

‘Refugees are streaming into Europe’: An image-schema analysis of the Syrian Refugee crisis in the Spanish and British press

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Abstract. By analysing the combination of an apparently neutral WATER metaphor, ‘flujo de refugiados / (in)migrantes’ and ‘flow of refugees / (im)migrants’, with very specific image schemas, in *El País* and *The Guardian* from 2015 to 2016, when the Syrian refugee crisis was at its peak, this study aims at uncovering the conceptualization of the refugees in two European host countries. To this aim, the study contributes to the field of anti-immigration discourse by presenting a comprehensive qualitative analysis of all the image schemas identified in the data (FORCE, PATH, UP-DOWN, CONTAINER, and BALANCE); a cross-linguistic and corpus-based, quantitative analysis of the different schemas used in the newspapers; and a study based on the left-wing press, intuitively considered to have a more pro-immigration orientation. In short, the analysis reveals how, these highly covert preconceptual structures, used as powerful ideological tools, help to shape public opinion by projecting a very clear REFUGEES AS DANGER frame.²

Keywords: Syrian Refugee crisis, image schemas, water metaphors, anti-immigration discourse, Spain, U.K.

[es] ‘Una corriente de refugiados llega a Europa’: Estudio de los esquemas de imagen en la conceptualización de la crisis de los refugiados sirios en la prensa española y británica

Resumen. Este trabajo muestra cómo la prensa de dos países de acogida, España y Reino Unido, conceptualizan a los refugiados sirios a través del uso de una metáfora aparentemente neutra, ‘flujo de refugiados / (in)migrantes’ y ‘flow of refugees / (im)migrants’, en combinación con esquemas de imágenes muy específicos. El análisis, basado en *El País* y *The Guardian* durante los años más agudos de la crisis, 2015 y 2016, presenta un estudio cualitativo y contrastivo en castellano e inglés de todos los esquemas identificados (FUERZA, CAMINO, ARRIBA-ABAJO, RECIPIENTE Y EQUILIBRIO), además de un análisis cuantitativo basado en un corpus de noticias de ideología de centro-izquierda, intuitivamente considerada más pro inmigración. En definitiva, el estudio muestra cómo los esquemas de imágenes, estructuras pre conceptuales invisibles, son utilizadas como una poderosa arma ideológica que contribuyen a configurar la imagen de los refugiados como peligro ante la opinión pública.

Palabras clave: crisis de los refugiados sirios, esquemas de imágenes, metáforas de agua, discurso anti-inmigración, España, Reino Unido.

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1. Introduction

The aim of this paper is to analyse the conceptualization of Syrian refugees in two different European host countries, Spain and the U.K., by identifying the WATER metaphors used in the Spanish and British press during the so-called ‘refugee crisis’. More specifically, the study focuses on the image-schemas underlying the metaphorical string ‘flujo de refugiados/(in)migrantes’ and ‘flow of refugees/(im)migrants’ appearing in two mainstream centre-left wing newspapers (*El País* in Spanish and *The Guardian* in English) from 2015 to 2016.

The analysis relies on a corpus of news reports and opinion articles comprehending the years when the Syrian conflict was at its height and, therefore, the number of refugees seeking asylum in Europe at its peak from 2015 to 2016 (Álvarez-Osorio, 2016; Espinosa & Prieto, 2016). In addition to this corpus-based approach, the study integrates findings coming from (Critical) Socio-Cognitive models of discourse and metaphor (Charteris-Black, 2004, 2005; Chilton, 2004; Hart, 2010, 2011; Musolff & Zinken, 2009; Semino, 2008; Steen, 2011; Soares da Silva, 2016; Soares da Silva et al., 2017; among others), together with the general framework of Cultural Linguistics (Bernárdez, 2008; Frank et al., 2008; Sharifian, 2011, 2015; Frank, 2015). And more specifically, the analytical tools deriving from Image-Schema theory (Hampe & Grady, 2005; Johnson, 1987) and Force-Dynamics theory (Talmy, 1985, 1988, 2000) have been especially useful, as explained in section 3.

The study of anti-immigration discourse and, in particular, the conceptual metaphors impregnating it are many and impossible to summarize in these lines. In the data under analysis, Syrian refugees are usually represented within a very clear ‘enemy’, ‘conflict’ frame, and thus are: AN ARMY, THUGS, PRISONERS, MARAUDERS OR EVEN BOMBS and SWARMS; as well within negative ‘sports’ domains such as PAWNS IN A GEOPOLITICAL GAME, BASEBALLS OF TENNIS BALLS being hit by Europe, etc.³

In addition to groundbreaking work coming from Critical Discourse Analysis on anti-immigration discourse (Wodak & Van Dijk, 2000; De Fina, 2003; Van Dijk, 2008, 2018; Zapata-Barrero, 2009), many recent studies show how massive human displacements seem to be conceptualized through different NATURAL FORCES and WATER metaphors that depict immigrants as an uncontrollable force or threat (El Refaie, 2001; Santa Ana, 2002; Charteris-Black, 2006; Dervinyte, 2009; Hart, 2010, 2011; Musolff, 2015, 2018; Parker, 2015; Kopytowska & Chilton 2018; among others). Especially interesting for the data under study have been Hart’s (2010 and 2011) applications of Talmy’s Force-Dynamics to examples from the British press from 2000-2006, and Charteris-Black’s (2006) and Hart’s (2010) description of immigration to the U.K. in terms of the CONTAINER schema.

In a similar theoretical line as these works, the present study intends to show how image-schemas, cognitive structures which establish patterns of understanding and reasoning, usually derived from knowledge of our bodies and physical interactions

³ All examples from *The Guardian* (30/07/2015 to 6/9/2016) and Baek (2016).

with our environment (Johnson, 1987; Sharifian, 2015) contribute, as ideologically covert cognitive and discursive strategies, to create a specific conceptualization of immigrants in social practice.⁴ But, in addition, this research pushes the field of anti-immigration discourse forwards by offering in addition: a comprehensive qualitative analysis of all the image schemas identified in the data (FORCE, PATH, UP-DOWN, CONTAINER and BALANCE); a cross-linguistic and corpus-based, quantitative analysis of the different schemas used in the newspapers; and a study based on the left-wing press, intuitively considered to have a more pro-immigration orientation than right-wing newspapers (Charteris-Black 2006).

By analysing anti-refugee discourse, both qualitatively and quantitatively, in two European countries affected by the Syrian refugee crisis, this study throws light on the fruitfulness of integrating socio-cognitive models of language and (critical) discourse analysis, as well as on the persuasive force of image schemas as subtle but powerful ideological weapons.

To this aim, section 2 summarizes the highly complex conflict forcing Syrian citizens out of their country; section 3 describes the theoretical notions used in the analysis; section 4 presents the data and methodology; and section 5 discusses the results of the contrastive Spanish-English analysis. Finally, section 6 offers some preliminary conclusions.

2. The conflict

The outbreak of the Syrian refugee crisis seems to have been triggered in March 2011 when thousands of Syrian citizens started peaceful demonstrations against Bashar al-Asad's government in a replica of the so-called Arab Spring revolts taking place in other Arab countries such as Egypt, Libya, Yemen and Bahrein, among others. Contrary to these countries, Syrian demands for more freedom and democratic reforms did not bring political changes, but a civil war affecting not only the country but also the Middle East region in general, as well as Europe, indirectly affected by the number of refugees seeking asylum. According to Antonio Guterres, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees 2005-2015, the Syrian war is the most dangerous crisis for peace and global security since World War II (Álvarez-Osorio, 2014).

The causes for such a far-reaching conflict are many and highly complex (Dahi, 2011; Jenkins, 2014; Espinosa & Prieto, 2016; Álvarez-Osorio, 2016) and can thus be only sketched in the following lines, which intend to understand why half of the Syrian population -around 13 million people- have been displaced since 2011, 6.5 million outside Syria, as well as the impact this massive migration has had on Europe, the specific socio-historical background under study. One of the first causes of the 'refugee crisis' was the extreme cruelty with which al-Asad's government suppressed the first dissents and which rapidly helped to escalate the conflict into a full-scale civil war. The manipulation by the different parties of the highly fragmented nature of Syrian society, both ethnically and religiously,⁵ is clearly behind

⁴ In the sense of Bourdieu's (1994) concept of 'habitus', which explains metaphor and, therefore image schemas, as social and cultural products which are cognitively integrated into the community in an unconscious way rather than simple linguistic expressions.

⁵ Main ethnic groups: Arabs, Kurds, Armenian, Assyrian. Main religious groups: Muslim (Sunni, Shiite, Allawi, Ismaili, Druze) and Christian (Greek-Orthodox, Catholic, Melkite, Maronite).

the incapacity of the opposition to form a united force against al-Asad. Together with these ‘internal’ causes, the initial passivity of western countries such as USA and the EU seem to have fostered the interference of ‘external’ countries, each with its own political, geostrategic and energy interests in the area -Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Jordan, Iran and Russia, in the main-, as well as the involvement of international Jihadist groups, who have only added cruelty and suffering to the population.

The first migrations towards neighbouring countries (Lebanon, Jordan and Turkey) start as early as 2011, right after the first demonstrations, but the greatest displacements take place from 2013 to 2016. UNHCR registers 1 million Syrian refugees in 2013, when Syrian protests escalate into a civil war, over 5 million in 2015, and 6.5 million by 2017.⁶ Syrian refugees, in addition, have continuously had to change their migration routes from safer land-ways through Turkey, Macedonia and Greece to dangerous sea-routes (Turkey–Greece and Libya–Italy) in search for safety in Europe, as the EU implemented different policies and treaties⁷ which closed its borders and pushed people into even more dangerous sea-routes. These treaties have only increased the problem, stranding thousands of people in Greece, Libya and Turkey for years, as well as forcing them into the hands of smugglers and into the deadly Mediterranean.⁸

Today, this multidimensional conflict is far from envisaging a solution, on the contrary, it is still open, as internal fragmentation and chaos have grown, and the efforts of western nations and neighbouring countries since 2011 to stop the war in the many Treaties and Conferences⁹ organized to this aim have not succeeded, partly because of each country’s own geostrategic interests, but also because the main objective seems to be stopping Jihadism, rather than bringing the conflict to an end and helping to solve the biggest humanitarian catastrophe taking place in the area and the EU in the last century (Álvarez-Osorio, 2016). The results of the Syrian war, according to UNHCR Report 2018, are devastating: over 511.000 casualties, 9 million internal displacements, 13.1 million people in urgent need of protection in Syria, and 6.5 million Syrian citizens searching for refuge in neighbouring countries and the EU since 2011, among many other consequences, such as a decrease of 15 years in life expectancy, a whole generation lost with no education, 85.2% increase in poverty rate, etc.

Finally, it is interesting to note how both Spain and the UK have developed very similar anti-refugee discourses in spite of the real figures¹⁰ and their different immigration histories. Spain has been itself a migrating country in the last 60 years, first in post-Franco times, when thousands of Spaniards migrated to other European countries in search for a better life, and more recently from 2008 until today when thousands of highly qualified young Spaniards are migrating because of the economic crisis. This situation contrasts with the latest harsh frontier and immigration treaties signed by Spain and the EU, as one of the most frequent ‘doors’ into Europe. Britain, on the contrary, has always been a recipient nation until its decision in June

⁶ UNHCR Syria Regional Refugee Response Reports 2011-2018.

⁷ Such as the March 2016 EU-Turkey Agreement by which any person arriving illegally at Greek coasts had to be returned to Turkey.

⁸ Only in 2018, six immigrants have died each day trying to reach Europe through the Mediterranean (Huffingtonpost 30/01/2019).

⁹ The last one held at Munich 17/02/2019.

¹⁰ Total number of international migrants has stayed relatively steady: 3% since 1960 and 90% of migration to Europe takes place legally (Czaika & Haas 2014).

2016 to leave the European Union (Brexit), a decision which has changed its hosting tradition and tightened its immigration laws. The peak of the refugee crisis (2015-2016) coincides in both countries with tough austerity measures after the onset of the 2008 economic crisis and with right-wing political parties in the government: Partido Popular in Spain, and Conservative Party in the U.K., facts that might have enhanced their anti-immigration discourse and policies.¹¹

In short, in spite of the figures and magnitude of the conflict, the European Union has remained impassive, caught in a double discourse. On the one hand, the discourse of solidarity, based on human rights' and international humanitarian law, and realized through the many treaties the EU has held since 2011 to give asylum and distribute the Syrians arriving at our borders.¹² And on the other, the real facts, all European countries bargaining with the number of refugees they have accepted to shelter and summarized in a very clear anti-refugee discourse permeating the whole ideological spectrum of the press, including the left, which is the object of this study.

3. Theoretical background

As mentioned in the introduction, this study follows a cognitive, anthropological or cultural approach to image-schemas (Zlatev, 1997, 2007; Sinha & Jensen, 2002; Hampe, 2005, Sharifian, 2011, 2015). Within this framework, image-schemas are understood as preconceptual structures which directly arise from bodily experience, the interactions with our physical environment and our manipulation of objects (Johnson, 1987; Lakoff, 1987; Talmy, 1988), but also as "cognitive structures which establish patterns of understanding and reasoning, [...] and which are often elaborated by extension from knowledge [...] of our experience of social interactions" (Sharifian, 2015, pp. 474).¹³ The approach adopted in this paper thus draws on the recent trend in cognitive linguistics which assumes that much of the embodiment on which conceptual systems are based is near-universal, but, at the same time, cross-linguistic and cultural differences can be depicted based on the different socio-cultural and historical contexts (Palmer, 1996; Bernárdez, 2008; Frank et al., 2008; Sharifian, 2011, 2015; Frank, 2015).

The image schemas identified in the data, namely FORCE, UP-DOWN, PATH, CONTAINER and BALANCE (Talmy, 1985; Johnson, 1987; Lakoff, 1987; Clausner & Croft, 1999), as explained in the contrastive analysis in section 5, have been especially useful to explain the political-ideological metaphorical strategies used by *El País* and *The Guardian* to construe a similar conceptualization of Syrian citizens as a 'dangerous flow that must be stopped'. More specifically, FORCE schemas, as preconceptual structures which relate to our experience of how physical entities interact with respect to force, including the exertion of and resistance to force, the blockage of force, and the overcoming of force, (Talmy 1985, 1988, 2000; Johnson 1987), have proved to be helpful in understanding the conceptualizations behind anti-immigration discourse (Hart, 2010, 2011). Concepts such as 'causing', 'letting', 'helping', 'trying', and 'hindering', among others (Talmy, 1988, 2000), explain how and why refugees have been forced

¹¹ Spain has hosted 16% -2792 out of the 17387 it compromised to shelter-, and the U.K. 50% -10.000 out of the 20.000 it agreed on (UNHCR Syria Refugee Response Report 2018).

¹² *Ibid* 7.

¹³ The concept of *cultural image schema* (Palmer, 1996; Sharifian, 2008, 2011) comes very close to the use of image schema followed in this study.

to leave their country, as well as the effects of their arrivals to European borders. And the prototypical force scenario, involving at least an ‘agonist’, on which force is exerted, and an ‘antagonist’, the object or entity exerting force on the agonist (Talmy, 1985, 1988), is highly prolific in the data under study. Regarding *PATH* schemas, all three components of the prototypical motion event or ‘schematic path’ characterization are present in the data: beginning, middle and end (Jackendoff, 1990; Zlatev, 1997, 2007). This schema, we will see, shows with great detail the routes refugees are taking, where they are arriving at, and how they are travelling. *UP-DOWN* or *SCALE* schemas (Johnson, 1987) project refugees as a vertical mass of water, in which the upper pole is clearly negative and the lower positive. Different realizations of the three-dimensional *CONTAINER* schema (Johnson, 1987; Charteris-Black, 2006) have also served to depict immigrants as a threatening content and Europe as a fragile container that, together with *BALANCE* schemas, which depict refugees as an unsustainable physical load, contribute to enhance a very clear *DANGER* frame.

Moreover, the study is also based on one of the cognitive linguistics’ foundational premises, the idea that language construes the world in a particular way depending on the specific context, speaker’s/writers’ purpose, interlocutors, etc. of the communicative act, and that it, therefore, provides different ways of directing attention to certain aspects of what we are talking about or viewpoints (Langacker, 1987). This idea is especially relevant in the analysis of image-schemas since, as extremely subtle, covert cognitive structures which help to construe specific conceptualizations of non-physical realities, they have the power to provide a particular perspective on especially salient subject matters in a specific language and culture, and to function as latent norms of conduct (Kövecses, 2015, Hart, 2015), as is the case of the anti-refugee discourse under analysis. In addition, as cognitive strategies conceptualized below the level of awareness, image schemas are especially powerful ideological tools for persuasion (Charteris-Black, 2006; Hart, 2010; Author, 2018). This would explain why the Spanish and British press is making extensive use of image-schemas, in addition to other negative metaphors, intentionally construing a very specific image of Syrian refugees as potential danger.

Finally, image schematic representations of Syrian refugees seem to be a paradigmatic case of *body-based and socially constructed* metaphor (Kövecses, 2015), since they have been constructed under the pressure of coherence deriving from physically embodied conceptualizations -image-schemas- within a specific socio-historical context, namely, the worse human migrations taking place in Europe in the last century.

4. Corpus and methodology

The *REFUGEES/(IM)MIGRANTS ARE WATER IN MOTION* metaphor was chosen because of its pervasiveness in anti-immigration discourse in general (El Refaie, 2001; Santa Ana, 2002; Charteris-Black, 2006; Dervinyte, 2009; Hart, 2010, 2011; Musolff, 2015, 2018; Parker, 2015; Kopytowska & Chilton 2018; among others), as well as in the data under study. Within the *REFUGEES ARE WATER IN MOTION* metaphor, the corpus of analysis focuses on all the contexts of occurrence of the metaphorical expressions ‘flujo de refugiados/(in)migrantes’ and ‘flow of refugees/(im)migrants’ appearing in two mainstream, quality centre-left wing newspapers (*El País* in Spanish and *The Guardian* in English) from 2015 to 2016. The timespan corresponds, as explained in

section 2, to the years the Syrian conflict was at its height and, therefore, the number of refugees seeking asylum in Europe highest (Álvarez-Osorio, 2016; Espinosa & Prieto, 2016). *El País* and *The Guardian* were selected as datasets not only because of their political orientation, as explained in the introduction but also because of their digital facilities and wide range of readers.¹⁴ Within the newspapers, all news reports and opinion articles were analysed for this two-year period, leaving blogs, reader's comments and other texts such as video transcripts, captions, etc. out of the analysis.

In order to analyse the pervasiveness of the REFUGEES IS WATER IN MOTION metaphor, the data search was organized in two stages. First, all possible WATER sources were searched for within different Spanish and English thematic dictionaries¹⁵ and then checked in both newspapers by means of Google Advanced Search and each of the newspapers' search engines within the exact strings: 'X of refugiados/refugees' and 'X of (in)migrantes/(im)migrants', where X stands for all the sources found in the dictionaries: 'flow of refugees', 'tsunami of (im)migrants', etc. Both terms, 'refugees' and '(im)migrants', were searched for because, even though they have different denotations and obligations within international law, in the case under study they are used for stylistic reasons and to avoid repetitions in the main. All sources identified in the dictionaries and corroborated in the search engines from January 2015 to December 2016 are shown in Table 1 from more to less frequent:

Table 1. Articles mentioning exact string 'X of refugees/(im)migrants' 2015-2016 in *El País* & *The Guardian*.

<i>El País</i>			<i>The Guardian</i>			Total
Term	Articles		Term	Articles		
FLUJO	134		FLOW	246		380
OLA OLEADA	47 67	114	WAVE	73		187
AVALANCHA	48		AVALANCHE	3		52
INUNDACIÓN ALUVIÓN	5 18	23	FLOOD	26		49
GOTEO	31		TRICKLE	9		40
RÍO RIADA	5 12	17	RIVER STREAM	3 13	16	33
MAREA	11		TIDE	15		26
OCÉANO	2		SEA	10		12
TSUNAMI	0		TSUNAMI	4		4
TOTAL	380			393		773

¹⁴ *El País* (1.1 mill) and *The Guardian* (3,4 mill) daily readers (*Similarweb* Ranking and Pamco Audience Membership for Publishers 2018).

¹⁵ *Roget's Thesaurus* 2004 ed. and *Diccionario Temático del Español*, R. del Moral 2013.

As can be seen in Table 1, FLUJO/FLOW is the most frequent source domain found within the conventional metaphor REFUGEES ARE WATER IN MOTION, as it appears at least once in 380 articles, more than double than the next source domain in the corpus, OLA/WAVE, with 187 occurrences. This is the main reason why the source domain FLUJO/FLOW was chosen for the second stage of the search. In this second stage, rather than analysing the exact string of words ‘flujo de refugiados/(in)migrantes’ and ‘flow of refugees/(im)migrants’, the search was broadened to contexts in which the source FLUJO/FLOW could appear in the same clause or paragraph of any of its targets: ‘refugees’ and/or ‘(im)migrants’. This procedure not only elicited all the contexts containing the exact string, but it also increased the number of occurrences of the metaphor in the corpus (see Table 2). The analysis of the broader and more flexible syntactic/semantic patterns or co-texts, coincides with Stefanowitsch’s (2006) ‘metaphorical pattern analysis’ of metaphor identification: “a multiword word expression from a given source domain into which one or more specific items from a given target domain have been inserted” (ibid, pp. 66). Examples of these metaphorical patterns from more fixed to freer are:

- (1) EU-Turkey summit to focus on stemming flow of migrants to Europe (TG32-7/3/2015)¹⁶
- (2) The EU executive has announced proposals to attract more qualified foreigners to work in Europe as part of a wider effort to fill skills gaps and stem migrant flows (TG25- 7/6/2016)
- (3) UNHCR spokeswoman Sunjic said “It is like a big river of people, and if you stop the flow, you will have floods somewhere” (TG31- 19/10/2015)

This second corpus consisted of 420 news reports, 200 articles or hits containing the lexeme ‘flujo’ in the same context as ‘refugiados and/or(im)migrantes’ from *El País* (EP) and 220 for ‘flow’ + ‘refugees and/or ‘(im)migrants’ from *The Guardian* (TG) within the timespan 1 January 2015 - 31 December 2016. Next, these 420 articles were ‘cleaned’ for repetitions, blogs, reader’s opinions, captions, etc., leaving only news reports and opinion articles. The whole texts were read in order to make sure the use of ‘flujo de refugiados/(in)migrantes’ and ‘flow of refugees/(im)migrants’ was metaphorical (Steen et al.’s 2010 MIPVU identification procedure), as well as to eliminate references to refugees’ crisis other than Syrian taking place worldwide during the same period.

Once each sub-corpus (*El País* and *The Guardian*) was retrieved, manually read and cleaned, a total of 307 instances of the metaphorical string were identified, 157 in EP and 150 in TG. For the final analysis, seven examples from *El País* were randomly eliminated in order to balance both subcorpora, and so the total number of articles, metaphorical contexts, words per sub-corpus, image schemas, and metaphorical density/thousand words per newspaper or sub-corpus are summarized in Table 2:

¹⁶ Abbreviations: TG - *The Guardian*, EP - *El País*. First digits correspond to number within corpus, and the second to date of publication.

Table 2. Number of articles, metaphors corpus length¹⁷, and metaphorical density.

Paper	Hits/Articles	Metaphors	Image schemas	Words	Metaphor density
<i>EP</i>	200	150	205	138.779	1,47
<i>TG</i>	220	150	253	161.563	1,56
Total	420	300	258	300.342	1,52

Each metaphorical string or pattern was individually analysed and classified according to the image schemas elicited by its co-text, that is, the metaphorical structures based on very basic physical-embodied experiences -such as FORCE, CONTAINER, PATH, UP-DOWN, and BALANCE- and which help to explain not only physical phenomena, but also psychological and social ones as the Syrian exodus under study (section 2). To this aim, it is interesting to note that, as explained in section 5, many contexts show a concatenation of several image schemas -they are multi-schematic-, as can be seen, for instance, in example (4), in which CONTAINER, FORCE and PATH are projected by means of the noun ‘closure’, the verb ‘speed’, and the preposition ‘through’ respectively:

- (4) A temporary pressure valve emerged on Wednesday on Serbia’s border with Croatia, after Croatia’s prime minister, Milanović, condemned Hungary’s border closure and promised to help speed the flow of refugees through his country if necessary (*TG*63- 16/9/2015)

This concatenation of schemas explains why there are more schemas than contexts. In addition, to these multi-schematic contexts, we also find instances of schema-overlapping or mergings, that is, the presence of more than one schema within the same lexeme, as is the case of example (5), in which *canalizar* ‘channel’ projects both PATH and FORCE, and *disminuir* ‘decrease’, ‘reduce’ UP-DOWN and FORCE simultaneously, as in example 5. In these cases, explained in the analysis of the data in section 5, only one schema was taken into account for the sake of methodological simplicity.¹⁸

- (5) El plan (...) contribuirá a canalizar el flujo de refugiados de Siria hacia las costas del Egeo, (...) y disminuir el flujo de Turquía hacia Europa (*EP*95-27/3/2016)
‘The plan (...) will contribute to channel the flow of refugees from Syria to the Aegean (...) and to reduce the flow from Turkey to Europe’

Finally, the classification of the data into 5 specific image-schemas (FORCE, PATH, UP-DOWN, CONTAINER and BALANCE) made it possible to compare in detail their frequencies by means of a chi-square test, as well as to describe the different conceptualizations of Syrian refugees in the two newspapers thoroughly, the main aim of this work.

¹⁷ Article length ranges from 297 to 1765 words in *El País*, and 385 to 2021 in *The Guardian*.

¹⁸ As can be seen in examples (4) and (5), even though the construal of the image schemas underlying the anti-refugee discourse under study relies mostly on verbs, all word classes were considered in the analysis.

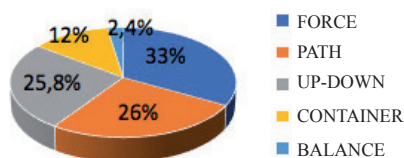
5. Image-schemas contrastive analysis and results

The following section describes, both quantitatively and qualitatively, the image schemas identified in the two sub-corpora, *El País* (EP) and *The Guardian* (TG). Table 3, and Figures 1 and 2 below summarize the quantitative findings on which the analysis is based. Table 3 presents the frequencies of image schemas in raw and percentage frequencies per 150 articles;¹⁹ and Figures 1 and 2 give an overall picture of these frequencies in both sub-corpora.

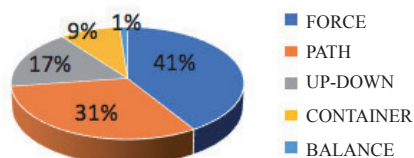
Table 3. Image schemas' raw frequencies (*Rf*) and percentages.

	FORCE		PATH		UP-DOWN		CONTAINER		BALANCE		SCHS
	<i>Rf</i>	%	<i>Rf</i>	%	<i>Rf</i>	%	<i>Rf</i>	%	<i>Rf</i>	%	
<i>EP</i>	68	33,1	54	26,3	53	25,8	25	12,1	5	2,4	205
<i>TG</i>	104	41,1	80	31,6	43	16,9	23	8,9	3	1,1	253
	172	37,5	134	29,2	96	20,9	48	10,4	8	1,7	458

El País



The Guardian



Figures 1 & 2. Image schema percentages in each subcorpus.

Before describing the specific quantitative and qualitative differences in the conceptualization of Syrian refugees in each newspaper, some general, bird's eye view statistical information is necessary. First, as mentioned in the methodology in section 3, *The Guardian* sub-corpus is bigger than *El País* (161.563 vs. 138.779 words), but the difference in metaphorical density is not relevant, 1,56 image schemas related to 'flow of refugees/(im)migrants' identified per thousand words in *The Guardian* and 1,47 in *El País*. And second, even though the chi-square test results comparing the different image schemas in each newspaper were on the limits of statistical relevancy ($p > 0,054$),²⁰ both qualitative and quantitative differences were detected, as summarized below.

¹⁹ See Table 2 for metaphorical density per thousand words and corpus length.

²⁰ Results that would probably change with a broader study including a wider timespan and a wider ideological spectrum.

5.1. Force schemas

The most productive schema found in the data analysed is by far *FORCE*, representing 37,5% (172) of the total data (see Table 3); an amount that is especially noticeable in the case of *The Guardian (TG)* 41,1% (104) in comparison with *El País (EP)* 33,1% (68).

Following Talmy's (1985, 1988) basic *FORCE*-schema frame (section 3), Syrian refugees are conceptualized, both by *El País* and *The Guardian*, as agonists in the main, but also contexts with refugees pictured as antagonists were identified.

5.1.1. Refugees as agonists

Of the 172 *FORCE* schemas found in the data, 157 (91,2%) project refugees as agonists – 99 cases (95,1%) in *TG* and 58 (85,2%) in *EP*-. The agonists' (refugees') inherent tendency towards motion, trying to escape war, death and hunger, is kept at rest by a stronger force, the antagonists (European countries, razor-wire barriers, borders, fences, frontiers, controls, etc.), which clearly hinder their movement. The verb *stem* most frequently prompts *this image schema*,²¹ occurring 42 times in *The Guardian's* contexts, as well as verbs such as *stop* and *halt*, and *frenar* 'stop', *contener* 'contain', and *hacer frente* 'confront' in *El País*. Many euphemistic uses of verbs such as *control*, *manage*, *monitor*, *handle*, *regulate*, *check*, etc., in *TG*, and *controlar* 'control', *gestionar*, *manejar* 'manage', *organizar* 'organize', etc., in *EP*, are also found. Especially interesting within this first *FORCE*-schema are those verbs that project the *WATER* frame, such as *contener* 'contain' or *taponar* 'plug' in *EP* and *block* or *staunch* in *TG*.

Two prototypical contexts of refugees as agonists are examples 6 and 7:

- (6) La UE propone blindar Grecia para frenar al flujo de refugiados (...) La agencia de fronteras exteriores de la UE entiende (...) que el flujo es imparable (...) y que, si se tapona la salida por el norte de Grecia, los inmigrantes (...) continuarán su ruta como puedan (*EP*88 - 23/10/15)
'The EU proposes to seal Greece in order to stop the flow of refugees (...) The European agency of borders and coastal guard understands (...) that the flow is unstoppable (...) and that if the exit in North Greece is plugged, immigrants will continue their route as they can'
- (7) Austria issued its own notice that it planned to throw up barriers along the border with Slovenia, although chancellor Faymann insisted they would be to control the flow of refugees more effectively rather than stop anyone entering the country (*TG*10- 31/10/15)

A second pattern, implicit in the anti-Syrian refugees' force frame is one in which the agonists' (refugees) intrinsic tendency towards rest, living in their country, staying in a specific European country, etc., is overcome by a stronger antagonist, war, ISIS, hunger, Al Qaeda, Al-Ássad, EU borders, laws, etc., which forces them into motion, that is, migration, as in examples 8 and 9:

²¹ Original data are in italics; English translations in single quotes.

- (8) La guerra de Siria y el caos en Libia disparan el flujo de pateras (EP22 -19/4/2015)
‘War in Syria and chaos in Lebanon trigger the flow of boats’
- (9) The new barrier adds to a barbed-wire fence that ..., backed with laws threatening illegal migrants with jail, [...] forced the migrant flow towards Croatia (TG74 -20/9/2015)

The resulting pattern would come very close to what Johnson (1987) called the ‘counterforce schema’, one in which obstacles resist force; in the case under study, the agonists (refugees) are blocked, trapped between two ‘counter-antagonists’ (European frontiers and the war in Syria), as in examples 10 and 11:

- (10) More than 10,000 refugees stranded in Serbia as borders close, UNHCR says (TG30- 19/10/2015)
- (11) El Ejecutivo croata [...] pretendía presionar así a Serbia para que dejase de reconducir el flujo de refugiados bloqueados en el paso hacia Hungría (EP115- 24/9/2015)
‘The Croatian Executive (authority) intended to put pressure on Serbia to stop diverting the flow of refugees blocked at the passage to Hungary’

Example 10 is especially interesting for its clear projection of the WATER frame, depicting refugees as ships or boats stranded on land.

5.1.2. *Refugees as antagonists*

5% (5) of FORCE schemas in TG and 14,7% (10) in EP conceptualize the ‘flow of refugees/(im)migrants’ in the role of antagonists exerting a force on the European Union that will: *change* the EU, *hit*, and *menace* our societies; *raise tensions* and *open a rift* among the different European members; *have an impact* on society, tourism and economy; *break down* the system, *affect* Europe’s reception capacity, *displace* European workers, etc. Even though this schema is not very frequent, since it represents only 8,7% of FORCE schemas and 3,2% of the total image schemas in the data, it is ideologically the most overtly negative of all, permeating a very negative picture of how sheltering Syrian refugees can and will affect every single European citizen in various and threatening ways.

Finally, it is important to mention that this prevalence of FORCE schemas in the corpus, could increase if the different percentages of PATH (17,9%), UP-DOWN (46,8), CONTAINER (22,9) and BALANCE (100%) schemas that overlap with FORCE, were taken into account, as the same lexeme can sometimes project more than one schema.²²

5.2. Path schemas

The second most productive image schema present in the corpus is PATH, found in 134 contexts, that is 29,2% of the data -54 cases (26,3%) in EP and 80 (31,6%) in TG. In both newspapers, thus, there is a high incidence of contexts conceptualizing Syrian refugees in motion, exposing with great detail the exact routes this dangerous

²² See section 4 for methodological decisions.

human flow is taking, where they are arriving at, the frontiers they blocked at, and how they are travelling (on foot, by train, boat, etc.).

As explained in the theoretical section, in the data under study, all three components of the motion event or 'schematic path' characterization are present in the data: beginning, middle and end (Jackendoff, 1990; Zlatev, 1997, 2007). But, within this basic PATH schema, it is the middle²³ and end²⁴ that seems to worry journalists most. Using Langacker's (1987) concepts, it is the 'ground' or 'landmarks' (countries, borders, coasts, etc.) the 'trajector' (refugees) is traversing and arriving at that matter most. In this sense, within the 80 instances of PATH conceptualizations of Syrian refugees in *The Guardian*, 76,2% (61) specify the countries they are travelling through, where they are being held, and where they are arriving at. More specifically, 39 contexts (63,9%) mention the exact endpoint they have reached, Europe and specific European countries in most cases. It is also interesting to notice that, from these 39 path schemas detailing the schematic endpoint in *The Guardian*, 14 conceptualize Europe as a container by means of the preposition *into* instead of the more unmarked, neutral *to*. See examples 12 and 13 for this contrast, 12 depicting a neutral conceptualization of the end of the migrants' route, and 13 a clearly marked conceptualization of Europe as a container, more specifically Western Europe:

- (12) Human rights groups say returning asylum seekers from Greece to Turkey would be illegal, but the EU is desperate to reduce the flow of migrants and refugees coming to Europe (TG84 -8/3/2016)
- (13) Thousands of people clamoured to enter Croatia from Serbia on Monday after a night spent in the cold and mud, their passage west slowed by a Slovenian effort to limit the flow of refugees into western Europe (TG30-19/10/2015)

As for *El País*, even though numbers are not as striking as in *The Guardian*, 27% (15) of its PATH schemas give details on the exact point refugees are at.

Finally, as mentioned in section 5.1., in both newspapers, PATH merges with FORCE schemas (21,2% in *TG* and 18,5% in *EP*), as refugees are: *distribuidos* 'distributed', *dispersados* 'dispersed', *trasladados* 'relocated' and *desviados* 'diverted'; and, more specifically within the WATER frame, *reconducidos* 'redirected' or *canalizados* 'channelled' in *El País*, and *pushed back*, *forced towards*, *returned*, *slowed down*, *transported*, as well as *channelled* and *diverted* within the WATER frame in *The Guardian*. Example 14 shows a complex concatenation and merging of schemas in which we can see: (i) a clear PATH schema projecting the WATER metaphor, as 'refugees are streaming into Slovenia'; (ii) a merging of PATH and FORCE in the choice of the verb 'divert', that necessarily implies that the antagonist – 'border' controls or 'closures' needs to exert FORCE upon the agonists - refugees for them to move elsewhere (PATH):

- (14) Refugees are streaming into Slovenia, diverted overnight by the closure of Hungary's border with Croatia, in the latest demonstration of Europe's disjointed response to the flow of people reaching its borders (TG16- 7/9/15)

²³ Talmy's (2000) *conformation* or Svrou's (1994) and Zlatev's (1997) *region* or Jackendoff's (1983, 1990) *place*.

²⁴ Talmy's (2000) *vector*.

5.3. Up-Down schemas

20,9% (96) of the total image schemas under study picture refugees along a scale, more specifically along a vertical UP-DOWN scale (Johnson, 1987) in which UP is NEGATIVE and DOWN is POSITIVE, clearly referring to the number of refugees arriving at European borders. The incidence of this UP-DOWN schema is significantly higher in *El País*, 25,8% than in *The Guardian*, 16,2%. Within this schema, the ‘flow of refugees / (im)migrants’ is: *grande - big; enorme - enormous, huge; alto - high, intenso - massive, intense; aumentando, creciendo, ascendiendo - growing; as well as reaching record numbers, disminuyendo - diminishing, decreasing; being alleviated, curtailed, reduciéndose - being reduced, etc.*; both in *EP* and *TG*.²⁵

As in the case of PATH schemas, a substantial number of UP-DOWN schemas merge with FORCE, as we find many contexts which conceptualize refugees as an entity (agonist) that has to be reduced by exerting a force ‘from above’ (European borders, laws, politicians, etc.). This merging of UP-DOWN and FORCE is implicit in the verbs: *restringir, reducir* and *regular* in *El País*; *restrict, reduce, regulate, and curb* in *The Guardian*. *Alleviate*, is another example of UP-DOWN and FORCE merging from *The Guardian* that clearly projects the WATER domain. UP-DOWN and FORCE mergings are especially noticeable in *The Guardian*, with 67,7% of cases, in contrast to 28,3% in *El País*. Example 15 is a prototypical example of UP-DOWN schema, and 16 of an UP-DOWN - FORCE merging:

- (15) Un nuevo flujo ha resurgido en esta crisis de los refugiados que asola a la Unión Europea (*EP*121 -14/12/2015)
 ‘A new flow has emerged in this refugee crisis that is ravishing the EU’
- (16) This aid is much needed, but it is optimistic to expect it alone to curb the flow of refugees to Europe (*TG*101 -3/2/16)

5.4. Container schemas

10,4% (48) of the data show CONTAINER image schemas 8,9% (23) in *TG* and 12,1% (25) in *EP*. Emerging from very basic experiences of physical and bodily containment and boundedness, the IN-OUT orientation within a three-dimensional enclosure seems to be the most salient CONTAINER schema (Johnson, 1987). Within the data, 70,8% (34) of the contexts conceptualize Europe as a bounded container that is unable to *assimilate the flow*, that has *overflowed, exceeded* its (sheltering) *capacity*; a *porous* object that needs to protect its content (European citizens) from external forces, the *unstoppable flow*, and to *seal, tighten, and secure* its borders (in *The Guardian*). In *El País*, the EU has *desbordado, rebasado, sobrepasado* (‘overflowed’) and needs to *blindar* ‘fasten’ and *taponar* ‘plug’ its frontiers. The CONTAINER schema is, in addition, the image schema that most clearly relates to the WATER frame, as can be seen from the verbs that prompt its meaning.

Moreover, 16,6% of CONTAINER schemas (10,4% in *TG* and 6,2% in *EP*) show a further conceptualization of containment related to Johnson’s (1987) ‘transitivity of containment’, the fact that refugees are, in addition to a dangerous content ‘flooding’ Europe, a container in themselves hiding a threatening content, terrorists, who

²⁵ All real examples from data and thus in italics.

colarse ‘infiltrate’ and *camuflarse* ‘camouflage’ (in *El País*), and *hide* and must be *screened*, in *The Guardian*. Example 17 presents a prototypical context of Europe as a CONTAINER and 18 one in which refugees are a container in themselves for terrorists:

- (17) El Gobierno asegura que el flujo de llegadas sobrepasa sus capacidades [...] por la tarde se abrieron los controles, lo que ha trasladado el flujo a Croacia y, desde allí a Eslovenia (...) las medidas que se están ofreciendo a Turquía para]que contribuya a frenar los flujos de refugiados que necesariamente atravesian este país (EP10 -20/10/15)
 ‘The Government claims that the flow of arrivals overflows its capacities (...) the opening of controls has moved the flow to Croatia and to Slovenia (...) measures are being offered to Turkey to stop the flows of refugees that are necessarily crossing this country’
- (18) Partly as a result, the Jordanian government has been slowing the flow of refugees, keeping them in holding camps and screening them as security risks (TG15 -29/1/16)

5.5. Balance schemas

Finally, only 1,7% of the total number of image schemas conceptualize refugees as BALANCE, 1,1% (3) in *The Guardian* and 2,4% (5) in *El País*. Within this last image schema, the flow of refugees/(in)migrants is depicted as a burden that cannot be *supported* by the EU, as European countries cannot *cope* with it, in *The Guardian*, and *insostenible* ‘unsustainable’ and has to be *repartido* ‘shared’ among all countries, in *El País*, as examples 19 and 20 show. All BALANCE schemas merge with FORCE, since force is implicit in the frames of verbs such as *sustain* and *cope*, for instance.

- (19) Los críticos de Merkel avisan de que el flujo migratorio actual es insostenible (EP18 -15/12/15)
 ‘Merkel’s critics warn that the current migration flow is unsustainable’
- (20) Other EU countries are getting angry because they’re taking people ashore, but what are they supposed to do? [...] They can’t stop the flow, and they can’t support it (TG92 -29/12/2015)

6. Conclusions

The main aim of this paper has been to study the conceptualization of Syrian refugees in two European host countries, the U.K. and Spain, as shown in two mainstream centre-left wing newspapers during the most acute years of the Syrian refugee crisis, 2015 and 2016. By analysing the image-schemas underlying the metaphorical string ‘flujo de refugiados/(in)migrantes’ and ‘flow of refugees/(in)migrants’ in *El País* and *The Guardian*, this work wishes to push socio-cognitive and critical approaches to anti-immigration discourse forwards by applying a comprehensive qualitative analysis of all the image schemas identified in the data (FORCE, PATH, UP-DOWN, CONTAINER and BALANCE), a cross-linguistic and corpus-based, quantitative analysis of the different schemas used in each of the newspapers and cultures, as well as a study

based on the left-wing press, as already mentioned, intuitively considered to be more pro-immigration orientated.

Results show that the well-known MIGRANTS ARE WATER IN MOTION metaphor is very pervasive both in *The Guardian* and in *El País* in the conceptualization of the Syrian refugee crisis. WATER metaphors, as explained in the introduction, seem to be a constant in the depiction of massive human displacements as an uncontrollable force and threat, but the great amount and variety of water sources (FLOW, WAVE, AV-ALANCHE, FLOOD, TRICKLE, RIVER, STREAM, TIDE, SEA and TSUNAMI) identified in the data can probably be explained because of the long duration and effects the Syrian crisis has had and is having on the European Union, as well as the press' need to keep the information active and attractive for readers. A second trigger for the high number of WATER metaphors might also be the crucial role the Mediterranean Sea is playing in this conflict -one of the major and most dangerous migratory routes to Europe, with thousands of sea deaths, etc.

As for the image schema analysis triggered by this apparently neutral MIGRANTS ARE WATER IN MOTION metaphor, even though *The Guardian* and *El País* seem to use the same schemas from a qualitative point of view, some differences between both newspapers regarding both the number and typology of the metaphorical expressions have been identified: (i) FORCE schemas are the most frequent of all in both newspapers, and this is especially noticeable in *The Guardian*, with 41,1% of the image schemas identified construing Syrian refugees within a FORCE frame, most of which conceptualize refugees as a mass entity or flow (agonist) that has to be hindered, stemmed. In *El País*, FORCE is also the most pervasive schema (33,1%), but most interestingly, the number of refugees depicted as antagonists exerting a negative force on the European Union triples *The Guardian* (14,7% vs 5%). This greater insistence of *El País* on the negative effects of Syrian refugees in the country needs further analysis but could be related to the fact that Spain is one of the Mediterranean countries receiving migrants directly at its shores in their journey to other European nations. (ii) Both newspapers, in addition, show similar rates for PATH schemas (26,3% *EP* and 31,6% *TG*), which, as already mentioned, reflects an uneasiness or concern for the exact routes migrants are taking, where they are stranded at, how they are travelling; in short, how far or near this menacing flow is from our own countries and homes. (iii) Regarding UP-DOWN schemas, the Spanish newspaper focuses more than the British one on the number of migrants, the 'level of the flow', arriving in the continent, since it includes 25,8% of this sub-type of scale schemas, in contrast to the 16% found in *The Guardian*. (iv) Finally, even though less productive in the corpora, CONTAINER and BALANCE schemas also picture refugees as DANGER; CONTAINER schemas, in addition, projecting the WATER frame more than any other schema, showing the European Union as a 'porous', fragile container that is unable to 'assimilate the flow', and depicting refugees themselves as a CONTAINER for terrorists.

The role of image schemas in the discourse of immigration or refugees is thus crucial as they conform and impregnate this discourse type, even the discourse of the left-wing press. Image schemas are neither positive nor negative, they are neutral preconceptual cognitive structures used by speakers/writers for specific socio-political contexts, audiences and purposes. *The Guardian* and *El País*, from their centre-left wing stance, could have chosen among many other realizations to picture Syrian refugees; for instance, their positive contributions as qualified workers to Europe's economy, their effects on Europe's ageing population pyramid, etc.; or

their discourse and metaphors could have focused on Europe's obligations to shelter refugees and asylum seekers in need by International Law, etc. But both newspapers choose a clear anti-refugee discourse, more expected in the right-wing press.

By combining an apparently neutral WATER IN MOTION metaphor, 'flujo de refugiados/(in)migrantes' and 'flow of refugees/(im)migrants', with very specific image schemas, *The Guardian* and *El País* construe a whole DANGER frame in which migrants are a threatening flow flooding Europe, and that must be stopped at any cost before it reaches our borders. Public opinion is thus being shaped using an extremely powerful ideological tool, image schemas, especially influential because of their pre-conceptual, covert nature.

Finally, while these last lines are being written, Syrian refugees have almost disappeared from the Spanish and British press, even though still stranded in Greece, Libya and Turkey, waiting to be sheltered by Europe or for the war in Syria to end. Meanwhile, in the U.K. and Spain, politicians and the mass media are still spreading their contradictory immigration policies and discourses: 'we are doing all in our hands, but we are overwhelmed', 'refugees are dangerous for our wellbeing'.

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