

# Is the German Immigration Debate Changing? A Discourse Linguistic Approach to the German Immigration Debate. On Changes since the 1970s

Journal Article

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The national immigration debate that increased in connection with the numbers of immigrants arriving in Germany and reached its climax in summer 2015 has since dominated German newspapers and politics. A diachronic investigation of the greatest German immigration debates seems highly relevant as it can reveal possible changes in the public discourse on immigration. Moreover, social networks might give rise to further changes in the nature of the immigration debate. It appears that with immigration being and having always been the subject of heated debates, the immigration discourse offers the possibility of investigating the strong connection between language and politics like few other topics. This contribution comprises two parts: Based on a corpus linguistic analysis, the immigration discourse in German newspapers of record in 2015 will be investigated and compared to discourses on the subject in the recent past. In order to extend the scope of the analysis of change in the German immigration debates, in the second part, a discussion of the role of social media in furthering change will be provided.

## PART I | (CONTINUITY AND) CHANGE IN THE GERMAN IMMIGRATION DISCOURSE

### 1. Introduction

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**T**he German immigration debate has increased and reached its climax in summer 2015 in connection with the numbers of immigrants arriving in Germany. As there have been debates on immigration in Germany before, a diachronic investigation of the greatest immigration debates can reveal changes in the public discourse on the topic. The crucial role of social networks in this context is that they might give rise to further changes in the nature of the immigration debate. Thus, it appears that with immigration as a subject of repeated fierce debates, the immigration debate offers the possibility of investigating the strong connection between language and politics like few other topics. The main claims, here, are that on the one hand, the public discourse on immigration plays a crucial role in how people respond to the issue, while on the other hand, the characteristics of the debate mirror collective patterns of thought and socially shared knowledge as well as controversial attitudes and perceptions predominant in a particular time.

My contribution comprises two parts: Beginning with a corpus linguistic analysis of the lexis, metaphors and topoi in relevant German print articles published in the second half of 2015 and comparing them with the main results of the linguistic examination of the 1970s to 1990s debates (the so-called “Gastarbeiter-Diskurs” and “Asyl-Diskussion”) by the Düsseldorf research group led by Wengeler, conclusions will be drawn considering continuity and change in the linguistic nature of the immigration debate. The investigation will determine whether the relevant print articles of the biggest German newspapers (among them SÜDDEUTSCHE ZEITUNG, FRANKFURTER ALLGEMEINE ZEITUNG, DER SPIEGEL and DIE ZEIT) reveal any changes in the use of lexis, metaphors and argumentation patterns in the course of time.

In the second part of the article, the role of social media in furthering change in the immigration discourse will be investigated. The question will be raised whether we experience a split in the immigration discourse where essentially two discourses are being conducted at the same time (under the heading of immigration) or whether it is more appropriate to refer to it as one discourse only. As the heterogeneity of the

discourse on social media does not allow for an overall analysis of the discourse in this paper, the aim is to selectively highlight the novelty of the online discourse. Thus, exemplary contributions published on Twitter and Facebook serve as basis for a (qualitative) comparison between the discourse in German newspapers and that conducted on social media. In this context, I will also examine the phenomena political correctness, hate speech, post-truth and fake news. Extending the scope of the investigation of the immigration discourse in order to include social media serves to answer the research question at hand: Is the German immigration debate changing?

## 2. Corpus Analysis

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The corpus I will analyse consists of the relevant print articles of the biggest German newspapers SÜDDEUTSCHE ZEITUNG, FRANKFURTER ALLGEMEINE ZEITUNG, DER SPIEGEL and DIE ZEIT between 01/07/2015 and 31/12/2015. The analysed newspapers are national papers with a high circulation and are targeted at a broad readership. With DIE ZEIT and DER SPIEGEL being weekly papers and SÜDDEUTSCHE ZEITUNG and FRANKFURTER

ALLGEMEINE ZEITUNG appearing daily, different forms of news coverage are included in the corpus (i.e. weekly papers are able to devote more attention to chosen topics allowing a more differentiated reporting). Concerning the political affiliations of the investigated newspapers, the research subject includes the left-liberal SZ, DER SPIEGEL and DIE ZEIT as well as the politically conservative FAZ. Moreover, as the linguistic analysis of the earlier debates was based on these (and a few other) newspapers as well, comparability of the results concerning the language of the immigration debates is ensured.

In order to compare the language of the public immigration debate in 2015 with that of earlier debates, the use of lexis, metaphors and topoi will be analysed and contrasted, as the analysis of these linguistic levels is particularly suitable for capturing the characteristics of a discourse. This diachronic view on the discourse will further our understanding of the connection between language and politics in the field of immigration. The investigation period as portrayed in Diagram 1 below encompasses the months in which the publication counts greatly increased. In the investigation period, FAZ articles covering immigration tri-

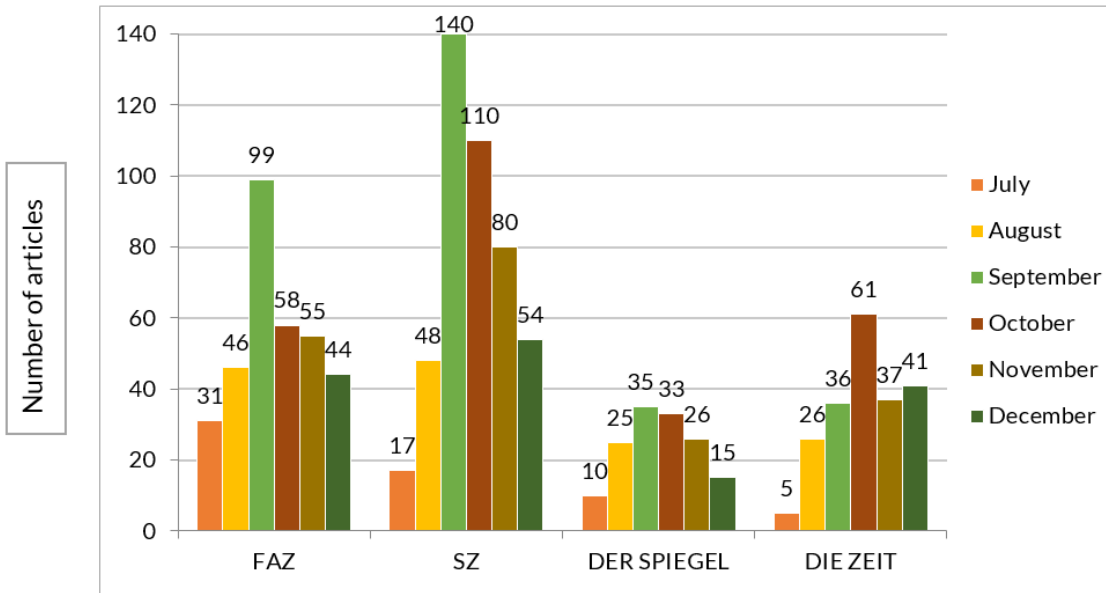
pled compared with the first half of 2015 (Diagram 2 below). This development is visible in the other newspapers as well.

With the use of the newspapers' digital archives, the print articles that appeared in the investigation period were thematically and regionally limited<sup>1</sup> and downloaded. The articles were converted into plain text and saved as a .txt file for use in the corpus tool AntConc. The final corpus consists of 1,132 articles summing up to nearly a million words of four newspapers including various text types such as report, comment and reader opinion (for details see Table 1 below).

Applying quantitative and qualitative forms of analysis, the use of lexis, metaphors and argumentation patterns in the corpus are subject of investigation. In what follows, I will sum up the most important results focussing on a diachronic view on the language of the debate.

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<sup>1</sup> For the FAZ, the relevant articles were extracted using the keyword "Asyl" (engl. "asylum") as topical limit and choosing Germany as regional limit. The corpus for SZ was built using the offered topic search "Flüchtlinge in Deutschland" (engl. "refugees in Germany") in the investigation period. The text corpora for DER SPIEGEL and DIE ZEIT were generated from the portal WISO-Presse filtering the search results for the investigation period based on the topic "Asyl" and the region "Germany".



News- paper	Number of Articles	Number of Words
SZ	449	310,507
FAZ	333	303,787
DIE ZEIT	206	218,652
DER SPIEGEL	144	165,336
<b>total</b>	<b>1,132</b>	<b>998,282</b>

Table 1 Corpus: Number of Articles and Words

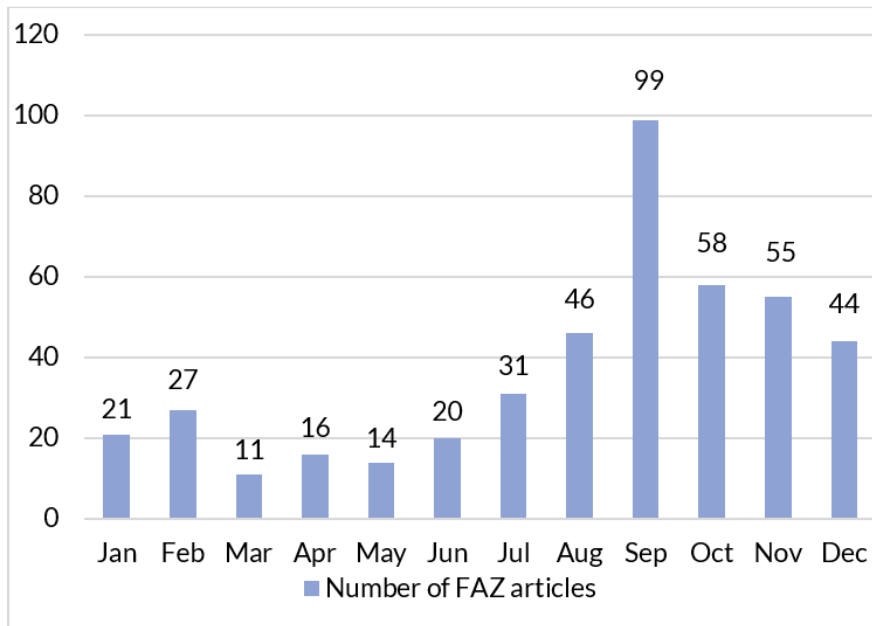


Diagram 1 (top)

Distribution of articles on immigration to the individual months and newspapers in the investigation period (01/07/15-31/12/15).

Diagram 2 (bottom)

Articles in the FAZ on the subject migration in 2015. Total number for 2015 = 442; total number for the investigation period (01/07/15-31/12/15) = 333.

## 2.1 Lexis

Frequently used and controversial lexemes in the corpus texts are essential in linguistic discourse analysis concerned with continuity and change of patterns of thoughts. Especially metalinguistic discussions about keywords resemble discussions of appropriate modes of thought on a particular subject (see Wengeler 2000: 281). In conformity with Böke's (2000: 162-163) categorisation of central discourse specific lexis, the following topical categories are relevant in the comparative discourse analysis:



A new and alternative lexeme in the corpus is *Geflüchtete*. Although the lexeme is not as dominant as *Flüchtlinge* in the corpus texts (*Flüchtlinge*: 9.966 use cases including compounds, *Geflüchtete*: 60 use cases), discourse participants used and metalinguistically discussed it (“Bezeichnungskonkurrenz”, see Girnth 2015: 74-75). The lexemes *Flüchtlinge* and *Abschiebung* are marked by a change in their evaluative meaning as they are partly discussed and complemented by lexemes with neutral evaluation such as *Geflüchtete* and *Rückführung*. Thus, in a diachronic view, for both lexemes (i.e. *Flüchtlinge* and *Abschiebung*) pejoration is notable.

2) **Lexemes that openly reject migration are often replaced by technical and more neutral terms, sometimes even by euphemisms.**

For instance, the collective name *Flüchtling* is used instead of the negatively connoted lexeme *Asylant* and *Abschiebung* is supplemented by the euphemistic term *Rückführung* (see Table 2).

Another instance of replacement of lexemes is notable in the topical category of words/ slogans used in contexts of social exclusion and rejection. In the analysed

TERMS	COMPOUNDS	FREQUENCY IN THE CORPUS
<i>Abschiebung*</i>	<i>Abschiebungspolitik, Abschiebungspapiere, Abschiebungsstopp, Abschiebungszahlen</i>	248
<i>abschieb- / abgeschob-</i>	/	51 / 122 (total number: 173)
<i>Rückführung*</i>	<i>Rückführungseinheiten, Rückführungszentrum, Rückführungsabkommen, Rückführungsquoten, Rückführungsbescheinigung/-en etc.</i>	85
<i>rückführ*/rückgeführt*</i>	/	1 / 2 (total number: 3)

Table 2

Most frequent lexemes denoting measures affecting the immigration process in the corpus.

corpus, the terms *Rassismus* and *Fremdenfeindlichkeit* replace the negatively connoted lexeme *Überfremdung* that is rarely used in the corpus for 2015 but has been central in former immigration debates (see Böke 2000: 162-163). However, at the same time negatively connoted terms such as *Flüchtlingsskrise*

and *Flüchtlingsproblem* exist in the corpus without distanced usage (see Diagram 3 and Figure 2 below).

The term *Wirtschaftsflüchtling* shows intensive linguistic criticism and amelioration in that it is often used in contexts arguing for a change in its meaning (this is the case in 69% of its use).

[...] ‘denunziatorische Begriffe’ wie *Wirtschaftsflüchtling* dienten ‘rechtsextremistischen geistigen und praktischen Brand-

stiftern als regierungsamtliche Berufungsinstanz'. [...] Der Begriff des 'Wirtschaftsflüchtlings' ist stets verbunden mit dem Vorwurf des 'Asylbetrugs'. Von den Asylbetrügern werden die 'wirklich Verfolgten' sprachlich scharf abgegrenzt. Dabei geht die Unterscheidung zwischen rein politisch Verfolgten und Wirtschaftsflüchtlingen an der Wirklichkeit vorbei.

SÜDDEUTSCHE ZEITUNG 30/07/15<sup>4</sup>

Denn wer von uns würde sich nicht auch auf den Weg machen, um seinen Kindern eine bessere Zukunft zu ermöglichen, wenn wir in so hoffnungslosen Lebensumständen leben müssten wie viele Angehörige der Roma in manchen Staaten Osteuropas? Was soll also der verächtliche Hinweis, dies seien doch 'nur Wirtschaftsflüchtlinge'?

DIE ZEIT 27/08/15<sup>5</sup>

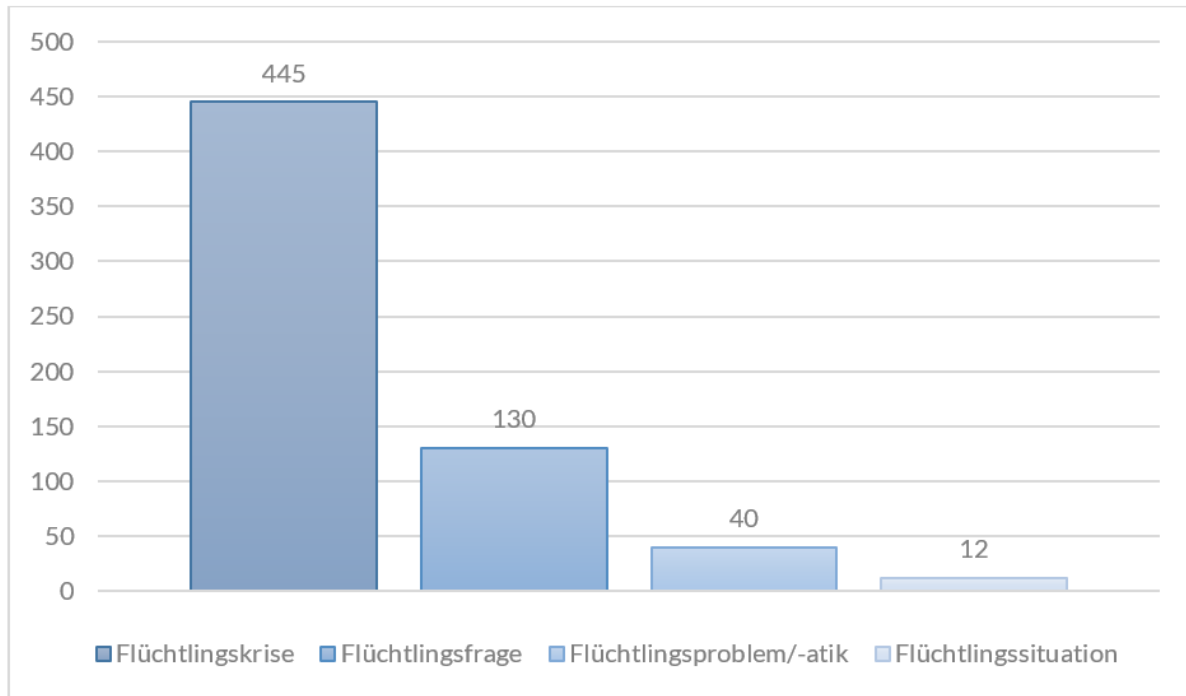


Diagram 3

Most frequent terms denoting the socio-political situation in the corpus.

## 2.2 Metaphors

Generally speaking, the function of metaphors is to represent new, complex or abstract concepts by known, simple and con-

European states? So what is this contemptuous suggestion of 'merely economic refugees'?"

crete concepts in order to make the signified plausible for the addressee. Their effects of highlighting certain aspects while hiding unfavourable ones (see Lakoff & Wehling 2014) as well as the possible use for exaggeration and dramatization or understatement and palliation constitute their subliminal persuasive power, thus making metaphors a central means in the language of politics (see Böke et al. 2000: 131). The focus for the comparative analysis is on the three

<sup>4</sup> Engl. "[...] 'denunciatory terms' such as 'Wirtschaftsflüchtling' serve extreme right-wing intellectual and practical instigators as government-issued appeal body. [...] The term 'Wirtschaftsflüchtling' is always linked to the accusation of 'Asylbetrug'. 'Asylbetrüger' and 'wirklich Verfolgte' are strictly delimited from each other linguistically. Yet, the differentiation between the politically persecuted and economic refugees is far from reality".

<sup>5</sup> Engl. "Who wouldn't set out to lead his/her children to a better future if we lived in such desperate living conditions like many people belonging to the Roma minority in some Eastern

Total No. of Collocate Types: 246		Total No. of Collocate Tokens: 2960			
Rank	Freq	Freq(L)	Freq(R)	Stat	Collocate
1	36	36	0	10.18011	bewältigung
2	3	0	3	8.81754	zwingt
3	4	0	4	8.68004	bewältigt
4	4	2	2	8.38458	dimension
5	4	3	1	8.33211	versagen
6	4	4	0	8.09507	fürchtet
7	5	4	1	8.03513	ankara
8	3	1	2	8.02399	bayerstorfer
9	18	18	0	7.64406	lösung
10	9	0	9	7.56793	bewältigen
11	7	7	0	7.52056	beginn
12	3	3	0	7.43903	europäischer
13	3	3	0	7.29817	schulden
14	3	2	1	7.23258	zuversicht
15	3	0	3	6.89154	griff
16	3	0	3	6.79369	reagieren
17	3	3	0	6.74715	überblick
18	6	6	0	6.71320	umgang
19	3	0	3	6.51498	finde
20	3	2	1	6.49561	zusammenarbeit

Figure 2

Most frequent collocations for the term *Flüchtlingskrise* in the corpus texts..

most frequent metaphorisations of migration in the 1960s to 1990s immigration debates: ‘Wasser’, ‘Militär’ and ‘Waren’ (engl. ‘water’, ‘the military’, ‘product’). All analysed metaphors in the corpus can be rated as discourse-forming as they suggest seemingly plausible options for action and coin attitudes towards the signified (here: immigrants). I will present the most important results of the comparative analysis of the metaphors in the immigration debates in the form of two central theses.

3) The source domains of the dominant metaphors in the “Gastarbeiter-“ and “Asyl-Diskurs” correlate with the most frequent metaphors in the 2015 “*Flüchtlingsdiskurs*”.

In the corpus as well as in the earlier debates, the most frequent source domain is ‘Wasser’, which is highly complex in the corpus. In addition, military, product and vehicle metaphors characterise the discourse as in the earlier debates. Nevertheless, metaphors that openly reject migration and its actors (such as *Flut*, *Überflutung*, *Schwemme*; *Invasion*) are also avoided (as was the case with negative lexemes). Strikingly, the frequent and lexicalised token *Flüchtlingsstrom* is not being critically discussed, although its context (i.e. the whole phrase or sentence) clearly realises a rejecting attitude and guidance for actions corresponding to it (see Table 3 below for clusters/n-grams for the metaphor *Flüchtlingsstrom* in the corpus texts).

Rank	Freq	Range	Cluster
1-4	7;3;2;2	3;2;1;2	<i>flüchtlingsstrom</i> + [preposition/article:] <i>nach, nicht; an; die</i>
5	2	2	<b><i>flüchtlingsstrom eingedämmt</i></b>
6-11	2;2;2;2;1	2;2;2;1;1;1	<i>flüchtlingsstrom</i> + [prep/particle/verb not action-guiding:] <i>in; von; zu; zum; nicht; sei</i>
12	1	1	<b><i>flüchtlingsstrom stoppt</i></b>
13-16	1;1;1;1	1;1;1;1	<i>flüchtlingsstrom</i> + [no action-guiding verb/no verb:] <i>2016 fortsetzt; allmählich;</i> <i>als; am</i>
17	1	1	<b><i>flüchtlingsstrom aufhalten</i></b>
18	1	1	<b><i>flüchtlingsstrom begrenzen</i></b>
19	1	1	<b><i>flüchtlingsstrom begrenzt</i></b>
20-23	1;1;1	1;1;1	<i>flüchtlingsstrom</i> + [no action-guiding verb/no verb:] <i>bereits, besonders,</i> <i>betrachten</i>
24	1	1	<b><i>flüchtlingsstrom bewältigen</i></b>
25-28	1;1;1;1	1;1;1;1	<i>flüchtlingsstrom</i> + [no action-guiding verb/no verb:] <i>diese; eine; einfach;</i> <i>eingestellt</i>
29	1	1	<b><i>flüchtlingsstrom einzudämmen</i></b>
30-42	(...)	(...)	<i>flüchtlingsstrom</i> + [no action-guiding verb/no verb:] (...)
43	1	1	<b><i>flüchtlingsstrom stoppen</i></b>
42-44	(...)	(...)	<i>flüchtlingsstrom</i> + [no action-guiding verb/no verb:] (...)
45	1	1	<b><i>flüchtlingsstrom versiegt</i></b>

**Table 3** *n*-grams for search term *Flüchtlingsstrom*\* in AntConc (*n*-grams not relevant in this context are presented in abbreviated form or are not displayed). Search term: *Flüchtlingsstrom*\*; Total no. of cluster types: 68; total no. of cluster tokens: 84.

- 4) In the corpus, metaphors mostly serve to express a great amount or surfeit of immigrants and are used in negative (e.g. *Schleuser*) to neutral contexts (only rarely in positive contexts).

For instance, the metaphor “Welle” is mainly realised with tokens such as *Welle der Hilfsbereitschaft* to denote the great amount of volunteers. Of the metaphors denoting a (too) great amount of immigrants, metaphors of the source domains ‘Wasser’ and ‘Militär’ are still dominant. Altogether, metaphors of threat (e.g. ‘Militär’: *Invasion, Ansturm, Andrang*; ‘Wasser’: *Zustrom, Strom*) are still characteristic of the immigration discourse. However, lexicalised metaphors, especially the lexicalised water metaphors, are not always perceived as metaphors anymore. Under the assumption that the use of certain metaphors could hint at their conventionality in the investigation period, the lack of critical discussions and distancing usage of the metaphors *Strom, Welle, Ansturm* and *soziale Sprengkraft* could be explained.



### 2.3 Topoi

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In order to compare the characteristic argumentation patterns in German immigration debates linguistically, the most frequent topoi of the 1970s and 1980s debates will be analysed in their use in the second half of 2015. Additionally, discourse specific topoi in the recent debate are analysed although not being as quantitatively strong as the patterns mentioned first. Thus, the investigated argumentation patterns are Nutzen/Schaden-Topos (engl. “benefit/harm topos”), Gefahren-Topos/Krisen-Topos (engl. “threat topos/crisis topos”), Humanitäts-Topos (engl. “humanity topos”), Belastungs-Topos (engl. “burden topos”), Solidaritäts-Topos (engl. “solidarity topos”), Realitäts-Topos (engl. “reality topos”), Missbrauchs-Topos (engl. “misuse topos”) and Zahlen-Topos (engl. “number topos”) (see Wengeler n.d.). Again, I will present the most important results of the comparative analysis concerning constancy and change in the language of the immigration debate in the form of two theses.

- 5) **Although not being restricted to a fixed position (with the burden topos being the only exception), the use of the analysed topoi in most cases realises an argumentation against a continued immigration.**

According to the crisis topos, immigration led to an unsafe and untenable situation in Germany in the second half of 2015. The lexeme *Flüchtlingskrise*, which has negative evaluation (“Unwertwort”, see Girth 2015), is central in this context in order to constitute immigration in public awareness as a crisis. The reality topos supports this perception. The burden topos and solidarity topos are often used for an argumentation in favour of a distribution of migrants within the EU. This argumentation is supported especially with the use of the number topos. Finally, the benefit/harm topos is mostly used for a justification of integration measures; the misuse topos supports law changes in the corpus texts (see Appendix for description and examples for crisis topos and solidarity topos from the corpus).

- 6) **The dominant topoi in the second half of 2015 are essentially consistent with the most important argumentation patterns in the 1970s and 1980s debates.**

The discussion about a limitation on new arrivals and the demand of returning migrants that started in the 1970s continues in 2015. In addition to Wengeler’s (2003: 509) main issues for the past debates ‘How can further immigration be prevented?’ and ‘How do Germans get rid of migrants?’, the economic-utilitarian question on the migrants’ benefits is the third main subject for 2015: ‘How should we evaluate migration, does Germany benefit from it?’ (a central lexeme in this connection is *Fachkräftemangel*). Claims regarding immigration in 2015 are, among other things, the distribution of migrants within the EU (solidarity topos), limitations on new arrivals, law changes as well as migrant expulsions. Equally important is the question of migrants’ integration as the condition for economic benefits of migration (benefit topos). A central lexeme here is *Integration(-maßnahmen)*, a lexeme with positive evaluation (“Hochwertwort”, see Girth 2015).

### 3. Results

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In sum, it can be demonstrated that the immigration debate in the recent past and present is substantially marked by constancy. Especially migration-specific metaphors remain unchanged as the dominant metaphorisations and source domains in the corpus correlate with the most frequent types of the comparative discourses. Similarly, known argumentation patterns (primarily benefit/harm, threat and burden) realise an anti-immigration argumentation in the corpus texts. However, in addition to previously existing argumentation patterns, a solidarity topos as well as a crisis topos occur in the current debate. Concerning lexis, remarkable change in the evaluative meaning of central lexemes that combine reference and evaluation (“Nominationsausdrücke”, see Girnth 2015) is discernible. Thus, while the current immigration debate is mainly characterised by consistency of metaphors, changes can be seen with regards to the (evaluative) meaning of lexemes and central topoi.

## PART II | FURTHER CHANGES: SOCIAL MEDIA AND THE IMMIGRATION DISCOURSE

### 4. Social Media and Social Discourses

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The potential of discourse analysis as a linguistic method lies in the possibility of investigating the relation between language and politics (and power), thereby asking not only whether language has power or not, but also when, under which circumstances, by what means over which addressees it has what kind of power (Betz 1977: 92). Social media such as Twitter and Facebook have led to an increase in the opportunities of political participation and public communication. Consequently, the influence of traditional forms of media and journalism on publicly relevant, i.e. political topics and opinions has declined. Extending the scope of the investigation of immigration discourse in order to include social media is essential because the electronic discourse on Twitter and Facebook linguistically differs from the offline discourse of the newspapers. Moreover, the inclusion of social media into discourse analysis is necessary, as their role

within public discourses cannot be neglected anymore. For instance, the influence of social media on social discourse in general can be described in terms of an increase in participants and a general opening of social discourse, as all kinds of individuals – both private and professional actors – can participate in social discourses as speakers. These parameters already reveal a change in social discourses.

The nature of discourses as inspired by Foucault and adapted for linguistic discourse analysis can be briefly described highlighting the following main characteristics:

- (1) Discourses are assemblages of consistent texts, i.e. texts belonging together with regards to content (Fraas & Klemm 2005: 3).
- (2) Discourses constitute a reference figure for individual texts, as texts do not exist in isolation, but are in association with co-existing texts (Fraas & Klemm 2005: 3).
- (3) Discourses can be defined as dialogues between texts (Fraas & Klemm 2005: 3).
- (4) Discourses are a form of “interaction in society” (van Dijk 1997: 3, qtd. in Fraas & Klemm 2005: 3).

- (5) Discourses are virtual text corpora sharing related content (Busse & Teubert 1994: 14, qtd. in Fraas & Klemm 2005: 4).

The discursive phenomena dialogue and intertextuality seem to be especially important for the research question of this contribution. Texts are oriented at other texts and relate to one another. In the same way can discourses refer to other discourses in the past or present (see Girnth 2015: 90). Taking into account the above central assumptions on the nature of linguistic discourses, do we experience a split in the immigration discourse where essentially two discourses are being conducted at the same time (under the heading of immigration) or should we refer to it as one discourse only? What evidence is there supporting or undermining these assumptions?

## 5. Evidence for One Immigration Discourse and for Two Parallel Immigration Discourses

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### 5.1 The Discourse of the Newspapers of Record

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As was shown in part 1, the immigration discourse in classical media, i.e. the newspapers of record that have been subject to investigation, tends to be rational. Newspaper articles vary due to the political orientation of the particular newspaper or the author's political opinion (especially so in the text type comment and letter to the editor). Nevertheless, the discourse in the newspapers of record is (expected to be) committed to the ideal of a rational political discourse in which arguments outweigh emotions.

Participants or speakers in the immigration discourse conducted in the quality press are a rather small number of professionals, i.e. journalists and a few readers who contribute via letters to the editor (and in the digital sphere via comments below the articles of online newspapers). Thus, the discourse in the newspapers resembles a one-way communication in that the commu-

nicative direction is largely monologic and intramedial replies are only possible in the form of letters to the editor. The conversational situation is characterised by a formal time-delayed style that is constitutive for written communication. The authors of the texts constituting the immigration discourse in the quality press are not anonymous speakers, as their full names are given in the heading of the articles. These medial characteristics of the communication situations affect the way the immigration discourse is being conducted (and cause the changing of the debate), as the analysis of the conversational situation in social media will show a very different communication type being realised on Twitter and Facebook (see Table 4 below).

### 5.2 The Discourse on Social Media: Twitter and Facebook

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Twitter being one of the leading micro-blogging services worldwide and the largest social network Facebook are two essential forums for public discourse. With approx. 12

million<sup>6</sup> Twitter users (among them registered users and unregistered recipients of tweets) in Germany and 24 million<sup>7</sup> on Facebook, the number of potential discourse participants greatly increased. Yet, not only has the number of discourse participants changed, but also the variety of users concerning partisan and non-partisan affiliations: participants in the public discourse on social media include professionals such as

journalists, political parties and politicians as well as private persons and novices – of all political or ideological orientation. Thus, the internet allows a greater participation in both the reception of news and particularly in the production of news items. Furthermore, social media complicate social discourse through the users’ sharing of a diverse range of sources via retweets, providing hyperlinks to other platforms (You-

tube, Instagram, blogs, digital newspapers and other homepages) etc. Social media users are thus reshaping information flows (see Highfield 2016: 78). Through the parameters of space and pace, the new public sphere online allows more text and a greater diversity in the range of topics.

Both Facebook and Twitter, and particularly the latter, cause a specific communication situation caused especially by its core characteristic: brevity. The distinct style has technical reasons, as each Twitter message is limited to 140 characters.<sup>8</sup> Moreover, addressing, mentioning and replying to other users is possible using the “@” sign (dialogic). Using the “#” sign users can group posts together by topic. A fast distribution of tweets is possible due to the retweet function. These functions make Twitter a more systematic, less diffuse public sphere for political discourse than Facebook.

Time-delayed communication	Almost real-time communication, rapidity
One-way communication, mostly monologic	Two-way communication possible, interactive, quasi-dialogic, contextualisation via “#”, addressing via “@”, distribution via retweet
No anonymity	Anonymity possible: real name is no obligation on Twitter and can be avoided on Facebook
Conceptually written and medially written communication situation	Conceptually oral and medially written communication situation (see Girth 2013: 119)
Limited capacity of published texts, limits to the number of pages	No limitation on length of online texts, unlimited resources (see Bucher 2005: 194)

**Table 4**

Comparison of the different communication situations in newspapers and on Twitter.

<sup>6</sup> Number of Twitter users in Germany in 2016 (“Twitter nennt erstmals Nutzerzahlen für Deutschland”, 2016).

<sup>7</sup> Number of Facebook users in Germany in 2016 (eMarketer 2017).

<sup>8</sup> The forms of communication via Twitter and Facebook vary, as tweets need to be much shorter than Facebook posts and Twitter offers greater opportunity to contextualise and address other users with the use of hashtag and “@”. Tweets are also often written under greater time pressure than posts on Facebook because Twitter communication resembles real-time communication.



**Figure 3**

Tweet by the right-leaning political party AfD with substantially reduced argumentation (engl. “#AfD #Gauland Terror in Berlin is not an isolated case and is directly linked to #Merkel Asylpolitik”).

All of the mentioned functions constitute a conversational situation that is written in terms of medium but oral in its realisation resembling a near real-time dialogical communication (see Girth 2013: 119). An important linguistic difference between the discourse in traditional media and the discourse on social media, thus, lies in the need to minimise and reduce text while maximising content.

Girth (2013: 120) points out that the language action pattern (“Sprachhandlungsmuster”) ARGUE is minimalised on Twitter resulting in a focus on facts heavily emphasising the data topos (“Datentopos”). The data topos realises the speaker’s

assumptions about the situation, which forms the basis for his/her evaluation of the situation motivating and finally resulting in corresponding political action

(see Girth 2011). The brevity and reduction of content work to the disadvantage of the language action pattern ARGUE which speakers using social media mostly do not fully execute. This is especially true for brevity demanding and accordingly often concise tweets. Since essential information in (political) argumentation patterns is omitted (i.e. political details), the justification and legitimisation of actions or corresponding attitudes in favour of or against particular political actions is insufficient, thus furthering the online discourse’s leaning towards non-rationality.

The exemplary tweet<sup>9</sup> realises the data topos without expressing the other topoi

<sup>9</sup> While the findings stated in part 1 of this paper are based on a quantitative corpus analysis, the following investigation of social media is based on a qualitative analysis. Thus, the cited exemplars in part 2 are intended to serve as examples illustrating the different setting for public discourse caused by social media.

that Klein (2010) defined for political argumentation:

- Data topos (“Datentopos”): “#AfD #Gauland Terror in Berlin is not an isolated case and is directly linked to #Merkel Asylpolitik” (see tweet)
- Principles topos (“Prinzipientopos”): security (values held by the speaker, not realised)
- Motivation topos (“Motivationstopos”): terrorist attacks by migrants coming to Germany are not tolerable (not expressed)
- Final topos (“Finaltopos”): reorient German migration policy (the speaker’s aims, not expressed)

When comparing the immigration discourse conducted in German newspapers with the electronic discourse on social media, there are (internet) phenomena that seem crucial in that they define the role of social media in furthering change in the discourse. Thus, in what follows, a brief discussion of the concepts political correctness, hate speech and post-truth together with fake news will be provided.

### 5.2.1 Political Correctness

In the recent immigration discourse offline and online, the concept of political correctness is popular. The term denotes a non-judicial norm for correct political and linguistic conduct (see Meibauer 2013:10). This language regulation aims against extralinguistic phenomena such as the suppression of minority groups. The discourse linguistic analysis of the current immigration discourse in German newspapers has shown that the term is being used as a pejorative, a “Stigmawort”, i.e. a term used by a particular (political) group with negative evaluation that is used in order to defame the political opponent or his/her point of view (Girnth 2011: n.pag.). In contrast to the immigration discourses in the 1970s and 1980s, the accusation of *Sprachsäuberung* and *Sprachpolizei* in the context of a stigmatised politically correct language, that is present in the discourse in 2015, is new (see exemplar of the corpus of newspaper texts and Figure 4).

Herfried Münkler sagt: Eine Art **Sprachpolizei** hat in Deutschland bewirkt, dass sachliche Lagebeurteilungen schwierig werden. Viele Politiker hätten Angst, den



falschen Begriff zu verwenden und sich Ärger einzuhandeln. **Flüchtlingsstrom, manche halten schon das Wort für anstößig.** [...] Wie soll ein Land eine Million Menschen integrieren, wenn es sich schon darüber verkracht, wie man **die Aufgabe nennen darf?** [...] Es gebe da diese Vorstellung, man könne durch die **Verfügung über Benennungen Probleme lösen.** Münkler muss fast lachen: Aber **sprachliche Säuberung ändert nun mal nicht die Wirklichkeit.**

SÜDDEUTSCHE ZEITUNG 12/12/15,  
emphasis added<sup>10</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Engl. “Herfried Münkler says: In Germany, a kind of language police has caused factual situation assessments to become difficult. Many politicians feared trouble for using the wrong term. Some already find the term ‘Flüchtlingsstrom’ obnoxious. [...] How should a country integrate one million people when already fighting over the right term for this task? [...] There was this idea that disposal of nomination could solve problems. Münkler almost laughs: But linguistic purge does not alter reality”.

**Figure 4**

Example tweet showing pejorative use of the term political correctness (engl. “In a few years, #Nafri will certainly be a swearword and then I won’t be allowed to order a Nafrischnitzel with Nafrisauce #politicallycorrect”).

Although the movement political correctness is present in both the discourses in traditional media and on the internet, the usage of lexemes that are controversial according to PC differs. While controversial words are avoided in the formal register of the investigated quality newspapers more often – although being a subject of discussion and differing between newspapers with disparate political orientations as well – , politically incorrect words are used in the informal or even subversive writing on Twitter and Facebook more often and more freely (see Hughes 2010: 292, qtd. in Technau 2013: 251). This also stands in connection with the perception of online platforms as semi-public, rather private

space (see Klemm/Michel 2013: 124) where free speech, that is speech not under control of the *language police*, is demanded. In this sphere, the (non-pejorative) usage of officially tabooed terms might even increase for various effects (see Technau 2013: 224): “[T]he more taboo a particular word becomes, the more likely it will survive in alternative social settings” (Andrews 1996: 400, qtd. in Technau 2013: 229).

#### Figure 5

Controversial Facebook post by a leading AfD-politician after the 2016 Brussels suicide bombings of which a terrorist group (ISIL) claimed responsibility (engl. “Kind regards from Brussels. We have just left the parliament house. Helicopters circle. The military approaches. Sirens everywhere. Apparently many deaths at the airport and the central station. But everything has nothing to do with nothing.”).

*Hat aber alles nix mit nix zu tun* (see Figure 5) is a variation of the – in the immigration debate often used – phrase *Das hat nichts mit dem Islam zu tun*. The post has been the subject of a heated discussion about agitation and irreverence in von Storch’s use of social media. The phrase is semantically vague and highly depends on the context; its intended meaning can only be deciphered with knowledge of the immigration discourse and political affiliations of the speaker. The replacement of *Islam* with the vague term *nix* (engl. “nothing”) can be interpreted as a strategy in the context of political correctness: to make an expression vague in order to pry it out of the hands of political correctness (and to ridicule PC by the frequent repetition of a phrase which can serve as an example of a distorted PC).

#### 5.2.2 Hate Speech

The informal register and anonymity characterise the communication situation on social media such as Twitter and Facebook and affect the manner in which the immigration discourse is being conducted. That is, it allows (dialogical) phenomena like hate speech, which may aim at eliciting response in the sense of flamebait. Hate speech is a concept related to that of political correctness. It can generally be defined as “speech that negatively targets people based on personal traits like religion or race” (Carroll 2015: n.pag.). Being a political term rather than a linguistic concept, hate speech is linked to a punishable offense in Germany under Germany’s criminal code (i.e. incitement of popular hatred). However, a linguistic discussion of the concept is able to strengthen our understanding of the mechanisms and power of hate speech.





**Figure 6 (top)**

Example tweet of a private user (not politician) expressing hate speech against immigrants in Germany.

**Figure 7 (bottom)**

Tweet addressing the different approaches to truth and untruth (engl. “If lies on the internet will be prohibited – are we getting a Ministry of Truth? [After all, ] someone has to sort liars from speakers of the truth”).

Linguistically, hate speech denotes the verbal expression of hate or, more generally, strong negative feelings as speech (with de Saussure’s term: parole) (see Meibauer 2013). Hate speech can be expressed in

various ways and can thus be analysed by several linguistic disciplines: pragmatics, morphology (e.g. the suffix *-ler* or *-ling* are often regarded as conventional pejorative linguistic signs) or syntax (e.g. the paradigm [SUBSTANTIVE +DIRECTION] as in *Ausländer raus!*, engl. “Foreigners out!”) (see Meibauer 2013; Stefanowitsch 2015: 12).

Figure 6 shows a tweet by a private Twitter user who, like many others, uses the social platform for the expression of political dis-content and frustration (“The most fitting farewell gift for #Gauck are complaints by all #Germans who have come to harm (...)”) (see Klemm/Michel 2013: 124) as well as hate against immigrants (“#Asylan-

ten#Migranten-Pack”). Hate speech can be seen as one factor causing a different quality of the discourse, thus furthering a split in the immigration discourse, as this phenomenon is more present in the relatively unregulated online sphere on Twitter and Facebook than in traditional media, and hate is expressed more due to the users’ perception of social networks as “private sphere” (Klemm & Michel 2013: 124).

### 5.2.3 Post-Truth

Post-truth frames the debate by appeals to emotion rather than facts and hints at the fact that the discourse relies on talking points instead of political truths and details. The increase in speed to almost real-time communication on the internet has made the fast distribution of fake news possible (cf. Figure 7).

**Fake News.** The effect of fake news, i.e. the intentional spreading of false information in order to manipulate, can be explained with frames – “conceptual structure[s] used in thinking” (Lakoff 2006: n.pag.). Every word evokes a frame and frames are strengthened with each activation (see Lakoff 2006). Especially important for the explanation of fake news is the fact that also “negating a



frame evokes the frame” (Lakoff 2006: n.pag.). Frames select new information according to our knowledge of the world and our experiences. If new information does not fit an existing frame, it will be rejected and dissipate (see Lakoff 2006; see also Wehling 2016). This selection of information which fits our worldview is an unconscious process and shows how powerful frames in political discourse are. Thus, the power of language in politics as explained by frame-semantics is this: to use language that fits a particular worldview (i.e. to activate coherent frames), e.g. a conservative/anti-immigration worldview, thus evoking it with every use. In frame-semantics, there are two kinds of facts: facts that easily fit into an existing frame (coherence) and facts that do not easily fit into a frame or do not fit at all. The distinction between facts that are true and information that is false, i.e. not a fact, thus, plays a marginal role. False information, fake news, although untrue can activate and strengthen particular frames. Even if information is classified as fake news soon after its publication, it has already had an effect on the recipients. Fake news intensifies opinions and attitudes in that it putatively confirms beliefs its recipients already have.

Social media often serve as a platform for the distribution of information (claimed the truth by speakers) as correction of the news coverage of traditional media (Figure 8 below). Together with the language action pattern RECTIFY, the speaker of the example Facebook post below uses it as a politician in order to realise his self-portrayal. Using social media, he presents himself as in touch with the people and establishes the dichotomy between “us” and “them”, i.e. the old parties and the people of which he claims to be part (*wir Bürger*, engl. “we citizens”). Moreover, the speaker claims (political and economic) expertise and morality. For the recipients, social media can serve as alternative source of information.

In context with the mutual accusation of distributing fake news in order to persuade, the term *Lügenpresse* has regained popularity. In the immigration discourse, it is used for direct reference to and distancing from the “other” discourse. The discourse participants themselves introduce a distinction between the discourse by an elite and the discourse on social media by the “citizens”.

The immigration discourse online can be regarded as an alternative discourse that provides an impetus und brings new topics and questions into the public discourse

(agenda setting). Rather than being a minority discourse, the discourse on social media influences the public discourse, which takes on topics that are actively discussed on social media. Endres (2005: 224-225) suggests referring to internet discourses with the potential of influencing the public discourse as “alternative discourse”. She names three conditions under which an alternative discourse can affect the discourse in mass media:

- (1) Both groups of discourse participants, the virtual community as well as the public, require a critical review and unfiltered information.
- (2) There are active users of social media who are both recipients and producers of texts.
- (3) While according to van Dijk minorities have no access to the public discourse, the internet offers the possibility of developing a countervailing power within the discourse providing participants of minority discourses with new participation opportunities. (Endres 2005: 224-225)

**Björn Höcke**  
9. März um 10:21 · €

Sie irren sich mal wieder ... die „Wirtschaftsexperten“ Großbritanniens Wirtschaft wuchs im Jahr 2016 um 1,8 Prozent – trotz Brexit-Beschluss. „Wirtschaftsexperten“ hatten aufgrund der positiven Abstimmung über den Austritt aus der Europäischen Union lediglich ein Prozent vorausgesagt.

Die gleichen „Experten“ sahen die Finanz- und Wirtschaftskrise nicht kommen, sie sahen die Euro-Krise nicht kommen und rieten Gerhard Schröder vor etwa 15 Jahren zur Zerstörung des Solidarsystems – auch Agenda 2010 genannt. Das Ergebnis: Heute hat Deutschland Europas größten Niedriglohnssektor und die Armut wächst.

Die Altparteien sind den Empfehlungen und Einschätzungen der „Wirtschaftsexperten“ (auch Fake-News-Produzenten genannt) zu lange gefolgt, wir Bürger bezahlen für ihre Fehler.

Der Mut der Briten, nicht auf diese „Experten“ zu hören, hat sich auszagehüt.



**Wirtschaftsexperten irren sich schon wieder:**  
**BREXIT-SCHOCK**  
**BLEIBT AUS...**

Prognostiziertes Bruttoinlandsprodukt nach dem BREXIT: **1,0%**

Tatsächliches Bruttoinlandsprodukt: **1,8%**

Alternative für Deutschland  
REAKTION IM BRITANNISCHEN LAENDER

👍 Gefällt mir    💬 Kommentieren

Anna Brosowski, Be Vo, Renate Masam und 922 anderen gefällt das.

504 Mal geteilt

Chronologisch -

Figure 8

Multimodal text on Facebook by German politician realising self-portrayal, putative correction of information and persuasion (engl. “They were wrong again ... the ‘economic experts’ In 2016, Great Britain’s economy grew by 1.8 percent – despite the Brexit resolution. Based on the favourable vote for a withdrawal from the

European Union, ‘Economic experts’ had prognosticated only 1 percent. The same ‘experts’ did not see the financial and economic crisis coming, they did not see the euro-crisis coming and advised Gerhard Schröder to destroy the solidarity system – also called Agenda 2010 15 years ago. The result is this: Today, Germany has Europe’s largest low-wage

sector and poverty increases. The old parties have been following the advice and evaluation of the ‘economic experts’ (also called producers of fake news) too long. We citizens pay for their mistakes. The Briton’s courage not to listen to these ‘experts’ has paid off.”).

As the immigration discourse conducted on Twitter and Facebook meets these criteria and has consequently become a counterbalance to traditional media, it can be assumed that the internet has facilitated the development of an alternative immigration discourse. Instead of having one clearly limited immigration discourse (in traditional media), the current discourse is being conducted on diverse platforms due to the medial changes. Moreover, the discourse in the newspapers and the online discourse mutually influence each other to some extent (intersected discourse), while at the same time the participants tend to distance themselves from each other (e.g. the use of the term *Lügenpresse* as described in this chapter). It can thus be claimed that there is evidence in support of the tendency of a split in the immigration discourse favoured by the increasing ubiquity of social media.

## 6. Conclusion

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Is the German immigration debate changing? The linguistic discourse analysis of 1,132 newspaper articles in the German quality press and the comparison of the results with national immigration discourses of the

recent past shows that the debate in 2015 is substantially marked by constancy. Nevertheless, the diachronic investigation demonstrated change on the linguistic levels lexis and topoi. In the second part of this paper, a qualitative interpretation of the different setting social media provide for online discourse(s) aimed at a supplement to the investigation of the changes of the German immigration discourse. Based on central assumptions on the nature of linguistic discourses and in face of the specific medial characteristics of the communication situation especially on Twitter, this paper arrives at the conclusion that there is indeed evidence in favour of the hypothesis that several discourses are being conducted under the heading of immigration to Germany. The two prominent ones being the discourse of the elite conducted in the quality press and being shaped by rationality, the second one being characterised as non-rational (post-truth, the nature of facts, political correctness, hate speech) and being conducted on social media such as Twitter and Facebook.

Phenomena like political correctness and hate speech as well as post-truth and fake news are relevant in this context as they exacerbate the divide in society. They further the split between an elite and the

people that feel alienated and discontent with the government's immigration policy. With mutual criticism in the context of a stigmatised political correctness and fake news working against a shared basis for discussion, a joint discourse on immigration is being prevented. The question is whether the online responses to traditional media content imply that a different discourse is taking place. As the analysis of the specific communication situation on social media (with Twitter as a prominent example) has shown great differences to the setting provided by traditional media and because the online discourse influences the discourse in the newspapers to some extent, I suggest referring to the texts published on social media as alternative discourse. In this respect, the existence of an alternative discourse in social media signifies further change in the German immigration discourse. Although the discourse on social media cannot be regarded as homogeneous because of the multiplicity of actors, the paper has shown that the specific characteristics of the communication situation on social media influence the linguistic quality of the German immigration debate. The rise of social media reduces the importance of newspapers leading to a medial change of

the immigration discourse. Thus, the current immigration discourse is being conducted on different platforms, from different kinds of actors and in linguistically diverse manners.

In summary, the analysis reveals that the German immigration debate – from the 1970s to 2017 – is undergoing several changes, the current one being provoked by a shift from traditional media to new media as an important means of (political) communication.

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## Appendix

### Description and Example of the Solidarity Topos

*Because countries are part of a bigger community, part of a confederation, they should find joint solutions for supranational questions, show solidarity and support one another in the completion of political/economic/social tasks.*

#### Premise 1

Of the EU member states, Germany has received the most immigrants in 2015.

#### Premise 2

Germany is part of the European Union.

#### Premise 3

Migration from Syria in particular is an international task.

#### Topos/argumentation pattern:

*Because countries are part of a bigger community, part of a confederation, they should find joint solutions for supra-national questions, show solidarity and support one another in the completion of political/economic/ social tasks.*

#### Conclusion 1:

It is not Germany's task alone and cannot be carried out by Germany alone to receive the majority of immigrants in the EU.

#### Conclusion 2:

Immigrants in the EU (including future immigrants) are to be distributed between all member states based upon the principle of solidarity.

#### Example of the Realisation of the Solidarity Topos in the Corpus

'Ich habe gesagt: Wir schaffen das. **Nicht: Wir schaffen das allein**', erklärt Merkel. Damit präsentiert sie seit Wochen den zweiten Pfeiler ihrer Krisenstrategie: die **europäische Solidarität**. Doch so naheliegend es wäre, die **Lasten der Flüchtlingskrise innerhalb der EU fair zu verteilen**, so wenig tut sich auf diesem Feld. Sie werde nicht nachlassen, bis jeder seine **Pflicht** erfülle, verspricht Merkel. **Entlastung** kann sie nicht verkünden. Stattdessen berichtet sie ihren Parteifreunden vom europäischen Gang: 'Es ist im Augenblick noch mühsam. Wir haben schon eine Menge erreicht. Aber wir sind längst noch nicht am Ende.' (DIE ZEIT 22/10/15, emphasis added)<sup>11</sup>

<sup>11</sup> Engl. "I said: We can make it. I haven't said: We can make it alone', Merkel explains. For weeks, she is presenting the second pillar of her crisis strategy like this: the European solidarity. However, although it might seem obvious to distribute the burdens of the refugee crisis fairly among the EU member states, little is happening in this field. She will not sustain her efforts, until everyone would carry out his/her duty, Merkel promises. She cannot proclaim relief. Instead, she

### Explanation of the Crisis Topos (variation of the threat topos typical in the investigation period)

*Because immigrants in large numbers cause an administrative crisis in the country of migration, they should be rejected and measures against continued migration should be pursued.*

#### Premise

High and sustained migration causes a crisis.

#### Topos/argumentation pattern:

A crisis constitutes a difficult and potentially dangerous situation that should be rejected and measures against its sources should be taken.

#### Conclusion:

High and sustained migration is to be rejected respectively prohibited.

tells her party colleagues the European developments: 'At the moment it is still hard. We have already achieved a lot. But we are still far from reaching our goal.'