

## Terminology of Migration Studies: A Corpus Analysis of Research Papers in Social Sciences

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### Abstract

*Migration studies is a new, rapidly developing research area whose terminology is being established at the intersection of various social sciences. This article undertakes a quantitative and qualitative analysis of terms associated with migration, conducted on a 281,000-word corpus of research articles in social sciences, published in leading academic journals. Our analysis involves corpus processing with AntConc software and semantic tagging of terms that contain the words migrant and migration, with the purpose of detecting the semantic categories that migration-related terms belong to and identifying what areas of research in the field they outline. The qualitative analysis proves two directions in migration studies, focusing on migrant communities as national groups and experience of individual migrants. Semantically, there are two approaches to studying migration: time-oriented, referring to past, present, future, and subject-oriented, e.g. geography, economy, demography, etc.*

**Keywords:** *Migration discourse; collocations; corpus linguistics; migration terms; semantic categories*

### Introduction

Globalisation and technological advancements in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries caused ‘human movement’ known as migration (see, for example, Zeng 2017). The phenomenon of migration is at the forefront of political, social and cultural debates around the world in the 21st century, attracting the focused attention of sociologists, historians, political scientists and economists, who publish their research on the topic in international academic journals. It is commonly known that the role of academia is central to the creation, shaping and (re)production not only of public opinion, but also of terminology of a certain knowledge domain, describing current trends in a particular field and determining the direction of further research.

One of the roles of a researcher is to identify terms to manifest the knowledge produced in a tangible way. Terminology production also signifies the relationships between the researcher and the researched, careful negotiations of those who actually “set” the research agenda and the experiences of shifts in knowledge position as central or peripheral in the discussions (Raheim et al. 2016). Very few studies, though, address the issue of terminology in migration studies, a new area of research.

This study undertakes a quantitative and qualitative analysis of terminology associated with migration, which is seen as ‘a single domain for specialised terminology’ (Mariani 2021, 35), conducted on a corpus of research articles in social sciences, published in leading journals.

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The goal is twofold: first, to identify migration-related terms functioning in the papers and, second, to classify them into semantic fields (Wilson and Rayson 1993) in order to detect the key aspects of the topic being researched as well as possible trends in migrations studies. In this study we focus on two-word terms, because in previous research it has been proven that two-word combinations are the most frequent terms in dictionaries of technical terminology in various subjects, as ‘when native English forms are used to create new terms, it most often takes at least two words to adequately specify a meaning’ (Justeson and Katz 1995, 13).

## **2 Literature review**

### **2.1 Linguistics and migration studies**

Rapid development of migration studies has become the subject of research itself, in order to trace theoretical and conceptual institutionalization of a new research area. The comprehensive work by Pisarevskaya and colleagues (2020) is based on topical modelling of bibliometric data, to reveal the diversity and connectedness of topics in the field. Very few studies, however, address the issue of terminology in migration studies, which, according to Amelina (2021), focuses on the processes that transform “(im)mobile individuals into ‘migrants’ and geographic movements across political-territorial borders into ‘migration’”. According to Pace and Severance (2016), migration terminology goes beyond semantics and has deeper consequences. If unaccounted for, it may contribute to the risks to the migrants’ rights or be damaging the polemics. Similar to this opinion is the conclusions by Gulina’s study (2016), based on a migration terminology analysis in Russian and German.

One of the reviews by Levitt and Jaworsky (2007) explores that, as migration scholarship as an interdisciplinary field has been changing, researchers seek to describe and analyze these dynamics and invent new methodological tools. The implication of these studies is to present promising new scholarship and highlight future research directions. Therefore, the issue of terminology analysis becomes critical, as it contributes to the resolution of ambiguities and rethinks the socio-cultural aspect in the conceptual framework of a particular line of migration research. It offers not only systematic solutions of mono- and multi-lingual language problems and translation, but also the development of multidisciplinary communication through linguistic knowledge representation and transfer, expert databases, improved theory and practice in general and in particular specialised sub-fields.

### **2.2 Linguistics, migration and media**

The functioning of migration-related words has been studied in various types of discourses, for instance, in media discourse, which is considered to play a crucial role for understanding migration and its consequences by media actors and consumers, as well as migrants and ethnic minority groups themselves (Wood and King, 2001). Media representation of immigrants in different countries and regions has been investigated in a number of works (see, for example, Pogliano and Solaroli 2012).

Various methodologies in studying immigrant representation in different types of discourses highlight the socio-cultural role of language as well as mediated language specificity. They point out the need for investigating the complicated issues of the immigrant personality and attitudes towards migrants. That is why in some studies, the linguistic perspective on the representation of immigrants has been combined with the sociolinguistic one. For example, as concluded by Santa Ana (1999), metaphor frames of immigrants are likely to affect public



perception, dehumanising immigrant workers. In line with this are the research findings of Esses et al. (2013), who examined media covering immigration policies. Both studies claim that immigrants and refugees appear to be dehumanised, being portrayed as terrorists, sources of infectious diseases, and a threat to the safety of Western nations.

### 2.3 Corpus linguistics and migration studies

A growing body of research into linguistic analysis of the topic of migration employs methods associated with corpus linguistics. This approach provides a number of benefits to scholars, the most essential of them being an opportunity to process large amounts of data quickly and to identify significant collocations effectively. For example, in their seminal study, Baker et al. (2007), after analysing a corpus of 175,000 British newspaper articles from 1996–2005, suggested a range of classifications for migrants – refugees, asylum seekers, immigrants, and migrants (RASIM), and found that a considerable proportion of UK broadsheets and tabloids tend to use the same collocations. This finding allowed them to draw a conclusion about the existence of consistent patterns underlying racist discourses relating to RASIM.

Archer and Rayson (2004) applied the UCREL Semantic Analysis System (USAS) (Rayson et al. 2004) for tagging data from *Forced Migration Online* (FMO), an online resource which comprises government documents, academic articles, legal texts, newspaper items, and other materials related to the issue of migration. The results were subsequently compared with *International Thesaurus of Refugee Terminology* (ITRT) that is used to ensure thematic searches in FMO. The authors conclude that the USAS system could be used as a linking component between ITRT and the FMO data by means of providing the user with an indication of other germane ITRT Terms or Subclasses within a particular dataset, as well as identifying semantic areas not covered by the ITRT.

The studies previously mentioned pave the way for a fine-grained exploration of migration-related terminology in the discourse of a broad range of social sciences. We posit that linguistic analysis of migration, aimed at investigating the generation of meanings in contexts under conditions of power asymmetry, such as culture-related assumptions and legal frames of interpretations (Verschueren 2008), along with the application of corpus linguistics tools, might be promising for the identification and classification of migration-related terminology. Thus, this study focuses on two-word terms containing the words *migrant* and *migration* in journal papers, under the hypothesis that they might shed light on the areas of research in this field as well help to identify possible directions for further studies. Specifically, two research questions (RQ) are addressed here:

- RQ1. What statistically significant two-word terms are employed in research papers focusing on migration?

- RQ2. Based on the semantic fields these terms belong to, what areas of research in the field do they outline?

### 3 Data and Method

The analysis is based on a 281,000-word corpus of research articles published in peer-reviewed journals focusing on migration. They are the *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* (JEMS) (6 articles), the *Journal of International Migration and Integration* (JIMI) (7 articles), *International Migration* (IM) (6 articles), *International Migration Review* (IMR) (7 articles), *Comparative Migration*

*Studies* (CMS) (7 articles), *Migration Letters* (ML) (7 articles) and *Remittances Review* (RR) (6 articles). All the texts were published from 2018 to 2020. The titles of the selected papers include the words *migration* or *migrant(s)* to ensure a large number of returns on the topic-related terminology.

The data was processed with the AntConc software (Anthony 2014), namely its Concordance and Keyword List functions, in order to detect specific terms related to the discourse of migration studies. At the first stage of the analysis, we employed the Keyword List function of the tool in order to identify the words that are significantly more frequently used in the target corpus in comparison with the reference corpus. The reference corpus, accounting for approximately 775,000 words, represents a broad scope of academic discourse. It consists of research papers in eight disciplines: chemistry, physics, mathematics, engineering, business studies, history, linguistics and political science. All the articles (105 in total) were published in leading academic journals, indexed in Scopus Quartile 1, in 2016 and 2017. Therefore, the reference corpus represents academic discourse in general, against which the target corpus is compared.

The results gained were quantitatively analysed with the help of the Concordance function of AntConc to determine terms which include the top keywords.

In this work, we used MI (mutual information)-score and t-score as statistical measures of collocation strength. Their respective cut-offs of 3.00 and 2.00 are conventionally used in corpus linguistics to differentiate between collocates which are “linguistically interesting” and those that are not (see, for example, Church and Hanks 1990, 24). This idea is supported by McEnery et al. (2006, 56–57), who claim that an MI-value that is greater or equal to 3 can be seen “as evidence that two items are collocates”, while a t-score greater or equal to 2 is “normally considered to be statistically significant”.

## 4 Results

As expected, the three top keywords sorted by keyness were found to be *migration*, *migrants* and *migrant* (see Table 1).

**Table 1.** The three top keywords sorted by keyness.

Rank	Frequency	Chi-square	Keyword
1	2673	7394.114	migration
2	1789	4947.197	migrants
3	1107	3064.182	migrant

Given that a term is defined as a lexical label in the special language of a specific domain which designates ‘a particular concept in the knowledge of that domain’ (see, for example, Ahmad et al. 1994, 269), we assume that the keywords can be seen as terms, and are likely to be part of compound terms.

In order to retrieve two-word terms including the keywords, we sorted the immediate right-hand and left-hand collocates of the words *migrant*, *migrants* and *migration* alphabetically, then manually selected those whose range was more than two. The right-hand collocates of the word *migrants* were not considered, as a plural noun does not normally act as the left component of a two-word term. Then the strength of all the two-word collocates was tested for statistical significance. The results of the analysis are shown in tables 2-5 below.



Table 2 shows the statistically significant right-hand collocates of *migrant* in the corpus, ordered according to frequency. The column Frequency demonstrates the raw frequency in the corpus; Range stands for the number of texts the term was used in.

Term	Freq	Range	t-score	MI-Score
Migrant household(s)	100	8	9.708	5.099
Migrant worker/s	91	11	9.353	5.679
Migrant mother(s)	86	3	9.184	6.701
Migrant integration	65	4	7.869	5.385
Migrant woman/women	44	7	6.293	4.286
Migrant child(ren)	41	5	6.107	4.436
Migrant population/s	26	16	4.900	4.678
Migrant group/s	23	7	4.412	3.645
Migrant care	16	3	3.734	3.912
Migrant background	15	3	3.774	5.295
Migrant community/ies	15	9	3.620	3.935
Migrant sending	14	7	3.591	4.636
Migrant man/men	10	3	2.942	3.843
Migrant receiving	10	6	3.014	4.416
Migrant characteristics	9	3	2.776	3.741
Migrant professionals	9	2	2.946	5.801
Migrant labourer(s)	6	2	2.427	6.766

**Table 2.** Right-hand collocates of *migrant*.

Term	Freq	Range	t-score	MI-Score
Migration policy/ies	132	14	10.896	4.275
Migration studies	125	17	10.789	4.837
Migration decision/s	27	9	4.940	4.342
Migration management	42	2	6.372	5.900
Migration-related	47	11	6.490	4.227
Migration research	40	9	5.632	3.190
Migration flow/s	34	11	5.647	4.984
Migration decision-making	18	2	4.144	5.427
Migration experience/s	29	9	4.856	3.346
Migration governance	19	4	4.285	5.877
Migration researcher/s	19	5	4.126	4.223
Migration background/s	20	5	4.213	4.108
Migration theory/ies	17	5	3.833	3.827
Migration pattern/s	18	10	3.898	3.620
Migration project/s	15	5	3.645	4.084
Migration scholars	15	9	3.640	4.054
Migration aspiration/s	13	3	3.160	3.016
Migration scholarship	11	3	3.248	5.591
Migration history/ies	15	5	3.659	4.181
Migration program/me(s)	13	5	3.160	3.016
Migration journey/s	8	3	2.674	4.193
Migration route/s	6	5	2.310	4.132
Migration status	37	4	5.609	3.683

**Table 3.** Right-hand collocates of *migration*.

Term	Freq	Range	t-score	MI-Score
High/low/semi-skilled migrant/s	91	11	9.175	4.712
Rural migrant/s	58	4	7.387	5.059
Female migrant/s	44	10	6.324	4.424
1 <sup>st</sup> /2 <sup>nd</sup> /3 <sup>rd</sup> -generation migrant/s	42	3	6.325	5.379
Return migrant/s	33	5	5.511	4.623
Male migrant/s	20	8	4.018	3.301
Internal migrant/s	18	5	4.022	4.263
Prospective migrant/s	12	3	3.375	5.279
Temporary migrant/s	12	5	3.351	4.938
Asian migrant/s	9	5	2.715	3.396
Irregular migrant/s	8	4	2.726	4.794
Undocumented migrant/s	8	5	2.781	5.901
Urban migrant/s	19	4	4.012	3.649

**Table 4.** Left-hand collocates of *migrant/migrants*.

Term	Freq	Range	t-score	MI-Score
International migration	75	24	4.292	3.012
Labour migration	39	15	5.622	3.326
Internal migration	37	9	5.941	5.418
Skilled migration	29	6	4.790	3.178
Forced migration	18	9	4.117	5.079
Return migration	23	9	4.538	4.218
Irregular migration	11	5	3.236	5.369
Cross-border migration	25	2	4.914	5.869
Male migration	28	3	4.938	3.902
Asian migration	11	2	3.079	3.801

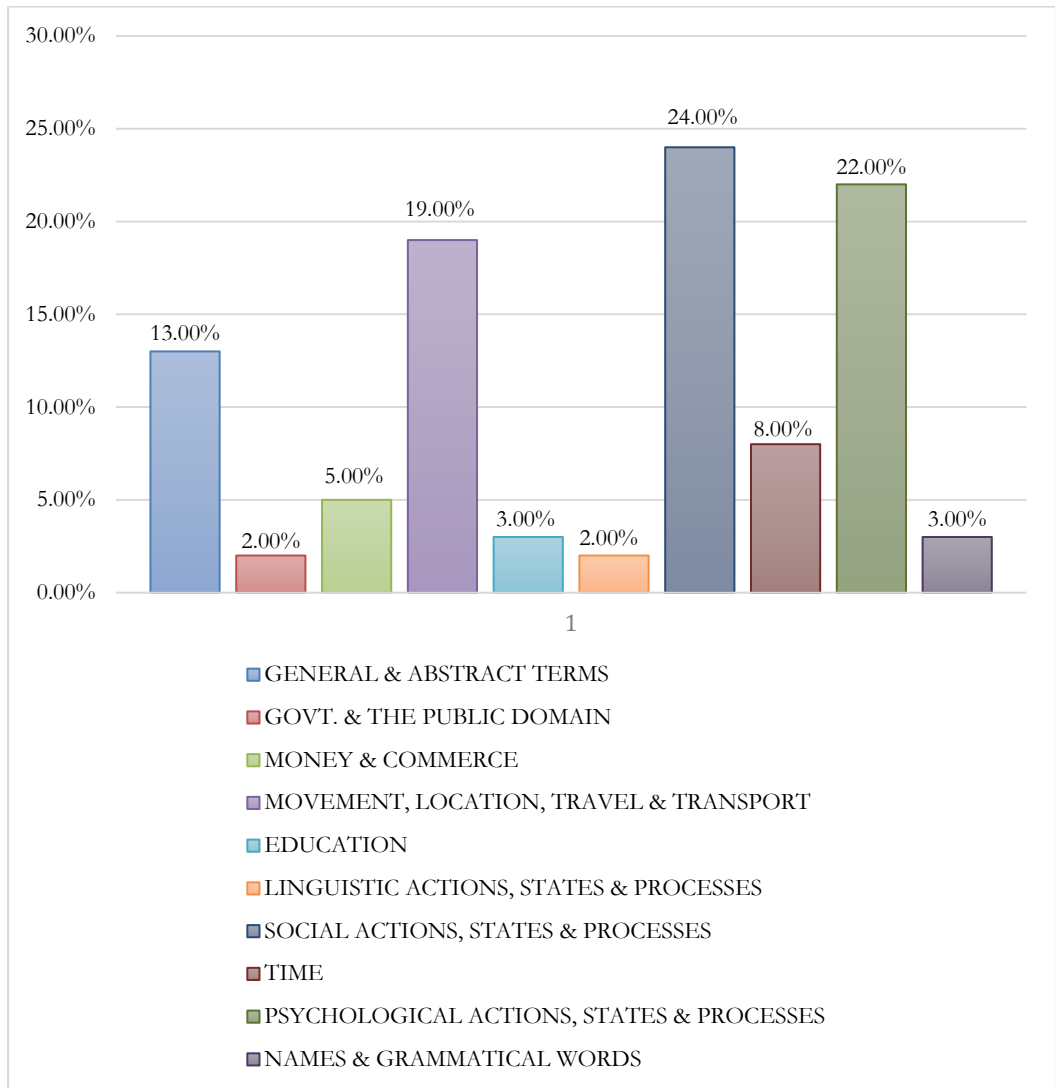
**Table 5.** Left-hand collocates of *migration*.

As can be seen from tables 2 and 3, there are more terms including the word *migration* as with the word *migrant* (23 and 17 respectively). The most frequent term was found to be *migration policy/ies* and the most widely used collocation is *migration studies*. As regards the left-hand collocates, their number is higher for the words *migrant/migrants*, than for *migration* (13 vs 10), with the most frequent terms being *high/low/semi-skilled migrant/s*, which is also the most widely used one.

At the next stage of the analysis, in order to classify the terms and to identify the areas of interest in the field of migration studies, their right and left components were tagged with the UCREL Semantic Analysis System (USAS) (Rayson et al. 2004).



**Figure 1.** shows the proportions of semantic categories assigned to the migration-related terms.



**Figure 1.** Semantic categories of the terms.

As can be seen from the chart, the terms are assigned to ten semantic categories, the category of Social actions, states and processes being the most numerous one. The second and the third largest categories respectively were found to be Psychological actions, states and processes and Movement, location, travel and transport. The smallest proportions of the terms belong to the categories of Government and public domain, Linguistic actions, states and processes, Names and grammatical words and Education.

## 5 Discussion

The identified terms may give us insight to what aspects of migration the studies highlight, therefore, helping to detect what areas of research there are in this field. In line with Archer and Rayson (2004), we believe that semantic tagging of terms, functioning in migration discourse, can contribute to developing their taxonomy, however, since the semantic categories, suggested in the USAS, provide a very general conception of the world, identifying the approaches employed in migration studies needed a more fine-grained analysis of the examples the detected terms are used in.

From the semantic angle to terminology (L'Homme, 2020), we operate the knowledge-based perspective to differentiate concepts. This perspective corresponds to five criteria to address polysemy in specialised texts such as a synonym substitution, differential opposition, differential morphological derivation, differential paradigmatic relations and compatible and differential co-occurrence (L'Homme, 2020). Among complex networks of relations of terminological structures, we focus on paradigmatic (vertical) relations with two domains in studying migration: time-oriented and subject-oriented. The time-oriented approach is concentrated on the migrants' past and the history of the phenomenon; the description of the present situation with migration, and the possible prospects that are defined by decision-makers and governments of migrant-receiving and migrant-sending countries. It mainly comprises the terms belonging to the categories of General and abstract terms, Time and Psychological actions, states and processes.

A number of terms refer to the past-oriented study of the phenomenon, both from the global and individual perspectives (*migration history*, *migration/migrant background*, *migration experience*). The first two terms (*history* and *background*) belong to the semantic category of Time, while the third one (*experience*) has been assigned to the category of Psychological actions, States and Processes. This might suggest the knowledge gap and the enhanced need for methodology to study global processes from a personalised perspective.

Interestingly, slightly different terms tend to be employed for referring to the historical aspect of migration in general terms and to more particular cases, e.g. *migrant background* vs *migration background* or *migration history* vs *migration histories* (see examples 1-4). This distinction is in line with the existing dichotomy in migration studies between studying migrants as national groups and exploring their individual experiences (see, for example, Krawatzek and Sasse 2020).

- 1) The share of foreigners in the Swiss resident population is much higher than in neighbouring countries: population aged over 15 with a *migration background* is 37.2% in 2017 (RR-2019-1).
- 2) Migrant mothers with long *migration history* adapt better to the urban life and have a rich work experience (IM-2020-2).
- 3) Having a non-European *migration background* is also relevant, as this characteristic is positively related to attitudes (JEMS-2020-7).
- 4) One way to move closer to causality ... would be to use panel data, where *migration histories* and EU preferences of the same people are observed over time (IMR-2020-3).





As can be seen, examples 1 and 2 are focused on individuals (*second generation migrants* and *migrant mothers*), while in examples 3 and 4, a more global view of migration is given (i.e. migrants' attitudes and longitudinal study of migration). As far as the dichotomy between studying individuals and populations is concerned, the key terms *migrant man* and *migrant woman* contrasted with *migrant group*, *migrant population* and *migrant community* can be considered.

A number of terms from our list can be assigned to a present-oriented study of migration and are used for describing migration and migrants. Looking at the terms connected with the present, we can see the dichotomy of general vs individual here. Thus, the term *migration pattern/s* is related to migration as a social phenomenon (see examples 5), whereas the term *migrant characteristics* is more focused on individuals (example 6).

5) Hanna lives in Poppyfield, a village with 1,950 inhabitants located at the Hungarian-Serbian border, where the dominant *migration pattern* has been the circular migration of female care workers (ML-2020-7).

6) Some studies have also shown that *migrant characteristics* have a significant effect on mothers' employment (IM-2020-2).

Another area of research can be called 'future-oriented' and deals with migrants' prospects which are shaped by *migration governance*, *management*, *policies*, and *programmes*. See, for example, 7.

7) Indeed, there are theoretical and empirical grounds for assuming that lenient *migration policies* may reduce generalised trust in society (JIMI-2020-5).

The future-oriented domain is focused on migration in general, not on individuals. Also, it mainly refers to the idea of being managed with certainty for the future. It implies that an emerging line of research in migration may require contrasting current and future policies and programmes with a retrospect.

The second approach is subject-based, which focuses on studying geographical, economic and demographic aspects of migration. Migration studies tend to investigate such topics as the origins of migration, the directionality and continuity of migrant flows, the utilization of immigrant labour, and the sociocultural adaptation of migrants (Torkington & Ribeiro 2019; Weichhart 2015). This is in line with the idea that migration is a rational choice which is based on a cost-benefit analysis and involves a number of individual, family, and socio-economic factors (Lee 1966). The geographical aspect involves the terms related to the semantic category of Movement (i.e. *migration flow/s*, *migration journey/s*, *migrant sending*, *migration route/s*), as well as the term *migrant receiving*, and is related to the places where people migrate to and from (see example 8). It should be noted that the terms *migrant sending* and *migrant receiving* do not fit a very common term form are actual terms from the knowledge-based perspective, as opposed to lexicon-driven analysis (L'Homme 2020).

8) Asian migration, the *migration flows* to and from Asia, has captured the attention of many Asian and western researchers (CMS-2020-6).

These findings reveal that currently, migration is researched in a straightforward manner as flows and routes on geographically-scaled surfaces, sometimes omitting or overlooking other dimensions of space, be those local, regional, international, urban or rural. In general, this

group of terms signify how societies are stratified in space and what society finds important in movement over the space.

Economic environment plays a key role in the migration process. 'Low productivity, unemployment, unsatisfying economic conditions, lack of opportunities for advancement, and exhaustion of natural resources' may make people leave their native land in search for 'higher wages and better working conditions' (Zeng 2017). The economic aspect of migration is reflected in the use of the terms from the Work and employment category, namely, *migrant worker/s*, *migrant professionals* (9).

9) Whereas most studies on migrants focus on underprivileged newcomers or *migrant professionals* in global cities, my paper concentrates on... (JIMI-2020-3).

Finally, the demographic aspect of studying migration is revealed through the use of the terms assigned to the semantic categories of People (10) and Belonging to group (11).

10) Specifically, China had a *migrant population* of 245 million at the end of 2016, registering as one of the largest human migrations in history (JEMS-2020-4).

11) Renegotiating gender-equality norms provides them with such privileges while maintaining a safe social position within the *migrant communities* (JEMS-2020-2)

Since these semantic group collocates are collective nouns and plural forms, once again it proves that the focus of migration studies is the process and social groups, not the individual. It implies that though academic research rarely focuses on one individual at a time, the diversity and variety of purposes and motivation for migration, for family, educational, climatic, cultural, etc. reasons are either neglected, or overseen. Additionally, individual characteristics such as gender, (working) age, education level, race and ethnicity, are supposed to be universally perceived.

To summarise, we have combined the results of term frequency, semantic categories and two knowledge paradigms – time and subject. The semantic analysis of the identified terms reflects the state-of-the-art of a new, emerging area of study, as research concepts are initially driven by the real experiences and an attempt to abstractly conceptualise them within the existing knowledge domains and theoretical social frameworks. Interestingly, the migration process itself, represented as movement over space and time, is conceptualised significantly less frequently in research papers. We find that education and economy (money) are the two social sciences that have so far developed and applied theoretical terms to explain the observable and immediately affecting practices, therefore, the term categories' frequency is lower in the corpus. The same is applicable to public governance and regulation.

## 6 Conclusion

This is the first paper to conceptualise through corpus linguistics, a new knowledge domain of migration studies. The analysis revealed that migration studies has become a specific area in social sciences in terms of terminology. It *is* interdisciplinary and is built on the intersection of economics, business and management, demographics, geography, history, education, public governance, politics, law, and psychology. The findings support the conclusions made by Pisarevskaya and colleagues (2020), that migration studies is a fragmentary, but interconnected field of research.



The qualitative analysis of the identified terms allowed us to conclude that, first, there are two directions in migration studies, focusing on migrant communities as groups and the experience of individual migrants. Second, semantically, two approaches to studying migration can be observed. They are time-oriented and subject-oriented. It should be noted that they normally overlap in one study when, for example, the economic well-being of migrants is investigated from a longitudinal perspective (see, for example, Kratz 2020). Moreover, it is found that while economics, education and public governance have already established the terms with regard to studying migration, such studies as history, geography and psychology have not yet applied their theoretical terms to this new large-scale social phenomenon.

One of the limitations is that this research-purposed corpus is based on the English language; therefore, other languages, especially of the countries with an intensive migration agenda, go unnoticed. Likely, a comparative study of parallel corpora would yield different dimensions of space- and time-orientation of terms, diverging meanings potentially causing conflicts as well as merging meanings calling for preventive mechanisms and solutions.

Since a corpus can be treated as a resource, it may be used to analyse the dynamics in migration studies, with the evidence of over- and under-represented topics, implied theories and practices. Linguistic analysis of antonyms permits the identification of ‘tensions’ and/or ‘controversies’ in research agenda-setting, as we have already observed in disproportions of studies related to migrant-sending vs migrant-receiving countries (Pérez-Armendáriz 2014).

Corpus methodology also is purported to be applicable to other, non-academic platforms, for example, personal accounts and social media reports, to compare the perception of migration terms for a broader public.

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