



ORIENTALIST BIASES IN BRITISH NEWS DISCOURSE: A LEXICAL-THEMATIC ANALYSIS OF REPRESENTATIONS OF MIDDLE EAST MIGRANTS

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The study aimed to identify lexical-thematic groups dominant in the British news discourse about illegal migration that manifest and reinforce orientalist biases. Orientalism, as stated by E.W. Said, is a special prejudiced way in which the Western world (the USA, the UK, the EU) perceives, controls, thinks, and speaks about the Middle East cultures. This social phenomenon has been an essential subject matter in post-colonial studies, particularly in sociology, cultural studies, politics, history, etc. However, there is a research gap regarding the lingual manifestation of Orientalism from the perspective of the cognitive-discursive paradigm and linguocultural studies. This study methodologically applied corpus-assisted discourse analysis to reveal how lexical distribution shapes the image of the Middle East 'Other', and then accommodated critical discourse analysis to discover how lexical-thematic groups construct discursive strategies that reinforce orientalist biases. This study might be practically important for discourse analytics and writers, who might get valuable insights about the influence of lexical distribution within the framework of the discourse on the image of the Middle East migrants. The lexical-thematic analysis of 20 BBC news articles (sized at 18,135 total words and 3,023 unique word forms) draws us to the conclusion that the majority of lexical-thematic groups related to the topic of the Middle East migration negatively influences the sentiment built around Middle East migrants, depersonalising them and manifesting a negative image. Overall, the study contributed to the understanding of Orientalism as a social and cultural phenomenon that can lingually manifest in the news discourse. For a more comprehensive and precise analysis, future research should choose a wider range of news stories. Aside from that, more study should be done using the paradigm of critical discourse analysis to contrast media discourse with migrant self-representation to challenge prevailing frames in which Middle East migrants are viewed.

ОРІЄНТАЛІСТСЬКІ УПЕРЕДЖЕННЯ В БРИТАНСЬКОМУ ДИСКУРСІ НОВИН: ЛЕКСИКО-ТЕМАТИЧНИЙ АНАЛІЗ ЗОБРАЖЕННЯ МІГРАНТІВ З БЛИЗЬКОГО СХОДУ

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Ключові слова: *Орієнталізм, постколоніальні дослідження, когнітивно-дискурсивна парадигма, корпусний аналіз дискурсу, лінгвальна маніфестація.*

Метою дослідження було виявлення лексико-тематичних груп, що домінують у британських новинах про нелегальну міграцію, які маніфестують і підсилюють орієнталістські упередження. Орієнталізм, як стверджує Е. В. Саїд, є особливим упередженим способом, у який західний світ (США, Велика Британія, ЄС) сприймає, контролює, мислить і говорить про культури Близького Сходу. Це соціальне явище є важливою темою в постколоніальних дослідженнях, зокрема в соціології, культурології, політиці, історії тощо. Однак існує прогалина в дослідженнях щодо лінгвальних проявів орієнталізму з точки зору когнітивно-дискурсивної парадигми та лінгвокультурних досліджень. У цьому дослідженні методологічно застосовано корпусний аналіз дискурсу, щоб виявити, як лексичний розподіл формує образ «Іншого» Близького Сходу, а потім застосовано критичний аналіз дискурсу, щоб виявити, як лексико-тематичні групи конструюють дискурсивні стратегії, що підсилюють орієнталістські упередження. Це дослідження може бути важливим з практичної точки зору для аналітиків дискурсу та письменників, які можуть отримати цінну інформацію про вплив лексичного розподілу в рамках дискурсу на образ мігрантів з Близького Сходу. Лексико-тематичний аналіз 20 статей новин BBC (загальним обсягом 18 135 слів і 3023 унікальних словоформ) дозволяє зробити висновок, що більшість лексико-тематичних груп, пов'язаних з темою міграції з Близького Сходу, негативно впливає на ставлення до мігрантів з Близького Сходу, знеособлюючи їх і створюючи негативний образ. Загалом, дослідження сприяло розумінню орієнталізму як соціального та культурного явища, яке може лінгвістично проявлятися в сучасному дискурсі новин. Для більш всебічного та точного аналізу в майбутніх дослідженнях слід вибирати ширший спектр новинних сюжетів. Крім того, слід провести додаткові дослідження з використанням парадигми критичного аналізу дискурсу, щоб порівняти медійний дискурс із самопредставленням мігрантів, або оскаржити панівні рамки бачення мігрантів з Близького Сходу.

Problem statement. The study of Orientalism as a special way of the Western world (*the USA, the UK, and the EU*) to think and speak about the Middle Eastern cultures has been a subject matter in a variety of academic paradigms that study social and cultural affairs: sociology, cultural studies, history, political studies, literary studies, etc. Orientalism is a cultural and social phenomenon that has not yet been thoroughly examined in terms of the linguistic means of its expression in the text, even though a great deal of scholarly research on the subject has been done within the aforementioned fields.

In general, Orientalism has become a relevant subject matter in post-colonial studies, both on an international level and within the Ukrainian scientific discourse. The central figure in studies about Orientalism is E.W. Said, who characterises this concept as a way that the Western world views, controls, and thinks about the Middle East, which leads to stereotypes and prejudices about the "Other" that are constantly in conceptual opposition to the "Self" and experiencing a certain level of inequality in multicultural societies or in the international arena [Said, 1978, pp. 15-21]. Orientalism, according to E.W. Said, is "a sieve through which the

West passes everything Eastern, and at the same time it is a Western way of dominating the East, restructuring it, and exercising power over it." [Said, 1978, p. 16].

According to S. Trojan, Orientalism is "a worldview, a way of thinking, a system of views of Europeans and the Western world on the world and societies that were previously under the colonial influence of the European metropolitan states." [Trojan, 2015, p. 345]. Orientalism continues to have a significant impact on intercultural communication, according to K. Savva (2025), where preconceptions, prejudices against Middle Eastern civilizations, and cognitive discursive techniques for creating the image of the "Other" are still prevalent [Savva, 2025, p. 77]. In addition, "contemporary intercultural communication is often carried out in conditions of asymmetry of resources and voices, where the Western view dominates and the Eastern view is portrayed as peripheral or 'Other,'" according to F. Elmenfi [Elmenfi, 2023, p. 64].

As a structural cultural formation, Orientalism is fundamentally infused with misconceptions and prejudices regarding the Middle East. For instance, M. Apic listed the following as the main Orientalist stereotypes: 1) eastern harshness and inferiority; 2) danger to the Western civilization; 3) excessive sensuality and irrationality; Using the approach of literary hermeneutics of the cultural historical school and multiculturalism, the author recognized these orientalist stereotypes by citing how "Orientals" are portrayed in Western authors' works [Apic, 2010, p. 94].

Despite extensive research on Orientalism in literary studies, modern literary hermeneutics focuses more on the interpretation of literary tropes, character construction and description, analysis of symbolic images, and plot analysis from the perspectives of the cultural-historical school and multiculturalism. Therefore, from the perspective of the cognitive-discourse paradigm and linguocultural studies, there is a research gap in contemporary linguistics regarding the linguistic manifestation of Orientalism and its structural components, particularly the linguistic means by which Orientalism manifests itself through lexical-thematic groups that shape the image of the Middle East.

Aim of the research. Our study aims to identify the lexical-thematic groups that are dominant in British news discourse about migrants, while manifesting orientalist biases, reinforcing them further, and creating a negative image of the Middle East migrants in both British news discourse and in readers' cognitions.

Thus, our main **research tasks** are: 1) to collect linguistic material that represents the domain of Middle East migration in contemporary British news discourse; 2) categorise collected material into specific lexical-thematic groups; 3) to accommodate qualitative critical discourse analysis to find out how lexical-thematic distribution in news discourse manifests orientalist biases about Middle East migrants;

Research object. Orientalism and orientalist biases in contemporary British news discourse.

Research subject. The lexical-thematic groups that manifest and reinforce orientalist biases in contemporary British news discourse.

Main findings. Generally speaking, Orientalism possesses certain terminological polysemy across post-colonial studies. To be more specific, in E.W. Said's fundamental work "Orientalism", the author defines it from different perspectives: 1) "studies of the Middle Eastern cultures conducted by the representatives of the Western world; 2) the corpus of orientalist texts about the Middle Eastern cultures; 3) discourse about the Middle Eastern cultures; 4) the mental foundation on which Western people think about, perceive, and talk about the cultures, peoples, and ethnicities of the Middle East, typically conveying a biased image of the East." [Said, 1978, pp. 15-21].

Our study accommodates the notion of Orientalism as a biased way in which the Western world perceives the Middle East, in consideration with our research being focused on how orientalist biases linguistically manifest themselves in the British news discourse and reinforce a rather negative image of Middle Eastern migrants. In particular, our study aims to identify how lexical-thematic groups connected with the Middle East migration construct a biased negative image of the migrants and migration from the Middle East to the UK.

In the theoretical framework of our study, lexical-thematic groups, according to A.G. Nikolenko, are defined as "words joined together by common contextual associations within the framework of the sentence and reflect the interlinking of things and events in objective reality" [Nikolenko, 2007, p. 238].

However, considering that we are working with the news discourse of British mass media, we argue that it is essential to perceive lexical-thematic groups as words joined together by common contextual associations within the framework of texts, which are considered to be "structural-semantic and communicative unities" according to G. Eyvazli [Eyvazli, 2022, p.179].

Since our study employs the analysis of 20 news articles by British mass media, it is more appropriate to take a broader notion into account – "discourse". The dictionary of the cognitive-discursive paradigm terminology by A.P. Martyniuk understands "discourse" as "situationally conditioned intersubjective speech and mental activity aimed at mutual orientation in social contexts based on giving the language form semiotic significance" [Martyniuk, 2012, p. 11].

Considering our study aims to discover lexical-thematic groups in the British news discourse about migrants to prove the key role they play in shaping social views of the Middle East 'Other', we argue that discourse is a cultural, cognitive, pragmatic, and social phenomenon. What's more, whenever we talk about 'orientalist' texts within the news discourse, we sug-

gest understanding them as the ones capable of shaping social power asymmetry, constructing the negative sentiment of “the Other”, reinforcing stereotypes and biases, and developing negative attitudes towards the Middle East migrants. To be more precise, a range of studies in critical discourse analysis (CDA) and the cognitive-discursive paradigm support our view of the discourse.

For example, there is a wide variety of approaches to viewing discourse, but this study applies the semiotic approach that is widely used in CDA, which has three key branches to it: sociocognitive, sociocultural, and sociosemiotic. Taking this into account, in the framework of the semiotic view of discourse, it is perceived as the linguistic reflection of social reality [Martyniuk, 2012, p. 12].

Furthermore, R. Wodak states that discourse is “a form of social practice. The definition of discourse as a social practice implies the existence of a dialectical relationship between a particular discursive event and the situation, institution, and social structure that frames it: consequently, the discursive event takes on a certain form, but in turn, it also gives form to it. In other words, discourse is socially conditioned – it constitutes situations, objects of knowledge, social identities, and relations between people and groups of people. It is fundamental both in the sense that it maintains and reproduces the social status quo, and in the sense that it allows it to be transformed” [Wodak, 1997, p. 3].

The ideas mentioned above are further supported by I.V. Sytnyk, who, in his study of discourse, applies T.A. von Dijk’s approach to understand it as “a complex communicative phenomenon that includes a text (spoken or written) and extra-linguistic factors (addressee’s goals, thoughts, attitudes, and knowledge about the world) that are necessary for understanding the text.” [Sytnyk, 2020, p. 124].

Thus, if we consider certain points mentioned in this section of our study, discourse has a capacity not only to linguistically reflect intersubjective social mindsets, culture, and biases but also to have an influence on their formation. As a result, Orientalism, as the mental foundation on which different biases manifest, can be reflected in the discourse, particularly by lexical-thematic groups that manifest orientalist senses about the Middle East migrants and frame them as ‘different’ and ‘others’.

Methodology. The study adopts a mixed-methods approach and combines quantitative corpus-assisted discourse analysis with qualitative critical discourse analysis (CDA). The methodology of the study is selected in order to identify high-occurrence lexical-thematic groups in British news discourse on the Middle East migration, and to interpret the results of data collection through theoretical lenses of Orientalism and post-colonial studies.

More precisely, our study design consists of two components: 1) a quantitative component that estab-

lishes the frequency and the distribution of key lexemes in their corresponding lexical-thematic group; 2) a qualitative component that accommodates critical discourse analysis (CDA) to examine the discursive functions of lexical-thematic groups and ideological implications in the context of news articles.

Data collection has been conducted in a few stages.

1. 20 British news articles (sized at 18,135 total words and 3,023 unique word forms) were carefully selected in terms of their relevance to migration, asylum seeking, and border control in the context of the UK; their thematic focus on migrants coming from the Middle East; being published in high-circulation British news media (BBC, The Guardian); their genre being a news report.

2. URL links to articles were then uploaded into the VoyantTools online platform, which automatically creates a simulation of a linguistic corpus, which makes data collection and analysis more accurate.

3. Lexical items were identified through both manual reading of news articles and the implementation of the linguistic corpus simulation SEARCH function.

4. Lexical items were stratified into their lexical-thematic groups by the criteria of their contextual meaning in the framework of the news article; their discursive functions, semantic similarity, and contribution to the framing of migration.

To be more specific, the data collection focused on 1) nouns and noun phrases related to migration and migrants; 2) lexemes related to movement and border crossing; 3) legal and administrative terminology related to migration policies and notions of illegality; 4) securitising vocabulary and vocabulary related to punishment.

Each lexical item was then counted as a token, with all occurrences being recorded to ensure accurate frequency measurement. Furthermore, some of the broader contextual examples were collected to support our qualitative interpretation of the data.

When the data was collected, the data analysis was conducted through the calculation of the overall frequency of each lexeme, the cumulative frequency of lexical-thematic groups, and the distribution of groups in the set of data.

Then the quantitative data were interpreted in order to conduct the qualitative discourse analysis, examining lexemes in context while emphasising collocations and lexical patterns, and evaluative and semantic implications.

The analysis of 20 BBC news articles (sized at 18,135 total words and 3,023 unique word forms) about the Middle East migrants has proven to be useful in terms of identifying how the lexical distribution in those news articles demonstrated that British news discourse about migrants frames migration through a variety of topics such as securitisation, notions of illegality, and administrative control, while marginalising the Middle

East migrants. Furthermore, gendered representations reinforce orientalist hierarchies by framing migrant women as passive victims of sexual violence who urge Western protection, whereas male migrants are often framed as sex offenders, criminals, and individuals who are generally described using the lexical-thematic group of illegality.

It has been decided to stratify lexemes into 6 lexical-thematic groups (LTGs): 1) illegal movement; 2) asylum and management; 3) crime and punishment; 4) deportation; 5) gendered vulnerability; 6) crisis and protest. Generally speaking, over 90% of lexical attention is focused exactly on illegality, control, punishment and removal, which can be seen in further details in Table 1. The following data demonstrates high lexical density around migration-related nomination, with strong repetition of key labels and evaluative notions

LGT 1: “**Illegal movement**” frames migrants primarily as law-breaking, irregular, and undocumented individuals who violate borders and control. Certain discursive features can be noticed: 1) the use of strong collocations that are often repeated in common contexts like *‘illegal migrants,’ ‘small boat crossings,’ and ‘irregular arrivals’*; 2) these lexical occurrences frame migrants as illegal, undocumented, and irregular trespassers, especially if we consider that one of the most representative lexical unities here is *‘boats’* (56 occurrences) that the Middle East migrants use for illegal channel crossings.

LGT 2: “**Asylum and management**” shapes the image of the Middle East migrants as an administra-

tive burden managed by the state. This lexical-thematic group is heavy on bureaucratic language (‘removal schemes,’ ‘accommodation,’ ‘dispersal accommodation,’ ‘non-contingency accommodation’) In Table 1 a high occurrence of the lexeme ‘home’ can be observed (103 occurrences). However, ‘home’ mostly implies ‘return,’ ‘removal,’ and ‘exclusion,’ which makes it oppositional to the notion of ‘belonging’ and marginalises migrants. As a result, lexemes of this lexical-thematic group make migrants framed as a ‘logistical problem.’

LGT 3: “**Crime and punishment**” is closely linked to crime, imprisonment, arrest, sexual offenses, etc., which constructs a threat narrative related to the Middle East migrants. Hence, migrants appear in news discourse as ‘objects of punishment,’ especially if we consider the words ‘migrant’ and ‘foreign’ frequently appearing in a related context with the notions of crime, prison, murder, sex offense, and other thematically related lexemes. Consequently, lexemes of this lexical-thematic group reinforce the frame ‘migration as security threat.’

LGT 4: “**Gendered vulnerability**” constructs migrant women primarily through the victimhood, shaping their image as passive, vulnerable, and exposed to such threats as rape, exploitation, and abuse. The lexemes of this lexical-thematic group frame women as individuals who lack decision-making and agency. Additionally, it has to be mentioned that women are usually framed as victims in discourse about migrants, whereas male migrants are more frequently described as criminals.

Table 1

LTGs that reflect and shape orientalist biases

LTG	tokens 1175	% of analysed lexemes	lexeme occurrences
LTG 1: Illegal movement	375	~32%	Migrant–108; migration–48; immigration–41; illegal–20; illegal immigration–11; undocumented immigration–7; immigrant–6; crossings–17; arrivals–17; boats–56; small boats–24
LTG 2: Asylum and management	333	~28%	Asylum – 101; asylum seekers – 16; asylum hotels – 12; asylum accommodation – 14; home – 103; migration scheme – 20; asylum policy – 16; visa – 41; legal – 10.
LTG 3: Crime and punishment	159	~13%	Prison – 55; foreign offenders – 19; arrest – 10; crime – 8; murder – 7; sex offender – 20; sex – 13; sexual offense – 9; violence – 18;
LTG 4: Gendered vulnerability	100	~8%	Women – 25, violence – 18; sexual violence – 8; sexual offense – 9; psychological violence – 3; physical violence – 6; man – 25; sex slaves – 2; abuse – 4;
LTG 5: Deportation	71	~6%	Return policy – 15; deport – 14; deportation – 10; removal – 12; country – 20;
LTG 6: Crisis and protest	37	~3%	Migration crisis – 14; immigration crisis – 8; asylum-based protests – 10; migration protests – 5;

LGT 5: “**Deportation**” frames migration as a temporary, reversible, and undesirable presence. To be more specific, migrants are constructed as removable ‘*bodies*’ in this lexical-thematic group. Moreover, the repeated use of the phrase ‘*go back to their/his/her country*’ reproduces colonial spatial hierarchy, reinforcing a strong ‘*us vs. them*’ territorial dichotomy.

LGT 6: “**Crisis and protest**” frames migration as a systemic breakdown, reinforcing narratives about protests, loss of control over migration, and imperfections in the regulation of migration.

Overall, the lexical distribution shows that migrant agency and voice are marginalised in British news discourse, which primarily characterizes migration through securitisation, illegality, and administrative control. By portraying migrant women as helpless victims in need of Western protection, gendered depictions serve to further uphold orientalist hierarchies.

Discussion. The analysis of 20 British news articles reveals a patterned and ideologically loaded representation of the Middle East migrants. The lexical-thematic analysis demonstrates that the image of migration is dominantly constructed through frames of illegality, violence, securitisation, and administrative control, while alternative frames (e.g., foregrounding migrant agency, contribution, and belonging to the community) in our selection of articles are rather absent.

For example, the most dominant lexical-thematic group, “illegal movement,” accounts for approximately 32% of our lexeme selection, reinforcing a discourse in which migration is primarily perceived as a violation of territorial and legal boundaries. This lexical-thematic group is rich in repeated use of nominalisations such as ‘arrivals’, ‘migration numbers’, ‘migration statistics’, and ‘channel crossings’ that suppress human agency, which might result in abstracting migrants into quantifiable phenomena, which, from a cognitive linguistic perspective, facilitates the conceptual framing of migration as a natural or mechanical process rather than a human decision shaped by geopolitical and historical forces.

Closely aligned with this is the high occurrence of the lexemes of the lexical-thematic group “Asylum and management”, which shapes and reinforces the image of migrants as a certain administrative burden that requires regulation, accommodation, and dispersal. Lexemes such as ‘scheme’, ‘accommodation’, ‘asylum hotel’, and ‘dispersal policy’, at first, might appear neutral, but they have the possibility to cause a cumulative effect, shaping the image of migrants as logistical units within state systems.

What’s more, the “Deportation” lexical-thematic group further frames migrants as temporary and removable. Frequent use of lexemes like ‘removal’, ‘deportation policies’ might strengthen spatial exclusion. Equally important, verbs such as ‘return, remove, deport’ are mostly used in passive voice, e.g., “he was

forcibly removed,” which might construct the notion of the loss of control over their own lives.

Moreover, the collected data signals about the manifestation of gender-based biases, framing migrant women as victims. While women are frequently mentioned in contexts of sexual abuse and psychological violence, exploitation, and danger, they are represented with a lack of agency in discourse. As a consequence, female migrants who fled their countries might often be framed as helpless subjects requiring Western protection, whereas male migrants are more frequently found to be represented as offenders – not victims – even though both groups escape their countries looking for better conditions.

This way, British news discourse both manifests and reinforces orientalist biases about the Middle East migrants, shaping a rather negative image of “the Other”, in particular by employing lexical choices that frame migration.

Conclusion. To conclude, this study demonstrates and elaborates on how orientalist biases manifest in British news discourse via lexical-thematic groups that are common in news articles about illegal migration. Findings reveal that the analysed articles construct the image of migration through a set of lexical-thematic groups dominated by the notions of illegality, securitisation, administrative control, removal, and victimhood.

To be more precise, lexical-thematic analysis draws us to conclusions that the majority of migration-related lexemes contribute to the formation of the negative and problem-oriented representation of the Middle East migrants, leaving little space for more positive representations.

Our study accommodated the cumulative knowledge of E.W. Said’s methodology of Orientalism and post-colonial studies, which assisted in revealing the presence of colonial ways of perceiving the Middle East migrants that end up positioned as an undifferentiated, threatening ‘Other’ whose presence in the state must be controlled, regulated, managed, or even reversed. Such representations through lexical distribution might cause the reproduction of certain sociocultural dichotomies such as civilisation versus disorder, legality versus illegality, and belonging versus social exclusion.

Overall, the findings highlight the powerful role of lexical choice in sustaining hegemonic narratives about migration and reinforcing orientalist biases stated by M. Apić.

Future studies should expand the selection of news articles for a broader and more accurate analysis. Apart from that, there should be more research in the paradigm of critical discourse analysis to compare news agencies with differing political orientations or to contrast media discourse with migrant self-representation to challenge dominant frames. It is also worth noting that it might be useful to conduct a sim-

ilar analysis from the perspective of feminist critical discourse analysis (FCDA) since the lexical-thematic group “Gendered vulnerability” revealed that there is an evaluative asymmetry in the discourse about female and male migrants.

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