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What if migrants were only people and relatives? Designations used to name people on the move in the Belgian media

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Abstract

This article focuses on denominations that are used to name people on the move in Belgian media discourse, but that are not specifically related to migration. It specifically studies the nominal syntagms formed with the noun *people* (*people on the run*, *people in need*) and words of kinship (*mother*, *brother*). A Discursive Semantics analysis implemented through Corpus Linguistics is run on a corpus of Belgian news items issued from March 2015 to July 2017. The corpus gathers 13,391 newspaper articles and 3490 TV news items (representing 7,637,986 words).

The mention of words of kinship and designations formed with *people* shows that there is a willingness to humanise media discourses on migration. However, although non-profit organisations encourage this humanitarian vision of people on the move, these usually positively connotated designations also foster a vision of people on the move as victims and does not discourage the mention of controversial denominations.

Keywords

media discourse, migration, designations, people on the move, words of kinship

Introduction

This article tackles the terms used to name people on the move in Belgian French- and Dutch-language media discourse during the 2015-2017 migratory crisis. The research is done through the nouns used to name them, in other words, the denominations. Just as discourse exercises power (Fairclough & Wodak, 1997), the denomination appears as the mark of power that the social construct of society exerts on individuals (Krieg-Planque, 2017: 92). These stakes are observable in the act of naming that generates and historically, or normatively, fixes a denomination of a person, place, event or organisation.

In this sense, the meaning of words and names should be stable. Nevertheless, if “naming an object means using a significant label to identify it [...], no lexical item can be used objectively” (Kerbrat-Orecchioni, 1980: 126). Representations are only partial and temporary since several lexical units can be used simultaneously –without being synonymous– to refer to a given object. We call denominations words that have an established meaning, rather constant although polysemous is possible (for instance *migrant* or *refugee*). Denominations have a referential fixation resulting from an act of effective naming or associative habits (Kleiber, 1984: 79) while designations refer to words

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or sequences of words, used to name an entity, that are less stable and less consensual. They are not fixed expressions (for instance, the usage of *fortune hunter* to refer to a person on the move).

In the media, the choice of a term rather than another is often made by default or dictated by professional habits or expectations: “If journalists are usually aware of their lexical choices, most of the time they need to use the language in a referential, not metalinguistic, fashion” (Calabrese & Mistiaen, 2017: 214-215), reporting the events that occur. However, the choice of a term rather than another sometimes gives rise to linguistic debates such as the semantic controversy that occurred in the summer of 2015 over the terms *refugee* and *migrant* when the Qatari outlet *Al-Jazeera* decided to stop using the word *migrant* and systematically shift to *refugee* (Malone, 2015). The international lexical debate (Calabrese, 2018) shows that denomination is not only a label to name the world but a tool to give meaning to events and, more broadly, history.

Words used to name, constitute a prominent political issue and the way people on the move are named influences the construction of their identity and impacts their future (Zetter, 1991). Being labelled as a *migrant économique* (“economic migrant”¹), a *gelukzoeker* (“fortune hunter”) or being granted *refugee* status do not have the same political implications: the former risk of living in illegality while the latter obtain a protection status for a limited time. It has been demonstrated that categorisation (and thus the word used to name the category) displays power “through administrative procedure and practice” (Zetter, 1991: 45). In the context of Europe’s migratory crisis, the use of categories has become deeply politicised, and strongly vary according to the social and discursive context (Kunz, 2020: 2147).

Furthermore, the categorisation of people on the move in media discourse influences public opinion (De Coninck, 2020). A recent example is Joe Biden’s proposal to eliminate the term *alien* from the US immigration laws. Whereas Barack Obama spoke about “undocumented immigrants” and Donald Trump frequently used “illegal aliens” or “foreign invaders”, Joe Biden would like to replace “alien” with “non-citizen” to recognise “the humanity of non-Americans” (Johnson, 2021: online). Of course, these different terms justified implementing different immigration policies from a fervent anti-immigrant to more open-minded administrations. Johnson (*Ibidem*) argues that “one-word change could deeply influence Americans’ views about the rights of non-citizens and, by so doing, the future trajectory of immigration law and policy”. These examples show that the categories are not given for once and for all. They result of “complex processes, including discussions, controversies, [and] disagreements” (Mondada & Dubois, 1995: 283).

¹ All translation are ours.

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3 The research exploring the discursive construction of terms used to name people on the move focus
4 mainly on the most mentioned terms (Calabrese & Veniard, 2018; Baker *et al.*, 2008) whose lexical
5 meaning is directly linked to migration (*migrant, refugee, asylum seeker*) while other common terms
6 with another lexical meaning are often not approached (such as *people, candidate*, ethnonyms,
7 words of kinship).
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11 Therefore, the aim of this research is, first, to document, through a lexical discourse analysis, the
12 lexical repertoire of denominations used to name people on the move in the Belgian national media
13 in French and Dutch during the 2015-2017 migratory crisis. Second, the research focuses on words
14 whose lexical meaning is not directly related to migration (*people, words of kinship*) but which are
15 used to name people on the move during the migratory crisis.
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20 21 1. Discrepancy of media denominations referring to people on the move

22 A large set of denominations and designations is found in media discourse. Some follow legal
23 definitions (*refugee, asylum seeker, foreigner*), whereas others come from the common lexicon
24 (*(im)migrant*) and are charged with the context (Calabrese & Veniard, 2018) in which they were used
25 in the past. As reality varies and changes, it is not unusual to observe the creation of new words to
26 name people on the move (for instance, *transit migrants*; Mistiaen, 2021), or to avoid the negative
27 connotation of another denomination, as is the case for *sans-papiers* (Akin, 2018). Some of them
28 are new coinages (such as *primo-arrivant* or *nieuwkomer*; Mistiaen, 2021), while others refer to a
29 moving person but do not have the lexical meaning of it. This could, for instance, be the case of
30 *expat, terrorist, tourist, Syrian* or words related to religion (Mistiaen, 2023).
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38 The lexis used to speak about people on the move varies according to the language of the media.
39 For instance, Germany and Sweden overwhelmingly mention the terms *refugee* or *asylum seeker*
40 while *migrant* is much more used in Italy and in the UK. In Spain, the most common denomination
41 is *immigrant* while *refugee* is only sporadically mentioned (Berry, Garcia-Blanco & Moore, 2016:
42 7-8). Even in the same language, many terms to name the protagonists of the migratory crisis are
43 available in the lexicon and circulate in media discourse: *spontaneous/illegal/bogus/failed asylum*
44 *seekers, economic refugee, trafficked migrant, overstayers* or *undocumented migrant* (Agier &
45 Madeira, 2020: 5; Berry, Garcia-Blanco & Moore, 2016: 184).
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52 This high number of syntagms generates an intermingling that leads to a general confusion in
53 political and media discourses. The fact that there is no clear definition of the migrant (a notion
54 often extended to newcomer, immigrant, binational) generates a semantic and legal confusion
55 between “refugees, displaced people, asylum seekers, rejected asylum seekers [and] stateless
56 people” (Agier & Madeira, 2020: 5). Often, a gap between lexical and legal definitions is observed
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2 in media discourse (Berry, Garcia-Blanco & Moore, 2016), revealing “the remarkably complex
3 nature of the words that serve to classify people according to their relationship to the territory”
4 (Calabrese, 2018: 117).
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8 Although the use of these terms is confusing and interchangeable –sometimes even used as
9 synonyms in the same piece of news (Baker *et al.*, 2008)–, most journalists try to report a reality as
10 accurately and objective as possible, calibrating the words they use. Journalists are not always aware
11 of their lexical choice as they tend to use the language in a referential manner but sometimes, the
12 choice results in habits or is made by default (Calabrese & Mistiaen, 2017: 214-215). Although
13 these categories seem objective, not only do the lexical items vary, but also the semantic meaning
14 of the same term might have a different signification (Calabrese & Veniard, 2018: 10). The
15 denomination *refugee* itself is highly changeable, depending on the context and time (Akoka, 2020).
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19 Comparing the reception crisis of 2000 and the migratory crisis of 2015, it has been observed that
20 the syntagm *undocumented migrants* disappeared from the Belgian French-language coverage of
21 2015 (Sow, 2016: 51). In the 2000 coverage, the Belgian French-language media clearly identified
22 migrants and asylum seekers as two distinct categories. Still, as years go by, “articles refer[ing] to
23 one of the categories of people [...] increasingly refer to the other as well” (*Ibidem*). It testifies that
24 these categories are pervasive, and the lexis used to refer to people on the move have become blurred
25 (Berry, Garcia-Blanco & Moore, 2016).
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29 Belgium is politically divided between the North (Flanders, Dutch-speaking) and the South
30 (Wallonia, French-speaking), Brussels being between the two. Both linguistic communities of
31 Belgium harbour different journalistic traditions (Sinardet, 2009). French-speaking journalists are
32 more eager to promote tolerance than their Flemish counterparts. They tend to cover migration in a
33 more sympathetic and positive way (De Cock, Sundin & Mistiaen, 2019: 320), showing increasing
34 interest in welcoming reactions from the population and politicians as well as humanitarian
35 dimensions and rights for migrants (*Ibidem*). In the same line, in 2006 French-language press and
36 TV, entertainment was the second theme through with migratory news were narrated (Saeys *et al.*,
37 2007). As the entertainment section usually portrays the protagonists positively, the news related to
38 migration was more positive than in the Flemish media.
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42 During the migratory crisis, the Flemish press mentioned the refugees’ Islamic background more
43 often and linked Islam with a threat more frequently (De Cock, Sundin & Mistiaen, 2019: 320).
44 Mentioning the religious background suggests higher concern, sometimes even fear. This is
45 probably a consequence of the negative depiction of Muslims and Islam in the Flemish news
46 (Mertens & de Smaele, 2016).
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Variations of terms used to name people on the move were studied in 2006 in a corpus of Belgian news items related to migration (Saeys *et al.*, 2007). Among the terms used to name the protagonists in the Dutch-language sub-corpus, *allochtoon* (“allochthone”; “non-native”) was the most used, followed by *vreemdeling* (“foreigner”), *migrant* (“migrant”), *vluchteling* (“refugee”) and *asielzoeker* (“asylum seeker”). The most mentioned term, *allochthone*, was common to refer to people with migration backgrounds in Dutch-speaking Belgium and The Netherlands. However, its usage decreased as it became negatively charged (Roblain, 2018).

2. Research question, corpus and method

As soon as we consider the denominations in their discursive actualisation and their context of realisation, we see that what appeared to be an anomaly is, in fact, the norm. Not only do speakers use different terms to designate the same referent –and argue about them– but when they use the same words, they understand them differently and have to negotiate their meaning in order to get along. The quest for the denied stability of the meaning of names must therefore be replaced by understanding their perpetual variation and the regulation of meaning in discourse (Siblot, 1999: 20).

As words are to vary in meaning according to contexts and circumstances, words not directly related to migration should also be used to refer to people on the move. As a result, the research question that leads this work is as follows:

What are the most common terms that are not lexically related to migration that score significantly high in the Belgian French- and Dutch-language media repertoire of denominations and why are they used?

To answer the research question, an exhaustive corpus composed of press articles and evening news items was collected in Belgium’s French- and Dutch-speaking communities from March 2015 to July 2017. For each community, the broadsheet, the popular newspaper, the Public Service broadcaster and the Commercial broadcaster with the largest audience were analysed (Table 1). Focusing on words used to name people on the move, the corpus was gathered employing a lexical query in news databases (GOpres for newspapers and TV channel databases for evening news) of the following lemmas: *refugee** and *migrant**. It corresponded to 13,391 articles and 3490 news broadcasts representing 7,637,986 words. This corpus is analysed through a mixed approach combining Discursive Semantics (DS) and Corpus Linguistics (CL).

Media	Number of words	Number of news items
Total	7,607,449	16,881
French-language corpus (FLC)	4,126,842	8227
Newspaper articles	3,567,883	6582
<i>Le Soir (LS)</i>	2,800,352	4509
<i>La DH (La DH)</i>	767,531	2073
Evening television news	558,959	1645
<i>RTBF</i>	319,814	765
<i>RTL-TVi</i>	239,145	880
Dutch-language corpus (DLC)	3,480,607	8654
Newspaper articles	2,947,314	6809
<i>De Standaard (DS)</i>	1,039,764	1738
<i>Het Laatste Nieuws (HLN)</i>	1,907,550	5071
Evening television news	533,293	1845
<i>VRT</i>	286,837	951
<i>VTM</i>	246,456	894

Table 1. Corpus description

Discourse analysis (DA), and more specifically DS, is the perfect frame to study the trajectory of words, as this discipline conceptualises language as a form of “social practice” (Fairclough & Wodak, 1997). DS refers to a set of methodological approaches as well as a theoretical framework aimed at studying rather brief discursive segments at the interface of the linguistic repertoire and usage. DS goes beyond the traditional opposition between language and discourse in favour of a “dynamic articulation” (Lecolle, Veniard & Guérin, 2018: 35), it relies on discourse and textual genres as well as on the context and history of forms and their usage. It keeps in mind that semantic phenomena are unstable and, consequently, pays attention to polysemy, ambiguity and the play and reconfiguration of meaning. DS studies the “construction of meaning” according to “units of different ranks (word, syntagm, statement, textual sequence)” with the aim to describing “how uses become fixed, how emerging forms become routinised to become shared resources” (*Ibid*: 36).

DS helps to articulate the situational context with the linguistic co-text. The co-text (immediate lexical context) is the first central feature that helps to understand the construction of a word’s meaning. In other words, what is coming before or after a term helps to give meaning to the term. Actually, the situational context and the direct lexical environment are often unconsciously kept in people’s mind and, *in fine*, charges the word itself:

each time we encounter a word [...], we subconsciously keep a record of the context and co-text of the word so that cumulatively as we re-encounter the word [...], we build up a record of its collocations. [...] when we come to use the word [...], we characteristically replicate the context in which we had previously encountered it (Hoey, 2007: 7-8).

Because the corpus under study is significant, CL tools are used to identify the denominations and designations as well as to study their meaning. CL is a computer-assisted method that “describes the variety of discursive usages by means of corpus [analysis]” (Lebart, Pincemin & Poudat, 2019: 16). It allows researchers “to establish which sorts of language strategies are most frequent or

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2 popular” (Baker & McEnery, 2005: 223), to measure recurrent discursive phenomena (Baker *et al.*,
3 2008: 284-285), to objectivise the way social actors produce meaning as well as the differences and
4 similarities among them.
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8 The first CL tool that is used in this research is the lexical index. It lists all the words of each sub-
9 corpus. From these lists, all the denominations and designations used to name people on the move
10 were selected to draw up the lexical repertoire in each language. Then, denominations and
11 designations are analysed through the concordance and co-occurrence tools as these tools allow for
12 the study of the lexical environment of a term. The concordance tool displays all the occurrences of
13 a chosen word within its immediate co-text (Lebart, Pincemin & Poudat, 2019: 95). The co-
14 occurrence index shows the words that usually appear together with the word studied (*Ibid*: 113).
15 The open-source software chosen to conduct this research is TXM.
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22 3. The lexical repertoire of media denominations

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24 The first step of the analysis was to scrutinise the lexical index of each sub-corpus to identify all
25 denominations and designations used to name people on the move. It gave rise to two long lists
26 including 312 lexical items from the Dutch-language corpus (DLC) and 268 from the French-
27 language corpus (FLC). This lexical productivity generates a large repertoire of denominations from
28 those most fixed in language (denominations such as *refugee*) to those less fixed and temporary
29 (designations such as *people in need*).
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35 These lists contrast with previous findings (Calabrese & Mistiaen, 2017; Berry, Garcia-Blanco &
36 Moore, 2016; Baker *et al.*, 2008) according to which *refugee*, *asylum seeker* and *(im)migrant*
37 (shortens in “RASIM”²) are the most frequent denominations used in the media. As a matter of fact,
38 previous studies focus on the lexical repertoire of migration, instead of listing all the words used to
39 refer to people on the move, including those that do not convey the idea of migration.
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59 ² The acronym RAS refers to Refugees and Asylum Seekers while the acronym IM refers to Immigrants and Migrants.
60 All four groups together are referred to as RASIM (Baker *et al.*, 2008: 276).

Denomination/designation DLC	Absolute frequency of the denomination (relative frequency 10 ⁻⁷)	Denomination/designation FLC	Absolute frequency of the denomination (relative frequency 10 ⁻⁷)
Vluchteling ("refugee")	17,970 (51,629)	Réfugié ("refugee")	10,790 (26,146)
Mensen ("people")	7345 (21,103)	Migrant ("migrant")	9062 (21,959)
Asielzoeker ("asylum seeker")	5094 (14,635)	Enfant ("child")	2671 (6341)
Migrant ("migrant")	2763 (7938)	Personne ("person")	2570 (6228)
Kind ("child")	2696 (7746)	Syrien ("Syrian")	1240 (3005)
Man ("man")	1313 (3772)	Demandeur d'asile ("asylum seeker")	991 (2401)
Vrouw ("woman")	1082 (3109)	Étranger ("foreigner", "alien")	984 (2384)
Syriër ("Syrian")	980 (2816)	Gens ("people")	752 (1822)
Illegaal ("someone who is illegal because (s)he does not have any documentation")	737 (2117)	Femme ("woman")	745 (1805)
Nieuwkomer ("newcomer")	585 (1681)	Candidat ("candidate")	601 (1456)
Syrische vluchteling ("Syrian refugee")	504 (1448)	Homme ("man")	573 (1388)
Erkende vluchteling ("recognised refugee")	423 (1215)	Réfugié syrien ("Syrian refugee")	460 (1115)
Minderjarige ("minor")	231 (1189)	Afghan ("Afghan")	359 (870)
Bootvluchteling ("boat refugee")	391 (1123)	Arrivant ("comer" - present participle form of the verb "come" used as a noun)	354 (858)
Bewoner ("inhabitant")	377 (1083)	Candidat réfugié ("refugee candidate")	320 (775)
Ouder ("parent")	348 (1000)	Irakien/Iraquien ("Iraqi")	311 (754)
Vader ("father")	317 (911)	Immigré ("immigrant")	305 (739)
Broer ("brother")	280 (804)	Mineur ("minor")	274 (664)
Persoon ("person")	279 (802)	Parent ("parent")	270 (654)
Moeder ("mother")	268 (770)	Père ("father")	269 (652)
Irakees ("Iraqi")	262 (753)	Fille ("daughter")	243 (589)
Niet-begeleide minderjarig ("non-accompanied minor")	231 (664)	Mort ("dead person")	221 (536)
Oorlogsvluchteling ("war refugee")	220 (632)	Ressortissant ("national")	216 (523)
Vreemdeling ("alien")	209 (600)	Sans-papiers ("without documentation")	214 (519)
Lichaam ("body")	173 (497)	Frère ("brother")	212 (514)
Allochtoon ("allochthone")	171 (491)	Mère ("mother")	199 (482)
Immigrant ("immigrant")	151 (434)	Primo-arrivant ("newcomer")	194 (470)
Minderjarige vluchteling ("minor refugee")	156 (448)	Résident ("resident")	187 (453)
Slachtoffer ("victim")	145 (417)	Corps ("body")	150 (363)
Dode ("dead person")	141 (405)	Famille syrienne ("Syrian family")	150 (363)
Politieke vluchteling ("political refugee")	141 (405)	Déplacé ("displaced person")	142 (344)
Zus ("sister")	137 (394)	Victime ("victim")	126 (305)
Afghaan ("Afghan")	130 (374)	Candidat à l'asile ("candidate for asylum")	126 (305)
Zoon ("son")	125 (359)	Clandestin ("stowaway")	113 (274)
Buitenlander ("foreigner")	113 (325)	Fils ("son")	112 (271)
Mensen zonder papieren ("people without documentation")	110 (316)	Exilé ("exile")	110 (267)
Dochter ("daughter")	108 (310)	Réfugié politique ("political refugee")	108 (262)

Vluchtelingenkind ("refugee child")	107 (307)	Nouvel arrivant ("newcomer")	101 (245)
Economische vluchteling ("economic refugee")	104 (299)	Passager ("passenger")	101 (245)
Mensen op de vlucht ("people on the run")	92 (264)	MENA (acronym for <i>Mineur Etranger Non-Accompagné</i> : "unaccompanied foreign minor")	95 (230)
Mensen in nood ("people in danger")	91 (261)	Illégal ("illegal")	94 (228)
Economische migrant ("economic migrant")	88 (253)	Musulman ("Muslim")	90 (218)
Moslim ("Muslim")	86 (247)	Maman ("mum")	83 (201)
Sans-papiers ("without documentation")	77 (221)	Erythéen ("Eritrean")	81 (196)
Transitmigrant ("migrant in transit")	72 (207)	Immigrant ("Immigrant")	75 (182)
Verstekeling ("stowaway")	70 (201)	Réfugié reconnu ("recognised refugee")	78 (189)
Anderstalige nieuwkomer ("a newcomer who has another native language")	69 (198)	Soeur ("sister")	71 (172)
Afrikaan ("African")	67 (193)	Chrétien ("Christian")	69 (167)
Mensen op te vangen ("people to welcome")	62 (178)	Cadavre ("corpse")	63 (155)
Illegale vluchteling ("illegal refugee")	61 (175)	Africain ("African")	60 (145)

Table 2. Top 50 of the most mentioned denominations and designations in both corpora (relative frequency of 10^{-7})

Table 2 lists the top 50 of the most mentioned denominations and designations. Both sub-corpora display words related to legal and statistical discourse (*refugee*, *migrant*, *asylum seeker*, *foreigner*, *minor*), administrative and institutional discourse (*inhabitant*, *resident*), kinship (*child*, *parent*, *father*, *brother*, *mother*, *sister*), nationalities (*Syrian*, *Afghan*, *Iraqi*), religion (*Muslim* and *Christian*), death (*body*, *cadaver*, *death people*) as well as common language terms not exclusively used within the frame of migration (*victim*, *client*). These words could be classified according to the actors who use them. Some of them are used in political (*illegal*) or administrative discourse (*client*), while others are specific to journalistic discourse (*shipwrecked*, *passenger*) or activist discourse (*friend*).

The table shows the numerous mentions of ethnonyms that are used as a designation for people on the move. Indubitably, nationality is still seen as a significant characteristic for being granted a protection status or not (Akoka, 2020). Such as previously studied (Saeys *et al.*, 2007), the mention of nationality (in this corpus, especially *Afghan* and *Iraqi*) is also significant when there is a security threat. Nationality in media discourse has then an argumentative value (Mistiaen, 2023).

Regarding the mention of a religion, *Muslim* and *Christian* are the two religions found in the lexical indexes. While *Christian* is found as a strong co-occurrent of *Muslim* in both corpora (score 49 in the DLC and 48 in the FLC), the negative connotation is exclusively found with *Muslim*. Indeed, its co-occurents are strongly linked to terrorism and the IS (*radical*, *radicalised*, *attacks*, *kill*, *terrorists*, *menace*, etc.).

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3 (1) With this equation: refugees = Muslims = likely terrorists. One in two people think so. Finally, 64%
4 of the population also say they are afraid of the influx of refugees into Europe because they are
5 specifically Muslims (*RTBF*, 09/01/2017).
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7 Whereas Muslims are more often associated with threats in the political discourse, the media try to
8 balance this idea by warning against amalgams. Such as for ethnonyms, religion is used as a
9 designation of social actors. The occurrences found in both corpora are used to condemn the fact
10 that some European countries do not want to welcome Muslim asylum seekers and instead prefer
11 Christians.
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13 In sum, the analysis of the lexical indexes shows that, even though the classical denominations used
14 to name people on the move are found at the top of the list of both sub-corpora, other common
15 language designations related to statistics (*minor*, *Syrian*), kinship (*child*, *mother*), civil
16 organisations (*friend*, *sans-papiers*) or general human names such as *people* are significantly found
17 in both corpora. The next two subsections precisely deal with (complex) nominal syntagms formed
18 with *people* and words of kinship.
19

20 3.1. *People*: a general human name

21 Complex nominal syntagms formed with the substantive *mens(en)/personne(s)* (“people”) are of
22 two kinds: either they are followed by a preposition and a noun (*mensen in nood/personne dans le*
23 *besoin*; “people in need”), or they are followed by a prepositional complement (*mensen die op de*
24 *vlucht zijn*, “people who are fleeing”). The substantive that composes these complex nominal
25 syntagms is a general human name (“people”), a synonym for “man” in its general meaning
26 (Schneedecker, 2018: 13) and refers to human beings in a collective way (Cappeau & Schneedecker,
27 2014: 3029). It aims at underlining the humanity of the people designated under these designations
28 and not categorising them into classes of people. Moreover, in the FLC, a few occurrences of
29 complex nominal syntagms that work similarly are found with *gens* as the head element (*gens du*
30 *voyage*, “travelling people”; *gens qui demandent l’asile*, “people who seek asylum”), which could
31 be translated as a *human being* in English.
32

33 The prepositions used in these constructions are various and have different meanings (Table 3).
34 They mostly refer to a place, destination, movement or the state in which the person is found. Others
35 are formed with a relative pronoun (“who”) that introduces a periphrasis. Some of them are more
36 common in one language than another (for instance, the FLC does not mention many complex
37 nominal syntagms with the prepositions *with* and *without*).
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Preposition	Relational meaning	Designations	Translation + number of occurrences
<i>in/dans/en</i> ("in")	state	<i>mensen in nood/ gens dans le besoin/ personne dans le besoin</i>	"people in need" (DLC: 91; FLC: 8 and 4 respectively)
		<i>personne en situation irrégulière</i>	"people in irregular situation" (DLC: 16)
		<i>personne en détresse</i>	"people in distress" (FLC: 11)
<i>van/de(d')</i> ("of")	origin	<i>mensen van vreemde origine/ personne d'origine étrangère</i>	"people of foreign origin" (DLC: 8; FLC: 37)
<i>aan/à(au)</i> ("at")	location	<i>mensen aan de grens/ personne à la frontière</i>	"people at the border" (DLC: 5; FLC: 2)
<i>te/à</i> ("to")	action	<i>mensen op te vangen/ personne à accueillir</i>	"people to welcome" (DLC: 62; FLC: 8)
<i>zonder/sans</i> ("without")	manner	<i>mensen zonder verblijfsvergunning/ personne sans permis de séjour</i>	"people without residence permit" (DLC: 3; FLC: 2)
		<i>mensen zonder geleidige (verblijfs)papieren</i>	"people without valid (resident)document" (DLC: 4 and 2)
		<i>mensen zonder verblijfsrecht</i>	"people without residence right" (DLC: 1)
		<i>mensen zonder papieren/ personne sans papiers</i>	"people without documentation" (DLC: 110; FLC: 8)
<i>op/in/en</i> ("on")	movement	<i>mensen op de vlucht</i>	"people on the run" (DLC: 92)
		<i>mensen op de weg</i>	"people on the road" (DLC: 4)
		<i>personne en transit</i>	"people in transit" (FLC: 1)
		<i>mensen in beweging/ personne en mouvement</i>	"people on the move" (DLC: 5; FLC: 3)
	action	<i>mensen op zoek naar een beter leven</i>	"people in search of a better life" (DLC: 3)
		<i>mensen op zoek naar hun geluk</i>	"people in search of their happiness" (DLC: 1)
<i>met/avec</i> ("with")	state	<i>mensen met een migratieachtergrond</i>	"people with a migration background" (DLC: 12)
		<i>mensen met een vluchtelingachtergrond</i>	"people with a refugee background" (DLC: 1)
		<i>personne avec un taux de reconnaissance très élevé</i>	"people with a very high recognition rate" (FLC: 2)
Coordination conjunction <i>die/qui</i> ("who")	relational meaning	<i>mensen die vluchten/ personne qui fuit</i>	"people who flee" (DLC: 25; FLC: 19)
		<i>mensen die op de vlucht zijn</i>	"people who are fleeing" (DLC: 22)

Table 3. Complex nominal syntagms formed with people

Mensen op de vlucht ("people on the run") is found significantly in the DLC but it is not yet a fixed denomination as alternatives are also found in the corpus: *mensen die vluchten* ("people who flee") and *mensen die op de vlucht zijn* ("people who are fleeing"). Even though these syntagms are less mentioned in the FLC, the study of the co-occurrences in both sub-corpora shows that the meaning of these expressions is shared. They refer to millions of people who flee conflicts, wars, persecutions, violence. Because *people on the run* is used in official reports, figures are often found in the co-text of the designation.

- (2) According to the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, 34 percent of **people displaced** in the Mediterranean come from Syria, 12 percent from Eritrea, another 12 from Afghanistan, 5 from Somalia and 5 from Nigeria. All countries where a civil war is raging or random violence is part of the daily routine. In short: the vast majority of people on the run risks the perilous crossing to Europe

will be recognised as refugees or entitled to subsidiary protection. What rights does the **refugee** have? (DS, 14/09/2015).

In media discourse, these syntagms are positively connotated because the reasons why these people flee are valuable according to the Geneva convention (Akoka, 2020). Moreover, as we can see in the example (2), the nominal syntagm is used as a synonym for the legal term *refugee*, a term usually positively connotated (Calabrese & Mistiaen, 2017).

People in need is also a designation that is almost exclusively mentioned in the DLC. The analysis of the co-occurrences proves that people named under this designation are portrayed in a rather positive way. As a matter of fact, the idea that it is an *ethical obligation to help* them is found in many occurrences:

- (3) Whether you call yourself Christian or Humanist, it is part of our cultural and moral self-understanding to help people in need. On the other hand, it is legitimate to worry about how many **newcomers** we can integrate into European welfare societies, as they are based on a precarious balance between rights and duties, between plurality and unanimity on society's most important values: equality, freedom of expression, the secular (DS, 14/11/2015).

In both sub-corpora, the designation **people to welcome** is mentioned mainly concerning the management of the number of places in reception centres and Fedasil's³ call to find more places to host asylum seekers. As a result, OCMW⁴, Fedasil, Caritas and a significant number of names of mayors and politicians are found in the co-text. Because the preposition (*à/op te*, "to") used in this nominal syntagm has an injunction value, it seems evident then that no discussion is to be made as these people have to be welcomed.

People of foreign origin is often linked to work and employment, stating that, "with equal skills", these persons have less chance to find a job, and it appears in reports that speak about migration and diversity. Other occurrences refer either to the integration path or the idea that the people included under this denomination are confined to one area (for instance, *Molenbeek*), are poor, poorly educated and show *the misery of the world*:

- (4) These neighbourhoods are the most densely populated in the region (more than 30,000 inhabitants per square kilometre, four times the regional average), where the lowest incomes are concentrated, with a very high proportion of people of foreign origin, and, around them, all the misery of the world. Some of the buildings remain terribly decrepit, sometimes abandoned (LS, 21/03/2016).

Nevertheless, the media also underlines that they are not all the "black sheep":

³ The Federal Agency for the reception of asylum seekers.

⁴ Public Centre for Social Welfare.

(5) When we ask them why they are afraid, the answer is often that they have “read something in the newspaper. Few have had a bad experience themselves with people of foreign origin”, says Berdai (DS, 30/09/2015).

Compared to the other nominal syntagms formed with *people*, *people of foreign origin* refers to foreigners in general, often poor people located in disadvantaged neighbourhoods of the capital. Actually, in discourse, it does not comprise people moving within the frame of the 2015-2017 migratory crisis.

As seen in the examples (1), (2), (3) (and (6), (7) and (8) in the next subsection), the nominal syntagm understudied (underlined) is often accompanied with another –more conventional– denomination (in **bold**) in its co-text. This gives the illusion that the terms are almost synonyms and, consequently, their referent become blurred. This being said, the fact that *people of foreign origin* is not found with another common denomination in its immediate lexical context supports the theory that it is not used to refer to people on the move during the 2015-2017 migratory crisis.

The examples of this subsection also show that the nominal syntagms formed with *people* either occur in reports or in quotes from experts or protagonists who probably pay attention to the denominations they use. Most of these occurrences are precisely used to avoid the mention of a common –sometimes controversial– denomination. They all have a clear euphemistic aim, some more obviously than others, as is the case for *mensen op zoek naar een beter leven* (“people in search of a better life”), *mensen op zoek naar hun geluk* (“people in search of their happiness”) and *personne en mouvement* (“people in movement”). This does not prevent them to become negatively charged in the future⁵ as it has already been observed with the French nominal syntagm *jeune immigré* (“young immigrant”) that replaced *jeune de banlieue* (“young people from the suburbs”), to underline the origin of these young people less in lieu of “their social marginality (unemployment, delinquency, drugs)” (Bonnafous, 1997: 100). Or, as *allochthone* that was introduced as an alternative for *migrants* or *guest workers* (Roblain, 2018), that had become negatively charged. It is interesting to note that today, both *allochthone* and *young immigrant* are as negatively connotated as the term/nominal syntagm they replace.

3.2. Designations related to kinship

Words of kinship are a subcategory of words of relationship. They have a proper meaning but also an autonomous referent (Kerbat-Orecchioni, 1980: 37) that can only be determined according to a relation with another person:

⁵ Especially in the case of *people of foreign origin* that it is already collocated to negative terms such as *unemployment*, *illiteracy* and *poverty*.

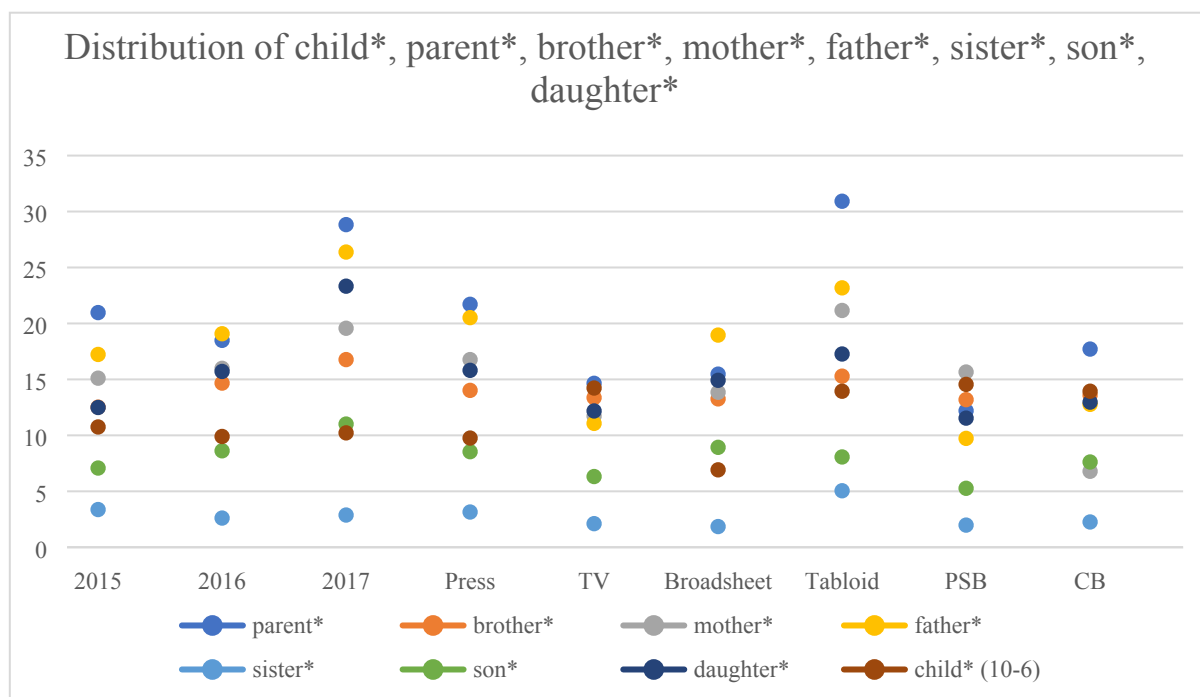
the denoted entities are not described in themselves, according to their ontological properties, but according to their relation to another term. In this sense, relational substantives imply a point of view on the referent and they are characterised by a particular relationship to the denomination, not constituting a standard and autonomous designation of the entities to which they refer (Huyghe, 2015: 16).

What is particularly striking is that the order of frequency is almost the same in both corpora (see Table 4): *child* and *parent* are followed by *father*, *brother* in the DLC and *daughter* in the FLC, then comes *mother* in both corpora. These are followed by *sister*, *son*, in the DLC and the other way around in the FLC (*daughter* in the DLC), *mum* and *daddy*. The fact that *daughter* scores higher in the FLC is probably because the term is also used in French with the meaning of “girl”, which is not the case in Dutch which has two different words for “girl” (*meisje*) and “daughter” (*dochter*).

Denomination	Relative frequency (10^{-7}) DLC	Relative frequency (10^{-7}) FLC
Child	7746	6341
Parent	1000	654
Father	911	652
Brother	804	514
Mother	770	482
Sister	394	172
Son	359	271
Daughter	310	589
Mum	126	201
Daddy	75	118

Table 4. Denominations of kinship and their relative frequency (10^{-7}) in the DLC and FLC

When we look more specifically at the distribution of each word of kinship found in both corpora, most of them show not only a similar number of occurrences but also a similar distribution throughout all sub-corpora, as shown on Graph 1. Except for *sister* and to a lesser extent for *son*, they are mentioned more often in the press than on TV, and much more in popular newspapers and on commercial broadcasters than in broadsheets and public service broadcasters.



Graph 1. Distribution of *child** (relative frequency of 10^{-6}), *parent**, *brother**, *mother**, *father**, *sister**, *son**, *daughter** in all sub-corpora (relative frequency of 10^{-5})

These similarities in terms of distribution show that they are not used in relation to a specific event but mentioned in a rather uniform way. It proves that they are commonly used to refer to people on the move, especially in commercial outlets. As observed by the study of the co-occurents, these words are often found in moving stories and thus trigger empathy, which is a common feature of tabloids (Zelizer, 2000: xi). Therefore, it is not surprising to observe that *Het Laatste Nieuws* over mentions them.

As seen in Table 5 with the example of *child*, the co-occurents of the words of kinship are relatively similar in both corpora: personal relative pronouns (*my*, *her/his*), other words of kinship (*child(eren)*, *parent*, *sister*, *brother*, *grandparent*), words related to family (*home*) and education (*school*), the age of the person (*year*) and, sometimes, the state in which the person is (*eldest*, *deceased*). The lists of co-occurents also show that *child* shares the same discursive meaning in both sub-corpora.

Cooccurrent	Frequency	CoFrequency	Score	Mean distance	Cooccurrent	Frequency	CoFrequency	Score	Mean distance
vrouwen	1133	311	198	2.0	femmes	1378	368	127	2.4
school	1022	279	177	3.9	hommes	1356	174	99	4.6
æzinnen	690	179	110	2.5	école	758	133	93	4.6
ouders	849	195	109	4.4	des	57886	1542	88	3.3
vrouw	1191	209	93	3.0	parents	536	105	79	4.9
hun	8333	600	83	3.0	dont	3121	208	66	2.7
en	56559	2373	60	3.4	leurs	2986	203	65	1.8
kinderen	3846	323	59	5.8	familles	858	109	62	3.4
met	23996	1154	54	3.1	adultes	145	56	61	3.8
scholen	421	96	54	5.1	et	58193	1415	58	3.3
æzin	1094	136	43	3.6	mes	722	92	52	.6
volwassenen	113	49	43	2.9	femme	947	103	52	3.1
onderwijs	451	87	42	4.0	écoles	348	66	49	4.6
mannen	1263	145	42	4.3	scolarisés	46	32	46	2.0
drie	2287	181	30	2.4	bébés	63	34	43	2.5
twee	4016	262	30	2.3	place	259	48	35	4.1
moeder	502	76	30	4.1	mère	518	63	35	4.2
kind	658	86	29	4.9	les	62279	1339	31	3.0
æboren	291	57	28	3.4	sont	14367	407	28	3.4
ionæ	887	100	28	1.8	ieunes	1544	96	28	2.6
vier	1495	134	28	2.6	ses	6053	215	26	1.8
moeders	89	32	25	3.7	enfants	2666	126	26	5.3
oud	375	60	25	5.8	æce	360	43	23	2.8
wie	1638	135	24	2.8	famille	1700	92	23	4.6
Unicef	76	29	24	3.9	trois	2246	108	23	2.2
soeeloed	130	35	22	3.9	avec	12653	348	22	2.9
babv	233	45	22	4.0	ans	5231	183	22	5.0
ziin	31013	1224	22	4.0	photo	459	46	22	3.0
kwetsbare	130	34	21	3.3	ont	13987	373	22	3.5
ionæer	73	26	20	2.1	Des	2343	105	20	3.7
verdronken	301	48	20	2.7	Unicef	72	20	19	5.4
kleine	936	88	20	1.7	adulte	46	17	18	4.3
miin	3741	218	19	2.5	ces	6763	207	18	3.0
leren	680	68	17	3.5	deux	5585	178	17	1.9
voor	27100	1041	16	3.5	adolescents	75	19	17	1.9
onder	3365	189	15	3.0	malades	77	19	17	2.9
recht	734	68	15	3.8	scolaire	131	23	16	4.7
Gezin	24	14	15	1.1	scolariser	16	11	16	1.2
kleinkinderen	42	17	14	1.2	morts	713	47	15	3.7
Gezinnen	36	16	14	2.5	enceintes	40	14	15	3.5
families	254	37	14	3.1	pour	29793	638	14	3.6
vader	648	61	14	4.5	couple	304	30	14	3.8
les	380	45	14	4.2	vieillards	15	10	14	2.5
mama	209	33	14	4.7	viouets	45	14	14	3.0
					cino	895	51	14	1.6
					nés	68	16	14	1.9
					dère	691	44	14	3.8

t pivot 5559, v cooc 852, t cooc 39344, T corpus 3480607

t pivot 3295, v cooc 719, t cooc 25701, T corpus 4126842

Table 5. Co-occurents of kind* (DLC) and enfant* (FLC) that have a score equal to or higher than 14

Several organisation names (*Unicef*, *Kind en gezin*, *SOS Kinderdorpen*, *BlitZ*) are found in the co-occurent lists of both corpora. *Unicef*, an agency of the United Nations responsible for providing humanitarian and development aid to children worldwide (including children on the move), has a co-occurrence score of 24 in the DLC and 19 in the FLC. In the corpora under study, it appears in relation to fundraising and as a protector of children's rights:

- (6) All these children are especially vulnerable to exploitation and abuse. Unicef says new measures are needed to protect them. They must be protected and so there must be more protection systems for children during every stage (*VRT*, 02/02/2016).

Children are depicted as *vulnerable* (co-occurrence score of 21 in the DLC and 9 in the FLC), sometimes lost on their journey or victims of human trafficking and experiencing trauma. Some occurrences of *child* refer to less sad stories and insist on their education to learn the language:

- (7) At present, 47 children are in nursery and primary classes in the four schools concerned, including the Arthur Haulot local school, which has already received **newcomers** in the past (*LS*, 25/09/2015).

Such as for *vulnerable* with *child*, *single* is a strong co-occurrent of *mother* (score of 18 in the DLC and 12 in the FLC) that forms the collocation *single mother*, underlying the vulnerability of the mother and her need to be assisted:

- (8) In Lennik, a family from Syria is hosted in a transit house in Frans Vandersteenstraat. The family consists of a single mother, three daughters and a son. Currently, they can only speak Arabic. “The family is accompanied by a social assistant”, says OCMW president Nestor Evens (*HLN*, 18/11/2015).

Besides other words of kinship, words linked to pregnancy and illness are also strong co-occurents of *mother*, underlying even more this necessity to be helped. On the contrary, *father* is in co-occurrence with agentive terms, such as conjugated verbs. While *mother* is collocated to *grandmother*, *father* is collocated to *grandfather*. Similarly, *son* is collocated to *eldest* while *daughter* is found with *little*, *little girl* or *youngest*. Even though these associations do not stand out, this distribution underlines the classic dichotomy between the powerful males who work outside of the house and the vulnerable females who need assistance.

Despite this opposition between people in danger and people who inspire danger, the strong usage of words of kinship also has the ability to humanise the discourse and could maybe be explained by the recommendations made by non-profit organisations to help giving people on the move a “humanitarian and human aspect”, such as in the brochure issued by the non-profit organisation *Vluchtelingenwerk Vlaanderen* (2021: 44): *Communicating migration and refugees to the moveable middle - a framing guide from other talk*. The non-profit organisation advises journalists and communication managers to “replace words like ‘refugee’, ‘migrant’ or ‘immigrant’ where possible with ‘people, fathers, mothers, children, neighbours’”. Nevertheless, as observed in these corpora, this humanitarian dimension also encourages the vision of people on the move as victims. As a matter of fact, these denominations mostly appear in sad, moving pieces of news, where the fact of being a parent adds an emotional component. It should also be noticed that in news stories where parents search for their children, or when an incident happens to them or to their children, the fact of being a parent is more significant than the fact of being a person on the move and can even provoke empathy and move people (politicians) who are usually against the reception of refugees, as was evident in the reaction of the State Secretary for Asylum and Migration at the time, Theo Francken, after the death of Alan Kurdi for instance:

- (9) When Theo Francken tweeted yesterday that he feels so small in the face of Aylan Kurdi’s tragedy, many found the tweet distasteful and implausible. How could it be otherwise, after all Francken is

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2 the “Frankenstein” of asylum policy? Still, I want to believe he meant it, that the man and the father
3 in him can transcend the politician and the nationalist militant (*DS*, 04/09/2015).
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6 However, this is not the case for every right-wing politician, as seen by the reactions of the
7 Hungarian Prime Minister, Viktor Orbán and the N-VA president, Bart De Wever (Mistiaen,
8 forthcoming).
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11 Conclusion

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14 This research focused on denominations used to name people on the move in Belgian media
15 discourse. What differs from previous studies is that this research not exclusively focus on terms
16 commonly used to name people on the move but displays the exhaustive paradigm of words used to
17 name people on the move, including terms not especially focusing on the origin, destination or
18 movement. The lexical productivity found in both sub-corpora can be explained by the significant
19 place the migratory crisis took in the Belgian media, inviting more and more actors from the Belgian
20 society to speak about people on the move. These actors choose terms to name people on the move
21 in this wide repertoire of denominations and designations according to personal sensitivity and
22 objective or subjective criteria.
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30 While the need to describe new categories or specific cases encourages the creation of new nominal
31 syntagms, activists plead for the humanisation of the discourse, using (complex) nominal syntagms
32 formed with *people* and words of kinship. The similar distribution of these terms in both sub-corpora
33 and over time proves that they are not used in relation to one specific event. They are mentioned
34 avoiding controversial denominations and debates on the terms. Whether some of the nominal
35 syntagms have a clear euphemistic aim (*people in search of a better life*), the fact that they are
36 formed with a general human name underline their human aspect, showing the will to erase the
37 negative connotation found with many common denominations (such as *migrant* and its
38 derivations). The humanity of the people is even stronger when words of kinship are used as they
39 facilitate the identification with the protagonists. Even though the study of the co-occurents
40 suggests that they are mostly positively connotated in discourse, sometimes their usage leads to the
41 victimisation of the protagonists underlying their vulnerability and the moral need of Europe and
42 Belgium to protect and help them.
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53 Because of the recommendations made by activists and as the usage of legal denominations
54 decreases (Zetter, 1991), we could expect that the mention of these terms increases in the future, at
55 least as long as the media makes a point of relaying and circulating these designations. The
56 importance of naming (Krieg-Planque, 2017: 92) and the power of denominations and designations
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encourage the media to choose the denominations used to name people on the move carefully, focusing on the different aspects that define them.

The societal interest of this work is to shed light on the mechanisms underlying news-making routines, which could explain the different discursive and linguistic processes made by the media. Moreover, this research showed the huge repertoire used to refer to people on the move, going beyond conventional terms and illustrating the efforts of the media to humanise the discourses on migration. It also shows how the meaning of a word is built and how (positive) connotations can be attached to it.

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