

MARÍA MARTÍNEZ LIROLA
Department of Linguistics and Modern Languages
University of South Africa (UNISA)
Universidad de Alicante
Alicante, España
maria.lirola@ua.es

***Approaching the visual representation of Sub-Saharan¹ immigrants as illegal:
examples from the Spanish press***

1. Introduction

Media discourse influence the mental models of people and shape people's thinking. Consequently, it may contribute to socio-political change by promoting criticism and reflections about the social realities transmitted in the different news reports. In this sense, the media is important in the creation of public debate and public opinion due to its power to create the image of others, including minorities. This is significant if news items deal with the representation of immigrants because, depending on the way the media in general and the press in particular portray them, the audience may have a different view of the said immigrants. In this sense, this article will show that the press has power to shape or to modify people's attitudes as regards news items on sub-Saharan immigrants because each image and each linguistic component are not chosen at random but, on the contrary, are motivated and created as the result of the complex phenomenon of multimodal discourse.

Generally, the press highlights the differences between "we-they" (the Spanish population-immigrants). This is particularly evident when dealing with Sub-Saharan immigrants because of their being black. For this reason, this paper intends to study how Sub-Saharan immigrants are represented as illegal linguistically and visually in samples from the Spanish press. The main research questions we will attempt to answer in this article are the following: How are these immigrants portrayed from the visual point of view? How is the idea of illegal Sub-Saharan immigrants created through discourse?

This paper will be a critical analysis of the way in which the said press portrays such immigrants as illegal and the ideological effects for the audience of the newspapers. For this reason, the principles of critical discourse analysis (CDA) will be taken into consideration in order to deconstruct how the press represents social inequality and power between different groups of society, in this case, between the Spanish population and Sub-Saharan immigrants.

2. Literature review

Sub-Saharan immigration started to become significant from 1997 onwards (Arango, 2002: 65). The author specifies that the majority of the Sub-Saharans who emigrate to Spain stem from the following countries: Angola, Burkina Faso, Cape Verde, Cameroon, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Equatorial Guinea, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea Bissau, Ivory Coast, Kenya, Liberia, Mali, Nigeria, Senegal and Sierra Leone. Rodríguez Breijo (2010: 114) explains that Sub-Saharan immigration burgeoned at the beginning of the 21st century due to the difficult conditions of life in many countries, to the growth in their population and to their socio-economic problems. These challenging conditions make many people leave their countries without official documents; the majority arrives by boat on the coast of the Canary Islands or Andalusia.

There are many national and international studies that pay attention to the representation of immigrants in the press following the principles proposed by CDA (Alonso Belmonte et al., 2010; Bañón, 2002; Bañón and Romero, 2013; Crespo and Martínez Lirola, 2012; Khosravi Nik 2009, 2010a, 2010b; Martínez Lirola, 2006, 2008a, 2008b, 2013, 2014; Moore, et al., 2012; van Dijk, 2005, 2008; Wodak and Reisigl, 2001, among others). The number of studies is not so extensive if we search for the representation of Sub-Saharan immigrants in the press (Hatoss, 2012; Triandafyllidou and Maroukis, 2012).

In general, the Spanish press portrays immigrants as associated with negative issues, which does not favour their integration into the Spanish society. Moreover, the news items normally make reference to the first moment of arrival in Spain and to the needs of these immigrants (social support, jobs, houses, social help, etc.). In addition, they ignore the reasons why immigrants emigrate, their cultures or their situation in their countries of origin. Consequently, highlighting the negative side of immigration in the press contributes to the perception of immigrants as constituting a people-problem whose members do not seem to contribute to Spanish society but to demand social services and support from it.

3. Objectives, data and methodology

The main objectives of this paper are the following: 1) to observe the main ways in which Sub-Saharan immigrants are portrayed as illegal immigrants in the Spanish press; 2) to analyse the main visual characteristics that contribute to representing them as illegal; 3) to offer a detailed analysis of some news reports in which Sub-Saharan immigrants are represented in order to illustrate the previous points.

¹By Sub-Saharan immigrants we understand immigrants coming from African countries situated in the South of the Sahara. Therefore the term does not include those arriving from Egypt and the Maghreb: Morocco, Tunisia, Algeria, Libya and Mauritania. It also excludes Occidental Sahara.

The data was collected compiling all the news items on Sub-Saharan immigrants that suggested the idea of them being in an illegal situation and which appeared in the digital version of the main Spanish newspapers, i.e., *ABC*, *El Mundo* and *El País* from 1 June 2011 to 1 January 2016. All in all, 451 news reports were obtained from the online archives of the newspapers under analysis: 284 from *ABC*, 46 from *El Mundo* and 121 from *El País*.

The principles of critical discourse analysis (CDA) will be used in this study. CDA is useful to study the representation of Sub-Saharan immigrants as illegal in a sample of the Spanish press because one of the main aims of CDA is to understand the relationships between discourse and society (van Dijk, 2008: 21). CDA has as one of its main purposes to increase the critical consciousness of speakers when facing the discourse of power. For this reason, it pays attention to the discursive strategies of legitimation and manipulation used in society to exclude certain social groups and to empower others.

van Leeuwen's (2008) model for the verbal representation of social actors will be considered in the analysis in order to observe how Sub-Saharan immigrants are portrayed. In addition, working with multimodal texts requests a framework to analyse the visuals. Kress and van Leeuwen's (2006) visual grammar will be the theoretical framework used to do so.

4. Discussion: towards the representation of sub-Saharan immigrants as illegal

The general tendency observed in the corpus of examples is the representation of Sub-Saharan immigrants as vulnerable, lacking autonomy, victims etc.; therefore the dichotomy "we-they" is emphasized. The image offered of the said immigrants, which is public, consequently tending to be represented as objective and to be accepted as true, real and unquestionable by the audience, suggests that immigrants are inferior and unable to occupy the same roles or enjoy the same rights as the Spanish population.

Mentioning only the fact that many Sub-Saharan people arrive in Spain contributes to the sense of invasion and suggests the necessity of protecting the Spanish population from the massive arrival of immigrants. In this sense, presenting immigrants as collectivized and assimilated linguistically and visually (van Leeuwen, 2008: 38) without explaining anything about their personal migratory project does not favour attitudes of cooperation or understanding the situation of those who arrive.

Moreover, the Sub-Saharan immigrants represented appear as a group of unspecified, anonymous individuals (van Leeuwen, 2008: 39), i.e., nothing is said about their identity, the reasons why they come and their personal situation in their countries of origin.

In addition, they are identified with being immigrants or illegal immigrants without any reference to their function in society, i.e., they are not referred to in terms of an activity, in terms of something they do, for instance, an occupation or role (van Leeuwen, 2008: 42). Identification occurs when social actors are defined in terms of what they, more or less permanently, or unavoidably, are.

Heroes and victims (both a threat to the Spanish population) are represented similarly in the Spanish press because the heroes become victims once they arrive in Spain and are rescued, which ends their dream of starting a new life in Europe. Immigrants are represented as passive victims when they do not succeed in their migratory projects, when they need to be rescued and protected by the Spanish population and as active heroes when they arrive in Spain and are close to their dream of starting a new life in Europe.

5. Conclusion

The news items analysed portray immigrants as active invaders when they are able to assault the Melilla's fence; however, immigrants are also presented as passive when they request help or are rescued. In both cases the arrival of immigrants is problematized because they either invade Spain or need help from the Spanish society, and therefore they are a burden since they require social help and resources. Presenting immigrants in this way adds to emphasizing the dichotomy "we-they" and to highlighting negative attitudes towards the arrival of immigrants.

Moreover, the press normally uses as its sources of information those of the Government and of the police without comparing these discourses with others, especially those of the immigrants themselves. In other words, the negative representation of immigration in the Spanish press affects the perception of immigrants as a problem in society because there is hardly any place for their cultural and economic input in the press's discourse.

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