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Migration Discourse:
a Cognitive-Pragmatic Vantage Point

This article focuses on the English-language migration discourse and aims to develop its methodology through the lens of cognitive pragmatics and cognitively oriented critical discourse analysis. The analysis is underpinned by understanding of discourse against a social, pragmatic, and cognitive background, which postulates the unity of cognitive and pragmatic aspects of migration discourse. This paper focuses on the 2024 USA presidential election as a case study. First, I studied the discourse-generating concept of MIGRANT represented in Donald Trump's utterances by lexemes, word-combinations, and cognitive metaphors. Then with the help of critical discourse analysis framework I singled out discourse strategies of migration discourse in the Republican Party Platform and in Harris – Trump presidential debate. In the 2024 USA presidential election campaign, the written migration discourse of the Republican Party sought to evoke negative emotions and included populist content. I argue that in his speeches at public events, Donald Trump often generated dramatization, both verbally and non-verbally, and engaged in negative campaigning concerning the issues of migrants and migration. Migration discourse that involved negative campaigning and evoked negative emotions towards migrants yielded high voters engagement. Negative, exaggerated, and sensationalized style of argumentation in migration issues is a strategic tool of Donald Trump's political discourse, intentionally meant to reach the voters both rationally and subconsciously. Republican migration discourse is ethno- and culturally specified; its strategies bear the features of xenophobic ethno-cultural stereotypes that are underpinned by cognitive 'immigrants-as-home-invaders' scenario based on discursive narrowing of the conceptual space of MIGRANT as compared to that of CITIZEN.
Key words: *cognitive pragmatics, critical discourse analysis, migration discourse, negative campaigning, Trump.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Discourse Studies or Discourse Analysis is a broad, multidisciplinary field of research that combines linguistics and anthropology, sociology, psychology, semiotics, literature, and communication. In the 21st century, a scholarly interest in political discourse and migration studies gained a special s i g n i f i c a n c e; it both shapes public opinion and changes itself under the influence of the development of society. Its relevance is determined by the growing global inequality of countries, developed and developing, by their instability with an inherent flow of migrants, on the one hand; and on the other hand, the expansion of military conflicts and, as a result, huge flows of refugees to Europe and America. Accordingly, within the framework of political discourse, a separate field has emerged – the discourse of (im)migration [22], which is widely studied in linguistics, political and social sciences by P.Boccagni, V.Bilger, D.Jacobs, K. Leurs, E.Morawska, P. Scholten and others. In linguistics, scholars most often use the term Migration Discourse to refer to a large class of texts and discourses of or about migration and migrants [16]. In migration discourse studies, the methodology of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) prevails [8; 10; 11; 16].

The o b j e c t of this analysis is English-language migration discourse. In this article, I a i m to critically generalize linguistic approaches to the study of migration discourse and suggest a comparatively new framework of analysis—cognitive pragmatic, with the migration discourse of Donald Trump as a case study. In particular, this paper sets out to investigate the increasing negative attitides within migration discourse in public spheres and the role of fakes, negative campaigning, and dramatization in Republican presidential election campaigning.

2. METHODOLOGY

As van Dijk puts it, migration discourse represents a vast class of different discourse genres primarily defined in terms of their reference to different aspects of migration as a social and political phenomenon [6, p.230]. He also points out the function of migration discourse as an independent component of social life: "Migration discourse not only may be about migration or its many aspects, but also be a constituent part of migration as a phenomenon, as would be the stories of migrants, as well as parliamentary discourse preparing immigration policies" [6, p.230].

Migration discourse studies have a wide range of focuses including sending and receiving societies, migration-related policies, and social institutions. Migration discourse differs along many criteria, and the roles of its actors mainly depend upon their social identities (ethnic identities, origin, gender, age, etc.) and goals of participants of communicative situations. In Donald Trump's public speeches and official documents, which are my case study, his statements about migrants, migration, the Mexican border, etc. are a manifestation of his own world construal. At the same time, in 2024, under President Biden, the migration discourse of Trump and his supporters in the Republican Party had a significant impact on the U.S. immigration policy.

In this present study, I will proceed from an integral understanding of discourse: "Discourse is a multidimensional cognitive–communicative–linguistic gestalt, which is specified by the unity of three aspects: the construction of ideas and beliefs (a cognitive aspect), the interaction of interlocutors in certain social-cultural contexts/situations (a social-pragmatic aspect), and the use of signs, verbal and para-verbal (a linguistic aspect). Various discourse aspects are inseparable: pragmatic and social-cultural aspects have cognitive-psychological basis, while cognitive ones are rooted in communicative experience, therefore they are divided only for heuristic purposes" [19, p.115-116].

The material for analysis – 450 discourse fragments containing lexical conceptualizations of migrant and migration – is drawn from Donald Trump's discourse and illustrated by the excerpts from the official 2024 Republican Party Platform known as "Make America Great Again" [25] and the Harris–Trump presidential debate [24]. They supply realistic examples of Donald Trump's verbal and non-verbal migration discourse.

Van Dijk argues that "discourse analysis is not a method, but a broad, multidisciplinary field of study of the humanities and social sciences" [6, p. 227]. Among many tools of migration discourse studies, Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is one of the leading; it addresses discursive domination and discursive resistance against domination [5; 7; 21].

Another approach to migrant discourse is Proximization Theory (PT) suggested by P. Cap [3] and involving discursively construed 'THEM'-peripheral *vs* 'US'-center entities. PT links negatively-charged evaluation of the out-group members to 'disastrous' consequences of their activities for the in-group (e.g., migrants *vs* Polish citizens [3]).

Today, a new cognitive-linguistic approach to CDA [8] offers "theoretical perspective on the conceptual import of linguistic choices identified as potentially ideological. It thus affords a new and promising lens on persuasive, manipulative and coercive properties of discourse, worldview and conceptualization which have hitherto been beyond the radar of CDA" [3, p.117]. Exploring discourse strategies in social and cognitive interaction is key to understanding political and migration discourse [4;17]. In my research, I use a complex cognitive and communicative approach to ideologically loaded discourse known as cognitive pragmatics. "Cognitive Pragmatics focuses on mental operations related to meanings construed in discursive situations; its subject is meaning production and interpretation viewed as mental/cognitive phenomena in linguistic interaction" [18, p. 308]. An integrated cognitive-pragmatic and CDA research framework suggests a few steps of analysis: first, to identify the

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leading discourse-generating concept (here – MIGRANT) using a methodology appropriate to the type of concept (here – Zhabotynska's methodology of Semantics of Lingual Networks (SLN) [23]) and then proceed to find out discourse strategies using cognitively-oriented methods of CDA.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION: DONALD TRUMP ON MIGRANTS AND MIGRATION

Migration discourse is based on shared knowledge about migration, attitudes and ideologies about migration or refugees. Such migration discourses are ethno- and culturally specified; they bear the features of ethno-cultural stereotypes, which are inherently subjective and often distort identity. Among many migration-related topics in the political discourse of the USA, border and mobility on the one hand and discrimination and xenophobia on the other hand require deep contextual analysis. In particular, Donald Trump has made them part and parcel of his 2024 presidential campaign.

Migration discourse is generated by the concept of MIGRANT. There is no definition of 'migrant' or of 'immigrant' in law. Linguistically, it is represented by lexemes (*im)migrant, asylum seeker, foreigner, refugee, relocated person,* which bear the meaning "a person that travels to a different country or place, often in order to find work" [13]. Potentially, the most typical collocations *male / female / economic / illegal migrant* are propositional schemes of identification and qualification:

• "ID-MIGRANT is CL-" (classification): *migrant – male/female migrant, person – relocated;*

• "MIGRANT IS SUCH-QL»:" (quality): SUCH according to the law – *illegal migrant, migrant crime;* SUCH according to the reason of migration – economic migrant; SUCH according to the nature of migration (free choice or the force of circumstances) – *migrant labour/worker, refugee, relocated person.*

Viewed asynchronously, most entities within the two schemes of the concept of MIGRANT are neutral and only one *(illegal migrant)* has negative connotation. In historical perspective, the evaluation of this concept transformed in American world construal from neutral / positive to negative. America was traditionally called 'the melting pot' of nations; American identity was formed by immigrants from Europe, Africa, and Asia (as well illustrated in early American fiction). The very term 'migrant' was hardly ever used before the 19ᵗʰ century since every non-aboriginal American was aware of their connection to their former homeland. In American world construal, the concept of CITIZEN (associated with an in-group 'us') was initially inseparable from the concept of MIGRANT as hyper-hyponymic entities; they both had equal freedoms (the domain of CONSTITUTIONAL RIGHTS). The evolution of ethnocentrism – a syndrome of discriminatory attitudes and behaviors of an in-group towards out-groups – caused a reassessment of the concept from positive to negative. With the formation of the nation, all newcomers were perceived as migrants and negatively conceptualized in the worldview of the receiving nation.

After WWII, significant shifts in geopolitics have caused large migration flows to Europe and the United States and changes in the assessment of the concept of MIGRANT in American world construal and, accordingly, in the migration policies and migration discourse.

For President Trump, migrants and migration issues have always been at the center of his policies with a clear negative stance. In 2024 Donald Trump's presidential election campaign, the topic of migration reached exceptional proportions never seen in presidential campaigns before. Current Trump's migration discourse carries a wide range of focuses, from migrants to host society and from migration policies to American public institutions.

The official 2024 Republican Party platform. The platform consists of 20 bullet points, four of which (#1, 2, 10, 18) directly address migration issues: the largest ever deportation action on Day 1, closing the border, crackdown on non-citizen voting [25]. It is illustrative that the platform begins with the issues of migration discourse:

"1. Seal the <u>border</u>, and stop the <u>migrant invasion</u>.

2. Carry out the largest <u>deportation</u> operation in American history.

10. Stop the <u>migrant crime epidemic</u>, demolish the foreign drug cartels, crush gang

violence, and lock up violent offenders.

18. <u>Deport</u> pro-Hamas <u>radicals</u> and make our college campuses <u>safe</u> and patriotic again." [25, p.4-5].

All these points elaborate a stereotypical 'immigrants-as-home-invaders' scenario and demonstrate an extremely negative assessment of the concept of MIGRANT *per se*. This rhetoric is not novel, it was a part of succesful electoral campaigns that called for 'liberating / regaining' the home nation and used xenophobic home-invasion scenarios (e.g., the 2016 "Brexit" campaign in Britain or the U.S. President Trump's "Build the Wall" initiative [14]).

In such a worldview, the MIGRANT is profiled in the domains of WAR (*invader*), LAW AND ORDER (*radical*, *criminal*, *drug dealer*, presumably an *illegal migrant*), they are subject to *deportation*.

The first point of the Republican Party platform [25, p.4] is a metaphor where the MIGRANT is conceptualized in the cognitive scheme of WARFARE as an enemy*:*

– AMERICAN REALITY IS WAR (*the border is breached);*

– THE MIGRANT IS AN INVADER (*the migrant invasion)*;

– MIGRANT'S ARRIVAL IN THE U.S. (border crossing) IS THE CAPTURE OF TERRITORY BY THE ENEMY.

In the cognitive metaphor of ILLNESS (point 10 [25]), the MIGRANT is profiled in the domains CRIME and then PANDEMICS (*the migrant crime epidemic)* to maximize the negative evaluation of the concept and link it to crime and drug trafficking. This point of the Party

platform limits the circle of criminals to migrants only.

In other examples above (# 2, #18 [25]), the MIGRANT is a radical who could undermine the foundations of society, denying its *safety and patriotism*. No wonder the only proper action towards the enemy is *deportation;* and this is exactly what his migration discourse postulates speaking of *the largest deportation operation in American history*.

This Republican discourse on migration is in stark contrast to other articles of the 2024 Party Platform that promote the most important rights and freedoms of the U.S. citizens: "*7. defend our constitution, our bill of rights, and our <u>fundamental freedoms</u>, including freedom of speech, freedom of religion, and the right to keep and bear arms*" [25]*.* Here the concept of the USA CITIZEN is profiled within the domain of CONSTITUTIONAL RIGHTS while MIGRANT is not. This xenophobic discourse strategy is the result of the narrowing of the conceptual space of the MIGRANT, from which the domain of RIGHTS/JUSTICE (inherent in all citizens of the country) disappears.

Kamala Harris–Donald Trump presidential debate. In political spheres, migration discourses are strategically configured as vehicles for argumentation, persuasion, and manipulation. In TV presidential debates, they acquire increased power as these debates take on the genre characteristics of the talk show.

Presidential debates in the United States have always had high popularity: in the ratings of television programs, they share top popularity with world sports events and famous TV series (such as "NCIS", "Dynasty", "Sunday Night Football", etc.) The latest Harris–Trump debate [24] was watched by 67m people, which is more than pivotal 2024 Biden show by 31% [20]. Its exclusive popularity is a result of the sharp struggle between Democrats and Republicans in the current US presidential race.

Migration discourse, that permeates the entire debate, reaches a climax with the topics of immigrants' voting rights, their 'low' cultural level, poor command of the English language, and crime (their negative assessment in the domains of CONSTITUTIONAL RIGHTS, CULTURE, LAW AND ORDER). Trump uses a range of representational strategies to frame MIGRATION as the main threat to America:

"*DONALD TRUMP: Crime in this country is <u>through the roof</u>. And we have a new form of crime. It's called <u>migrant crime</u>…*".

In the course of the debate, Trump also uses outright lies and accuses migrants of eating domestic animals:

"*DONALD TRUMP: In Springfield, they're <u>eating the dogs</u>. The people that came in. They're <u>eating the cats</u>. They're <u>eating</u> –they're <u>eating the pets</u> of the people that live there. And this is what's happening in our country. And it's a <u>shame</u>*" [24].

At first glance, such an accusation is ridiculous, and the moderator immediately disavows it as he contacts the source of the 'information' and completely refutes it:

"*Moderator: I just want to clarify here, you bring up Springfield, Ohio. And ABC News did reach out to <u>the city manager</u> there. He told us there have been <u>no credible reports </u>of specific claims of pets being harmed, injured or abused by individuals within the <u>immigrant</u> community –*" [24].

Later in the course of debate, the former president is backing up his claim by a reference to a grey source of information ('people on television') which is a strategy of manipulation:

"*DONALD TRUMP: Well, I've seen <u>people on television</u>*

Moderator: Let me just say here this …

DONALD TRUMP: <u>The people on television</u> say my dog was taken and used for food. So maybe he said that and maybe that's a good thing to say for a city manager.

Moderator: I'm not taking this from television. I'm taking it from the city manager.

DONALD TRUMP: But <u>the people on television</u> say their dog was eaten by the people that went there.

Moderator: Again, the Springfield city manager says there's no evidence of that.

DONALD TRUMP: <u>We'll find out</u>." [24].

The use of false or distorted ('grey') information is well-known to be a tool of information warfare [10] and it is not ineffective. Akin to psychological warfare, it involves the use of information against the human mind; in particular, the use of subconscious archetypes based on people's inner attachment to their pets and the desire to protect innocent animals. So even if the disinformation is uncovered, its effect – in this case, negative emotion of hatred towards migrants – remains at a subconscious level. Such intentional strategic use of negative emotions and populist content is characteristic of modern party campaigns [9, p.278].

In his public speeches, Donald Trump excessively uses non-verbal means of argumentation: a lot of gestures, facial expressions, raised tones. In debates, his turn-taking strategies (see [12] on turn-taking) are full of competitive overlaps, interruptions, and intrusions.

Negative evaluations distort the concept frame of MIGRANT in the voters' world construal and switch the domains within which the concept is profiled from neutral to negative. In processing political information, negative emotions play a crucial role because they affect voters' attitudes and voting decisions [2; 15]. Nai [15, p. 241] claims that negative campaigns are "detrimental forces in modern democracies, fostering depressed turnout, cynicism, apathy, and a gloomier public mood."

Overall, Trump's arguing style bears the evidence of declining institutional trust of political discourse. This coincides with the tendency of public spheres to become increasingly disconnected from traditional moral values and marked by disruptive communication processes [1]. Moreover, the latest technological affordances of social media make political discourse the sphere with obscure information sources, deceptive communication, and manipulative social effect.

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4. CONCLUSIONS

This present paper suggested an integrated framework of migration discourse analysis based on cognitive-pragmatics and cognitive CDA. A case study of the USA migration discourse allowed describing the concept of MIGRANT that generates migration discourse and Republican migration discourse strategies in electoral campaigning.

Republican migration discourse is an anti-immigrant discourse dominated by xenophobic discourse strategies, negative representation of out-groups, and manipulation; it is marked by turn-taking strategies of overlaps and interruptions in Donald Trump's oral discourse. Republican migration discourse involves recurring patterns of opposing the migrant group to the host nation; they rely on the overall stereotypical 'immigrants-as-home-invaders' scenario underpinned by negative evaluation of the conceptual of MIGRANT (the domains of CULTURE, LAW AND ORDER, conceptual metaphors of INVASION, WAR, ILLNESS) and discursive narrowing of the conceptual space of MIGRANT in contrast to the USA CITIZEN (lacking the domain of CONSTITUTIONAL RIGHTS).

Hopefully, the results obtained in this short study and the cognitive-pragmatic methodology suggested for analysis may be used in further analyses of migration discourse in Europe and America from different research vantage points.

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МІГРАЦІЙНИЙ ДИСКУРС: КОГНІТИВНО-ПРАГМАТИЧНА ТОЧКА ЗОРУ

Ця стаття присвячена аналізу англомовного міграційного дискурсу і має на меті виопрацювати його методологію через призму когнітивної прагматики та когнітивно орієнтованого критичного аналізу дискурсу. В основі аналізу лежить розуміння дискурсу на соціальному, прагматичному та когнітивному тлі, що постулює єдність когнітивного та прагматичного аспектів міграційного дискурсу. Матеріалом для аналізу обрано дискурс президентських виборів у США 2024 року. На першому етапі досліджено дискурсотвірий концепт МІГРАНТ, представлений у висловлюваннях Дональда Трампа лексемами, словосполученнями та когнітивними метафорами. Потім за допомогою методів критичного аналізу дискурсу виділено дискурсивні стратегії міграційного дискурсу в Платформі Республіканської партії і в дебатах Гарріс – Трамп. Письмовий міграційний дискурс представників Республіканської партії у президентській виборчій кампанії в США 2024 року мав на меті викликати негативні емоції та містив популістські смисли. Доведено, що у своїх промовах на публічних заходах Дональд Трамп часто вдавався до драматизації, як вербально, так і невербально, і наводив негативну аргументацію щодо мігрантів та міграції. Міграційний дискурс, який містив негативну аргументацію та викликав негативні емоції щодо мігрантів, підсилював високу активність виборців. Негативний, перебільшений і сенсаційний стиль аргументації в питаннях міграції є стратегічним інструментом політичного дискурсу Дональда Трампа і розрахований отримати увагу виборців як на раціональному рівні, так і підсвідомо. Республіканський міграційний дискурс є етно- та культурно конкретизований; його стратегії мають риси ксенофобних етнокультурних стереотипів, які підкріплені когнітивним сценарієм «іммігранти-як-загарбники-дому» на базі дискурсивного звуження концептуального простору МІГРАНТА порівняно з концептом ГРОМАДЯНИН США.

Ключові слова: *когнітивна прагматика, критичний дискурс-аналіз, міграційний дискурс, негативна аргументація, Трамп.*