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# Analysing Visual Dysphemisms in News Items on the Arrival of Sub-Saharan Immigrants to Spain in Small Boats: Visual Strategies of Pity, Fear and Compassion

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## **Abstract**

This paper is a multimodal critical discourse study of the representation of sub-Saharan immigrants who arrive on the Spanish coasts in small boats. The main objective of this research is to analyse the visual portrayal of the way the Spanish press transmits news items dealing with the arrival of the above mentioned immigrants. The data of this article consists of all the news items published upon arrival of these immigrants in the digital edition of the two most popular Spanish newspapers (ie. *El País* and *ABC*), from 1 June 2011 to 1 January 2015. For its framework of analysis, the study draws on the principles of critical discourse analysis and visual grammar in order to observe the main visual strategies used by the press to portray the immigrants under analysis. The analysis of the corpus of examples is intended to assist in the creation of a typology of the main ways in which immigrants

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are represented visually. The study reveals that immigrants are represented dysphemistically, which means that the negative aspects of them and their arrival are highlighted. The results show that the general tendency is to represent sub-Saharan immigrants as victims, distanced from the readers and as strangers and different from the majority group. Moreover, they are portrayed as vulnerable and dependent people who are sick or in need or, in other words, as a people-problem.

## **Keywords**

Sub-Saharan immigrants; critical discourse analysis; visual grammar; social actors; dysphemisms (Source: Unesco Thesaurus).

# Análisis de los disfemismos visuales en las noticias sobre la llegada de inmigrantes subsaharianos a España en pequeñas embarcaciones: estrategias visuales de lástima, miedo y compasión

## Resumen

Este trabajo es un estudio de discurso crítico multimodal sobre la representación de los inmigrantes subsaharianos que llegan a las costas españolas en pequeñas embarcaciones. El objetivo principal es analizar la representación visual de la forma en que la prensa española transmite las noticias relacionadas con la llegada de los inmigrantes mencionados. Los datos de este artículo fueron tomados de todas las noticias publicadas a la llegada de estos inmigrantes en la edición digital de los dos periódicos españoles más populares, a saber, *El País* y *ABC*, del 1 de junio de 2011 al 1 de enero de 2015. Para su marco de análisis, el estudio se basa en los principios del análisis crítico del discurso y de la gramática visual para observar las principales estrategias visuales utilizadas por la prensa para retratar a los inmigrantes objeto de análisis. El análisis del corpus de ejemplos pretende contribuir a la creación de una tipología de las principales formas en que los inmigrantes están representados visualmente. El estudio revela que los inmigrantes están representados de manera disfemística, es decir, se destacan los aspectos negativos de ellos y de su llegada. Los resultados muestran que la tendencia general es representar a los inmigrantes subsaharianos como víctimas, distanciados de los lectores y como extraños y diferentes del grupo mayoritario. Además, son retratados como personas vulnerables y dependientes que están enfermas o necesitadas, es decir, como un problema.

## Palabras clave

Inmigrantes subsaharianos; análisis crítico del discurso; gramática visual; actores sociales; disfemismos (Fuente: Tesauro de la Unesco).

# Análise dos disfemismos visuais nas notícias sobre a chegada de imigrantes subsaarianos à Espanha em pequenas embarcações: estratégias visuais de lástima, medo e compaixão

## Resumo

Este trabalho é um estudo de discurso crítico multimodal sobre a representação de imigrantes subsaarianos que chegam à costa espanhola em pequenas embarcações. O objetivo principal desta investigação é analisar a representação visual da forma em que a imprensa espanhola transmite notícias relacionadas com a chegada dos imigrantes mencionados. Os dados deste artigo constam de todas as notícias publicadas com a chegada destes imigrantes na edição digital dos dois jornais espanhóis mais populares, *El País* e *ABC*, desde o 1 de junho de 2011 ao 1 de janeiro de 2015. Para seu marco de análise, o estudo se baseia nos princípios da análise crítica do discurso e da gramática visual para observar as principais estratégias visuais utilizadas pela imprensa para retratar os imigrantes objetos de análise. A análise do corpus de exemplos pretende contribuir para a criação de uma tipologia das principais formas em que os imigrantes estão representados visualmente. O estudo revela que os imigrantes estão representados disfemisticamente, ou seja, se destacam os aspectos negativos deles e de sua chegada. Os resultados mostram que a tendência geral é representar os imigrantes subsaarianos como vítimas, distanciados dos leitores e como estranhos e diferentes do grupo majoritário. Além disso, são retratados como pessoas vulneráveis e dependentes que estão doentes ou necessitadas, ou seja, como um problema de pessoas.

## Palavras-chave

Imigrantes subsaarianos; análise crítica do discurso; gramática visual; atores sociais; disfemismos (Fonte: Tesouro da Unesco).

# Introduction

The media are the main institution of ideological reproduction in industrialized societies. They affect our knowledge, our values and our social relationships because they play a key role in the construction of social reality due to their capacity to create representations that contribute to building up social identities. Consequently, social power and the abuse of power are demonstrated through the texts that journalists prepare and that the media transmit. In fact, the majority of our social and political knowledge and our beliefs about the world arise from the numerous pieces of information that we read or listen to on a daily basis through the media; in other words, there are many items of information that are not known through personal experiences. In this sense, it is essential to be aware of the power behind the language and visuals used by the media in order to develop a critical attitude.

In the last decade there has been a transformation of media environment. Therefore, a new media scape is observed with online publications such as those used to prepare this article, i.e., the news items used for the analysis have been collected from online archives. In addition, the media are a source for creating opinions, and media representations are shaped by culture and society. Inside the media, the press is given special credibility and invites people to reflect, to create an ideology, and to offer social values; this is the reason why this study used news items from the press. Consequently, the media in general and the press in particular have the power to influence the way immigrants are represented. The negative representation of immigrants influences society to perceive immigration as a problem. In this sense, the media should play a key role in highlighting that present societies are multicultural and that immigrants should also be taken into consideration when talking about citizenship (Laurenzo Copello & Durán Muñoz, 2014).

Each linguistic and visual element in the news items are not chosen at random but with the purpose of creating the reality under description—in this case, immigration—in a particular way: positive or negative, with or without prejudices, giving power to the immigrants represented or depriving them of power. Consequently, each choice in the news items

matters due to the relationship between language and society (van Dijk, 2008), and to the dialogue between them; in other words, since language is used to represent reality, the different choices should be clear in the process of describing and understanding what happens in society (Richardson, 2007).

For example, there is a general tendency to represent the Spanish population in a positive fashion and immigrants in a negative one, which further perpetuates the “we-they” dichotomy; in Richardson and Wodak’s (2013) words, “The construction of in- and out groups necessarily implies the use of strategies of self-representation and the negative representation of others” (p. 247). This way, it is clear that the majority group is the one exercising power, whereas immigrants are portrayed as *the others*, as those who are not like us and therefore should be excluded from the privileges of the Spanish population.

The main objective of this paper is to observe the manner in which the Spanish press transmits news items dealing with the arrival of immigrants. We have selected them because most news reports deal with the first moment of immigrants’ arrival either by small boats or by jumping the fence in Melilla, Spain. The portrayal of this moment is very important in the transmission of public opinion because the constant representation of sub-Saharan immigrants as human beings in need of help and support from the Spanish population suggests that immigrants are a burden to the country, as the section where the analysis is presented will make clear. In this sense, the main research questions we will try to answer in this article are the following: How are the immigrants who arrive in small boats to Spain portrayed linguistically and visually? What are the main visual methods of representing the immigrants arriving in small boats?

The present paper is organized as follows: After this introduction, we present the literature review, followed by the objectives, data, and methodology. Then, we will offer the results and the corresponding discussion. The conclusions obtained from the analysis will bring this study to an end.

## Literature Review

There are many national and international studies that examine the representation of immigrants in the press from a critical discourse analysis (CDA) perspective (Bañón Hernández, 2002; Bañón Hernández & Romero, 2013; Crespo & Martínez Lirola, 2012; Geißler & Pöttker, 2009; KhosraviNik, 2009, 2010a, 2010b; Martínez Lirola, 2006, 2013, 2014; Moore et al., 2012; Richardson & Wodak, 2013; Ureta, 2011; van Dijk, 2005, 2008; Wodak & Reisigl, 2001, among others). These studies show that there is a general tendency to represent immigrants negatively—they are normally referred to as “illegal”, as people without official documents in irregular situations in the country of arrival, due to the fact that they enter other countries without permission, not respecting the laws of the countries they arrive in (Bacon, 2008; Newton, 2008, Martínez Lirola, 2014).

However, there are only a few studies that concentrate on the representation of sub-Saharan immigrants in the press (Concepción Sepúlveda et al., 2008; Hatoss, 2012; Kiwan, 2009; Riccio, 2001; Triandafyllidou & Maroukis, 2012). There is little research because immigrants tend to be underrepresented in the press. Moreover, there is a general tendency to represent sub-Saharans in a stereotypical and superficial fashion, i.e. associating them with poverty and misery, without deeper exploration into the reality behind their migratory process or the reasons why they emigrate. According to Haas:

Dominant media and political discourses tend to identify extreme poverty, war and environmental degradation amalgamated into a stereotypical image of ‘African misery’ as the root causes of this migration. This typically goes along with the portrayal of African migrants as passive victims of poverty and war, as desperate people who are driven off their native lands into the hand of ruthless smugglers and merciless traffickers. (2008, p. 14)

In addition, previous research on the topic shows that irregular migrants are not only framed as intruders or threats, but also as victims, which is an aspect that is found in the analysis. The victimization of immigrants has already been studied in the Belgian press (van Gorp, 2005) and in the Swedish and Finnish press (Horsti, 2008a, 2008b). These studies focus on



the role of humanitarian discourses and their relationships with the fact of immigrants being represented as immigrants.

The arrival of sub-Saharan immigrants in Spain is not new: It became significant from 1997 onwards (Arango, 2002). Most came from Angola, Burkina Faso, Cape Verde, Cameroon, Congo, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, among other countries. The main reasons for this include the difficult socio-economic conditions in their countries of origin and the increase in their population (Rodríguez Breijo, 2010).

In addition, the number of studies that examine the representation of immigrants who arrive in small boats is even fewer (González, 2011; Kiwan, 2009; Mullor, 2011; Rodríguez Breijo, 2010). These studies point out the main aspects in which sub-Saharan immigrants are discriminated against. For example, Kiwan's (2009) book concentrates on the French-born descendants of North African immigrants; the author makes it clear that they "[...] are often portrayed as dangerously 'Other', and thus their exclusion through racial or cultural discrimination in many areas of French life, such as employment and education, can be exacerbated" (Kiwan, 2009, p. 3).

The use of dysphemisms (i.e., the process whereby the most pejorative traits of the taboo are highlighted, aggressively targeting the addressee or the concept itself) is a resource for textual manipulation that allows people—journalists, in the case of our study—to use language and visuals in a way that fosters describing a particular reality or group of people in a manner that reinforces values and social codes. In this sense, the way immigrants are represented is manipulated to offer a negative view of the people portrayed. Following van Leeuwen (2000) and his concept of visual racism, we will use the term *visual dysphemism* to refer to the cases in which images show the pejorative side of a social reality or group of people—immigrants, in the present case. Both terms refer to negative aspects but visual dysphemisms are used in a broader sense, including aspects that are not only connected with race.

The high number of news items that concentrate on the arrival of immigrants in small boats on the Spanish coast and the few studies that have

paid attention to them justifies the fact that this paper intends to be a contribution in this field: in this sense, to understand the main ways in which immigrants are portrayed dysphemistically from the very first moment they arrive in Spain. Images can be manipulated in different ways in order to create visual dysphemisms (Crespo & Martínez Lirola, 2012), such as representing immigrants looking down and not interacting with the audience, showing their faces blurred, presenting a dark background that does not contribute to distinguishing the people represented, presenting photographs in non-prominent positions on the page, not framing texts properly, offering small images, among others.

We live in a visual society where photographs are the predominant element in many multimodal texts, which affects the perceptions of society. As Rose (2012) puts it, “There are different ways of seeing the world, and the critical task is to differentiate between the social effects of those different visions. All these arguments make clear the necessity of understanding what social relations produce, and are reproduced by, what forms of visibility [ ... ]” (p. 10).

The multimodal text needs to be understood as a whole in which the combination of the different modes has the purpose of creating meaning effectively. Moreover, everything that is part of the multimodal text (font, place in which the image appears on the page, vocabulary and syntactic structures used, etc.) may contribute to the creation of the sense of the text and have an influence on the reader.

## Data and Methodology

The majority of the news items dealing with immigrants focus on their first moment of arrival on small boats or scaling the fences that separate Africa from Spain; for this reason, we have chosen news items that inform the audience about these events. The selection of multimodal texts is necessary because they offer not only linguistic but also visual information about immigrants.

In this sense, the three main types of composition that Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) proposed to be taken into consideration when analysing

visuals will be used in the analysis: *Information value*, which refers to the fact that the location of the elements (e.g. from the centre to the margins, from the top to the bottom or, from left to right) can add value to the image; *Salience*, which refers to the different elements of a composition designed to catch the readers' attention (e.g. the colour contrast, the size of an element, etc.); and *Framing*, the presence or absence of frames that show elements as connected or disconnected.

The data collected was compiled with all the news items on sub-Saharan immigrants that dealt with the first moment of arrival in small boats in which appeared in the digital version of the main Spanish newspapers, that is, *ABC* and *El País*, from 1 June 2011 to 1 January 2015. These newspapers were chosen because they are the most widely read in Spain. This period coincides with the Spanish economic crisis, which relates to the trajectory of immigration to Spain because not so many immigrants arrived. However, there are still migrants who continue risking their lives in order to get to Europe. All in all, 206 news reports were obtained from the online archives of the newspapers under analysis: 151 from *ABC* and 55 from *El País*. The two newspapers espouse different ideologies: *ABC* is regarded as right-wing and *El País* is regarded as left-wing. However, there is no difference between the ways these two papers represent the issue. Regarding the different news items, 129 were monomodal, i.e., they consisted simply of written text, whereas 77 were multimodal, i.e., they were comprised of photographs in which the immigrants under analysis were represented, as well as written text.

The corpus is big enough to analyse certain texts in detail and to reach some conclusions. Due to the limitations of this paper, and following the tradition of CDA, we will choose just four multimodal texts (Figures 1, 2, 3 and 4) to illustrate the main visual and linguistic characteristics of the descriptions of sub-Saharan immigrants when they arrive. The selected texts were chosen because they are representative of the recurrent techniques by which immigrants are portrayed during the first moment of their arrival in Spain. These techniques were identified by observing the representation of the in-group and the immigrants in all the news items selected.

The texts chosen as examples show that immigrants are portrayed as different from the main group of the population. The news items selected portray the four main ways in which immigrants are represented after the first moment of arrival: immigrants need to be rescued (Figure 1); immigrants need medical help (Figure 2); women and children arrive and are vulnerable (Figure 3); and immigrants wait in Spain until they are taken back to their countries of origin (Figure 4). Table 1 shows the main ways in which immigrants appear in the whole corpus of multimodal texts analysed so that the four texts chosen as examples are clearly contextualised:

**Table 1. Main ways in which sub-Saharan immigrants are represented in the corpus**

Representation of immigrants in need of rescue	Representation of immigrants in need of medical help	Representation of women and children	Representation of immigrants waiting to go back to their countries
42%	25%	15%	18%

Source: Own elaboration based on data.

Once the corpus was selected, we applied some of the principles of CDA in order to investigate the relationship between the discourse used in the news items under analysis, the social reality they transmit, and the ideology behind each linguistic and visual choice. Moreover, the analysis will explore the relationships of power between sub-Saharan immigrants and the journalists who create the news items and who belong to the Spanish population. Approaching how the discourse of the press describes said reality will show how discourse is shaped by society (Wodak & Reisigl, 2001). Consequently, CDA will allow the deconstruction of patterns of discrimination against these immigrants by being problem-oriented and observing a sample from the Spanish press (Young & Fitzgerald, 2006; van Dijk, 2009; Wodak & Meyer, 2009).

In addition, van Leeuwen’s (2008) characterization of social actors will be useful when exploring the dysphemistic representation of the above-mentioned immigrants because it allows us to observe how these immigrants that appear in the pieces of news selected are portrayed as social

actors from the linguistic and the visual point of view. Social actors can be referred to as *individuals* or as *groups*, both verbally and visually. The visual representation of social actors calls for one to pay attention to social distance, social relation and social interaction in order to understand the portrayal of people in the visuals and their relationships with the audience (van Leeuwen, 2008). This model is also useful to observe whether immigrants are portrayed as groups, as individuals, active, passive, etc.

## Analysis

Having explained the main characteristics of the corpus of examples and the main method of analysis, this section will concentrate on offering the main general characteristics of the news items of the corpus. In addition, four multimodal pieces of news will be selected in order to systematize the main ways in which these specific sub-Saharan immigrants are represented dysphemistically from a visual point of view.

### **General analysis of the linguistic representation of the Sub-Saharan immigrants who arrive in small boats**

Due to the space limitations of this paper, the main characteristics of said phenomenon in a sample from the Spanish press will only be illustrated with a visual, its heading and its caption. However, we would like to refer briefly to some of the general characteristics of the written language. Immigrants are referred to in terms of *figures* and as collective nouns such as *immigrants*, *sub-Saharan*, or *the illegal*. This coincides with their representation as a group in the visuals.

Moreover, the use of words and collocations such as *avalanche*, *massive arrival*, or *wave* (used in other news items of the corpus) adds to portraying an imaginary invasion that makes the Spanish population feel threatened by the arrival of immigrants. Moreover, the latter are always represented as passive human beings waiting for the action of the majority group. In this sense, they are rescued and transferred (see figures 1, 2 and 3). All the news items of our corpus focus on negative topics since they concentrate

mainly on the first moment of arrival or on all the needs that immigrants have when they arrive.

The different examples of the language used in news items to refer to immigrants as mentioned in the previous paragraphs are examples of *appraisement*; in the words of van Leeuwen (2008), “social actors are appraised when they are referred to in terms which evaluate them as good or bad, loved or hated, admired or pitied” (p. 45). The examples analysed show that immigrants are referred to in a negative manner, which points to the division between ‘we’ and ‘they’.

## **Visual representation of the sub-Saharan immigrants who arrive in small boats: Exploring visual dysphemisms and the main strategies of pity, fear and compassion**

We have selected four multimodal texts for the analysis because present societies are multimodal (Kress, 2010; Machin, 2014; O’Halloran, 2011a, 2011b; O’Halloran & Smith, 2011). In this sense, all modes communicate and contribute to the expression of meaning in the text, as Machin (2007) puts it: “What is special about the multimodal approach to communication is ‘the idea that all modes need to be considered with the same kind of detail, as semiotic systems in themselves, whose potential choices, patterns and grammar can be described and documented’” (p. x).

After having analysed all the news items on the topic chosen, we have selected the following four because they are representative of the main ways in which immigrants are portrayed dysphemistically. The following analysis will allow us to deconstruct the main dysphemisms found in order to identify strategies of manipulation and discrimination in discourse.

### **Sub-Saharan immigrants who need to be rescued. The very first moment of arrival**

Figure 1 is characteristic of the very first moment of arrival because you can see that the rescue craft is still in the sea. A man belonging to the majority group, who is wearing white clothes and is completely protected, appears in the foreground, right behind the orange iron bars that portray immigrants



as a group in the middle ground and foreground (the fence has the symbolic meaning of controlling them), while the small boat in which they have just arrived (covered by an orange cover) and the sea are in the background.

Figure 1. Multimodal text 1<sup>2</sup>.

34 immigrants are rescued when they attempt to arrive in Spain in four inflated boats (Rescatados 34 inmigrantes cuando trataban de llegar en cuatro embarcaciones hinchables a España).

All the immigrants are men, adults, and have been transferred to Tarifa's port in good health (Todos los inmigrantes, varones y mayores de edad, han sido trasladados al puerto de Tarifa en aparente buen estado de salud). ABC, EFE, 19-03-2013.

### Figure 1. Visual 1



EFE. Ayer fueron rescatados también más de treinta inmigrantes.  
(Yesterday more than 30 immigrants were also rescued).

Source: EFE, (2013).

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.abc.es/espana/20130318/abci-inmigrantes-estrecho-201303181029.html>

One of the main characteristics of news items like this one is that immigrants are represented as a group and nothing is said of them as individuals. The red blankets that cover them and the orange waistcoats contribute to their homogenization. Moreover, they are represented as passive, waiting to be taken to Tarifa, Spain, and provided with help for their basic needs.

There is a clear difference between the group of immigrants wearing dark clothes and covered with red blankets and the man on the left in white clothes. On the one hand, he is wearing goggles, a half mask and a helmet as protection, which suggests that the others are sickly, perhaps infectious. The fact that he is standing while the group of immigrants are sitting gives him symbolic power as the only member of the main Spanish society in the image. His presence and the orange fence in the foreground further establish the difference between *we* and *they*. Moreover, his demeanour suggests the concept of capture. On the other hand, immigrants are collectivised and assimilated (van Leeuwen, 2008).

Regarding information value (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006), the right-hand side is the most important part of the visual; this is clear in this news item because there are more people in that part of the photograph and also because there we find a number of sub-Saharanans with their hands up, an action which catches the audience's attention. However, it seems that none of the represented participants are looking at the audience, which allows no possibility of interaction or dialogue between the represented social actors and the latter. In addition, in regards to framing, it is significant that immigrants are framed with the fence in the foreground and with the small boat they have used in the background. This is a symbolic method of connecting their past, trying to travel with their own boat, and their present, which is marked by them being rescued by Maritime Rescue (*Salvamento Marítimo*).

The analysis of social distance, social relation and social interaction allows us to observe how interpersonal relations with the audience are established (van Leeuwen, 2008). There is a clear distance between the different social actors represented and the audience due to the orange iron bars. We are invited to observe the action without participating in it because the people represented are not in a close shot. Following van Leeuwen (2008),



“In pictures as in real life, distance communicates interpersonal relationships” (p. 138). In this sense, distance is symbolic in this news item and it suggests that the immigrants represented are strangers and have nothing to do with us.

In regards to social relation, there is a horizontal angle since we see immigrants from the side. Symbolic detachment is suggested since immigrants are not observed at eye level; they are shown from some distance (van Leeuwen, 2008). Considering social interaction, this is a clear example of an offer image because the social actors do not look directly at the readers, and therefore there is no explicit demand. In this sense, the different people are represented as “[...] objects for our scrutiny rather than as subjects addressing the viewer with their gaze and symbolically engaging with the viewer in this way” (van Leeuwen, 2008, p. 141).

### **Sub-Saharan immigrants who need medical help**

In Figure 2, there are nine social actors represented between immigrants and volunteers from the Red Cross—four in the foreground and five in the background. Apart from the activeness of the latter, their colourful clothes help to distinguish them. This visual evokes associations of hiding and illegality. Sometimes, the arrival of immigrants takes place at night, and therefore the images are dark (Figure 2). Moreover, the lack of light in the visual also contributes to reinforce the nexus of illegality, hiding and secrecy. In addition, the fact that they request medical help reinforces the sense of vulnerability and dependency. In this visual, they are portrayed as receiving personalized attention.

Figure 2. Multimodal text 2<sup>3</sup>.

España

32 immigrants who travelled in a small boat have been rescued in the South of Malaga (Rescatados 32 inmigrantes que viajaban en la patera al sur de Málaga).

ABC, Europa Press Málaga, 03-06-2014.

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3 <http://www.abc.es/espana/20140603/abci-rescatados-inmigrantes-viajaban-patera-201406030852.html>

**Figure 2. Visual 2**



Los inmigrantes son atendidos en el puerto de Málaga  
(Immigrants are taken care of in Malaga's port).  
Source: EFE, (2014).

Taking into consideration van Leeuwen's (2008) representation of social actors, the immigrants represented are "patient" (goal), in other words, as persons to whom the action is done, they are laying down or sitting down in the photograph. Therefore, the sanitary services (that is, the people from the main group) are the "agents" (actors), the ones doing the main action or, in other words, taking care of the immigrants in this visual. In a sense, immigrants are represented as victims because they are in need of medical help.

The photograph is obviously taken at the end of a long trip and depicts that moment when immigrants are provided with medical help right after their arrival; Malaga's port can be seen in the background of the image. These people are in need. Consequently, they receive direct help from members of the NGO and the Red Cross. This reinforces the disjuncture between 'we' (the majority group of society, the one that gives and is active) and 'they' (immigrants, those who are passive and receive medical help).

It is significant that on the right and foregrounded, following the principle of information value (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006), we find a member of the Red Cross with his back to the camera and a red cross on his jacket. This is a method of emphasizing his action so that he becomes the centre of attention. It contributes to establishing a social distance (van Leeuwen, 2008) between the world of immigrants and that of the majority group: his presence seems to be a barrier between both worlds. He is crucial in the establishment of social relations, since he manipulates the viewer to perceive the visual from the side (a horizontal angle). Moreover, the fact that he covers the immigrant who is lying on the floor and is accompanied by another person from the Red Cross suggests the interpretation that this immigrant needs more medical help than the others. In consequence, the two immigrants in the foreground are presented as those whose health needs more attention. Those in the background are represented in a long shot, as if they were strangers.

All the social actors are joined by different vectors as a method of linking them and reinforcing the notion of belonging to the same group: the three immigrants in the background are associated, as are the members of the Red Cross in the foreground and background. However, in terms of social interaction (van Leeuwen, 2008) it is significant that none of the social actors represented looks at the readers: therefore, there is no direct relationship between the people depicted and the audience. In this sense, according to Kress and van Leeuwen (2006), this would be an example of an offer image.

### **Portraying the arrival of sub-Saharan women and children**

There are very few news items in which women and children appear represented in the corpus (15%), and Figure 3 is one example. As was the case in Figure 1, this news item also coincides with the very first moment of arrival and, once again, there is a man representing the majority group, and he seems to have a crucial role in the rescue. His body is completely covered with a helmet, a waistcoat and goggles. In this image, he is accorded even more attention than in Figure 1 because he appears on the right, the location of the most important part of the information, following the principle of information value (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006), and therefore he is the most salient social actor in this visual. He implies the notion of protection

and rescue. The heading, which refers to 107 immigrants being “rescued” within the span of 24 hours between the Straits of Gibraltar and Almería, also reinforces this idea by making explicit the idea of being rescued. Although his face is covered with sun glasses and a half mask, one may clearly distinguish that he is looking down into the middle distance.

Figure 3. Multimodal text 3<sup>4</sup>.

107 immigrants rescued between the Straits of Gibraltar and Almería in 24 hours (Rescatados 107 inmigrantes entre el Estrecho y Almería en 24 horas).

Los ocupantes iban en cinco balsas y han sido trasladados a Marruecos y España Una veintena de mujeres y 10 niños, entre los integrantes de las expediciones. (The occupiers were in five inflatable floats and they have been moved to Morocco and Spain. A set of women and 10 children, among the components of the expeditions).

El País, Lola Hierro, 11-09-2013.

**Figure 3. Visual 3**



Inmigrantes localizados en Alborán, a su llegada a Motril.  
(Immigrants found in Alborán, when they arrived in Motril).  
Source: Zarza,(2013).

4 [http://politica.elpais.com/politica/2013/09/10/actualidad/1378806482\\_123323.html](http://politica.elpais.com/politica/2013/09/10/actualidad/1378806482_123323.html)

As in the previous images, immigrants appear represented as a group in Figure 3. There are different vectors joining them by means of their heads, shoulders, arms and hands. However, this is different in the sense that this visual depicts the representation of women and children, more specifically as part of the family, because there are two women who are holding their children in the foreground. These groups are considered the most vulnerable members of society.

Apart from the man wearing white clothes on the right, the woman precisely in the centre of the visual is also given special attention. The fact that she looks directly at the audience implies that she requests an answer, inviting readers to sympathize with her social situation, to feel pity and compassion. Therefore, she interacts socially with the audience because she is demanding that readers react and, consequently, this would constitute an example of a demand image (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006).

Regarding social distance, the orange balustrade establishes a division between the women and children who have just arrived and the audience. Considering social relation, there is a frontal horizontal angle, in which the frontal plane of the image producer (and likewise the viewer) and the frontal plane of the represented actors are parallel. The frontal angle means “involvement” between the viewer and the people represented in the visual; i.e., the social problem portrayed affects the Spanish society and the immigrant women who arrive. This idea is reinforced because the social actors are observed at eye level (van Leeuwen, 2008).

In addition, the angle from which the photograph is taken means that the viewer looks from eye level at the different human beings represented. However, this contrasts with the woman on the right, since the latter is looking down, which implies that she is ashamed of her social situation. Moreover, the woman on the left who is facing the audience appears looking nowhere, which implies that she is worried about the uncertain future.

It is noteworthy that the children do not appear with their faces covered. The red blankets covering them draw attention to their presence in the

visuals and cause readers to think about the vulnerability of children in the migratory process. In addition, the women in the background (we can barely see the heads of two of them) are clearly more distanced from the audience than the ones in the foreground.

### **Waiting for a new destiny after the first moment of arrival**

Figure 4 is another text in which immigrants' representation as social actors is characterized by their portrayal as a group. This is an example of an image where no one from the majority group is depicted; therefore, all the attention falls on the immigrants. In van Leeuwen's (2008) terms, they are collectivized and assimilated so that any depiction of their distinctiveness as individuals is avoided. The notion of an indeterminate identity is thus present because they are portrayed as unspecified, anonymous people (van Leeuwen, 2008).

Figure 4. Multimodal text 4<sup>5</sup>.

The avalanche overwhelms the police headquarters of Tarifa and Algeciras (La avalancha satura las instalaciones policiales de Tarifa y Algeciras).

The agents are alerted to the lack of resources to take care of the massive arrival of immigrants (Los agentes alertan de la falta de medios para atender la masiva llegada de inmigrantes).

El País, Cándido Romaguera, 12-08-2014

These immigrants are doing nothing, homogenised by wearing clothes of the same colour and by the blankets that some of them use to cover their bodies. All the immigrants are joined by vectors, as lines that establish orientation, thereby connecting all the immigrants and causing one to perceive them as a unity. Vectors also situate the sub-Saharan, who are represented at the same level, emphasizing that they share the same social situation. Moreover, portraying so many sub-Saharan together suggests the impression of a cumulative invasion and of immigrants as people who are in need. The

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5 [http://ccaa.elpais.com/ccaa/2014/08/12/andalucia/1407853011\\_161446.html](http://ccaa.elpais.com/ccaa/2014/08/12/andalucia/1407853011_161446.html)



**Figure 4. Multimodal text 4**



Los inmigrantes esperan pasar a disposición de las autoridades tras ser atendidos en un polideportivo de Tarifa.  
(Immigrants wait to be taken to the authorities after receiving attention in a sports centre in Tarifa)

Source: Moreno, (2014).

heading also strengthens the notion of invasion by using the words *avalanche* and *massive arrival*.

Some immigrants are standing up on the right, thereby being accorded more importance than the rest of the immigrants who are lying down. Moreover, their size is larger due to the camera angle and the direct eye contact with the viewer of the middle figure contributes to highlight this part of the visual. This is one of the most strongly illuminated points in the visual, particularly due to the white t-shirt and the white bag that the immigrant in the middle of the three standing is carrying. Consequently, the principle of information value is accomplished because the most important part of the visual appears on the right.

Immigrants appear as objects to be observed by readers. This visual illustrates well what van Leeuwen (2008) refers to when he says that “[...] the strategy of objectivation, representing people as objects for our scrutiny, rather than as subjects addressing the viewer with their gaze and symbolically engaging with the viewer in this way” (p. 141).

This visual depicts a clear foreground, a mid-ground and a background. The background is blurred, which contributes to the concept of *collectivization* and also to establishing a distance between the subjects of the image and the audience. This highlights the interpretation of certain differences between *we* and *they*, between the world of immigrants and the world of the Spanish society.

In regards to social distance (van Leeuwen, 2008), the immigrants who appear on the right seem to be close to the audience, while those in the mid-ground and background do not. They appear in a long shot and, therefore, they are represented as strangers who have a different social reality to that of the main group, which contributes to highlighting the differences between them and us. However, we observe them at eye level (vertical angle), which suggests that, although we are detached from their reality, we are invited to observe them, to analyse what they do, making clear that “They are depicted as socially “below us” as low in power compared to us” (van Leeuwen, 2008, p. 139).

When considering social relation, it is observed that the image is taken from the right-hand corner; consequently, the social actors who are not in that corner are represented as remote from the reality of the Spanish population, which is related with power differences (van Leeuwen, 2008). In this sense, paying attention to social relation, this image is an example of detachment because the viewer is distanced from the immigrants represented, who are angled away from the reader’s view. The analysis of social interaction makes clear that this is also an obvious example of an offer image because none of the immigrants look at the audience, and therefore they do not request an answer but they offer themselves to be observed. Consequently, the analysis of this visual suggests that the Sub-Saharan immigrants portrayed are problematized because they are passive human beings who need help after they arrive to Spain.

## Discussion

The general tendency observed in the corpus is to represent immigrants as distanced from the readers as strangers and different from the majority group.



In essence, the majority of the sub-Saharan immigrants arrive on the coast of the Canary Islands or Andalusia without official documents, since they have emigrated from their countries of origin in negative socio-economic conditions; they have left their families behind in order to have a chance of starting a new life in Europe.

The different linguistic and visual choices in the news items analysed suggest the perspective that immigrants are illegal. The fact that the majority of the news items in the Spanish press concentrate on immigrants arriving in small boats or jumping the fence in Melilla, Spain emphasises that the latter arrive without official documents that allow them to work in the country. Moreover, concentrating only on the first moment of arrival, but not following up the situation of the immigrants who arrive, suggests that they do not contribute to the Spanish society in any way and that, after they arrive, the best course to adopt is to deport them to their countries of origin.

Additionally, the angles observed in the visuals also contribute to giving power to readers, as members of the majority group, representing immigrants socially situated “below us”. For example, Figures 1, 2 and 4 are taken from the right; therefore, the immigrants in the background on the left do not appear in a strong position. Finally, as regards social interaction, the general tendency is that the social actors represented do not look at the audience and therefore no direct interaction is established (see Figures 1, 2 and 4). Figure 3 would be an exception.

The main visual dysphemisms in the photographs analysed are connected with immigrants being portrayed in need, as being passive recipients of medical help. Moreover, the general tendency is to represent them as a group and to avoid any reference to them as individuals. In general, the news items analysed portray situations of vulnerability and dependency: immigrants request help after they arrive and they have no social or economic support when they arrive. Whenever there are members of the majority group in the visuals, they are portrayed as being active, whereas immigrants are passive.

The images analysed present sub-Saharanans as poor people who are in need (Navas Luque & Cuadrado Guirado, 2003), which suggests that they are inferior to the Spanish population and that they demand help and support from the very first moment they arrive. This highlights the ‘we-they’ dichotomy, which contributes to highlighting negative attitudes towards the arrival of immigrants or, as stated by Anderson (2013), “[...] how easy it is for the non-citizen, whatever their immigration or citizenship status, to be imagined as the ‘illegal’ and thereby associated with the criminal” (p. 5). This dichotomy is also highlighted by the fact that most of the immigrants represented in the visuals do not look directly at the audience (figures 1, 2 and 4), so that there is no direct interaction between them, as the protagonists of the news items under analysis, and the audience reading and viewing the pieces of news.

The main ways in which immigrants are portrayed dysphemistically in the corpus of examples are the following: the analysis shows that the general tendency is to represent immigrants as collectivized and assimilated linguistically and visually (van Leeuwen, 2008). Linguistically, they are referred to by nouns denoting a group of people (*sub-Saharanans*, *immigrants*, *workers*, etc.) or as statistics while, visually, they are portrayed as a group of unspecified, anonymous individuals (van Leeuwen, 2008), and never alone.

The active-passive dichotomy is very interesting in the visual representation of immigrants: they are active when they start their migratory project but once they arrive in the Spanish coasts and are rescued from the small boats in which they travel, they become passive because they are people for whom the action is done; in fact, most of the images indicate that people from the majority group are the “agents” (actors). Presenting the former as patients implies that they are a burden on the country of arrival. This is clearly seen in Figures 1 and 4.

The different visual dysphemisms analysed add to the immigrants’ social exclusion, because they are portrayed in a negative manner and as “the others”, as people who do not belong to the majority group and will never do so. Van Leeuwen (2008) makes this clear: “Representations include or exclude social actors to suit their interests and purposes in relation to the

readers for whom they are intended” (p. 28). In this sense, following van Leeuwen (2008), the main strategies used to exclude immigrants are the following: 1) strategy of objectivation: immigrants are represented as objects, since the majority do not engage with the viewer; 2) strategy of distancing: immigrants are presented as strangers, isolated from people from the majority group and 3) strategy of disempowerment: immigrants are also represented as inferior, poorer and with little or no power. In addition, the main visual strategies observed in the texts under analysis assist in creating pity, fear and compassion in readers and viewers.

There is a tendency to represent immigrants as homogenised once they arrive because they receive blankets or clothes in the same colour (figures 1 and 4). Apart from the sub-Saharanians represented, there are also Spanish people in the photographs, usually members of NGOs such as The Red Cross (figure 2) or members of the Social Security Forces (figures 1 and 3), which makes the division between “we-they” clear.

The previous analysis demonstrates that immigrants are represented as invaders who play an active role in their migratory project because they try to travel to Spain, which involves making decisions, working hard in order to make the money that they needed to pay to make the journey, risking their lives in small boats (figures 1 and 4). However, they are also presented as victims when they do not succeed in their migratory projects (figures 2 and 3). In this sense, they are portrayed as passive because, once they arrive, it is people from the majority group—NGOs or members of the Social Security Forces—who take care of them, protect them, offering medical care, food, clothes and shelter, and who make decisions for them.

In multimodal texts 1, 2 and 3 there are members of the in-group. In fact, the visual self-presentation strategies adopted in the news items under examination are important because they point out that the in-group is represented through the image of the rescuer (figures 1 and 3) and of people providing medical help (figure 2). The implications of such a way to represent the in-group are that they have a crucial role when immigrants arrive because they are active and what they do affects immigrants directly.

This suggests that immigrants could lose their lives without their actions. Consequently, the representation of people of the in-group in the news items analysed can be considered as the visual realization of the *topos* of humanitarianism, that is, on how the actions done by the people who belong to the majority group are essential to protect immigrants' lives and to offer them primary attention at the very first moment of arrival. Ideologically, said representation implies that immigrants need the in-group and they are portrayed as passive, which contrasts with the active role of the Spanish population.

Pity, compassion, and help have a crucial role in discriminatory discourse and in reproducing racism because immigrants are represented as a burden for the Spanish society from the first moment of arrival. Moreover, the in-group and the out-group are represented in different ways. In this sense, the contribution of this study rests on the insights it offers on the role played by humanitarian discourses in pointing out the importance and superiority of the majority group and in considering immigrants as victims and intruders at the same time. On the one hand, considering immigrants as victims supports humanitarian help and discourse towards them. On the other hand, their consideration as intruders contributes to racism and discriminatory discourse. In a sense, humanitarian discourse is used to legitimate border control, migrant detention, and deportation (Horsti, 2012).

The majority group of the population is that which wields more socio-economic power in all societies; therefore, minorities are less powerful from the discursive, social and economic points of view. In other words, the voices of the majority population are more strongly present, more often quoted and made to appear credible, whereas the voices of minorities hardly ever appear in the press and if they do, they appear victimized. The news items analysed do not make any reference to the reasons why immigrants arrive or to their cultures (Granados, 2002).

## Conclusion

The negative representation of sub-Saharan immigrants after their arrival in small boats justifies the study of the main visual dysphemisms in

this article. For example, in all the visuals analysed there are elements that contribute to highlighting the differences between “*we* and *them*”: a fence (figure 1), the colours of the clothes used by members of the majority group (figures 1, 2 and 3), the relative size of social actors from the majority group (figure 3), the representation of immigrants as a group (figures 1, 3 and 4), among others.

The visual dysphemisms observed in the corpus contribute to the social exclusion of immigrants. The news items analysed give no information about the reasons why sub-Saharan immigrants arrive on the Spanish coasts. Instead, their representation as vulnerable and needing help is a constant feature. In this way, the way journalists portray immigrants is legitimated.

The recurrent negative representation of sub-Saharan immigrants in the press contributes to fostering fear in the Spanish audience and to the reinforcement of prejudices and stereotypes that assume immigrants constitute a people-problem whose members have nothing to offer to the society of arrival. Their situation is presented as a generalization in which they all seem to be dependent on the Spanish population, without any reference to what they could contribute, as a means to emphasize that immigrants are excluded from the majority group because they are “the others”.

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