

Attitudes to immigration in Australian Hansard: 1970-2020

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Previous research into the representation of immigration and immigrants in the public forum has used both qualitative discourse analysis and quantitative corpus analysis to investigate attitudes displayed in data from newspapers and parliamentary interactions. While Greenslade (2005) provides an historical perspective on the coverage of immigration issues in the British press – with case studies from the 1940s to the 2000s – much of the research done has been looking at recent shifts of attitude due to contemporary refugee issues across Europe. Gabrielatos & Baker (2008) demonstrate different levels of negativity presented by common collocations with refugees and asylum seekers in UK newspaper data, 1996-2005, while Walter (2002) contrasts positive with negative representations of cultural diversity in mass media across Europe, 1995-2000. More recently, Fotopoulos & Kaimaklioti (2016) provide quantitative corpus evidence to suggest that the media coverage of the Syrian crisis across Greece, Germany and Britain is generally positive towards the refugees. There are also examples of parliamentary discourse used as data, notably an edited volume by Wodak and van Dijk (2000) looking at examples on ethnic issues from parliamentary records in six European states.

In Australia, there has been much discussion of attitudes towards immigration in terms of social justice (e.g. Ghezelbash, 2018; Jupp 2009) and some analyses of the discourse around the topic (e.g. Martin 2012; Morrissey & Schalley 2017), but no systematic, diachronic review of the language used to represent refugees, immigrants and asylum seekers. Australia is a particularly interesting focus for discussion of changing attitudes as it has historically relied so heavily – economically and socially – on immigration (Castles, 2009). In order to chart the changes of attitude over a range of historical and political movements, this study has undertaken to collect data from the last 50 years, representing a period from before the acceptance of the first boat people from Vietnam to the current national policy of prevention symbolised by strict policing of the sea borders, and offshore detention of asylum seekers. With the help of a grant from the Macquarie ECR Enabling Scheme, a corpus of 28 million words from Parliamentary Hansard has been compiled, composed of debates and speeches from the period 1970-2020 where immigration is the main, or a significant topic. These texts were identified by searching in the records using a set of relevant key terms including *asylum seeker*, *emigrant*, *foreigner*, *immigrant*, and filtering out irrelevant hits. The metadata downloaded with the texts also provides biodata about the speakers involved.

Preliminary findings demonstrate variability across time in the portrayal of immigrants to Australia, both in terms of the use of emotive terms such as *boat people* and *queue-jumper*, and positive/negative collocations with more official terms like *asylum seeker* and *refugee*. Quantitative analysis provides clear patterns of use identified by contrasting members of the governing party with the opposition party over the period. This seminar will examine the shifts in political rhetoric in Australia over the last 50 years based on quantitative analysis of some of the key terms involved.

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Biodata

Dr Adam Smith is researcher at Macquarie University with a particular interest in the study of language change and variation through the use of corpus analyses. He has been working with parliamentary data for the past 5 years.

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