



## Victimizing discourse towards refugees: A corpus-assisted study of news articles about the Syrian refugee movement

### El discurso victimizador hacia los refugiados: estudio asistido por corpus de noticias sobre el movimiento de refugiados sirios

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**Abstract:** The international conflicts of the last decade have provoked the flight of thousands of people from their countries of origin to other places, adopting the status of refugees or asylum seekers. This migratory phenomenon has been widely documented in the Spanish written press. This article analyzes a corpus of Spanish-language news articles published between 2010 and 2016 on the Syrian refugee phenomenon. The two most widely read Spanish national newspapers, *El País* and *El Mundo*, were taken as a reference, compiling a corpus of more than 1.8 million words. Through a CADS (corpus-assisted discourse studies) approach, our research particularly explores how victimization of the lemma *refugiado* is constructed from the perspective of semantic preference. Victimization is fine-tuned into different subsets. The results show that the lemma *refugiado* collocates with victimizing terms that express humanitarianism, misfortune and unfair treatment, the first subset being the most common. The humanitarianist language apparently involves a positive attitude towards refugees. However, it normally leads to an assistencialist discourse which reinforces the power relations between the assisted – refugees – and the assistants – those in the host country.

**Keywords:** Victimization - refugees - Spanish media - semantic preference - CADS.

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**Resumen:** Los conflictos internacionales de la última década han provocado la huida de miles de personas de sus países de origen a otros lugares, adoptando el estatus de refugiados o solicitantes de asilo. Este fenómeno migratorio ha sido ampliamente documentado en la prensa escrita española. Este artículo analiza un corpus de artículos periodísticos en español publicados entre 2010 y 2016 sobre el fenómeno de los refugiados sirios. Se tomaron como referencia los dos periódicos nacionales más leídos en España, *El País* y *El Mundo*, recopilando un corpus de más de 1,8 millones de palabras. A través de un enfoque CADS (estudios de discurso asistidos por corpus), nuestra investigación analiza especialmente cómo se construye la victimización del lema *refugiado* desde la perspectiva de la preferencia semántica. La victimización se desgrana en diferentes subconjuntos. Los resultados muestran que el lema *refugiado* coloca con términos victimizantes que expresan humanitarismo, desgracia y trato injusto, siendo el primer subconjunto el más común. El lenguaje humanitarista implica aparentemente una actitud positiva hacia los refugiados. Sin embargo, normalmente comporta un discurso asistencialista que refuerza las relaciones de poder entre los asistidos (refugiados) y los que los asisten (país de acogida).

**Palabras clave:** victimización - refugiados - medios de comunicación españoles - preferencia semántica - CADS.

## 1. Introduction

Mobility is something inherent to human beings. In fact, there are more than a billion people on the move in the world today. Up to 763 million are migrants in their own homeland, and 271.6 million have left their countries. According to the UNHCR report (2021), more than 89.1 million people have been forced to leave their homes due to armed conflict, widespread violence or natural disasters. Indeed, 51.3 million are internally displaced people, while almost 37.8 million are refugees and asylum seekers in other countries (UNHCR, 2021).

Although the refugee phenomenon is not new and can be traced back to ancient times, it started to receive considerable attention in the press from 2011 onwards due to various armed conflicts in the Middle East and especially the Syrian civil war. A significant part of the Syrian population left their country fleeing armed conflict and tried to reach Europe in search for a safer place to live. In 2017, the war began to stabilize with the entry of international troops, although the conflict is still latent today.

Spain has traditionally been a country of migrants, especially after its Civil War in the first half of the 20th century. However, towards the end of the last century, the country experienced an economic boost which made tables turn and it is now committed to hosting people from different countries.

The arrival of refugees to European countries in the last decade has been the greatest since the Second World War. Consequently, it has received special attention by the media. Thus, the phenomenon of refugees is generally accessed and known through the written and audiovisual press. Goodman et al. (2017) explore how discourse may shape social action and draw attention to the way media may topicalize certain groups of people. The authors warn that the social constructions which arise from categorization may have implications in the lives of those who are categorized. Neubaum and Kramer (2017) discuss how mass media can shape the users' viewpoints and attitudes. The influence of the media over public opinion has been studied by several scholars such as Peter (2004) and Carroll et al. (2016). This is appreciated in certain phenomena which are dealt with by mass media such as refugees. In this vein, Hier and Greenberg (2002) and Esses et al. (2013) explore how the phenomenon of people on the move, especially refugees, is problematized in the news, focusing on the significance of the terms used in relation to the migration discourse.

In this context, from a CADS approach, the present research addresses the study of the lemma *refugiado* (hereinafter *refugiad\**) and its collocational behaviour in a corpus of digital news in Spanish. The study is concerned with the exploration of refugees' victimization through the identification of semantic preferences in a 7-year period (2010-16). The objective is twofold: First, to identify and quantify the collocates of *refugiad\** that lead to victimization; and second, to label these collocates semantically and classify them into more specific subsets.

## 2. Victimization of refugees and other migratory groups

The concept of victimization has traditionally been treated from a legal and criminological standpoint. In the area of victimology, there has been a tendency to identify migrants as particularly vulnerable to victimization (García et al., 1998), recognizing the differential vulnerability that certain social groups show when faced with crime. In many cases, this differential risk is explained by the lifestyle of the subjects along with the conjunction of certain characteristics. The results of victimization surveys, together with the theories

of the victim's lifestyle, lead us to identify immigrants as a group that is especially prone to experiencing victimization.

These facts are reinforced by the victimized image of the migrants offered by the instances of power, among which the media is included. Lorenzo (2007) notes that migrants are often represented as helpless and ignorant, where asymmetrical relations of need on the part of that group and assistance on the part of the receiving society prevail. Cerezo (2016) talks about the problems suffered by migratory groups, especially refugees. In the current model of citizen security, refugees are paradoxically criminalized while being victims of crime. The reason for that may be found in the Integrated Threat Theory (Croucher, 2013), which explains the reactionary and criminalizing attitude of many European citizens towards displaced people. The main consequence of this is the victimization and harm that these people are suffering in their attempt to settle in Europe.

From a linguistic point of view, even though the last decade has witnessed an abundance of studies on the representation of migrants in the press, research has focused on aspects other than victimization, and the literature on this issue is limited. However, there are several studies that analyze how immigrants are victimized through language in the media. KhosraviNik (2009) carries out an analysis of several British newspapers on the representation of refugees. He compares how the press dealt with the 1999 Balkan war, which resulted in the diaspora of several hundred thousand people, and the 2005 national elections. He noted the use of different media strategies to portray refugees as helpless, powerless and desperate. Among the strategies found, the author highlights referential and predicational strategies, and individualization using proper names and providing details on the refugees' life and conditions. The author also focuses attention on the explicit allusions to atrocity, murder and genocide. There is even sometimes parallelism with the Holocaust language and ordeals refugees have to go through. One of the conclusions reached was that, irrespective of the newspaper's ideology, a victimized image of refugees was constructed. In a similar vein, Parker (2015) adopted a discursive psychological approach for the analysis of 40 articles from British and Australian print media of the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. He concluded that refugees and asylum seekers were represented as "tragic figures" (Parker, 2015, p. 16), hopelessly doomed. The author also reflects upon the effects of this conception on society, so that some of the government's decisions as regards this migratory group are supported and legitimized by the public opinion.

From a multimodal perspective and with a basically qualitative methodology, Martínez Lirola (2017) hinges on the visual strategies that *El País* and *ABC*, two Spanish national newspapers, use for the criminalization and victimization of migrants. She explores how these visual strategies in combination with discourse disfavour inclusion and promote discrimination and racism: “Immigrants are represented from a privileged European perspective and [at the same time] othered from the national community” (Martínez Lirola, 2017, p. 136). Her study samples some strategies of victimization found in the print media. Immigrants and refugees are usually portrayed arriving to the Spanish coasts in very bad conditions, carrying others in their arms, and being rescued by members of the Red Cross or other humanitarian organizations. Similar in scope, other scholars such as Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) carried out a multimodal text analysis through visual grammar. They argue that immigrants are victimized through the way they are visually represented, in the way they are helped by medical staff, and the way they are moved from one place to another. Immigrants are pictured as ill and contagious awaiting in their boats to be assisted and moved to a safe place.

### 3. Examining semantic preference

The notion of semantic preference can be traced back to Sinclair’s model of extended unit of meaning (1996, 1998), which involves “four types of co-occurrence relations in extended lexico-semantic units” (Stubbs, 2001, p. 64). The four relations are collocation, colligation, semantic preference and semantic prosody. The present paper will give special attention to semantic preference, although its association with semantic prosody is undeniable. In fact, both phenomena have been defined as “two distinct yet interdependent collocational meanings” (Xiao and McEnery, 2006, p. 107) or as “two types of the same collocational phenomenon” (Bednarek, 2008, p. 121). However, semantic preference and semantic prosody should be viewed as different phenomena. While the former is concerned with “the habitual collocation of lexical items with linguistic expressions that belong to certain semantic fields” (Bednarek, 2008, p. 120), the latter relates to a more general semantic group, and it is typically labelled as unpleasant/negative or pleasant/positive. The lexical items with which a word collocates usually share semantic features that can be classified into more precise semantic subsets that are not limited to the abstract categorization of positive/negative semantic prosody. Semantic preference therefore “involves collocation with semantic subsets of different degrees of generality” (Bednarek, 2008, p. 129). Yet, semantic preference should be

distinguished from collocation as it explores the tendency of a lexical unit to co-occur with forms from a particular semantic field, while collocation refers to the attraction between specific word forms.

Stubbs (2002) also noted that semantic preference arises from the semantically related collocates of a given node word, and Partington (2004) pointed out that semantic preference relates the node item to another item from a specific semantic set. Indeed, Xiao and McEnery (2006, p. 107) claimed that semantic preference is a feature of the collocates. Whitsitt (2005) offered an example with the verbs *alleviate* and *relieve*, which tend to collocate with words such as *backache*, *cramping*, *swelling* or *bruising*, bringing about a semantic preference of these verbs for pain- or symptom-related words. Stubbs (2001, p. 65) found out that *large* often collocated with words from the semantic set of 'quantities and sizes'. These examples illustrate that semantic preference is a collocational meaning that is constructed out of collocates that can be clustered into specific semantic subsets.

Semantic preference is often context-, genre- and domain-dependent (Partington, 2004; Hoey, 2005). This type of preference can be referred to as 'genre preference' (O'Halloran, 2007), which happens when the collocates of a given node item differ from one genre to another. For example, the type of collocates that go with a node word may differ depending on whether they occur in a scientific report or in the news. An additional important feature of semantic preference is its interaction with syntactic patterning (colligation), word class and meaning. Indeed, the part of speech to which a given node item belongs may modify the semantic preference of that item. Literal and metaphorical meanings of lexical items may also result in different semantic preferences (Bublitz, 1996). These differences in meaning are very difficult to capture by automatic analysis of the corpus, so at this point a detailed manual analysis by the researcher is necessary. Thus, in terms of methodology, semantic preference has been found to be "(relatively objectively) observable by looking at corpus evidence, yet it is the analyst who decides how to interpret, categorize, and classify the collocates semantically" (Bednarek, 2008, p. 122). Accordingly, we will focus on the identification and categorization of the semantic preference of *refugiad\** in the specific genre of newspaper articles, using first corpus analytic methods and then semantically labelling the different collocates. It should be noted that in this paper the term 'collocate' is to be understood as a synonym for co-occurrence or word that co-occurs with the node *refugiad\**.



## 4. Method

REFUCORES is an *ad hoc* corpus that contains 1,808,400 running words from the two most extensively read newspapers in Spain: *El País* and *El Mundo*<sup>1</sup>. Indeed, they have been estimated to be read by more than 3 million people per day (Oficina de Justificación de la Difusión, 2012; Asociación para la investigación de los medios de comunicación, 2017). In political terms, each newspaper has traditionally been associated with a different political ideology. While *El País* (1976-) has been connected to Europeanism, progressivism and social-liberalism, being situated in the center-left during most of the Spanish transition and democratic period, *El Mundo* (1989-) has always leaned towards a right-wing political perspective, being originally a keen supporter of the Popular Party, and a critic of the socialist government and the nationalisms. Nowadays, the paper seems to be far from purely conservative principles.

REFUCORES comprises 872,114 words from *El País* and 936,286 words from *El Mundo*, totalling over 2,000 news articles containing the lemma *refugiad*\*. The articles were published between 2010 and 2016 and reported on global facts and news about refugees, not necessarily happening within the Spanish borders. The analysis of REFUCORES was conducted through a bottom-up process. This means that the various semantic subsets that were found to co-occur with *refugiad*\* resulted from the detailed examination and classification of the collocates. REFUCORES focuses exclusively on the Spanish noun *refugiado* referring to a socio-political status of asylum seeker, and not to the past participle of the Spanish verbs *refugiar* or *refugiarse* [to shelter or to take refuge].

While studying the corpus, we took some morphological considerations. As we worked with lemmas, not with word forms, the quantification of the lemma *refugiad*\* included all its inflected forms, that is, *refugiado*, *refugiada*, *refugiados*, and *refugiadas*. The same procedure was applied to inflectional forms of verb tenses in Spanish. For instance, the verb *perseguir* [to persecute] would include inflected forms like *persiguiendo*, *persiguen* or *perseguirán*, all as part of the same lemma. Unlike inflected forms, derivational forms were considered as different lexical items. Using the previous example *perseguir*, one of its derivational forms could be *persecución* [persecution], which should be understood as an independent lemma built on a semantic suffix, bringing about a change in meaning.

As regards the tool for data analysis, the software WordSmith 6.0 (Scott, 2012) was used to process the corpus data and, particularly, to examine the collocational behavior of

<sup>1</sup> El País: <https://elpais.com/archivo/> El Mundo: <https://www.elmundo.es/hemeroteca/>

the lemma *refugiad\** in a span of five words to the left and five to the right (L5-R5), being semantic preference a co-occurrence-related phenomenon. Indeed, linguists in this area such as Stubbs (2001) and Partington (2004) have already approached semantic preference through the study of co-occurrences.

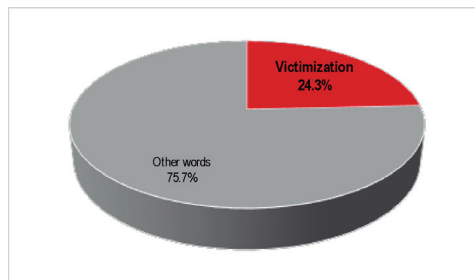
The news articles were selected from the digital libraries of *El País* and *El Mundo*, being copied and subsequently pasted and saved as .txt format. A stop-list was used prior to text processing, removing thus all non-content words such as articles, conjunctions, prepositions, and other non-informing or potentially misleading words that did not contribute to the construction of semantic preference. Eliminating grammatical words from our analysis did not impede obtaining recurrent patterns or clusters as WordSmith still keeps the position of these words in its collocational analysis. A bottom-up approach was adopted, in which collocates were labeled and categorized *ad hoc*. This means that the resulting subsets emerged from the corpus itself rather than being established before the analysis.

## 5. Results

### 5.1. Victimization in REFUCORES

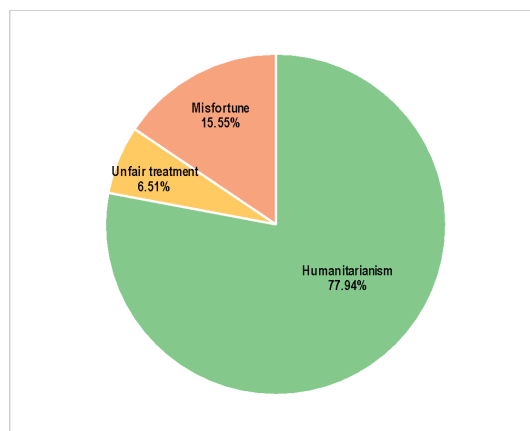
The semantic set of victimization involves that refugees are seen as victims who are unfairly treated, want to flee a devastating situation, and then need humanitarian support and protection. In accordance with the REDES Dictionary, the Collocations Dictionary of Contemporary Spanish (Bosque, 2005), victimization comprises not only words of misfortune and mistreatment, but also words from the semantic fields of support, help and humanitarianism. In this dictionary, “víctima” [victim] is related to words such as “desafortunado” [unfortunate] and “desasistido” [unassisted], but also to humanitarianism words such as “asistir” [assist], “atender” [take care of], “auxiliar” [aid] and “socorrer” [help]. Accordingly, 4,701 victimization collocates have been found to co-occur with the lemma *refugiad\**, which reaches 19,310 occurrences in REFUCORES. Therefore, as shown in Figure 1, the victimization collocates represent more than 24% of the total number of collocates with *refugiad\**.





**Figure 1:** Percentage of victimization collocates with the lemma refugiad\*.

The classification of the victimization collocates resulted in three different semantic subsets or semantic preferences, namely humanitarianism, unfair treatment and misfortune, which will be discussed in more detail below. In terms of percentages, Figure 2 shows that humanitarianism is the most numerous subset with nearly 78% of victimization collocates. The misfortune subset ranks second with more than 15% of victimizing collocates, while unfair treatment represents 6.51% of this type of collocates. The following sections of the results are intended to offer a detailed analysis of the three victimization semantic subsets, showing both qualitative and quantitative data on the collocates and their occurrences in a 7-year period.



**Figure 2:** Percentage represented by each victimization subset.

## 5.2. Humanitarianism

This subset includes collocates related to the attitude which implies being involved in, or connected with promoting human welfare and reducing the suffering of people by helping them. Table 1 shows the top 10 humanitarianism words out of 51 that have been found to collocate with *refugiad\** in the corpus, summing up to 3,664 occurrences. Among these collocates, we can find *acoger* [to host/shelter], *ayuda* [aid/help], *asilo* [asylum], *atención* [attention], *protección* [protection], and *apoyo* [support]. We can also see that the frequency of these collocates rises remarkably in 2015-16, and that some of them seem to occur almost exclusively in this 2-year period, as in the case of *apoyo* [support], *integración* [integration], and *alojar* [to accommodate]. As can be observed, all humanitarianism collocates share a semantic feature, that of the promotion and value of human life, whereby humans practice benevolent treatment and provide assistance to other humans. The following sentences contain examples of humanitarianism collocates:

- (1) *Obama no cede a la presión republicana y acogerá a 10.000 refugiados sirios.*

‘Obama does not give in to republican pressure and will host/shelter 10,000 Syrian refugees.’

- (2) *Uno de los motivos del aumento de la afluencia es la ayuda humanitaria a los refugiados que presta Alemania.*

‘One of the reasons for the increased influx is the humanitarian aid to refugees provided by Germany.’

- (3) *Numerosos trabajadores de la industria musical se solidarizan con el éxodo sirio para reivindicar un trato adecuado y un asilo justo para los refugiados.*

‘Many music industry workers stand in solidarity with the Syrian exodus to claim for adequate treatment and fair asylum for refugees.’

**Table 1:** Top 10 humanitarianism words collocating with *refugiad\**.

Word	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	Total
Acoger [to host/shelter]	7	17	16	26	41	855	505	1467
Ayuda [aid/help]	31	41	26	18	23	252	162	553
Asilo [asylum]	10	6	0	9	14	129	88	256
Atención [attention]	0	5	4	9	6	102	101	227
Protección [protection]	6	5	3	8	8	48	48	126
Apoyo [support]	0	3	6	0	0	57	43	109
ACNUR [UNHCR]	0	0	0	38	2	0	63	103
Asistencia [assistance]	0	2	4	11	7	37	26	87
Integración [integration]	0	0	0	0	0	47	32	79
Alojar [to accommodate]	0	0	0	2	0	45	18	65

### 5.3. Misfortune

Misfortune collocates were classified into minor and more tangible subsets: Physical misfortune, emotional misfortune (feelings), and poverty, in addition to general misfortune, which included the collocates that did not fit in any other misfortune subset. In general, this subset comprises words associated with unlucky events that refugees suffer as a result of their status. Accordingly, 52 words were identified as collocates of *refugiad\**, amounting to 731 occurrences in total. As we realized that misfortune can take multiple forms, ranging from being displaced, trapped and/or injured to suffering, feeling fear or simply being in need of food, the 52 misfortune collocates needed to be re-labelled and re-categorized into more specific subsets, falling under the umbrella of misfortune. The most numerous subset in terms of frequency was general misfortune, represented by 14 collocates and 293 occurrences, as shown in Table 2. Indeed, general misfortune collocates constitute 40.1% of all misfortune collocates. The top words are *desplazado* [displaced], *drama* [plight], *éxodo* [exodus], *tragedia* [tragedy], *desaparecido* [missing], and *víctima* [victim], lexical units that directly relate to the social injustice and the adversities faced by refugees throughout their forced displacement. Some examples illustrating this are the following:

- (4) *Cerca de 40 personas han muerto ahogadas en una embarcación llena frente a la costa occidental de Turquía. Es el drama diario de los refugiados.*

'About 40 people have drowned in a crowded boat off Turkey's west coast. It is the daily plight of refugees.'

- (5) *Las refugiadas son víctimas de acoso sexual durante su viaje a Europa.*

'Refugee women are victims of sexual harassment during their trip to Europe.'

**Table 2:** General misfortune words collocating with *refugiad\**.

Word	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	Total
Desplazado [displaced]	15	3	13	11	0	9	38	89
Drama [plight]	0	0	3	0	4	2	68	77
Éxodo [exodus]	0	0	3	0	3	13	10	29
Tragedia [tragedy]	0	0	0	0	0	13	9	22
Desaparecido [missing]	0	0	0	0	0	0	17	17
Víctima [victim]	0	0	0	0	5	4	7	16
Afectado [affected]	0	0	0	0	0	6	3	9
Grave [severe]	0	0	0	0	0	2	7	9
Prisión [prison]	0	0	0	0	0	0	8	8
Limbo [limbo]	0	0	0	0	0	0	7	7
Infierno [hell]	0	0	0	0	0	0	4	4
Apátrida [stateless]	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	2
Holocausto [Holocaust]	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	2
Masacre [massacre]	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	2
	15	3	19	11	14	53	178	293

It is also worth noting that two of the collocates from Table 2 point to the refugees as people without a nation, as if they were not recognized as citizens of any country. This is the case of words such as *limbo* [limbo] or *apátrida* [stateless], exemplified in the following sentences from REFUCORES:

- (6) *Del 'Willkommen' al limbo: la vida de los refugiados en Alemania.*

'From 'Willkommen' to limbo: the life of refugees in Germany.'

- (7) *Cientos de refugiados se convierten en apátridas a cambio de lograr su libertad.*

'Hundreds of refugees become stateless in exchange for their freedom.'

Another misfortune subset is made up of collocates that express only physical misfortune and that help depict refugees as people who physically suffer and survive

adverse circumstances. The words that describe visible effects and conditions of refugees represent 27.8% of all misfortune collocates. In total, 16 words were found to express physical misfortune, totaling 203 instances. Collocates such as *muerto* [dead], *atrapado* [trapped], *herido* [wounded/injured], and *ahogarse* [to drown] are at the head of the list, as can be observed in Table 3. The corpus offers examples of these collocates in context such as the following:

(8) *Las recetas para resolver la crisis siria siguen provocando más refugiados muertos.*

‘Recipes to solve the Syrian crisis continue to cause more dead refugees.’

(9) *Unos 75.000 refugiados sirios atrapados en la frontera con Jordania tienen que enterrar a sus muertos en medio del desierto.*

‘Around 75,000 Syrian refugees trapped on the border with Jordan have to bury their dead in the middle of the desert.’

(10) *Más de 3.000 refugiados se ahogaron el pasado año tratando de llegar a un lugar en el que ofrecer una vida mejor a sus hijos.*

‘More than 3,000 refugees drowned last year trying to find a place to offer their children a better life.’

**Table 3:** Physical misfortune words collocating with *refugiad\**.

Word	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	Total
Muerto [dead]	0	0	0	0	3	40	5	48
Atrapado [trapped]	0	0	0	0	0	14	26	40
Herido [wounded / injured]	0	0	6	0	0	8	11	25
Ahogarse [to drown]	0	0	0	0	0	20	2	22
Naufragio [wreck]	0	0	0	0	0	9	9	18
Bloqueado [blocked]	0	0	0	0	0	0	13	13
Enfermo [ill]	0	0	0	0	0	4	6	10
Cadáver [corpse]	0	0	0	0	0	4	0	4
Raquítico [emaciated]	0	0	0	0	0	0	4	4
Retenido [held prisoner]	0	0	0	0	0	4	0	4
Hipotermia [hypothermia]	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	3
Hundirse [to sink]	0	0	0	0	0	3	0	3
Secuestrado [kidnapped]	0	0	0	0	3	0	0	3
Agotamiento [exhaustion]	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	2
Desnutrición [malnutrition]	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	2
Quemado [burnt]	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	2
	0	0	6	0	8	110	79	203

Not only do refugees experience physical effects as a consequence of their forced displacement, they also feel negative emotions, hostile feelings that greatly affect their mental health. Indeed, emotional misfortune or negative feelings collocates make up another semantic subset the lemma *refugiad\** has a preference for. Particularly, this subset contains 12 collocates that appear 137 times in the corpus, representing 18.7% of the whole category of misfortune collocates. The news articles in REFUCORES often portray refugees as people who experience *sufrimiento* [suffering], *vulnerabilidad* [susceptibility], *miedo* [fear], *presión* [pressure] or *desesperación* [desperation], as can be seen in Table 4. The following sentences exemplify the use of these collocates in our corpus:

- (11) *Muchas refugiadas arrastran su propio sufrimiento y el de sus seres queridos atrapados en la violencia.*

‘Many refugee women carry their own suffering and that of their loved ones caught up in violence.’

- (12) *Eligieron a 12 refugiados en situación de vulnerabilidad, que tuvieran hijos pequeños y que provinieran de Siria.*



‘They chose 12 refugees in a vulnerable situation, who had small children and who came from Syria.’

(13) *Detrás de cada refugiado hay una historia de miedo, pérdidas familiares y otras tragedias humanas.*

‘Behind every refugee there is a history of fear, family loss and other human tragedies.’

**Table 4:** Emotional misfortune words collocating with *refugiad\**.

Word	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	Total
Sufrimiento [suffering]	0	0	0	0	0	21	20	41
Vulnerabilidad [susceptibility]	0	2	2	0	3	7	18	32
Miedo [fear]	0	0	0	0	0	10	9	19
Presión [pressure]	0	0	0	0	0	0	12	12
Desesperación [desperation]	0	0	0	0	0	2	9	11
Preocupación [worry]	0	0	0	0	0	4	5	9
Pánico [panic]	0	0	0	0	0	3	0	3
Angustia [anguish]	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	2
Frustración [frustration]	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	2
Incertidumbre [uncertainty]	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	2
Odio [hate]	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	2
Padecer [to suffer]	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	2
	2	2	4	2	3	51	73	137

The last misfortune subset we determined was poverty, which includes 10 collocates that contribute to the semantic characterization of refugees as people in need who live in misery. The lemma *refugiad\** co-occurs with poverty collocates up to 98 times, constituting 13.4% of all misfortune collocates. As shown in Table 5, words such as *necesidad* [need/necessity], *pobreza* [poverty], *malvivir* [scrape by], *sobrevivir* [survive] and *hambre* [hunger] are included in this category. The idea of homelessness also falls within this subset and is expressed through collocates such as *intemperie* [outdoors], *mendigo* [beggar], *vagabundo* [homeless], *calamitoso* [calamitous] and *indigencia* [indigence]. Indeed, migration undoubtedly has an impact on homelessness and a substantial share of some homeless populations are migrants. The themes of poverty and homelessness can be seen in the following examples from REFUCORES:

(14) *Más de 750.000 pequeños no tienen acceso a las aulas y miles de ellos malviven en campos de refugiados.*

'More than 750,000 children do not have access to school and thousands of them scrape by in refugee camps.'

(15) *Muchos de estos refugiados están condenados a la indigencia y al hambre.*

'Many of these refugees are condemned to indigence and hunger.'

(16) *Médicos Sin Fronteras denuncia que los refugiados viven como vagabundos en Italia.*

'Doctors Without Borders denounces that refugees live as beggars/homeless in Italy.'

**Table 5:** Poverty words collocating with *refugiad\**.

Word	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	Total
Necesidad [need/necessity]	0	0	0	0	0	28	5	33
Pobreza [poverty]	0	0	0	0	0	5	9	14
Malvivir [scrape by]	0	0	0	0	5	6	2	13
Sobrevivir [survive]	0	0	0	2	2	6	3	13
Hambre [hunger]	0	0	2	0	0	10	0	12
Intemperie [outdoors]	0	0	0	0	0	3	0	3
Mendigo [beggar]	0	0	0	0	3	0	0	3
Vagabundo [homeless]	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	3
Calamitoso [calamitous]	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	2
Indigencia [indigence]	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	2
	0	0	2	2	10	60	24	98

#### 5.4. Unfair treatment

The third subset within victimization is Unfair treatment. It contains words which involve treating refugees in a way which is morally wrong, usually on the part of hosting countries or institutions. Unfair treatment implies mostly transitive and negative verbs, such as *expulsar* [to expel], *rechazar* [to reject], *atacar* [to attack], *perseguir* [to persecute], *agredir* [to assault], or *desalojar* [to evict], among others. These verbs are often accompanied with *refugiad\** as a direct object, resulting in frequent chunks such as *expulsar a los refugiados* [expel refugees], *rechazar a los refugiados* [reject refugees], *atacar*

*a los refugiados* [attack refugees], *perseguir a los refugiados* [persecute refugees], and so on. Moreover, these chunks are seasonal as they mostly occur in the 2015-2016 period. Table 6 shows the top 10 Unfair treatment collocates out of the 25 found in REFUCORES, totalling 306 occurrences. The following sentences show examples of unfair or abusive treatment of refugees:

(17) *Trump promete expulsar a los refugiados sirios si es presidente.*

‘Trump promises to expel the Syrian refugees if he becomes president.’

(18) *Polonia y Eslovaquia usan este argumento para rechazar a los refugiados que les correspondían.*

‘Poland and Slovakia use this argument to reject their corresponding refugee quotas.’

(19) *Los traficantes de personas suelen agredir a los refugiados en su embarque, robándoles todo lo que pueden.*

‘Human smugglers often assault refugees on boarding, robbing them as much as they can.’

**Table 6:** Top 10 Unfair treatment words collocating with *refugiad\**.

Word	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	Total
Expulsar [to expel]	0	0	4	0	0	10	68	82
Rechazar [to reject]	0	0	0	2	0	0	33	35
Atacar [to attack]	0	0	0	0	0	7	20	27
Perseguir [to persecute]	0	0	0	2	2	11	11	26
Agredir [to assault]	0	0	0	0	0	4	14	18
Desalojar [to evict]	0	0	0	0	0	0	18	18
Deportar [to deport]	0	0	0	0	0	0	15	15
Lacrimógeno [tear gas]	0	0	0	0	0	3	7	10
Obligar [to oblige]	0	0	0	0	0	6	4	10
Patear [to kick]	0	0	0	0	0	0	9	9

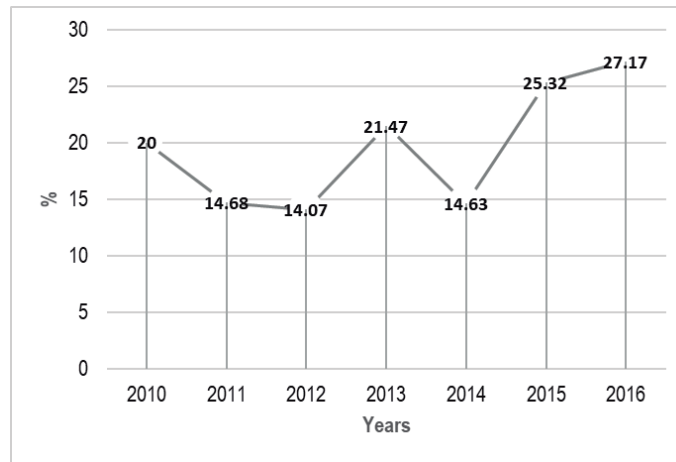
### 5.5. Diachronic evolution of victimization

This section of the results addresses the evolution of victimization collocates in REFUCORES over the 2010-2016 period. On a diachronic basis, Table 7 provides the distribution of the frequencies of each subset over the 2010-2016 period. A high number of victimizing instances is observed in the last two years with respect to prior years. As a matter of fact, more than 87% of the victimization collocates occur in this two-year period. This is particularly applicable to Unfair treatment, which can be considered as a seasonal category since most of its collocates only occur in the last two years. Indeed, we barely find occurrences of Unfair treatment from 2010 to 2014. Baker et al. (2008) refer to this phenomenon as ‘seasonal collocates’, that is, collocates which are highly frequent in a specific period of time and that, in this case, bring to light the dynamism of refugees linked to the refugee crisis.

**Table 7:** Victimization collocates: Frequencies per year and subset.

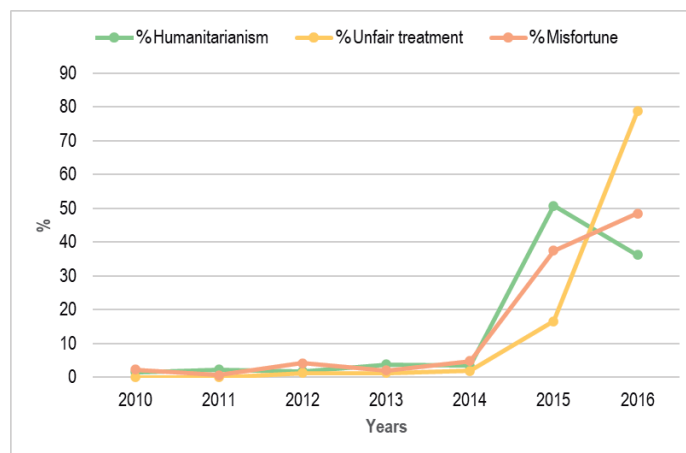
Subset	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	TOTAL
Humanitarianism	58	86	68	139	127	1858	1328	3664
Misfortune	17	5	31	15	35	274	354	731
Unfair treatment	0	0	4	4	6	51	241	306
Victimization collocates	75	91	103	158	168	<b>2183</b>	<b>1923</b>	4701

In terms of percentages, Figure 3 shows the relative percentage of victimization collocates per year, that is, the numbers have been normalized according to the frequency of the lemma *refugiad\** per year. Victimization collocates occur over the 7 years analyzed and range from 14% in 2012 to over 27% in 2016, with a difference of 13 points between the lowest and highest percentage. Once more, the last two years of analysis have the highest percentages of victimization, with more than a quarter of the collocates in these years corresponding to victimization.



**Figure 3:** Relative percentage of victimization per year.

Finally, we will show the diachronic evolution of each of the victimization subsets. It can be observed in Figure 4 that the most notable changes occur between 2015 and 2016. In fact, Unfair treatment rises dramatically more than 60 points, from 16% to almost 79%, Misfortune also rises over 10 points, from 37% to 48%, whereas Humanitarianism decreases 15 points, from 51% to 36%. It is noteworthy that the changes in the subsets coincide with the largest refugee influx into Europe in 2015 due to the Syrian Civil War.



**Figure 4:** Diachronic evolution of victimization subsets.

## 6. Discussion

As can be observed in the results, the subset of Humanitarianism represents more than three quarters of all victimization collocates. Among the three categories of victimization identified, Humanitarianism seems to offer a friendly and positive side, as opposed to the intrinsic negativity of Misfortune and Unfair treatment. From a superficial point of view, the words that make up this subset are essentially positive, conveying support and help to the refugee community. However, if we delve deeper, several authors maintain that humanitarianism victimizes refugees in a double sense, both as migrants and needing assistance.

Every (2008, p. 1) notes that “critiques of humanitarianism have highlighted its conceptual ambiguity and its usefulness in justifying the exclusion, rather than inclusion, of refugees and asylum seekers”. Authors such as Oliver (2017) and Dauvergne (2005) elaborate on this idea by considering humanitarianism as an instrument that reinforces power relations between the host and the refugee. Thus, it is the assistant who decides how to assist, what to be given and in what terms (Taylor, 2001).

The humanitarianist discourse leads to an assistencialist representation, instead of promoting a discourse of assistance based on human rights. In this sense, Agustín (2003) states that migrants, asylum seekers and refugees are victimized through humanitarianism as they need help and saving, putting the focus on those who help them, as the supporters and savers. Refugees are considered in terms of their status as victims and, consequently, as beneficiaries of intervention. This practice can be found in other contexts such as the media representation of unaccompanied minors. In a recent study carried out by Gómez-Quintero et al. (2021), news about this group in several newspapers from 2017 to 2019 were analyzed. It was found that the term Spanish MENA (Menores No Acompañados) - unaccompanied minors in English - evoked a clear assistencialist discourse.

Moreover, such assistencialism tends to portray refugees as second-class human beings who cannot fend for themselves. Humanitarianism here is closely related to the paternalism that emerges from many of the headlines discussed above. This fact reinforces the idea of us-them, which appears in studies such as Martínez Lirola's (2017) on Sub-Saharan migrants. Using the framework of Visual Grammar, the author analyzes Spanish news about this group, which have been published between 2012 and 2015. The results showed



how the media discourse contributes to racist and discriminatory attitudes based on the dichotomy of migrants as criminals or victims, while at the same time the distances between these migrants and the host country are remarked. The 'us' versus 'them' argument is quite recursive in the populist discourse of nationalist parties to strengthen the sense of belonging and to feed the idea of the inferior status of foreigners.

Humanitarianism implies an assistencialist discourse that deprives the subject, at least in part, of his or her own entrepreneurship. Van Leeuwen (2008) speaks of the tendency to represent refugees as passive in most cases. If they are depicted as active, it is in a criminalizing way, i.e., jumping a fence, stealing or committing some kind of crime. Rarely is the refugee portrayed as an enterprising human being, with projects and goals beyond survival. Thus, we can identify here the construction of this victim-like identity through language, a binary conceptualization of extremes where the refugee is either a victim as in this paper or a victimizer when active.

The results have revealed that in the 2015-2016 period, all three victimization subsets underwent noticeable changes. Thus, while Unfair treatment and Misfortune collocates increased, Humanitarianism collocates decreased. The year 2015 was in fact referred to by UNHCR as the year of the refugee crisis in Europe, which reached staggering levels, hitting headlines and provoking turbulent political debates. The forced movements resulting from the Syrian armed conflict began to be conceived of as a crisis, a tragedy, an avalanche, or an invasion (Abid et al., 2017) that was growing at breakneck speed. According to UNHCR, in January 2012, the year in which the escalation of violence turned into civil war, there were around 95,000 registered refugees, a figure that rose to more than 4 million by the end of August 2015. It was these mass displacements that led the EU to reluctantly reach a reception agreement that was eventually reneged on. It was apparently the unmanageable number of refugees that led to a shift in media discourse in which humanitarian aid and refugee protection gave way to a colder discourse that focused more on the unfair and abusive treatment refugees received from some European countries during their journey, and the physical and psychological misfortune they experienced. The language of the media became a mirror reflecting the attitude of many European governments that closed borders, persecuted refugees, or imposed strict reception quotas.

## Conclusions

The study of the semantic preference of the lemma *refugiad\** has proved that this lemma collocates with words from the category of victimization throughout the 7-year period under study (2010-2016).

Victimization can be considered an umbrella term that encompasses more specific subsets that are represented in the language of the media. These subsets include collocates related to (i) humanitarianism and assistance to refugees, (ii) misfortune and negative experiences and (iii) unfair and abusive treatment by host governments and countries. In diachronic terms, 2015 and 2016 are the most interesting years as they account for the majority of victimization collocates and contain notable changes in the different subsets, as discussed in Section 6. The discourse of victimization around refugees found in the Spanish written press seems to mainly point to an apparent humanitarianist discourse and an underlying assistentialist discourse that enhances power relations between refugees and hosts. This tendency is consistent throughout the period studied, although it seems to diminish in the last two years, when a 'colder' and 'unwelcoming' discourse comes to the fore as a consequence of the uncontrollable massive movements. Thus, this change in discourse seems to be due to the urgency of protecting ourselves from an uncontrolled mass of too many refugees that cannot be managed and that go beyond the limits of humanitarian aid.

The data obtained in this research come from *El País* and *El Mundo*, the two newspapers with the largest readership in Spain and traditionally linked to different political ideologies. However, the results have been presented as a whole and not separated by newspapers, as our intention was not to examine how the political ideology of a newspaper influences the discursive representation of refugees, but to explore such representation in the Spanish press in general. We know ideology may play a role in the portrayal of migrants and refugees; however, based on our explorations of the corpus and in line with KhosraviNik (2009), we consider that, in terms of discourse, migration issues seem to be rather a matter of social concern that goes beyond the political thought of conservatives and progressives. Nevertheless, the ideology of the newspaper may be an interesting criterion worth considering in future research.

This study has focused on collocational behaviour, explored through semantic preference, so the analysis has been limited to L5-R5 collocates. Therefore, the victimizing or non-

victimizing message of longer linguistic expressions or longer pieces of text has been left out of the scope of our study.

The results of this paper lead us to pose some research questions that would be worth answering in future studies: Does the semantic preference of Syrian refugees and Ukrainian refugees differ in the media? We hypothesize that, in the case of refugees from the Eastern European country, humanitarianism would be the predominant, if not the only, subset, and that misfortune and unfair treatment would have a marginal place. It would be interesting to look at what kind of portrayal surrounds Ukrainian refugees. Another issue to explore would be whether the media in other countries portray refugees in the same terms as the Spanish press and, furthermore, it might be of significance to distinguish between host countries and non-host countries.

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