Migration and metaphors of water:
A contrastive corpus-assisted study

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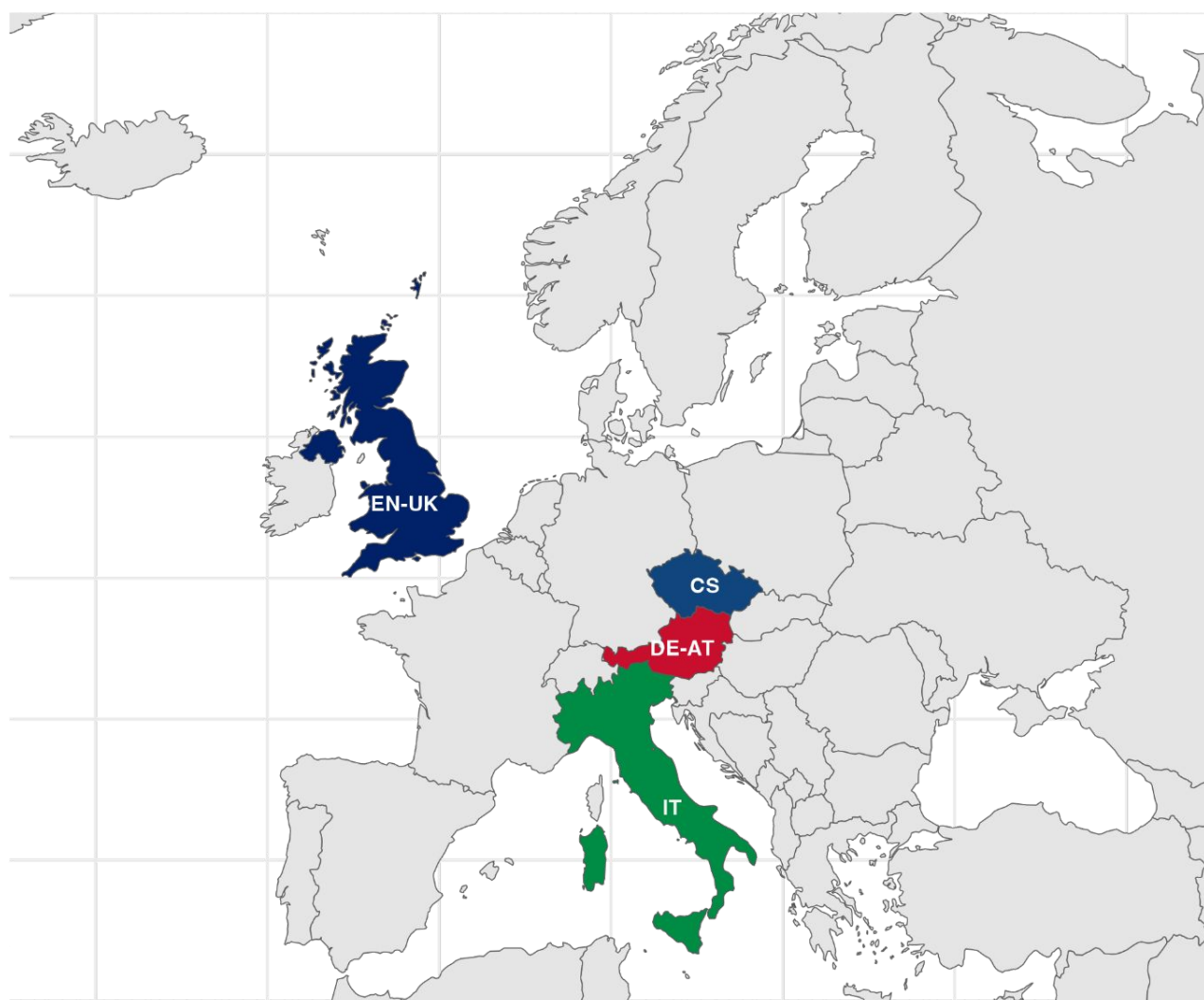Charlotte Taylor, University of Sussex – United Kingdom

Background

"Why would it be surprising with water metaphors? The UK has coast all around!"

Here:

- Two coastal countries, two landlocked.
- Two "popular" immigration countries, two not quite as "popular"

Embodiment and social cognition

➢Embodiment hypothesis: source domain water to describe external threats.
➢The nation as a (political) body: the sea as external danger is part of the social cognition in countries with sea access.
➢Following hypothesis: landlocked countries do not have this aspect of social cognition (or to a lesser extent).
➢Problem: is social cognition this homogeneous? (A person may be a national of a landlocked country but have connection to the sea, or vice versa.)
➢The hypothesis is that there is a national discourse that considers the sea conceptually part of the national narrative/consciousness. We can only give a tentative verification or falsification.

Research Questions

➢ Does living in a country with sea access influence the way water metaphors are employed?

➢ To what extent are discursive strategies picked up and used like Foucault's (1972) epistemes across speakers and languages, irrespective of their conceptual mappings?

BUT: Is there such a thing as a "national discourse" or "public opinion" for an entire country?

Data

➢ParlaMint corpora: transcriptions of country parliamentary debates 2015 to 2022 (Erjavec et al. 2023) https://www.clarin.eu/parlamint .

➢All four corpora include data from 2015 to 2022.

➢Search strings to capture RASIM: refugees, asylum seekers, immigrants and migrants in four languages.

➢Control for water words in thesauri etc.

➢Also searches for co-collocates with the RASIM names + a prominent waterphor.

Methodological Framework

➢ Cross-linguistic perspective – Cross Linguistic Corpus-Assisted Discourse Studies (Vessey 2013; Taylor & Del Fante 2020) – four countries.

➢ Three stage methodology

a. Identification of collocational patterns: co-occurrences of names for people who move (e.g. *refugees, asylum seekers, immigrants, migrants* and functional equivalents) and lexical items which might refer to WATER (e.g. *flow*, *wave* and equivalent).

b. Close reading of contexts around these examples to define a)the targets terms, b) the evaluation, c) the discourses .

c. Cross-linguistic Comparison.

Most salient collocations (in fq order)

➢DE-AT: *Strom, Zustrom, Welle, Fluss* (stream, influx/inflow, wave, flow/river)

➢CS: *vlna, příliv, proudit, proud* (tide/influx, wave, pour, stream/flow)

➢EN-UK: *flow, influx, wave, stem, flood, pour, absorb*

➢IT: *flusso, afflusso, ondata,* inondare, fiumane (flow, influx/inflow, wave/tide, to flood, torrential flood)

Austria

➢ Two main waterphors: *Strom* ('current', also pl. *Ströme* and *Zustrom* 'influx') and *Welle* ('wave').

➢ The former is connected to rivers and the latter to the sea.

➢ Where metaphors appear in the discourse around migrants or refugees, they seem to draw on land-based source domains (e.g. *Ansturm* 'onslaught, onrush or *Horden* 'hordes').

➢ Waterphors appear mainly in the discourse on Middle Eastern and African refugees (2015–2020) and hardly at all on Ukrainians -> racial differentiation / geopolitically welcome vs unwelcome migrants.

Czech republic

➢ The most common (*vlna* wave/tide and *příliv* tide/influx) occur in rivers – could verify embodiment hypothesis.
➢ But much fewer waterphors than e.g. EN, IT.
➢ Ukraine/ukrainian extremely dominating collocation for *příliv* in these texts.
➢ Discourse confirms Turkey as a EU border guard; warns of "mixing up" different kinds of refugees.
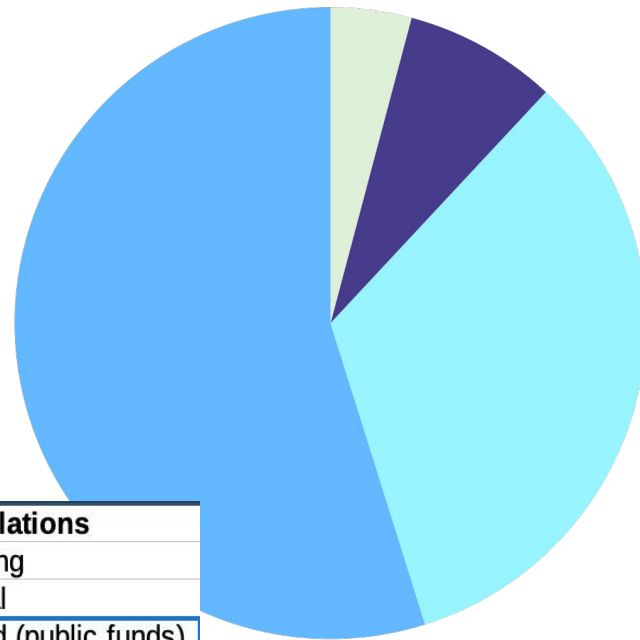
Collocations of RASIM + příliv	translations	Collocations of RASIM + vlna	translations
běženec	refugee	přejíc	wishing
ilegální	illegal	příchod	arrival
syrský	Syrian	vynakládání	spend (public funds)
Turecko	Turkey	migrační	migrational
typově	of a type	směšovat	mix up
zastavení	stem	válečný	war
záchytný	detention	turecký	turkish
azylant	asylum seeker	uprchlík	refugee
multikulturní	multi-cultural	Sýrie	Syria
rozlišení	distinguish	ukrajinský	ukrainian

Italy

➢ Waterphors are varied but unequally distributed

➢ *Flusso* (flow), *afflusso* (influx) could be related to the semantic frame LIQUID,

➢ *Ondata* (wave/tide), *inondare* (to flood) are specifically linked to the sea

➢ *Fiumane (torrential flood)* refer to a the rivers' semantic frame

➢ Most salient geographical collocates of migration names: *Malta, Grecia, Francia, Siria, [Dublino], Germania.*

➢ Second-order collocates point towards news value of superlativeness as key feature in waterphors: *massiccia/o* (massive), *enorme* (enormous).


Distribution of waterphors collocates: Italian data

- flusso (flow)
- afflusso (influx/inflow)
- ondata (wave/tide)
- inondare (to flood)
- fiumane (torrential flood)
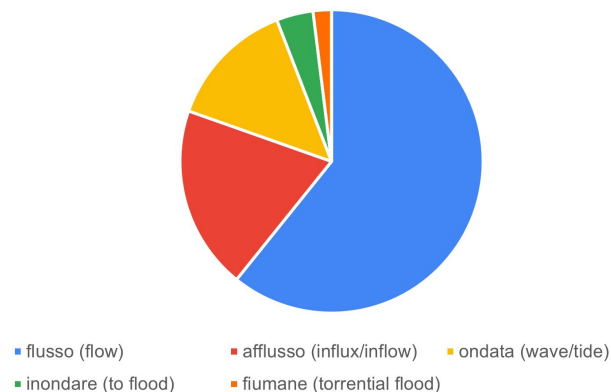
Ondata + MIGRATION te	Flusso + Migration terms	afflusso + migration terms
ondata	flusso	3,85
mattanza	migratorio	3-03190
Jugoslavia	migrante	afflusso
Serbia	clandestino	diseredato
dilagare	costa	Zelensky
massiccia	distinguere	Jugoslavia
afflusso	generare	Giordania
ondata	provenire	destabilizzazione
siriana	Libia	venezuelane
collaterali	mare	incominciare
	enorme	alleare
	fermare	emigrato
	EU	massiccio
	verso	indiscriminato
	sperare	incontrollato
	regola	prigioniero
	gestione	prolungato
	Unione	limitrofo
	crisi	Libano
	accordo	probabile

United Kingdom

➢ waterphors are varied but unequally distributed / conventionalised

➢ *wave* and *tide* point towards sea as water source but no definite pattern

➢ second-order collocates point towards news value of superlativeness as key feature in waterphors

➢ evidence that some migrants are more/less likely to be described with waterphors. Most salient geographical collocates of migration names: *Syrian*, *Syria*, **Ukrainian**, *Europe*, **Rogingya**, *Afghan*, *Calais*, *Turkey*, *Palestinian*, *Lebanon*

➢ Other frequent source domains in collocates: OBJECT, GUEST, WEIGHT

Distribution of waterphors collocates: UK data

legend: ■ flow ■ influx ■ wave ■ stem ■ flood ■ pour ■ absorb ■ surge ■ tide ■ stream
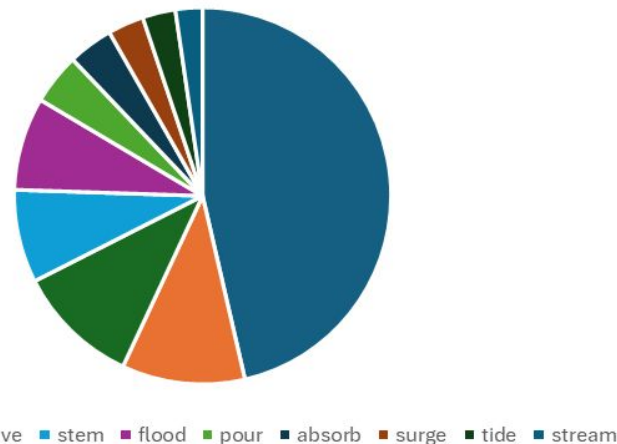
Collocates of migration names + flow	Collocates of migration names +influx	Collocates of migration names +wave
flow	influx	wave
stem	syrian	tidal
Mediterranean	enormous	migrant
Libya	bring	arrive
migrant	into	border
Turkey	such	large
illegal	from	since
massive	of	after
Syria	with	across
asylum	?	new

Conclusions

➢ All of these languages have highly frequent "waterphors".

➢ The most common in total are *flood*, *influx* and *wave.*

➢ The coastal countries seem to have a larger amount of different "waterphors" (or only English?)

➢ More countries needed – can you help?

Merci beaucoup!
Danke, Děkujeme, Grazie, Thank you!