THE EVOLUTION OF REFUGEE CRISIS TERMINOLOGY

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Limba este în continuă evoluție. Această constatare este și mai actuală în prezent, fiind impulsionată de multiple evenimente sociale, politice și economice. Criza refugiaților care a fost pe primele pagini ale ziarelor din toată lumea și, îndeosebi, din Europa a adus schimbări nu doar la nivel sociopolitic, ci și în limbă, în special în vocabular. Termeni precum ,,imigrant", ,,refugiat", „solicitant de azil" au devenit parte a vocabularului uzual.

Acest articol are ca scop efectuarea unei analize contrastive a tratării subiectului refugiaților în articolele mass-mediei din surse din limbile engleză și română, prin identificarea particularităților textuale, lexicale și terminologice ale acestora.

Since the beginning of the 21st century the broad topic of immigration, and in particular that of asylum, has grown in importance as conflicts in countries such as Afghanistan, Iraq and, more recently Syria, have caused people to flee in record numbers.

As the number of refugees and asylum seekers globally has grown, so these groups have become featured more prominently in the media. Some mass-media entities even considered the idea of providing their readers an explanation in respect of the topic. Therefore, British public service broadcaster has a note on terminology following its articles and reports about the migration crisis, and namely, the BBC uses the term *migrant* to refer to "all people on the move who have yet to complete the legal process of claiming asylum. This group includes people fleeing war torn countries such as Syria, who are likely to be granted refugee status, as well as people who are seeking jobs and better lives, who governments are likely to rule are economic migrants." As we can see, the term *migrant* is very neutral and concise.

Another mass-media organization that decided to make a commentary on migration terminology is the English news website Al Jazeera. BBC reported that in August 2015, the director of news at Al Jazeera English, Salah Negm has decided that they will not use

migrant and will instead, where appropriate, say *refugee.* An online editor for the network explained that this decision was taken because these terms "have evolved from their dictionary definitions into a tool that dehumanizes and distances, a blunt pejorative" [1]. The approaches of BBC and Al Jazeera are high class from a sociolinguistic point of view but not a terminological one, since terminology implies precision [2, p.338].

However, we have to consider that it is appropriate given the fact that today, under the current circumstances a migrant is a refugee and an asylum seeker at the same time. This can be demonstrated by any news article on the topic where the author switches these terms every line, either to avoid repetition or conducted by ignorance.

In order to continue and understand the given examples, first we have to analyze the semantic group *migrant – immigrant – emigrant – refugee – asylum seeker* in a broader sense. According to their country of origin, these people are approached differently by mass-media, for instance, those coming from Syria and Iraq are mostly called *asylum seekers* or *refugees*; those from African countries are denominated as *migrants* or *illegals*; Afghans are called *economic migrants*. Others will confuse the concepts behind the terms *refugee* and *asylum seeker.*

The confusion results from the fact that the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol defines a *refugee* as: "Any person who, owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his/her nationality and is unable, or owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself/herself of the protection of that country" [3].

The United Nations further defines an *asylum seeker* as a person who claims to be a refugee, but whose claim has not been definitively assessed [4]. The exact moment or chronology when a refugee becomes asylum seeker is unknown that is why they are used randomly.

And finally, there are very few, as a rule these are the specialists and experts in the field that will know exactly the definitions of these terms and distinguish the concepts they describe. Therefore, *migration* is a general term describing the movement of people from one area to another, but *immigration* is a sub-category which normally refers to

people moving into a country from another who intend to stay permanently. *Emigration* is defined as departure from one's native land to settle in another. This term is less frequently used.

There are a lot of refugee crisis terms that are not used anymore. For example, Panikos Panayi, professor of European history at De Montfort University stated that the term *alien* was used regularly in the UK press before World War. "The first major immigration act [in the UK] was called the Aliens Act 1905", he says [5]. But in the US, alien remains official terminology for any person who is not a citizen or national.

Debate over terminology is not a question of political correctness, as it is sometimes characterized. Many people, including some members of the general public, journalists and government officials, reduce the entire body of migrants to only two categories: those who are *legal* and those who are *illegal*. The term *illegal*, referring to lack of valid status, is often used to describe migrants who enter a territory clandestinely.

The UN Special Rapporteur on the human rights of migrants has emphasized that the irregular entry onto a territory should be only an administrative offence, not a criminal one. The International Organization for Migration and other international organizations have long promoted use of the term *irregular* instead of *illegal*, following the recommendation the UN General Assembly made in 1975 [4].

Analyzing articles from mass-media, it can be stated that a specific aspect of the lexical acquisitions in the field of migration refers to the inundation of metaphors. Our research has led us to conclude that there are many metaphors like *influx, flood, wave, tide, stream, pouring in*, etc., used in conjunction with labels like *migrants, refugees, asylum seekers,* and *boat people*, can certainly convey the large-scale horror of a people's displacement and generate more support for those who desperately need it by a sympathetic press.

Speaking about terminology, we have to add that there are a lot of international proper names that soon became terms in the field of refugee crisis. For example, organization names: *U.N refugee agency, UN High Commissioner for Refugees, United Nations, International Organization for Migration* etc.

The current migration crisis is unprecedentedly dynamic, that is why new lexical items appear very often. However, those who bring out these lexical items – that is mass media, policymakers, high officials, experts in the field, circumstances, – must be very accurate and diplomatic, politically correct, because words are like pearls: if they are not polished well they may scratch. This is the main principle of terms: precision.

Many different terms are used to describe refugees and immigrants, some with particular legal meanings, some with offensive associations. Using terms properly is an important way of treating people with respect and advancing an informed debate on the issues.

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