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BESHLEI Olga – Candidate of Philological Sciences, Associate Professor at the Department of English, Yuriy Fedkovych Chernivtsi National University, 2, Kotsiubynskoho str., Chernivtsi, 58002, Ukraine (o.beshlei@chnu.edu.ua)

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7127-0866>

SCOPUS: 57554095600

ResearcherID: M-8359-2018

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FRAMING THE IMAGE OF UKRAINIAN REFUGEES: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF THE NEW YORK TIMES AND THE GUARDIAN REPORTS

Summary. This research investigates how the sentiment of displacement towards Ukrainian refugees is framed in contemporary media discourse. The primary aim is to analyse linguistic and pragmatic means used in 24 news articles of two media outlets representing American (The New York Times) and British (The Guardian) framing strategies to evoke such public feelings as empathy, suspicion, or neutrality. The study highlights the relationship between narrative framing and sentiment construction through stylistic means of forming public opinion.

The study employs a qualitative method involving frame analysis. It examines a corpus of European news stories produced between March 2022 and March 2025 to identify prominent frames (e.g., humanitarian, threat-based, economic burden) and the specific linguistic resources they are enacted with, including metaphors, implicature, presuppositions, and connotative language.

The paper's originality draws on its combination of sentiment analysis, framing theory, and pragmatic discourse strategies within a single model to offer a general linguistic solution to displacement stories' ideological framing. Moreover, this study is novel in its approach to highlighting changes in the representation of Ukrainians in English and American media depending on the stages of conflict development and political circumstances arising in the international arena.

The findings reveal that British media (The Guardian) tend to employ emotive stylistic devices such as metaphors, epithets, and rhetorical questions in order to emphasise the 'humanitarian frame' around the Ukrainian refugee crisis. American media (The New York Times) employs a more formal and objective tone with its abundant use of passive voice, modal verbs, and syntactic inversion, which reflects the 'bureaucratic frame' of the displacement and the resettlement of Ukrainians.

Key words: discourse analysis, frame, sentiment, image, stylistic means, manipulation, pragmatics.

БЕШЛЕЙ Ольга – кандидат філологічних наук, доцент кафедри англійської мови, Чернівецький національний університет імені Юрія Федьковича, вул. Коцюбинського, 2, Чернівці, 58002, Україна (o.beshlei@chnu.edu.ua)

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7127-0866>

SCOPUS: 57554095600

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DOI doi: <https://doi.org/10.24919/2522-4565.2025.62.2>

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ФРЕЙМУВАННЯ ОБРАЗУ УКРАЇНСЬКИХ БІЖЕНЦІВ: ПОРІВНЯЛЬНЕ ДОСЛІДЖЕННЯ СТАТЕЙ THE NEW YORK TIMES ТА THE GUARDIAN

Анотація. У статті досліджено особливості висвітлення у сучасному англомовному медіадискурсі процесу переміщення українських біженців у сучасному англомовному медіадискурсі. Головною метою є аналіз лінгвістичних та прагматичних засобів, використаних у 24 статтях двох онлайн-видань, які представляють американську (The New York Times) та британську (The Guardian) стратегії фреймування, щоб викликати такі почуття, як емпатія, підозра або нейтралітет. Дослідження підкреслює зв'язок між наративним фреймуванням та конструюванням сентименту за допомогою стилістичних засобів формування громадської думки. У цьому використано якісно-описовий метод у поєднанні з фрейм-аналізом. Розглянуто корпус новин, опублікованих між березнем 2022 та березнем 2025 років, щоб визначити основні фрейми (наприклад, гуманітарні, засновані на загрозах, економічний тягар) та конкретні лінгвістичні ресурси, за допомогою яких вони втілені, включаючи метафори, імплікатуру, пресупозиції та конотативну мову. Наукова новизна статті полягає в поєднанні аналізу настроїв, теорії фреймінгу та прагматичних дискурсивних стратегій в рамках єдиної моделі, щоб запропонувати загальне лінгвістичне рішення для ідеологічного фреймінгу. Крім того, це дослідження є новим у своєму підході до висвітлення змін у репрезентації українців в англомовних та американських медіа залежно від етапів розвитку конфлікту та політичних обставин, що виникають на міжнародній арені.

Результати дослідження показують, що британські медіа (The Guardian) використовують емоційні стилістичні засоби, такі як метафори, епітети та риторичні питання, щоб підкреслити 'гуманітарний фрейм' кризи біженців в Україні. Американські медіа (The New York Times) використовують більш формальний та об'єктивний тон з використанням пасивного стану, модальних дієслів та синтаксичної інверсії, що відображає «бюрократичний фрейм» масового переміщення та переселення українців.

Ключові слова: дискурс-аналіз, фрейм, настрій, образ, стилістичні засоби, маніпуляція, прагматика.

Problem statement. Media coverage is central to shaping public opinion. Against the backdrop of the current war in Ukraine and the resulting large-scale internal and external displacement, news outlets are the primary means by which audiences worldwide learn about Ukrainian refugees. Their representation has varied across contexts, fluctuating between humanitarian victim and economic burden frames (Zannoni, Gladun & Beshlei, 2024). These frames shape public opinion, policy traction, and integration pathways. Despite growing interest in how refugees are represented, insufficient attention is given to the stylistic and pragmatic processes by which sentiment is established, particularly from the perspective of framing theory in media discourse.

The analysis of recent research and publications. *Framing* is a crucial media strategy

for shaping perception by highlighting certain aspects of a story while downplaying others. Thematic (contextual) and episodic (individual) frames are applied by media for highlighting structural or personal causes of displacement (El-Nawawy, Elmasry & Magash, 2024). Studies revealed that Ukrainian refugees are more likely to be framed in humanitarian discourses, while African or Arab refugees are associated with security concerns (Iberi & Saddam, 2022). Language activates frames through connotative lexical choices, metaphors, epithets, and syntactic structures. News reports use expressive stylistic means such as evaluative adjectives and emotive verbs to convey positive or negative sentiment (Ajana, Connell & Liddle, 2024). For example, framing a refugee as «fleeing violence» rather than «illegally crossing borders» evokes very different cognitive responses. *Pragmatics* has a crucial

role in the way readers infer sentiment. Framing exploits shared knowledge and contextual detail to evoke specific interpretations, typically implicit and ideologically charged (Alitavoli, 2019). In this way, a certain *sentiment* is created. In the news, not only is it explicit (through emotive language), but also in how stories are framed, who they quote, and whose voices are excluded.

Aim and scope. This research aims to explore how Ukrainian refugees are framed in media discourse through linguistic and pragmatic strategies. It analyses news coverage from March 2022 to March 2025, identifies dominant frames, examines the stylistic means that establish these frames, and reflects on how sentiment is established through pragmatic cues and media ideology.

Research methods. This study employs qualitative discourse analysis to examine how British and American media outlets frame displacement sentiment towards Ukrainian refugees. In accordance with *framing theory* (Entman, 1993), this research examines how media texts select the importance of some aspects of the refugee crisis. The process takes the following steps:

- The first step involves developing a corpus of approximately 24 articles from *The Guardian* and *The New York Times*, from March 2022 to March 2025. The articles are selected according to relevance (keyword search) and emotional tone.

- In the second step, the articles are coded for dominant media frames (e.g., humanitarian, security, or bureaucratic) according to models of framing (Ajana, Connell & Liddle, 2024).

- The third step involves classifying stylistic devices, such as metaphors, epithets, hyperboles, neologisms, etc., that aid in emotional tone and ideological positioning.

Presentation of the material. To understand how British and American news outlets construct displacement sentiment towards Ukrainian refugees, we conducted a qualitative content analysis of 24 articles. From this corpus, we identified recurrent linguistic and pragmatic patterns that actively frame refugees in specific ways. Our analysis reveals the strategic deployment of various stylistic devices to maximise impact on the reader and shape their perception. These linguistic tools were divided

according to the news outlet and are categorised across several levels:

- *lexical and semantic choices*;
- *figurative language*;
- *pragmatic level*.

The discourse analysis starts with identifying frames in **The Guardian**.

Lexical and Semantic Choices. This level encompasses the selection of words and phrases, and their associated meanings, to build specific narratives and images. Our analysis consistently found the use of carefully chosen *synonyms* to evoke particular sentiments. For instance, the article *My Daughters Were Always Hugged* (2024) shared experiences of a Ukrainian refugee family in Britain, we observed a clear contrast. Words like *lucky*, *blessed*, *heartwarming*, and *exceptional* were used to describe the positive emotions associated with the kindness of host families, aligning with a '*human interest frame*'. Conversely, *challenging*, *disappointing*, and *demanding* conveyed the negative aspects of adaptation, potentially to highlight the genuine difficulties faced despite initial warmth. This interplay of positive and negative lexical items constructs a nuanced sentiment, acknowledging both support and hardship.

The strategic use of *antonyms* further emphasises contrasting experiences, contributing to a multifaceted understanding of the refugee journey. Examples from the same article include *lucky* vs. *not so lucky* (contrasting successful adaptations with instances of homelessness) and *heartwarming* vs. *disappointing* (highlighting disparities between positive reception at school and issues with medical access). The articles in *The Guardian* frequently contain *marked vocabulary*, adding stylistic or emotional colouring, which is crucial in shaping the national-linguistic picture of the world. We identified two key types:

- Emotionally colored vocabulary, represented by the words *adorable*, *angel*, *exceptional*, *heartwarming*, and *blessed*, was frequently used to convey refugees' gratitude towards their host families, fostering a sentiment of empathy and warmth.

- Evaluative vocabulary, such as the words *absolutely*, *probably one of the best*, *quite expensive*, and *very difficult*, infused the text with subjectivity, highlighting the personal and often challenging experiences of the individuals

profiled. This contributes to the construction of the ‘victimisation frame’.

Figurative language. As a powerful rhetorical device, **metaphor** describes one concept through another, creating vivid imagery and imbuing emotional stances (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). There are numerous instances: “*Uprooting the lives of more than 6 million people*” (My daughters were always hugged, 2024). This metaphor compares war to the destruction of roots, symbolising the profound loss of home and forced migration. Using metaphor in the line “The shadow of war follows them”, the author of the article *Europe Must Defend Itself* (2024) depicted war as a persistent, haunting presence, intensifying the emotional resonance of the text, suggesting ongoing trauma even after fleeing. These metaphors collectively contribute to a narrative that emphasises the profound impact of war on individuals and the necessity of compassionate responses.

Epithets often convey an emotional state or specific quality, playing a crucial role in shaping perceptions of Ukrainian refugees. For instance, the phrase “*relentless increase in the number of refugees*” in the article *Ukrainian Refugees Struggling* (2023) used in the context of the Irish Prime Minister’s struggle, highlights the perceived overwhelming nature of the influx. While seemingly neutral, such epithets can implicitly contribute to the construction of the ‘*economic burden frame*’.

At the **pragmatic level**, media outlets utilise various stylistic means not just to attract attention but to actively shape emotional responses and influence the recipient’s perspective. The strategic use of epithets, hyperboles, and comparisons, as discussed, allows editors to guide reader opinion and evoke specific reactions. The predetermined selection of words significantly impacts message perception. For this reason, media editors frequently combine psychological techniques with stylistic devices to achieve diverse communication goals. One notable goal is the *manipulation of reader emotions, perception, and the subtle substitution of facts*, often through the use of *euphemisms*. They serve to conceal undesirable or sensitive statements. The author of the article *Ukrainian refugees face losing jobs* (2025) showcases the widespread use of *conflict* instead of *war* to describe events in Ukraine:

“*About two years since the conflict erupted, ten million Ukrainians still cannot return to their homes*”. This lexical choice can pragmatically downplay the severity of the situation, potentially altering the reader’s perception of the scale and nature of the aggression.

Furthermore, pragmatic considerations extend to the introduction of new concepts within the discourse. Given that approximately 34,000 Ukrainian children are currently in the UK (as of December 2024, as cited in *The Guardian*) and face challenges in accessing quality education due to language barriers, a crucial discussion has emerged regarding the reintroduction of GCSE entrance exams in Ukrainian. A fragment from the article *Why Should I Study Russian* (2024) highlights this: “*Ukraine’s education ministry has written to the education secretary, Bridget Phillipson, to say it is ‘crucial’ to reintroduce a GCSE in Ukrainian*”. The emphasis on language being *crucial* for Ukrainian independence and identity, particularly for refugee children’s future in the UK, has led to the emergence of the concept of ‘*GCSE in Ukrainian*’. By this new concept, the interviewee refers to a proposal to introduce an examination for obtaining a certificate of secondary education in the Ukrainian language within the UK, specifically to support the education of Ukrainian refugee children. This linguistic innovation, driven by the pragmatic need to address a specific challenge, frames the educational needs of refugees as a matter of cultural preservation and future viability.

The discourse analysis continues by identifying frames in **The New York Times**. The findings revealed distinct linguistic and pragmatic patterns that frame these refugees in particular ways. A notable difference between the American style of *The New York Times* and that of British media outlets like *The Guardian* is the more pronounced emphasis on **phonetic stylistic devices** in the American press. The primary purpose of these tools is to create an emotional impact on the reader, whether positive or negative, and to quickly capture and maintain reader attention through the inherent musicality of language.

Through the recurrence of initial consonant sounds across closely placed words, **alliteration** is widely employed to create a rhythmic effect, enhance expressiveness, and make the message

more vivid. For instance, “*warplanes streaked over the once-peaceful city*” (Finding a New Home, 2022) uses the repetition of ‘p’ and ‘s’ to create a sense of foreboding, while “*slow journey west*” with its repeated ‘w’ sound reinforces the idea of a long and tiring displacement. Similarly, the ‘r’ in «*Refugee resettlement remains a real risk*» (Refugees Are Bracing, 2024) amplifies the phrase’s intensity, highlighting ongoing challenges. In other instances, alliteration contributes to a smoother reading experience. “*Some have settled in with family, and others have been embraced by Americans eager to help in the war effort*” (These Ukrainians, 2023) uses the repetition of ‘s’ and ‘c’ sounds to create a fluid rhythm, making the text more engaging. The ‘p’ and ‘t’ repetition in “*Poland took in millions of people fleeing the war in Ukraine. But a vocal minority is trying to stoke tensions*” (In Poland, 2022) adds rhythm while subtly drawing attention to the underlying societal challenges and divisions.

Assonance is the repetition of vowel sounds in proximate words, which contributes to the text’s melodiousness and emotional depth. For instance, the ‘e’ sounds in “*refugee resettlement agencies say that many refugees have arrived at their doors after sponsors bailed*” (These Ukrainians, 2023) add a sense of flow and connectedness to the narrative of ongoing challenges.

Beyond phonetic devices, *The New York Times* actively employs a wide range of **lexical and syntactic expressive means** to construct narratives and shape reader interpretation, aligning with the framing mechanisms discussed previously.

Anaphora (the repetition of a word or phrase at the beginning of successive clauses or sentences) serves to emphasise a point or create a cumulative effect. The following examples from the article *We Have to Live Now* (2024) exemplify its usage in the context of refugee expectations. The repetition of “*They were told*” in “*They were told it was easy. They were told help was waiting. All they had to do was reach Mexico and cross the border*” starkly highlights the refugees’ initial naivety and the subsequent contrast with the harsh realities they encountered. Similarly, the article *These Ukrainians Arrived* (2023) uncovered the diverse and often challenging fates of Ukrainians. In “*More of them are coming*

every month because it is working, because the stories that they are sending back to Ukraine is that this is a path worth taking”, the repeated “*because*” emphasises the strong cause-and-effect relationships driving ongoing migration.

Comparisons as a stylistic device draw parallels and evoke specific sentiments. A striking example “*If Russia’s war turns into a yearslong occupation, millions of Ukrainians could end up like Syria’s refugees, stranded in a legal, economic and emotional limbo*” (Finding a New Home, 2022) pragmatically links the potential plight of Ukrainians to the well-documented challenges faced by Syrian refugees, drawing on existing public sentiment and highlighting a dire potential future for Ukrainians, thereby eliciting concern.

On the **level of lexical choice**, *The New York Times* demonstrates a precise use of vocabulary to convey the multifaceted nature of the refugee experience. The following are examples of the most recurrent lexemes used in the article. Key nouns *exodus*, *displacement*, *crisis*, *migration*, and *victims*, are frequently used to convey the sheer scale of the situation and categorise the individuals and groups involved. Descriptive adjectives like *desperate*, *confused*, *helpless*, *harsh*, and *traumatised* are employed to effectively communicate the emotional state and profound challenges faced by refugees, aligning with the ‘*victimisation frame*’. A range of verbs, including *flee*, *escape*, *survive*, *relocate*, *struggle*, and *adapt*, are used to describe the ongoing actions and dynamic processes inherent in the refugee journey, highlighting their agency and resilience amidst adversity.

Conclusions. The framing of displacement sentiment among Ukrainian refugees in British and American media varies in patterns. The lexicographical, phonetic, syntactic, and pragmatic alternatives used lead to the different reporting strategies of British and American media regarding Ukrainian refugees. *The Guardian* employs consistently emotive lexis that emphasises the **humanitarian** and **victimisation frames** for the purpose of creating empathy and moral duty on the reader’s part. *The New York Times* focuses, however, on policy-oriented features via its lexicon. Lexical expressions such as *humanitarian parole*, *sponsorship program*, and *immigration policies* predominate, consistent with the **bureaucratic frame**. While *The New*

York Times still employs descriptive words found in the phonetic analysis, its overall semantic field is fixated on the logistical complexities of the integration process of refugees. Moreover, the news source draws attention to disparities in the treatment of Ukrainian and Middle Eastern refugees through underscored words like *civilised people* and *European-looking families*, tending to reproduce cultural prejudices in reporting and to create a ‘worthy’ versus ‘unworthy’ refugee dichotomy, subtly shaping opinion based on perceived cultural or racial

similarity. These comparative strategies exhibit divergent communication strategies: the British media draws on shared moral responsibility and empathetic involvement, while the American media relies on a legalistic discourse and institutional response to refugee crises.

Subsequent research could further extend this cross-media analysis to additional news media and national levels and explore how national immigration policies and geopolitical affinities influence framing and displacement sentiment formation.

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