

# Refugees in the Spanish press: A corpus-assisted study of the semantic prosody of the term *refugiado* from a diachronic perspective

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**Resum. Els refugiats en la premsa espanyola: Estudi de corpus sobre la prosòdia semàntica del terme *refugiat* des d'una perspectiva diacrònica.** Aquest article estudia la prosòdia semàntica del lema *refugiat* a la premsa espanyola durant un període de set anys (2010-16) amb l'objectiu d'analitzar la representació discursiva dels refugiats en aquest gènere textual. L'estudi se centra en aspectes diacrònics i quantitius, a la vegada que determina les unitats lèxiques negatives que acompanyen un refugiat. La recerca es basa en l'anàlisi d'un corpus d'1.8 milions de paraules format per notícies en espanyol sobre els refugiats que van ser extretes de les hemeroteques digitals d'*El País* i *El Mundo*. Els resultats mostren que la freqüència de *refugiat* augmenta al llarg del període estudiat, igual que ho fa la prosòdia semàntica negativa associada a aquest mot. Aquesta negativitat, que és molt més alta en els dos últims anys analitzats, es construeix a través de determinades col·locacions constants, col·locacions puntuals i mitjançant patrons lèxics relacionats amb l'ocupació massiva i la victimització dels refugiats.

**Paraules clau:** refugiats, premsa espanyola, lingüística de corpus, prosòdia semàntica, perspectiva diacrònica.

**Abstract. Refugees in the Spanish press: A corpus-assisted study of the semantic prosody of the term *refugiado* from a diachronic perspective.** This paper explores the semantic prosody of the lemma *refugiado* in the Spanish press over a 7-year period (2010-16) with the aim of examining the discursive representation of refugees in this textual genre. The study is concerned

with diachronic and quantitative aspects, while focusing on the negative lexical units collocating with *refugiado*. The research is based on the analysis of a 1.8-million-word corpus of Spanish news articles about refugees that were extracted from the digital libraries of *El País* and *El Mundo*. The results show that the frequency of *refugiado* increases over the 2010-16 period, and so does its negative semantic prosody. This negativity—which is much higher in the last two years under study—is constructed through certain consistent collocates, seasonal collocates and patterns of language associated with refugees' massive occupation and victimization.

**Keywords:** refugees, Spanish press, corpus linguistics, semantic prosody, diachronic perspective.

## 1. Introduction

Despite the considerable number of studies about semantic prosody (henceforth, SP), there exist few of them which examine the SP of nouns. There are some exceptions such as Alcaraz-Mármol and Soto-Almela (2016) and Taylor (2009). Furthermore, most lexical units explored in previous studies (Hunston, 2002; Louw, 1993; Partington, 1998, 2004) do not imply any social controversy, and have been studied in the context of general English corpora. By contrast, the present study focuses on the term *refugiado* as a political status.

Whilst migration movements have been present over the history of human beings, the years after the Second World War—especially the 1950s—were a turning point regarding refugees. This phenomenon has been present since that moment and, during the years, Europe has been a referent in granting protection to asylum seekers from all over the world. Although refugees have been arriving in Europe during the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and the first years of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the number of asylum seekers has dramatically increased in the last years due to the conflicts in the Middle East, and especially the civil war in Syria. This phenomenon has called the attention of the media, where daily news about this issue has been published.

In the last decades, Spain has turned from being a country left by people who migrate to other places to being a recipient of immigrants. The migratory flow has been continuously growing due to the global economic crisis and some international conflicts, which have forced many people to leave their homes. Consequently, Spain, together with other developed countries, has publicly advocated the need to control its borders. The massive flow of people crossing European borders has brought to light alarming data that relate immigration to xenophobia (European Network Against Racism Annual Report, 2016). In the particular case of Spain, the Spanish Centre of Sociological Research (CIS, 2011) shows that 21.6% of respondents associated immigration to negativity. Yet, humanitarian institutions such as the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) or the Spanish Commission for Refugee Aid (CEAR) have claimed that international agreements about human rights should be

applied, and they have even denounced that some of these developed countries are not committed to those agreements.

Not only has immigration in the Spanish written media been the object of psychosocial studies (Antonín & Tomás-Sábado, 2006; Buades, Díe & Melero, 2010; Checa & Arjona, 2011), but also of studies which explore the connection between the media and migration from a linguistic viewpoint (Cisneros, 2008; Crespo Fernández & Martínez Lirola, 2012; López-Maestre & Scheu-Lottgen, 2003; Martínez Lirola, 2008). These linguistic studies rely on critical discourse analysis and visual grammar to explore the connection between language, attitude and ideology. Despite their diversity in aims and scope, they all seem to point to the conclusion that the media tends to offer a negative picture of migration. Furthermore, the last eight years have seen how the Syrian civil war has brought the phenomenon of refugees to the forefront. The way the Spanish government has managed this issue has been admonished by the European Union, being the media a crucial witness that has not helped to curb the political and social tensions that have arisen as a consequence.

Given the repercussions that the phenomenon of refugees has been having in the last years and its social and media impact, the present study aims to diachronically explore –within the methodological framework of Semantic Prosody (SP)– how the term *refugiado* has been constructed in two major Spanish newspapers from 2010 to 2016. The analysis hinges on the identification of negative collocates and the prosodic meaning they transfer to the lemma *refugiado* over these seven years.

## **2. The study of the phenomenon of refugees and other migratory groups from a linguistic perspective**

Linguistics has played a major role in the study of the discursive representation of different migratory groups such as refugees, immigrants or asylum seekers. The study of these phenomena has been approached from various perspectives within linguistics, being the most common corpus linguistics (CL), critical discourse analysis (CDA) or a combination of both, resulting in corpus-assisted discourse studies (CADS). In this section, we aim to offer an up-to-date overview of how refugees and other migratory groups have been linguistically explored in the media discourse.

The project entitled Discourses of Refugees and Asylum Seekers in the UK Press (Baker et al., 2008) is perhaps a ground-breaking project in this regard, as it combines a series of methodologies associated with CL and CDA to examine how RASIM (refugees, asylum seekers, immigrants and migrants) are linguistically defined and constructed in the British press over a period of 10 years (1996-2005). Baker et al. (2008) carried out both diachronic and synchronic studies grounded on the examination of relative frequencies, significant lexical patterns and concordances. Their results demonstrated that certain categories related to numbers or quantification negatively portrayed RASIM, representing them as “an out-of-control, agentless, unwanted natural disaster” (Baker et

al., 2008, p. 287). Taylor (2009) replicated the study by Baker et al. (2008) applying a CADS methodology with the aim of exploring the representation of ICES (*immigrati, clandestini, extracomunitari* and *stranieri*) in the Italian press, and also observed that the Italian newspapers tended to negatively portray ICES as an invading army which was out of control and needed to be stopped or blocked.

Likewise, in the framework of the above mentioned project, KhosraviNik (2008, 2010) also conducted diachronic studies focused on the discursive representation of RASIM groups. Nonetheless, KhosraviNik's studies approached this phenomenon from a selection of CDA methodologies and detailed textual analyses aiming at researching the portrayal of RASIM within different socio-political events at five critical points in time, and contrasting these groups among a variety of newspapers of different political ideologies. KhosraviNik's results are in the line of those obtained by Baker et al. (2008). They seem to point to the RASIM phenomenon –regardless of the newspaper political ideology– as an issue or problem firmly associated with common topics such as natural disasters, large quantities, economic burden, threat to community values, danger and law. The discursive and rhetoric analyses carried out by Lynn and Lea (2003) about the social construction of asylum seekers' image in the UK press also confirmed that this group was represented with different negative attributes which characterized them as the “other” or “enemy” group who is harming “us” and is associated to terrorism and criminality.

Allen (2016) and Blinder and Allen (2016), in collaboration with The Migration Observatory at the University of Oxford, have more recently contributed to understanding how the British press has actually talked about this issue. Blinder and Allen (2016) employed corpus linguistic and quantitative methods to find the most common collocates accompanying *immigrants, migrants, asylum seekers*, and *refugees*, thus detecting patterns of language use from 2010 to 2012. Their study was particularly focused on examining L1 collocates and consistent collocates (C-collocates), understood as those that regularly occur within five words (to the left and right) of the target word, consistently over the period under analysis. Regarding language around refugees, they obtained that both L1 collocates and C-collocates referred to conflict, fleeing, and refugees' nationalities. In his study of British print editions of newspapers, Allen (2016) noticed an important change in the portrayal of refugees between January 2006 and May 2015 as references to Syrians increased dramatically coinciding with the war in Syria.

As it has been shown through this section, most of the studies which analyze migratory groups from a linguistic standpoint have focused on the English language and, as a consequence, have primarily dealt with British tabloids, midmarkets and broadsheets. On the contrary, to our knowledge, this paper is the first one to adopt a methodology based on the identification of semantic prosodies to explore the particular phenomenon of refugees in the Spanish press. Furthermore, unlike the studies in the dominant English-language literature, our study examines a span of years which includes the whole 2015-16 period, offering thus more updated data as the analysis also covers the years coinciding with the aggravation of the Syrian refugee movement.

### 3. Exploring SP: Approaches and types

The term *prosody* was first used by Firth (1957) within the context of prosodic phonology, and then borrowed by two post-Firthian corpus linguists, Sinclair (1987) and Louw (1993). Although Sinclair (1987) was the first to observe the phenomenon of SP in the collocational behavior of words, the concept itself was not coined in linguistics until 1993 by Louw. Since then, various linguists (Hoey, 2005; Hunston, 2002; Louw, 2000; Partington, 1998; Schmitt and Carter, 2004; Stubbs, 1995, 1996, 2001a) have shown interest in the study of the semantic environment of certain items. Even though these scholars have approached the concept of SP from many different angles, they do at least seem to agree to describe it as a “(type of) meaning”. SP has been defined as an “aura of meaning” (Louw, 1993), “halo of meaning”, “transferred meaning” (Bublitz, 1996), “evaluative meaning” (Sinclair, 1996; Stubbs, 2001b), “pragmatic or attitudinal meaning” (Sinclair, 2004) or “attached meaning” (Stewart, 2010).

SP has been explored from both diachronic and synchronic approaches. Understood in synchronic terms, SP has been defined as an extending meaning which characterizes a group of items rather than a single item. As Stubbs (2001a) pointed out, SP refers to “a feature which extends over more than one unit in a linear string” (p.65). Accordingly, it is said to be a meaning which “belongs to or is distributed over a unit of language” (Stewart, 2010, p. 53), ranging over several units or combinations of words (Sinclair, 2003).

As for the diachronic approach, SP is defined as an attached meaning or as a meaning which is transferred from one word to another during the course of time (Stewart, 2010). A wide range of metaphors have been used to describe SP as a meaning transferable to an item over time. Indeed, Stewart (2010) pointed out that:

Prosodic meaning may be attached, be taken on, be taken, be acquired, be accorded, be carried or be held; it may imbue, colour, taint, rub off, be reflected or spill over; further, prosodic meaning is an aura, a halo, a shade or a hue, and is the result of infection or contagion. (Stewart, 2010, p. 43)

This collection of metaphors is the result of several studies that have dealt with the concept of SP. For instance, Louw (1993) defined it as “a consistent aura of meaning with which a form is imbued by its collocates” (p. 157). Louw (1993) added that “prosodies are undoubtedly the product of a long time of refinement through historical change” (p.164). Morley and Partington (2009) explained that the development of negative prosody happens with co-occurrence through time. Other studies, such as those conducted by Whichmann, Simon-Vandenberg and Aijmer (2010) and Zhang (2013), exemplify the diachronic dimension of SP by examining the behavior of different words through time.

Partington (2004) stated that SP affects wide stretches of text characterized by a particular evaluative valence which can be positive, negative or neutral. According to McEnery & Hardie (2012), words or phrases are said to have one type or another of SP depending on the meaning of the units they co-occur with, that is to say, whether that meaning is negative or positive. Thus, negative semantic prosody is given if a word “co-occur[s] with units that have a negative [...] meaning” (McEnery & Hardie, 2012, p. 135). Following these authors, in this study, negative semantic prosody is identified when the term of analysis *-refugiad\** co-occurs with negative words, that is, words having unpleasant or unfavorable meanings.

Most authors have identified many more negative examples of SP than positive ones (Louw, 2000). Thus, in the list of English lexical items compiled by McEnery, Xiao and Tono (2006), only three examples of positive prosody (*build up to, provide, career*) were identified against the numerous cases of negative prosody (*break out, happen, set in, bent on, cause, fan the flame, commit, peddle*, etc.). All of them coincide on the idea of negative semantic prosody as an adverse meaning which is transferred to a term as a result of the words with which it usually co-occurs. Furthermore, previous studies on SP have focused mainly on the analysis of verbs and adverbs that have been explored in general English corpora (Louw, 1993; Partington, 1998, 2004; Sinclair, 1991; Stubbs, 2001a) or have been the object of contrastive studies (Sardinha, 2000; Tognini-Bonelli, 2001; Xiao & McEnery, 2006). By contrast, this paper pursues to analyze the SP of a noun in a specific Spanish corpus made up of newspaper articles.

From a methodological point of view, SP has been mostly approached by means of computational methods, although some researchers like Stewart (2010) have also advocated for a role of intuition and introspection. Most authors (Channell, 1999; Hoey, 2005; Hunston, 2002; Louw, 2000; Sinclair, 2003; Stubbs, 1995; Widdowson, 2000; Zhang, 2013) seem to agree that we should go beyond native speakers' intuitions and introspection, and explore SP by using attested data from corpus and computational methods, given that a large number of examples of a lexical unit are needed for the analysis.

As SP is a co-text-dependent phenomenon, it can vary from one textual genre to another. This SP that only appears with certain items in specific-genre texts is called local prosody (Tribble, 2000), which is the one that is to be applied to our study, in which the prosody of the item *refugiado* is specifically explored in Spanish newspapers. Therefore, local prosody is strongly related to the particular genre in which a word is combined with its collocates.

## 4. Methodology

### 4.1. Corpus description

The study is based on a corpus of 1,808,400 words compiled *ad hoc*. The over 2,000 news articles that make up this corpus were extracted from the digital libraries of the two

most widely read national newspapers in Spain, namely *El Mundo* and *El País* (Oficina de Justificación de la Difusión, 2012). Although our analysis focuses on these two major Spanish newspapers, it is worth noting that the articles that were collected did not only report on the phenomenon of refugees in Spain, but also worldwide. The number of words collected from the two newspapers is comparable with 936,286 from *El Mundo* and 872,114 from *El País*. The time span for the articles selection covered 7 years, from 2010 to 2016.

#### 4.2. Corpus analysis

The analysis was based on the lemma *refugiado*, which included the inflected forms *refugiado*, *refugiada*, *refugiados* and *refugiadas*. The lemma is hereafter represented as *refugiado*. Hence, we focused on the analysis and quantification of lemmas, being understood as the base forms of words. Therefore, verb tenses, plural, or *-s* third singular person were counted as one single lexical item. For instance, the lemma *huir* represents the inflected forms *huyen*, *huían*, *huyendo*, etc. However, derivational forms –that is, those that contain semantic affixes such as prefixes or suffixes– were considered other different lemmas. It is also important to clarify that we distinguished between *refugiado* as a noun and as a participle. In Spanish both terms adopt the same form, but our analysis focused on the former, as it is the noun form the one that describes the political status of asylum seeker.

The software Wordsmith (Scott, 2012) enabled us to examine how *refugiado* behaved in the corpus. It offered the words that co-occurred with this node in question. Furthermore, we limited our analysis to collocates which co-occurred at least ten percent of their occasions with the lemma *refugiado*. A stop-list was used so that all non-informing or potentially misleading words were avoided. The list contained highly common words such as determiners, conjunctions or prepositions, which were filtered out prior to text processing.

### 5. Results and discussion

*Refugiado* appears 19,310 times in the corpus. Figure 1 shows the occurrences of this lemma per year with respect to the total number of content words. In general, the number of instances tends to increase every year, starting with 375 times in 2010 up to more than 7,000 occurrences in 2016. Nevertheless, the year with the highest number of occurrences is 2015, where *refugiado* is found 8,621 times. Furthermore, the percentage that this lemma represents in each year of the corpus is shown in Figure 2, where it can be observed that the percentage of *refugiado* has been regularly increasing up to 2012, the dramatic rise happening from 2014 to 2015, where this lemma occurs 25 out of 100 words in the corpus, multiplying by five its percentage with respect to 2010. The percentage slightly decreases in 2016, although it is still over 20%.



Therefore, it can be stated that over the seven years analyzed the lemma *refugiado* has grown in salience, experiencing a notable rise particularly in 2015-16. Similar results were found by Allen (2016) in his study based on the British press, in which he pointed out that the highest number of articles mentioning refugees ranged from January 2015 to May 2015, coinciding with the most critical moment of the Syrian refugee movement.

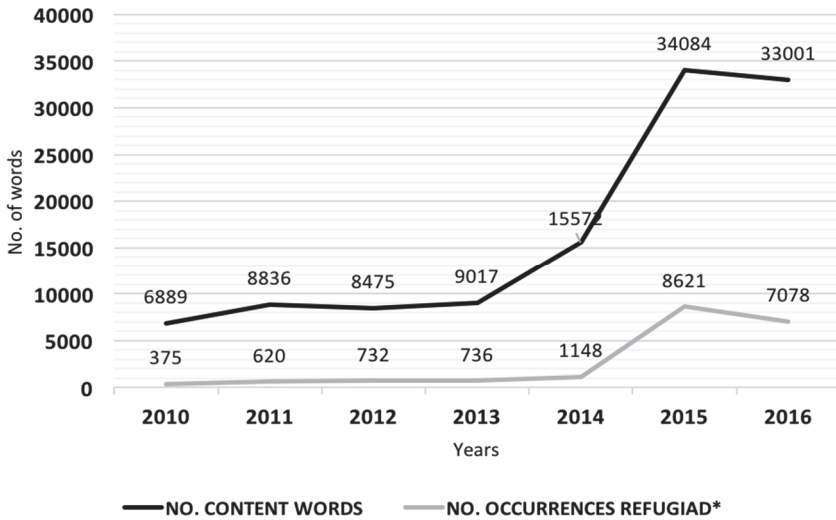


FIGURE 1. OCCURRENCES OF *REFUGIADO*/CONTENT WORDS PER YEAR.

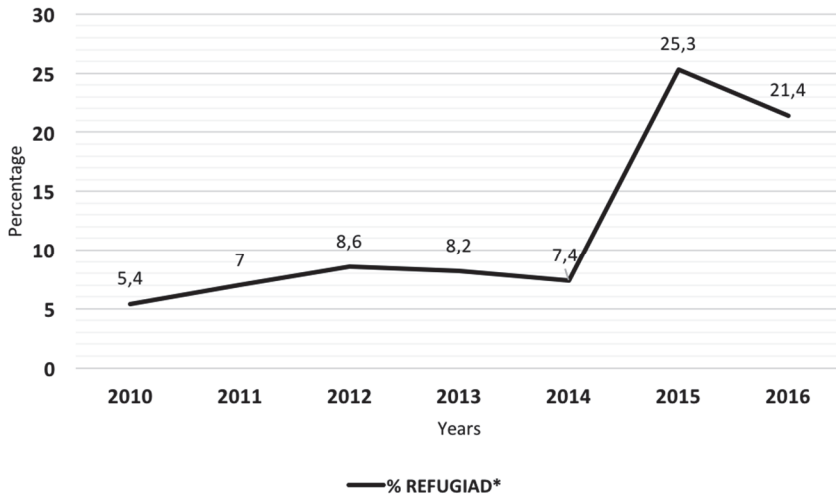


FIGURE 2. PERCENTAGE REPRESENTED BY *REFUGIAD\** PER YEAR.



Figure 3 shows the percentage of negative collocates per year co-occurring with *refugiado*. During the 2010-11 period, the negativity can be found in no more than 3% of the collocates of *refugiado*. The percentage of negativity significantly increases in 2012 up to almost 10% and decreases during the two following years (2013-14). However, the highest percentage of negativity around *refugiado* is found in 2015, where its negative collocates rise up to 20.4%, almost 17 points more than the previous year 2014. Put another way, every 100 times *refugiado* appears in the corpus, around 20 times it co-occurs with a word of unfavorable meaning in 2015. In general terms, although the negative SP is found in all the years under study, the collocates transferring a negative prosodic meaning to *refugiado* increase notably in the 2015-16 period, when negativity around this lemma becomes more pronounced.

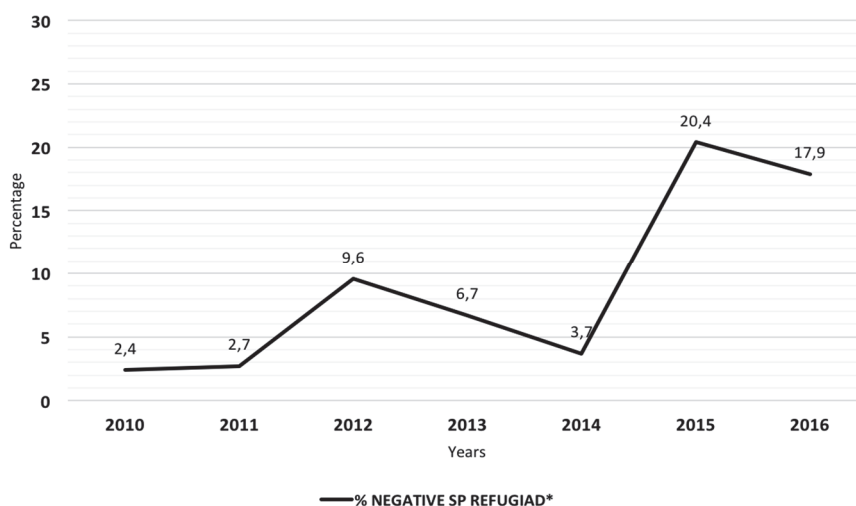


FIGURE 3. PERCENTAGE OF NEGATIVE SP OF REFUGIADO PER YEAR.

Table 1 shows the negative collocates of the 2010-14 period. In 2010 and 2011, there is only one negative word that co-occurs with *refugiado*, while 2012 and 2013 experience an increase. In the former, we find 4 different negative collocates co-occurring with the node in L5-R5 position, and 5 in the latter. Yet, 2014 only presents two negative collocates with a frequency of 42 in total. The last two years of the analysis, 2015 and 2016, make a difference with respect to the previous ones and will be then examined separately.

Table 2 shows up to 24 different negative collocates co-occurring with *refugiado* in 2015. The first in the table is *crisis* (crisis), appearing 677 times. *Frontera* ('border') is found in second place (180 instances), although the difference with *crisis* is remarkable. Following *frontera*, we find *guerra* ('war'), *flujo* ('flow'), *huir* ('flee') and *masiva* ('massive'), all of them with over 80 occurrences.

TABLE 1. NEGATIVE COLLOCATES WITH *REFUGIADO* (2010-14)

	Word	Total	L5	L4	L3	L2	L1	Node	R1	R2	R3	R4	R5	
2010	desplazados	9			1			R E F U G I A D *	3	4		1		
2011	huir	17			1					6	6	2	2	
2012	huir	29	1	1	1	2				2	9	9	3	1
	frontera	17	2		2						1	4	5	3
	flujo	13			1	12								
	desplazados	11		1		1				3	4	2		
2013	huir	11									3	7	1	
	frontera	8		1								1	6	
	flujo	7			2	5								
	guerra	7	2		1							1	2	1
	crisis	7			1	5							1	
2014	desplazados	22				4	1				14	2	1	
	guerra	20	2		1						1	10	2	4

TABLE 2. NEGATIVE COLLOCATES WITH *REFUGIADO* (2015)

	Word	Total	L5	L4	L3	L2	L1	Node	R1	R2	R3	R4	R5		
2015	crisis	677	12	12	345	272	2	R E F U G I A D *		9	11	8	6		
	frontera	180	22	15	13	3	2			3		43	38	41	
	guerra	94	4	5		1					19	14	19	32	
	flujo	89	1	6	4	74					1		1	2	
	huir	88	1		1	2				18	45	12	5	4	
	masiva	85	4	3	11	61					2			4	
	drama	76	5	6	59	2						1	2	1	
	frente	47	19	11	4					4	2	1	5	1	
	frenar	46	4	23	17							1	1		
	conflicto	36	3		1	1					8	8	7	8	
	problema	33	1	1	19	3						2	3	4	
	oleada	29		1	2	22						1	2	1	
	afluencia	27	2		7	17									1
	ola	27				21				1			1	3	1
	ataques	26	4	8	1	6						4	1	1	1
	evitar	23	4	9	1		1					4	2	2	
	avalancha	21		1		19							1		
	muertos	20	3		1	2					6	3	3	2	
	contingente	18	1	2	2	10						1	1		1
	yihadistas	18			10							1	7		
	detener	15	2	7	5									1	
	rechazan	15	1	9	3						1			1	
	atrapados	14									5	2	5	1	1
impedir	13	7	4	1					1						

The year 2016 follows the same line as 2015. As shown in Table 3, the collocates *crisis* and *frontera* are again the ones with the highest number of occurrences. *Crisis*, which repeats as the top word, occurs 554 times. It still counts over 500 times, although its frequency is lower in this year. After *frontera*, the list continues with *drama* ('drama'), *flujo*, *guerra* and *expulsión* ('expulsion').

TABLE 3. NEGATIVE COLLOCATES WITH *REFUGIADO* (2016)

	Word	Total	L5	L4	L3	L2	L1	Node	R1	R2	R3	R4	R5	
2016	crisis	554	7	6	283	228	5	R E F U G I A D *		10	6	3	6	
	frontera	87	7	7	10	2			2	1	27	11	20	
	drama	68	2	4	54	3				1	1	2	1	
	flujo	53		2	7	44								
	guerra	51	3	1	2					9	12	13	11	
	expulsión	43	1	2	9	24				1	1	2	3	
	masiva	32	1	2	8	21								
	huir	27	1			2				2	18	3	1	
	atrapados	26								14	6	3	2	1
	frente	25	10		4					6	1	3		1
	frenar	24	2	17	4									1
	evitar	22	3	6	4					1	6			2
	ataques	20	3	6	1	3						1	4	2
	expulsar	16	3	2	7	2							2	
	conflicto	16	1	3	3	1					1		6	1
	problema	15	1	1	12								1	
	ola	14		1		13								
	oleada	13		1		11							1	
	vulnerables	13	1	1						1	9	1		
	desalojo	13	2	6								1	1	3
	rechazo	12	4		7									1
	contingente	12			2	4						1	1	4
	avalancha	11			1	10								
	éxodo	10			3	5					1			1
	detener	10		6	3	1								
	terrorismo	10	1			2					3	1	1	2
	violencia	10	1	2	6									1
	detención	10	1		2	2							3	2
	sufrimiento	10		2	6							1	1	
	desesperación	9	1		4	2							2	

A detailed analysis of Tables 1-3 reveals that the most consistent collocates over this 7-year period are *huir*, which is present in five years of the corpus, *frontera* and *guerra*,

which occur over four years. These three words can be considered C-collocates that relate to the intrinsic definition of *refugees*.

As it can be observed in Figure 4, the collocate *huir* reaches its highest frequency in 2012, when every 100 times *refugiado* appears, it co-occurs 4 times with some of the forms of *huir*. Indeed, according to the UNHCR (2016), refugees are persons fleeing armed conflict or persecution. Fleeing involves “going to another country in order to escape from something or someone, especially because of danger or fear” (Cambridge University Press, 2008). People thus flee negative situations such as violence, death, hunger or war. In fact, the collocate *guerra* is also a constant from 2013 onwards, occupying a relevant position in 2014 (see Figure 4).

The collocates of *huir* found in the corpus *CREA* stress its negativity since words such as *guerra*, *violencia* (‘violence’), *catástrofe* (‘catastrophe’), *miseria* (‘misery’), *muerte* (‘death’), *combates* (‘combats’), *horror* (‘horror’), *crisis*, *hambre* (‘hunger’) or *conflicto* (‘conflict’) are frequent collocates. Some examples from our corpus illustrating this negativity are:

- (1) Miles de refugiados huyen de la guerra, la violencia y la persecución (‘Thousands of refugees flee war, violence and persecution’).
- (2) Cientos de refugiados huyen de la miseria y del terror del ISIS (‘Hundreds of refugees flee misery and the terror of ISIS’).
- (3) Un número creciente de refugiados sirios huyen de la represión y del conflicto (‘An increasing number of Syrian refugees flee repression and conflict’).

These results show similarities to those obtained by Blinder & Allen (2016) since they also found out that “refugees [were] depicted as FLEEING” (p.18). In fact, words such as *fleeing*, *camps* or *war* were consistent collocates used to describe refugees across the 2010-12 period, leading to the consideration that “the word ‘refugees’ [...] appears most associated with international crises” (Blinder & Allen, 2016, p.18).

The word *frontera* is another C-collocate of *refugiado* that shows a remarkable presence over the time span studied. It appears for the first time in 2012, and its frequency starts to grow in the following years, with the exception of 2014 (see Figure 4). The collocate *frontera* contributes to the view of the phenomenon of refugees as something to be stopped from reaching Europe. According to *DRAE*, *frontera* is defined as “confín de un estado; límite” (‘boundary of a state; limit’). In the beginning, this word may not imply any type of negativity. Nevertheless, in this context, the term has been considered to convey a negative prosody to the node. In the first examples provided by the *CREA*, *frontera* appears with items such as *miedo* (‘fear’), *desesperanza* (‘hopelessness’) or *dificultad* (‘difficulty’). The definition of *frontera* may not be denotatively negative in isolation, but its behavior in context points to negativity, as you normally put limits to negative things, not positive ones, so that they do not reach or affect you. Some examples extracted from our corpus are:

- (4) Schuster ha pedido a Merkel que cierre fronteras a los refugiados ('Schuster has asked Merkel to close borders to refugees').
- (5) Hay 5.000 refugiados varados en la frontera que viajan sin documentos ('There are 5,000 refugees stranded on the border traveling undocumented').
- (6) Los jefes de Estado y de Gobierno se reúnen este martes y miércoles en Malta para hablar sobre refugiados y control de fronteras ('Heads of State and Government meet on Tuesday and Wednesday in Malta to talk about refugees and border control').

In addition to *huir*, *guerra* and *frontera* as C-collocates, Figure 4 shows the development of *crisis* and *drama* as the two most significant seasonal collocates found in our corpus. A seasonal collocate is the term used by Baker et al. (2008) to refer to collocates that are very frequent in a small number of years. In fact, the collocates *crisis* and *drama* are concentrated in the last two annual sub-corpora (2015-16) and reflect the dynamics of migration and refugee issues. Although *crisis* occurs occasionally in 2012, it is in the last two years when it ranks first in the list of negative collocates co-occurring with *refugiado*. This collocate mostly appears in L2 and L3 positions, giving rise to the most repeated lexical patterns in 2015-16: *crisis de refugiados* or *crisis de los refugiados*. Likewise, *drama*, which collocates with *refugiado* 76 times in 2015 and 68 times in 2016, is principally found in L3 position, forming the expression *drama de los refugiados*. These lexical patterns are found in sentences such as the following:

- (7) La peor crisis de refugiados desde la Segunda Guerra Mundial está golpeando fuertemente Europa ('The worst refugee crisis since World War II is strongly hitting Europe').
- (8) El Consejo de Ministros ha tratado la crisis de los refugiados a la que se enfrenta Europa ('The Council of Ministers addressed the refugee crisis which Europe is facing').
- (9) Colau lleva días exigiendo al Gobierno español que responda al drama de los refugiados ('Colau has been demanding for days that the Spanish Government responds to the drama of refugees').

The negative SP of *refugiado* is also displayed through collocates that share certain semantic features and can be then classified into more specific semantic fields that go beyond the abstract category of negative SP. Thus, *refugiado* typically co-occurs with items which are directly related to massive occupation. Collocates such as *oleada* ('flood'), *ola* ('wave'), *avalancha* ('avalanche') and *contingente* ('contingent') are, by frequency order, among the ones co-occurring with *refugiado* in the 2015-16 period. *Ola* and *oleada* show a very similar behavior. In 2015, they co-occur with the node 29 and 27 times, respectively. Both are usually found in L2 position, bringing about the patterns *ola de refugiados* and *oleada de refugiados*. The collocate *avalancha* co-occurs up to 32 times between 2015 and 2016. This figure is very similar to that of *contingente* with 30

instances. Their most frequent position with respect to the node is also L2, giving place to the patterns *avalancha de refugiados* and *contingente de refugiados*.

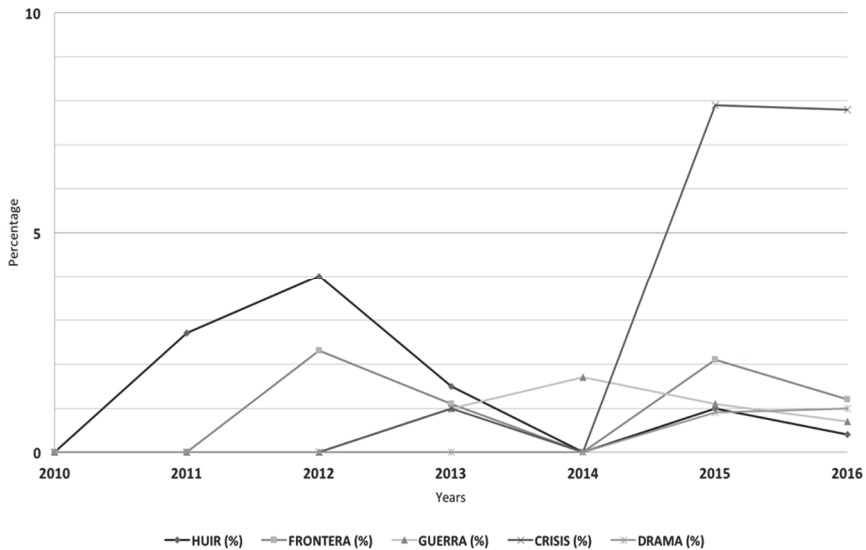


FIGURE 4. PERCENTAGE OF TOP NEGATIVE COLLOCATES PER YEAR.

Refugees are, therefore, described as an excessive sudden phenomenon harming us, and they are compared to water or natural disasters threatening cultural identities and community values (KhosraviNik, 2008). Taylor (2009), in her study based on the Italian press, also obtained the collocate *ondata/e* ('wave/s'), which was used "both in English and Italian newspaper discourse with similar targets" (p. 25), that is, to portray a situation which is out of control and must be stopped. Indeed, collocates such as *frenar* ('slow down'), *evitar* ('avoid'), *detener* ('stop') or *impedir* ('prevent/impede'), which are frequently present in the co-text of *refugiado* in 2015-16, contribute to the idea of fighting against this phenomenon. The following are some examples from our corpus illustrating the concept of violent occupation that must be prevented:

- (10) La UE se acerca a Turquía para que frene la oleada de refugiados ('The EU is approaching Turkey to stop the wave of refugees').
- (11) Europa levanta muros, físicos o simbólicos, para contener la ola de refugiados ('Europe builds walls, physical or symbolic, to contain the flood of refugees').
- (12) Se han reforzado los controles fronterizos para detener la avalancha de refugiados ('Border controls have been tightened to stop the avalanche of refugees').

Collocates from the semantic set of ‘victimization and vulnerability’ also tend to co-occur with *refugiado*. For example, words like *vulnerables* (‘vulnerable’), *muertos* (‘dead’), *atrapados* (‘trapped’), *sufrimiento* (‘suffering’) or *desesperación* (‘desperation’) describe refugees in our corpus as unprotected victims deprived of human rights. In KhosraviNik’s words (2008, p. 36), “such an attitude may best be described as ‘victimization’ rather than as ‘positive’ representation”. This victimization and vulnerability can be seen in sentences such as the following:

- (13) Los refugiados sirios son los más vulnerables en este escenario (‘Syrian refugees are the most vulnerable in this scenario’).
- (14) Hicieron un llamamiento a la acción urgente para aliviar el sufrimiento de los refugiados (‘They called for urgent action to alleviate the suffering of refugees’).
- (15) La desesperación de los refugiados por llegar a Europa es un caldo de cultivo para las mafias de tráfico humano (‘The desperation of refugees to reach Europe is a breeding ground for the mafias of human trafficking’).

## 6. Conclusion and final considerations

Our study seems to mirror a negative SP of the lemma *refugiado* in the Spanish newspapers under analysis. The results show that this negativity has increased over the 2010-16 period, and how the lemma *refugiado* has become to be linked to negative issues. In this sense, the results show how language can module a linguistic unit like *refugiado*, making it acquire this negative “halo” of meaning.

In general terms, this negative tendency is in line with studies conducted in other European countries such as the UK and Italy, which leads us to consider that the negative picture of refugees is not idiosyncratic of a specific country like Spain, but rather something crosslinguistic and crosscultural, regardless of different press environments and national contexts. This negative picture of refugees offered by the press may contribute to the social and political tension that is arising in the European continent.

The analysis tries to offer a general view of the negative prosodic meaning of *refugiado*. Nevertheless, we are aware of the fact that inferring certain prosodies may raise some controversy. For instance, we acknowledge that collocates such as *avalancha* or *ola* can be positive in *avalancha de prosperidad* (‘avalanche of success’) or *ola de suerte* (‘wave of fortune’). Notwithstanding, they have been interpreted as negative in the context of immigration since they explicitly refer to an uncontrollable phenomenon and transfer a negative meaning to *refugiado*. These examples bring to light the parameter or the criterion with which the prosody should be inferred as one of the unresolved dilemmas in studies on SP: is the concept denoted by the collocate unfavorable in the mind of the



person who produces the utterance, or is it a generally negative concept? This is one of the issues regarding SP that remains open to discussion.

Our study has focused on the two most important papers in Spain, although they are not the only written press published in this country. There are other newspapers that could have contributed to our analysis. These other papers are aligned with more radical ideologies, which could have influenced our outcomes. The time span analyzed seems to coincide with a conservative period in the history of Europe as it can be seen in the results of the last elections held in countries like Hungary, Austria or Germany, where the right wing has gained in importance. In fact, the negative picture of refugees may be partly influenced by this era of conservatism.

For future studies, in addition to violent occupation and victimization, other specific aspects of negativity such as objectification are intended to be further explored. This type of categorization will offer a more accurate picture of how the negative prosody of this term is conceptualized in the Spanish press.

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