

A Computational Analysis of the Dehumanisation of Migrants from Syria and Ukraine in Slovene News Media

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Dehumanisation involves the perception and/or treatment of the members of the target social group as if they were *less than human*. It implies a strong ingroup-outgroup dynamics and it often leads to discriminatory behaviour. It is reflected and perpetuated by **language**.

We investigate dehumanisation in **Slovene News Media**:

- towards migrants in the periods of the **Syrian (2015-2016)** and **Ukrainian (2022-2023)** wars;
- in the Ukraine period: towards **Ukrainian** and **other** migrants.

Corpora

News articles about migration from the online publications of 29 Slovene media outlets.

- **Corpus Syria (C_{syr})**: Articles from 2014-2015;
- **Corpus Ukraine (C_{ukr})**: Articles from 2022-2023;
 - **Subcorpus Ukraine**: Specifically mentioning Ukraine;
 - **Subcorpus non-Ukraine**: Not mentioning Ukraine.

Hypotheses

Comparing corpora from Syrian and Ukrainian periods

- **H1a)** Attitudes towards migrants became more positive/intense during the Ukraine period compared to the Syria period;
- **H1b)** dehumanising language was more prevalent in the Syria period than the Ukraine period;

Comparing subcorpora from Ukrainian period - With mentions of Ukrainian migrants or not

- **H2a)** attitudes towards Ukrainian migrants were more positive/intense than those towards non-Ukrainian migrants; and
- **H2b)** dehumanising language was more prevalent in discourse about non-Ukrainian migrants than Ukrainian migrants.

Statistic	C_{ukr}	C_{syr}
documents	8 470	8 556
sentences	311 185	338 759
paragraphs	137 164	132 934
total words	8 785 219	8 282 229
unique words	237 622	189 512
total lemmas	8 785 907	8 282 481
unique lemmas	100 895	77 927
words per doc.	1 037.22	968.00
words per sent.	28.23	24.45
word per par.	92.19	106.95

Methods

Our framework is based on **Mendelsohn et al.**'s work (2020).

Dehumanisation

Negative evaluation

Denial of agency

Moral disgust

Vermin metaphor

Paragraph-level sentiment analysis

Word embedding neighbour valence and arousal

Word embedding neighbour dominance

Vector similarity to disgust

Vector similarity to vermin

- Zero-shot Cross-Lingual VA Detection
- Novel Slovenian VAD lexicon (SloEmoLex 1.0)

- Cosine similarity between migrant and moral disgust concept vectors
- Cosine similarity between migrant and vermin concept vectors
- Anchoring + Kolmogorov-Smirnov test

Results

Qualitative

Quantitative

Sentiment analysis

- **Example 1 (POS)**: So these are the faces of people, volunteers, who selflessly help refugees day by day, giving them hope for a new and better tomorrow.
- **Example 2 (NEG)**: Illegal immigrants, breaking into Slovenia on a daily basis, are a big security problem. They are organized violent criminals, bringing unknown viruses, scabies and similar diseases with them.
- **Example 3 (NEG)**: "I have no words to describe how cruel they were. They treated us like animals. They hunt people in the woods. They are not police, they are thieves. They took everything, even rings, watches, money..." said Abdul Rashid from Afghanistan.

Nearest neighbours analysis

- **Syria-Ukraine periods comparison**
Syria: Names of countries; **Ukraine**: Human concepts
- **Ukraine period subcorpora comparison**
Ukraine: Human roles; **Non-Ukraine**: Impersonal roles

Comparison Syria-Ukraine periods

- **Valence**: Higher in the Syria period -> Contrary to what expected
- **Arousal**: Higher in the Ukraine period -> As expected
- **Moral disgust & Dehumanising metaphor**: Closer to migrant in the Ukraine period -> Contrary to what expected
- **Denial of agency**: Not statistically significant

Comparison Ukraine period subcorpora

- **Valence & arousal**: Higher in Ukraine subcorpus -> As expected
- **Moral disgust**: Closer to migrant in the non-Ukraine subcorpus -> As expected
- **Dehumanising metaphor**: Closer to migrant in the Ukraine subcorpus (not statistically significant) -> Contrary to what expected
- **Denial of agency**: Not statistically significant

While the discourse on migration became more negative and more intense over time, it is less dehumanising when specifically addressing Ukrainian migrants compared to others.