2011). "L'archétype rêvé du réfugié". *Plein droit*, (3), 13-16

Altheide, D. (1976) *Creating reality. How TV news distorts events*. Beverly Hills: Sage.

Altheide, D. L. (1997). "The news media, the problem frame, and the production of fear". *The sociological quarterly*, 38(4): 647-668.

Article 19 (2003). "What's the Story? Results from Research into Media Coverage of Refugees and Asylum Seekers in the UK". London: Article 19: http://www.article19.org/docimages/1695.pdf

Belluati, M. (2014): "Lampedusa 3 Ottobre 2013. Cronaca di una tragedia" In *Associazione Carta di Roma: Notizie alla deriva*. Secondo Rapporto Annuale. Rome: Ponte Sisto: 63–68.

Berelson, B. (1952). *Content analysis in communication research*. Glencoe: Free Press.

Binotto, M., Bruno, M., & Lai, V. (Eds.) (2016). *Tracciare confini*. Milano: FrancoAngeli.

Boomgaarden, H.G., & Vliegenthart, R. (2009). "How news content influences anti-immigration attitudes: Germany, 1993–2005". *European Journal of Political Research*, 48(4), 516–542.

Bruno, M. (2015). "The journalistic construction of 'Emergenza Lampedusa': The 'Arab Spring' and the 'landings' issue in media representations of migration". In Bond E., Bosaver G. & Faloppa F. eds 2015. *Destination Italy: Representing migration in contemporary Media and Narrative*. Oxford: Peter Lang: 59–83.

Calvanese, E. (2011). *Media e immigrazione tra stereotipi e pregiudizi. La rappresentazione dello straniero nel racconto giornalistico*. Roma: FrancoAngeli.

Cerase, A., & Lai, V. (2016). ""Migranti e criminalità: Il racconto dell'immigrazione nell'agenda dei media". In Binotto M., Bruno M. &. Lai V. eds. 2016. *Tracciare confini*. Milano: FrancoAngeli: 45–59.

Cerase, A. &Santoro, C. (2018). "From racial hoaxes to media hypes". In Vasterman, P.L.M. ed. 2018. *From Media Hype to Twitter Storm*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press.

Chebel d'Appollonia, A. (2012). *Frontiers of Fear. Immigration and Insecurity in the United States and Europe*. New York: Cornell University Press.

Chouliaraki, L. (2012). "Between Pity and Irony. Paradigms of Refugee Representation in Humanitarian Discourse", in. Moore K., Gross B. & Threadgold T. eds. 2012. *Migrations and the Media*. New York: Peter Lang: 3-31.

CNOG (Consiglio Nazionale dell'Ordine dei Giornalisti), & FNSI (Federazione Nazionale della Stampa Italiana) (2011). *Charter of Rome. Code of conduct regarding asylum seekers, refugees, victims of trafficking and migrants*. Brussels: Ethical Journalism Initiative: http://ethicaljournalisminitiative.org/assets/docs/068/223/47dfc44-3c9f7df.pdf

Cuttitta, P. (2012). *Lo spettacolo del confine. Lampedusa tra produzione e messa in scena della frontiera*. Sesto San Giovanni, MI: Mimesis.

Dal Lago, A. (2006). *Non-persone: l'esclusione dei migranti in una società globale*. Milano: Feltrinelli.

De Genova, N. (2004). "The legal production of Mexican/migrant 'illegality'". *Latino studies*, 2 :160-185

De Swert, K., Schacht, L., & Masini, A. (2015). "More than Human Tragedy? A Quantitative Comparison of Newspaper Coverage on Irregular Migration and Lampedusa in Five European Countries". *Italian Studies* 70(4): 506-520.

Del Grande, G. (2011). Mai così tanti: 1.510 morti in 5 mesi nel Mediterraneo. Fortress Europe: http://fortresseurope.blogspot.com/2011/05/mai-cosi-tanti-1510-morti-in-5-mesi-nel.html

European Commission (2015). *Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions: a European Agenda on Migration*. Brussels: 13.5.2015 COM(2015) 240 final: https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/homeaffairs/files/what-we-do/policies/european-agenda-migration/background-information/docs/communication_on_the_european_agenda_on_migration_en.pdf

Frontex (2016). Risk Analysis for 2016. Warsaw: Frontex Risk Analysis Unit: https://frontex.europa.eu/assets/Publications/Risk_Analysis/Annula_Risk_Analysis_2016.pdf

Gatta, G. (2011). "Le violenze dei salvatori e dei salvati. Scenari lampedusani". Trickster. *Rivista del Master in Studi Interculturali*, 2011(10).

Gatta, G. (2012). "Corpi di frontiera. Etnografia del trattamento dei migranti al loro arrivo a Lampedusa". *Pagina bianca*, 33(34): 129-161.

Golding, P., & Elliott, P.R.C. (1979). *Making the news*. London: Longman.

Gross, B., Moore, K., & Threadgold, T. (2007). Broadcast News Coverage of Asylum April to October 2006: Caught Between Human Rights and Public Safety. Cardiff: Cardiff School of Journalism, Media and Cultural Studies: http://www.cardiff.ac.uk/jomec/resources/BroadcastNewsCoverageofAsylum.pdf

Hubbard, J.C., DeFleur, M.L. & DeFleur, L.B. (1975). "Mass media influences on public conceptions of social problems". *Social Problems*, 23(1): 22-34.

Ieracitano, F., & Rumi, C. (2014). "La rappresentazione mediale dell'emergenza: Il caso degli sbarchi a Lampedusa". *Sociologia*, 2014(1): 85–93.

Ieracitano, F., & Vigneri, F. (2016): "The Interference of the Mass media in the Intercultural Dialogue during the Emergency Landings in the Mediterranean: Between Reality and Representation". *Journal of Mediterranean Knowledge-JMK*, 1(2): 143-163.

King, R., and Wood, N. (2001). *Media and Migration. Constructions of Mobility and Difference*. New York: Routledge.

Li, J. (2008). "Ethical Challenges in Participant Observation: A Reflection on Ethnographic Fieldwork". *The Qualitative Report*, 13(1), 100-115. Retrieved from http://nsuworks.nova.edu/tqr/vol13/iss1/8.

Lippmann, W. (1946). *Public opinion*. Picastaway: Transaction Publishers.

Losito G. (1993). *L'analisi del contenuto nella ricerca sociale*. Milano: FrancoAngeli.

Malkki, L. (1996). "Speechless Emissaries: Refugees, Humanitarianism, and Dehistoricization'". *Cultural Anthropology*, 11(3): 377-404.

McCombs, M. E., & Shaw, D. L. (1972). "The agenda-setting function of mass media". *Public opinion quarterly*, 36(2), 176-187.

Moore, K. (2012): "Asylum Crisis, National Security and the Re-articulation of Human Rights", in. Moore K., Gross B. & Threadgold T. (Eds.). *Migrations and the Media*. New York: Peter Lang: 65-88.

Moscovici, S. (2001). *Social representations: Essays in social psychology*. New York: NYU Press.

Pacelli, D., Ieracitano, F. & Rumi: C. (2014). *Problemi sociali e rappresentazioni culturali*. Milano: FrancoAngeli.

Pogliano, A. (2016). "News Media and Immigration in the EU: Where and How the Local Dimension Matters". In Pastore F. & Ponzo I. eds. 2016. *Inter-group Relations and Migrant Integration in European Cities. Changing Neighbourhoods*. Dordrecht: Springer: 151-176.

Proglio, G., & Odasso, L. (Eds.). (2017). *Border Lampedusa: Subjectivity, Visibility and Memory in Stories of Sea and Land*. Springer.

Reese, S.D., Gandy, O.H & Grant A.E., Eds. (2003). *Framing public life: perspective on the media and our understanding of the social world*. Mahwah NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Santa Ana, O. (2002). *Brown tide rising: Metaphors of Latinos in contemporary American public discourse*. University of Texas Press.

Sayad A. (1999). "Immigration et pensée d'Etat". In *Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales*, 129, 5-14.

Sciortino, G., & Colombo, A. (2004). "The flows and the floss: The public discourse on immigration in Italy, 1969–2001". *Journal of Modern Italian Studies*, 9: 94-113.

Sotirovic, M. (2003). "How individuals explain social problems: the influence of media use". *Journal of Communication*, 53(1): 122-137.

Stangor, C., & Schaller, M. (2000 [1996]). "Stereotypes as individual and collective representations". In Stangor, C. ed. 2000. *Stereotypes and prejudice: essential readings*. Philadelphia, PA: Psychology Press, p. 64–84.

Szczepanik, M. (2016). "The'Good'and'Bad'Refugees? Imagined Refugeehood (s) in the Media Coverage of the Migration Crisis". *Journal of Identity and Migration Studies*, 10(2): 23.33.

Terwal, J. (1996). "The social representation of immigrants". *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 22(1): 39–66.

Thompson. J.B. (1995). *The Media and Modernity: A Social Theory of the Media*. Cambridge: Polity.

Van Gorp, B. (2005). "Where is the frame? Victims and intruders in the Belgian press coverage of the asylum issue". *European Journal of Communication*, 20(4): 484-507.

Vasterman, P.L.M. (2005). "Media-hype. Self-reinforcing news waves. Journalistic Standards and the construction of social problems". *European Juornal of Communication*, 20 (4): 508-503.

82

Varia

A move analysis of personal statements written by Ghanaian university students

Joseph Benjamin Archibald Afful[42] & Nancy Boahemaa Nkansah[43]

Abstract

The personal statement (PS) serves as one of the vital documents in the university admission process for prospective postgraduate students. Yet, it poses a great challenge to students in several English-medium universities worldwide. This paper investigates the schematic structure of 20 PSs written by prospective Ghanaian postgraduate students, drawing on Swales' (1990) genre perspective. The analysis showed that Ghanaian students deployed six obligatory moves (Caption, Background, Programme, Choice of School, Credentials, and Career Objective) and one optional move (Closure). Further, the PSs in the study had average words of 524, with Move five (credentials) occupying the most textual space. The dominant sequence was 1→2→ 3→4→5→ 6 and 7, with multiple appearances of moves 2, 3, 4 and 5 throughout a PS. This paper is significant in providing insights on the writing of PSs from an under-researched setting. It also provides some practical implications for academic writing programmes, genre studies, and further research.

Keywords

Genre, Ghana, personal statement, persuasion, postgraduate students

42 Department of English, University of Cape Coast, E-mail: jafful@ucc.edu.gh or jbaafful@gmail.com
43 Department of English, University of Cape Coast, E-mail: nbnkansah@gmail.com

Introduction

Pursuing a graduate degree is an arduous task which requires circumspection from applicants seeking for admission into a graduate school. Making a decision in respect of the right programme, choosing the best school to enroll in, preparing for higher academic tasks, and ensuring financial stability are some of the issues prospective graduates consider before applying for their chosen field of interest, apart from the many documentary requirements. Among these required documents is the Personal Statement (PS), also termed an Application Letter. The PS, according to Ding (2007), is one of the most important pieces of documentary requirements in the graduate school admission process for it exposes the applicant's writing ability, which in turn evinces the prospective candidate's disciplinary knowledge and tentative proposal of future research. The PS, therefore, provides the door for admission evaluators of graduate schools to examine further the applicants' personal and academic preparedness which no other documentary requirements could provide.

Personal statement, which is technically an essay in form, is an admixture of different language functions, both self-promotional and self-representation. It is both descriptive (or informative) and persuasive for it recounts one's personal experience and proffers arguments or reasons in pursuing a graduate course to convince their reader in considering them for the programme. Therefore, if properly written, it can, to a certain extent, spell success for the applicant. PS, as a genre, has an arcane nature (Vossler, 2007) because it is practiced only by an aspirant to the academic community, and not by a member (Bekins, Huckin & Kijack 2004, as cited in Vossler, 2007). In spite of its importance in the admission process, it is only in recent times that we have begun to learn about its nature and textual features, perhaps because of its 'semi-occluded' status, as claimed by Samraj and Monk (2008). As argued by Swales, studies into such typically hidden genres can provide useful insights. Most genre studies in the past four decades have decidedly focused on genres produced in the academic context. These genres include research articles, abstracts, argumentative essays, job application letters (Hyland, 1990; Swales 1990; Bhatia, 1993; Santos, 1996; Mercado, 2007 or 2000?), acknowledgement (Hyland, 2004; Afful & Mwinlaaru, 2010; and Afful & Mwinlaaru, 2012), introduction (Bunton, 2002; Afful, 2006), discussion (Holmes, 1997), results (Bretts, 1994), and conclusion (Hewings, 1993).

However, PS differs in many ways from the aforementioned genres. According to Ding (2007: 370), it lacks "prescriptive guidelines"; thus, it paves way for "creativity and individuality", providing "space for narratives and stories" which aim "to inform and persuade" its audience. Moreover, the undefined boundaries of the genre pose difficulty to applicants because of their anxiety with the conventions of the genre and expectations of their evaluators. This problem accentuates the gap between the writer (applicant) and its readers (evaluators), with the former being a novice and a stranger to the academic territory where he/she is seeking an admission and who barely has a clue of the readers' expectations, and the latter who is an expert in the field looking for the right qualities of the writer judging from a set of criteria unknown to the writer he/she has set forth.

There is a need for studies of genres that have not been extensively explored, such as the PS. In the midst of globalization and migration, the writing of PS is important. Such a genre particularly needs to be examined in socio-cultural contexts that have not been given attention. Researchers such as Schall (2002), Brown (2004), Barton *et al*. (2004), Bekins *et al*. (2004), Vossler (2007), Ding (2007), Forrister *et al*. (2007), Jones (2012) and Sii (2004) have studied the schematic structure and linguistic features of PS in the Western contexts. The

present study seeks to explore the schematic structure of PSs written by prospective Ghanaian postgraduate students in order to provide some insight into the discursive construction of this "semi-occluded genre" (Swales, 1996; Samraj & Monk, 2008).

1. Literature Review

This section provides the conceptual framework and review of empirical studies of PSs in order to provide a clear background to understanding the analysis and discussion of data.

1.1. Conceptual Framework

The term "genre", which originally was a term used in classical times to refer to different kinds of literary texts, has extended its meaning and been applied in various disciplines such as Music, Theatre & Dance, Anthropology, and Linguistics. In Applied Linguistics, genre theory has been looked at from three different schools: The New Rhetoric School, American School, and the English for Specific Purposes School (ESP). Whereas the New Rhetoric focuses on the context and professional contexts, the other two perspectives focus on the textual features and students (non-native English and immigrants). The present study is situated within the ESP perspective championed by Swales (1990), Bhatia (1993), Hyland (2003), Henry and Roseberry (2001), and Samraj (2002). According to Swales (1990: 58), one of the most cited genre analysts in Applied Linguistics, a genre comprises "a set of communicative events, the members of which share some sets of communicative purpose. The communicative purpose shapes the schematic structure of the discourse and influences and constrains choice of content and style".

86

The communicative purpose shapes the structure into which a text is organized and it is achieved by rhetorical units known as 'moves', which are further realized through sub-rhetorical units called either "steps" or "sub-moves". These formal characteristics involve giving much attention to the move structure in three respects: identification and frequency of occurrence, textual space, and sequencing of moves-steps. The identification of moves and steps also relates to the content of the genre as the inability of a writer to utilize all the moves may signal a deviation from what is recognizably accepted by members of the discourse community. A genre may have moves-steps which can be obligatory and optional. Further, these moves-steps may be allocated different levels of importance in terms of the amount of space devoted to them. Depending on the text length, we may utilize units of measurement of space such as T-units, phrases, words or bigger discourse units such as paragraphs. The sequencing of moves allows us to see the linearity, cyclicality, and embeddedness of the moves-steps. Further, genre analysts also describe and interpret the choice of linguistic features, which is also influenced by the communicative function of a genre. In other words, an ESP approach to genre also emphasizes the lexico-grammatical features of genres, although the Systemic Functional perspective also does the same.

It is possible that a genre such as the PS in its realization in different cultural contexts will differ in the ramifications described above. In this paper however, we focus on the move structure due to space constraint. Considering the communicative purpose of PSs, we expect that the PSs will be organized into moves and steps.

1.2. Previous Studies on Personal Statements

In practice, it is difficult to distinguish between studies that highlight the themes of PSs and those that highlight the moves, as expected in typical genre studies espoused by influential genre analysts such as Swales (1990) and Bhatia (1993).

According to Brown (2004), three content areas constitute the core of a typical Clinical Psychology PS. These are the research experience, research interests, and practical experience. The first two (that is, research experience and research interests) are specifically required from applicants. In addition, Vossler (2007) examines the rhetorical characteristics of PSs submitted to Student Information Library System by master's degree applicants. Drawing on Brown (2004), Vossler (2007) argues that there are eight rhetorical characteristics of statements of purpose. These are professional experience, educational background, professional goals, personal, others relating to library, others relating to hope and praise and others that do not fit into any of the rhetorical units.

Forrister, Jones and Liang (2011) indicate the common themes in the Physician Assistant (P.A) program applications. They identify eight themes and sub-themes. The first theme is the altruism and desire to help people which has subthemes as cross-cultural and underrepresented, geriatrics, paediatrics, undeserved rural, and undeserved urban. The second theme is challenges or hardships which comprise academic challenges in the past, family or friend health story, personal health story, international or refugee story, prior P.A. admission failure and poverty. The third theme is experience, which comprises the dramatic patient encounter, health care experience, military experience, mission trips/international experience and volunteerism. The fourth theme is the key accomplishment which has sub-themes as academic achievements, athletic performance, and research project. Personal characteristics constitute the fifth theme, with fascination by science or medicine, compassion or empathy as the sub-themes. The next theme is the positive perception of P.A. career attributes. These include autonomy, flexible or specialty transition, marketability and compensation, more time or involvement for patient care, time for family commitment. Role model, which is the final theme, had the following as sub-themes: family in health care profession, MD interaction, NP interaction, PA interaction, and religious or spiritual quest. Taking into account the PS as an effective way to enhance fairness in the higher education admission process, a more recent research conducted by Jones (2012) examines three key indicators in 309 PSs. These indicators are the fluency of expression, work-related activity, and extra-curricular activity. Applicants are advised to include details of job placements, work experience or voluntary work if it is relevant to the chosen course(s). Almost all the PSs contained some description of extracurricular activities.

Also, Barton, Ariail, & Smith, (2004), as cited in Vossler (2007), discovered four distinct moves in 169 PS used in residency applications. These include the opening move, schooling/training, interests and career goals. According to Barton *et al*. (2004), there is a strong preference for a personal narrative in the first paragraph. Based on their studies of graduate medical school PSs, Bekins, Huckin and Kijack (2004), as cited in Swales (2009), identify five moves. These include the hook, programme, background, self-promotion and projection moves. Similarly, in conducting a multi-level discourse analysis of medical and dental school application letters, Ding (2007) identifies five recurrent moves. These include explaining the reason to pursue the proposed study which comprises: explaining academic or intellectual interest in medicine or dentistry, stating one's understanding of medicine/dentistry, describing the motivation to become a doctor /dentist due to personal or

family experiences. The second move establishes credentials related to the fields of medicine or dentistry. This move had the following steps: listing academic achievements, reviewing research experiences related to medicine or dentistry and discussing professional experiences in clinical settings. Move three discusses relevant life experiences. Move four states future career goals and the final move describes personality.

In recent times more disciplinary studies on personal statements have been noted (Chen & Nassaji, 2014; Chiu, 2016; Chen, 2017). While these have, as far as we know, not differed considerably from the earlier studies by Brown (2004) and Ding (2007) in terms of the themes that are discussed, the inclusion of more disciplines presents the potential of interesting insights. Chen and Nassaji's (2014) study involved biology, engineering, ad linguistics; Chiu's (2016) utilised PSs from a multi-disciplinary sources such as Curriculum Studies, Language and Literacy, Educational Linguistics, Higher Education, Science Education, and Education Policy; and Chen's (2017) involved a large number of disciplines in the Arts (e.g. Applied Linguistics, Cultural Studies, Hotel Management, and Political Science) and Science (e.g. Computer Engineering, Information Technology, Material Science, and Environmental Studies. In particular, Chen's (2017) work which foregrounds disciplinary variation indicates that while students in Engineering and Science predicate their self-promotional arguments on their previous research experience and future research prospects, their counterparts in Business, Humanities and Social Science do not.

Another perspective is given by Sii (2004) in his cross-cultural investigation of British and Chinese TEFL and TESL application letters. Using Bhatia's (1993) model for promotional genre, Sii (2004) presents six moves. These include establishing credentials, introducing candidature which comprises offering the candidature and indicating and detailing value of the candidature as steps. The third move is enclosing documents, the fourth is soliciting response, the next is explaining reasons and describing future plans is the final move. Chen and Nassaji (2014) provide another view into cultural differences in the construction of PSs from perspective of politeness strategies. While the Chinese English as Additional Language students preferred positive politeness strategies, the English as First Language students demonstrated flexibility in their PSs by adopting positive and negative politeness strategies equally.

Clearly, from above reviewed literature (e.g. Brown, 2004; Barton *et al.*, 2004; Bekins *et al.*, 2004; Vossler, 2007; Ding, 2007; Forrister *et al.*, 2007) varied disciplines have featured in the studies on the structure of the PSs. Some of the studies have also been presented from a cross-cultural perspective. Also, these PSs were written by students in, specifically, Anglo-Western contexts. Beyond these popular concerns of the studies that have been reviewed, Chen and Nassaji's (2014) study appears to be the only that have taken a pragmatic approach, focusing on politeness strategies. The above studies are, therefore, vital to the present study since it also considers the schematic structure of PSs.

2. Methodology

2.1. Research Site

The research site for this study is the University of Cape Coast, one of the ten public universities in Ghana. Established in October, 1962 as a university college affiliated to the

University of Ghana, on October 1, 1971, the college attained the status of a full and independent University by an act of parliament. In August 2014, the university went collegiate and is, therefore, currently organized into five colleges: Humanities and Legal Studies, Distance Education, Education Studies, Agricultural & Natural Sciences, and Health and Allied sciences. UCC's vision is to be a university that is strongly positioned with a world-wide acclaim and the mission of being the University of Choice in Ghana. English remains the medium of instruction throughout the University, as a taught subject in a Department of English and as a university-wide subject popularly known as Communicative Skills (known elsewhere as English for Academic Purposes, Study Skills, Freshman's Composition).

Moreover, the University of Cape Coast is presented because students from University of Cape Coast are increasingly writing PSs because of the imperatives of globalization and internationalization in higher education. Although the writers are from University of Cape Coast, the PSs are not written for University of Cape Coast. Also, when it comes to L2 users of English and the writing of PS, the literature is silent on it; hence, the need for this study.

2.2. Research Design

The research design adopted in the study is mainly the qualitative type. It is particularly helpful in a textual analysis and is known for ensuring a better and holistic understanding of a linguistic phenomenon. This study employs, specifically, the qualitative content analysis. In qualitative content research, the researcher looks for patterns in the data, codes the data by organizing it into conceptual categories and creates themes or concepts (Jackson, 2010). The qualitative content analysis aids in "the subjective interpretation of the content of text data through the systematic classification of coding and identifying themes or patterns" (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005: 1278). Since qualitative research focuses on descriptive analysis, it aided the researchers to give an in-depth description and interpretation of the data. The study also makes use of some quantitative techniques such as frequency counts and percentages in order to aid understanding.

2.3. Data Set

PSs from students who had graduated with their first degrees from the University of Cape Coast were considered as the major source of data. PSs were taken from prospective graduate students with different undergraduate degrees who had applied into different postgraduate programmes and had gained admission in universities outside Ghana; that is, successful PSs were used.

While the focus of the paper is on Ghanaian university students, it must be emphasized that Ghanaian universities generally do not require PS as part of the documentary requirements for admissions/ scholarships. It is necessary, however, to find out how they do so in response to the need to obtain university education overseas. These students had obtained their undergraduate degrees across five faculties/schools namely: The Faculty of Arts, Faculty of Education, School of Biological Sciences, School of Agriculture and School of Business. The researcher used the snowball sampling technique. The snowball sampling is a non-probability sampling technique for gathering research subjects through the identification of an initial subject who then provides the names of other actors (Atkinson & Fint, 2004). In all, 20 personal statements were collected for this study.

2.4. Data Analysis

In categorizing the moves and steps present in the corpus, the hand-tagged method of analysis pioneered by Swales (1990) in his CARS (Create-a-Research-Space) model in analyzing research articles as well as Ding's (2007) work was employed.

Although there are a number of perspectives on genre studies (e.g. Miller 1984 and 1994; Halliday & Hasan, 1989 or 1994?), the present study deployed Swales' (1990) genre approach. He proposes a model of genre analysis by looking at the rhetoric structure and lexico-grammatical features of a genre. According to Swales (1990), the communicative purpose shapes the schematic structure of the discourse and influences and constrains the choice of content and style. Some challenges that we encountered included the coding, labelling of moves, and the establishing of move and step boundaries. However, with the help of two postgraduate students in the Department of English, these issues were resolved. One of them had completed his MPhil in English Literature and the other was a PhD candidate in English Language. Inter-rater reliability was calculated at 75%.

Ding's (2007) work provides the rhetorical objectives of PS for the present study in terms of its cognitive structuring. He stated that the main objective of being admitted to the programme is by "demonstrating one's academic background, professional qualifications, and personal strengths", which will be the benchmark of moves and steps analysis. This organization is explained by Bhatia's (1993: 26) concept of cognitive structuring; he posited that it is "the conventional and standardized organization" of a written text. This also served as a point of reference in analyzing the rhetorical moves in the present corpus. **Erreur ! Source du renvoi introuvable.** below presents the summary of moves identified in the present data, and **Erreur ! Source du renvoi introuvable.** presents a sample of a PS.

Table 1: Move-Step classification

Number		Label	Purpose
Move 1		Caption	It identifies the genre.
Move 2		Background	It serves as an opening.
	Step A	Life Experience	It presents how one's past has influenced the current decision concerning admission.
	Step B	Motivation	It shows the reason for the application.
Move 3		Programme	It informs readers about selected programme.
	Step A	Importance to applicants	It emphasizes the relevance of the programme as far the individual lives of applicants are concerned.
	Step B	Importance to society	It is concerned with how the programme would benefit the larger society beyond the individual
Move 4		Choice of School	It informs the evaluators about the school applicants are applying to.
	Step A	Academic reasons	The aim is to present the school as an academic oriented institution which has influenced the decision.
	Step B	Social reasons	It shows that the institution provides a holistic training for its students.

Table continues

Number		Label	Purpose
Move 5		Credentials	This is where applicants prove their suitability for the admission.
	Step A	Academic credentials	It shows their academic prowess in the past.
	Step B	Non-academic credentials	It indicates their achievements beyond purely academic work.
	Step C	Distinctive personal qualities	Applicants state what they possess as distinctive individuals which are peculiar to them (uniqueness).
	Step D	Relevance of credentials	It presents an argument of the readiness of applicants for the programme with their stated credentials as the basis.
Move 6		Career objective	It emphasizes how the admission will help achieve their career goals.
Move 7		Closure	It provides a summary of the arguments raised.

Box 1: Sample of Personal Statement (PS 12)

Statement of Motivation **(Move 1: Caption)**
For several decades, Ghana constantly faces numerous environmental issues ranging from irregular water supply, sanitation, severe deforestation, water treatments, perennial floods events etc., and thus expertise are needed to help avert these situations. More importantly, water bodies (most rivers and streams) in the country have been engulfed by all forms of wastes (especially solid wastes) that have been major contributors to the prevalence of diseases and scarcity of potable drinking water in most communities. This is the prime reason my study interest is directed towards the area of water and environmental management specifically, water treatment technologies. Science and technology are two indispensable tools for improving the environment for everyone. For instance, science and technology has helped in treatment of wastewater, provided various methods for managing wastes, advanced methods for cleaner types of energy. As an ambitious scientist with passion for nature, this motivated me to apply for admission in the University of Cape Coast and studied Environmental Science. **(Move 2, Step B: Motivation)** Indeed, I have never been satisfied of myself in my whole life than the day I was awarded the certificate for pursuing B. Sc. Environmental Science. My undergraduate studies offered me a firm background in Environmental Management, yet, it is worth mentioning that this is not enough considering the complexity of water and environmental management processes and thus making further studies a necessity. After completion of my Bachelor's degree, I was selected as a teaching assistant in the Department of Environmental Sciences, University of Cape Coast. **(Move 5, Step A: Academic credentials)**
This gave me a large piece of experiences which makes me apt for a postgraduate degree**. (Move 5: Step D: Relevance of credentials)**
Considering state of the art academic facilities of University of Abertay Dundee and the various courses that are to be undertaken in the program, I am convinced that my application is a step in the right direction. **(Move 4, Step A: Academic reasons)**
My chance to take part in this program will indeed enhance my research capabilities **(Move 3, Step A: Importance of programme to applicants)** and also develop needed technologies to effectively manage water resources and provide solutions to most environmental problems in my country. (**Move 3, Step B: Importance of programme to society)**
After the program, I plan to work with governmental or non-governmental organizations in Ghana that provide services in water and environmental management. Later on, I hope to impart the acquired knowledge, know-how and expertise to students and the public through training programs such as conferences, seminars and workshops thereby improving the knowledge pool and experts in this country in the field of Water and Environmental Management. This will eventually help train more environmental and water resources managers for the country. With this I believe my longing ambition would be achieved. **(Move 6: Career objective)**

Box continues

91

I am aware of the excellent reputation of the University of Abertay Dundee, and by critical analysis of the structure and learning objectives of the program; my interest in pursuing the program has been further aggravated. I am therefore more than poised to start and complete the program successfully if I am offered an admission. (**Move 7: Closure)**

3.   Analysis and Discussion

This section presents both qualitative and quantitative analysis of the move structure of the PSs. based on the aim of study. It is worth mentioning that the extracts from the samples remain unedited.

3.1. Move Analysis

The PS presents a personal view of applicants with the aim of informing and persuading evaluators. In order to achieve these communicative functions, seven moves were identified in the data. These are the caption, background, programme, choice of school, credentials, career objective and the closure.

Move 1: Caption

This is the first move that was identified in the PS. The caption identifies and serves as a label for the PS. This move draws attention to what the text is about at a glance. The caption move is usually omitted in PSs where the school has provided a caption to an allocated space for the applicant to write the statement. This move is realised as: "Statement of Motivation" (PSs 2, 12), "Statement of Purpose" (PSs 1, 5, 8, 9) and "Personal statement" (PSs 7, 13, 17, 18, 19, 20).

Move 2: Background

This move serves as an opening to grab readers' attention. The background move comprises the following steps: Life experience and motivation.

Step 1: Life experience

This serves as an opening to the genre. It is usually achieved through an anecdote. Writers state how a personal experience has triggered their desire for the chosen programme. This move adds value to the writer's personality. The following extracts from the data highlight this point:

> *Extract 1:*
> "Working with children during community services in villages through evangelism programs and social work at Cape Coast has enlightened me to know that they need more of behavioural and mental health care services at their convenience." (PS 3)

> *Extract 2:*
> "As a result of my own experience with people trooping into our country due to war situations and tribal conflicts, it seems especially clear to me that the refugees that face the biggest challenges are women. Many have no educational background and few skills that might help them to adjust to the work force." (PS 16)