

The Representation of Afghan Refugees in Pashto Press
A Corpus-Assisted Discourse Study

Dr. Saqlain Hassan¹



Abstract:

Pakistan has been hosting more than two million Afghan refugees since the Soviet and United States' invasions of Afghanistan. This corpus-assisted discourse study aims to unfold the behaviour of the Pashto press towards Afghan refugees residing in Pakistan. This study uses both qualitative and quantitative research paradigms to investigate the corpora of Pashto newspapers' articles through the *Sketch Engine* software to look at the behaviour of the text used to represent Afghan refugees and to discern the discourse in terms of categories designed for this study. The results of this study provide an in-depth understanding of the attitude of the Pashto press towards Afghan refugees.

1. Introduction

The term “refugee” is used by the online Cambridge dictionary for those people who flee their country of origin to skip ongoing violences such as wars or conflicts.² Refugees are not just mere travelers as described by Rizvi (1984) that there must be a distinction between the people who travel for pleasure or businesses and the people who travel or to seek protection to overcome the fear of being killed due to the ongoing religious, race, national or international conflicts.

The history of Afghan refugees began in the latter half of the 20th century with the invasion of the Soviet Union in 1978/79 when millions of Afghan refugees migrated towards the nearest countries Pakistan, Iran, and India. It was the first big wave of Afghan refugees deserting Afghanistan. According to a report of National Geographic that there were more than 6 million

¹ Ph.D. Corpus-assisted discourse analysis (University of Navarra, Spain) Current affiliation and occupation: Assistant Professor at English Department, Qurta University, Peshawar.

² Retrieved from: <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/refugee>.

Afghans took refuge in the nearest countries: Pakistan hosted 3.5 million of them, Iran gave shelter to 2.5 million and thousands of Afghans went to the Western countries.³ Moreover, Grare and Maley (2011) in their study stated that during the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan more than 80,000 Afghans were migrating towards Pakistan each month and gradually the number grew to 3,270,000 till 1989 which made Afghan refugees the world's largest refugee population residing in a single host country. After the Soviet repatriation in 1989 half of the Afghan refugee population residing outside their country of origin was retreated to Afghanistan till 1994.

The second wave of Afghan refugees struck the Pakistani borders soon after the repatriation of millions of Afghans (who came in the first wave) back to their country when the Taliban or Afghan Mujahideen came in power in 1996 under the leadership of *Mulla Omar* and announced an Islamic state leading to civil wars between the different fighting groups (*Shumali Etihad* and *Sunni Pashtuns*) which again led to massive displacement of Afghans and also slowed down the repatriation process of Afghan refugees from Pakistan and Iran (Marsden, 2003).

The third wave of Afghan refugees emerged soon after the US invasion in 2001 to drag out the terrorists involved in the 9/11 attacks in New York. According to the study of Vine, Coffman, Khoury, Lovasz, Bush, Leduc, and Walkup (2020), there are more than 37 million people displaced worldwide due to the US wars on terrorism after 9/11. Vine et al. (2020) in their study calculated these numbers of displaced people in eight countries affected by the wars on terrorism since the 9/11 attacks. Their study revealed that 5.3 million Afghans were affected by the US invasion of Afghanistan (3.2 million were displaced internally while 2.1 million Afghans migrated towards the nearest neighboring countries; Pakistan and Iran).

Pakistan has been hosting Afghan refugees for almost four decades but due to the unfinished and perpetual tensions between the two governments (Pakistan and Afghanistan), there have been many difficulties for Afghan refugees in Pakistan. The policies kept changing and the government with the help of UNHCR are trying to repatriate Afghan refugees (with or without their will). On the other hand, the media has portrayed a negative image of Afghan refugees which also created problems for them in the host countries (Batool, 2019). Also, their influx in the local job market has also made people think of their quick repatriation from the country (Suzuki, Paul, Maru, & Kusadokoro, 2019).

³ Retrieved from: https://media.nationalgeographic.org/assets/file/afghan_MIG.pdf

1. Literature Review

Pakistan is currently hosting more than 1.4 million Afghan refugees as per the official report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (2021). Most of these Afghan refugees are ethnic Pashtuns. The province of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (which is a Pashtun dominated province) is the most populous province accommodating 58.1% of the whole population of Afghans living in Pakistan as shown in the table below:

SN	Province	Number of refugees	Percentage
1	Khyber Pakhtunkhwa	834,387	58.1%
2	Baluchistan	327,247	22.8%
3	Punjab	168,351	11.7%
4	Sindh	66,111	4.6%
5	Islamabad	35,003	2.4%

Table 1: Statistics of the population Afghan Refugees in Pakistan: source UNHCR (2021)

Afghan refugees are living in different camps around the country. They are provided with basic education and health facilities. On one hand, the UNHCR Pakistan is providing free schooling services to Afghan refugees in their home camps. While the Pakistani universities also provide reserve quota for Afghan refugees in annual admissions in each degree program. On the other hand, the UNHCR Pakistan makes sure to provide basic health facilities in all refugee camps.

The UNHCR Pakistan is also managing the economic crisis of Afghan refugees in their host countries. However, in Pakistan, most Afghan refugees rely on the local job markets as a source of their income. The major cities in Pakistan such as Peshawar, Lahore, Karachi, Quetta and Rawalpindi are the working places of Afghan refugees. They are considered to be the cheap source of labor in the market and can be often seen wandering in the streets selling carpets and dry fruits.

Nonetheless, in recent decades, their stay in Pakistan has been in public and media debates. The growing insurgency, terrorist activities, drug smuggling, kidnappings, and other social problems have been attributed to Afghan refugees in Pakistan (Javed, Khan, Syed, & Ahmad, 2020). Furthermore, in their study to examine the stances of the locals about the involvement of Afghan refugees in certain law-breaking activities Khan, Ahmad and Ayub (2020) concluded that a

portion of the local population strongly believe Afghans to be the sole cause of all criminal activities in Pakistan.

Also, the ongoing political tension between Pakistan and Afghans for many years has contributed to the harshness of media and government towards Afghan refugees in Pakistan. The Afghan refugees are mostly criticized by the media for their involvement in criminal operations such as terrorism. Furthermore, Batool (2019) in her study about the media framing of Afghan refugees found that Pakistani print media usually identify Afghan refugees' camps as secret hideouts or supporting places for terrorists while they take foreign aid to plant terrorists' activities in Pakistan. Similarly, the current corpus-assisted discourse study (CADS) will also be looking at a corpus of Pashto print media reports about Afghan refugees to observe how do they represent Afghan refugees.

The key concern of such CAD studies is to investigate and comprehend a particular discourse with the help of modern tools (Baker, 2006). The CAD methodology is a blend of both corpus linguistics and discourse analysis. Corpus linguistics is a branch of linguistics that is quantitative in the sense of dealing with languages through a set of procedures and computer tools using an electronic corpus as its main data source (McEnery & Hardie, 2011). A corpus (plural: corpora) is a collection of written texts in the soft form to be stored electronically. However, a corpus does not need to be defined in terms of written texts only, a corpus can also be composed by audio and video materials (Bennet, 2010; McEnery & Hardie, 2011). On the other hand, discourse analysis which is more qualitative in nature is a research methodology that studies a specific language or text in the context in which it has been produced (Suciu, 2019).

2. Methodology

Discourse analysts use different dimensions such as critical discourse analysis and corpus-based discourse analysis to retrieve the power abuse amalgamated in a media discourse (Van Dijk, 2008; Breeze, 2011; 2014; 2020, Partington et al. 2013). Also, the CAD studies usually go beyond the text and what is shown in the text by looking at the lexico-grammar as well as the meaning beyond sentences (Koteyko, 2014). Similarly in the current study, the researcher retrieved and analyzed the data following the methodology defined by Baker, (2006) and Partington et al. (2013) for the collection and analysis of the collected corpus.

3.1 Corpus Design

This CAD study is using a corpus of Pashto newspapers; BBC Pashto and Mashal Radio. The articles published in 2018 and 2019 were retrieved from the concerned websites of both the newspapers using the search terms “ګډوال” “مهاجر” “پناه غوښتونکی” reflecting “RASIM” *refugee, asylum seeker, immigrant, migrant* (Baker, McEnery, Wodak, Gabrielatos, Khosravini, Krzyzanowski, 2008).

All the articles were saved in doc files following the methodology of Baker et al. (2008). Each file was saved with its publication date and year and was placed in the concerned folder with the name of the newspaper. The collected data was then uploaded to an online corpus analyzing software the *Sketch Engine* (Kilgarriff, Baisa, Busta, Jakubicek, Kovar, Michelfeit, Rychly, and Suchomel, 2014). The following table shows the number of tokens retrieved for each of the newspaper’s corpus:

SN	Newspaper	Language	Duration	Total tokens	Sentences
1	BBC Pashto	Pashto	2018/19	32,788	1063
2	Mashal Radio	Pashto	2018/19	26,885	422
#	Total			59,673	1485

Table 2: Number of tokens in each corpus

3.2 Corpus Information

3.2.1 BBC Pashto

BBC Pashto station was launched in 1981, while the BBC online page came into being in 2002 by BBC World Service. It represents Pashtuns from around the world,⁴ and it is one of the most trusted websites Pashtuns browse on daily basis.

3.2.2 Mashal Radio

Mashal Radio is a part of RFE (Radio Free Europe) based in Prague (Czech Republic) and Islamabad (the Islamabad office was sealed by Pakistan in 2018 for spreading conspiracy).⁵ This online newspaper mainly represents the Pashtuns in Pakistan, and was initiated by the Pashtun community residing in Prague. Its print and radio versions are broadcasted in Pashto language.⁶

3.3 Corpus Analysis

This current CAD study uses the *Sketch Engine* (Kilgariff, 2014) as its main analyzing tool. According to the study of Kilgariff et al. (2014), the *Sketch Engine* software gives the freedom to analyze data according to the different modes of grammatical analysis and the best thing that comes from the *Sketch Engine* is amazing sketches of words and keywords, it gives a long list of concordances lines of a node word, and it also provides a series of frequently occurring words or collocations and n-grams. In addition to these features, the *Sketch Engine* also gives access to online corpora such as SiBol⁷, and UrWac⁸. Researchers can use these big corpora as their reference corpora (Kunilovskaya & Koviiazina, 2017). However, in the current study, the researcher did not use any of these as his reference corpora instead the researcher used the corpus of Mashal radio as a reference corpus for the BBC Pashto and vice-versa. In the current study, the researcher focused on the concordances of the most frequently occurring keywords.

Furthermore, this CAD study also followed Van Leeuwen (1996) model of the representation of social actors for retrieval of the main findings from the quantitative analysis of the corpus

⁴ Retrieved from: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/mediacentre/latestnews/2016/bbc-pashto> retrieved

⁵ Retrieved from: <https://cpj.org/2018/01/pakistan-orders-closure-of-us-funded-radio-mashaal.php>

⁶ Retrieved from: <https://www.rferl.org/>

⁷ SiBol is a large corpus consisted of articles from different English newspapers from 1993-2003 containing 650 million words.

⁸ urWac or UrduWac is a large corpus of Urdu text collected from internet containing 53 million words.

through the *Sketch Engine*. Leeuwen’s network of categories enhances the understanding of power abuses encapsulated within a specific discourse. The researcher in the current study had developed a framework of categories which he used to categorize the main findings of the representation of Afghan refugees throughout the corpora of the two Pashto newspapers. The following fig. 1 shows the framework of three categories designed for the current study:

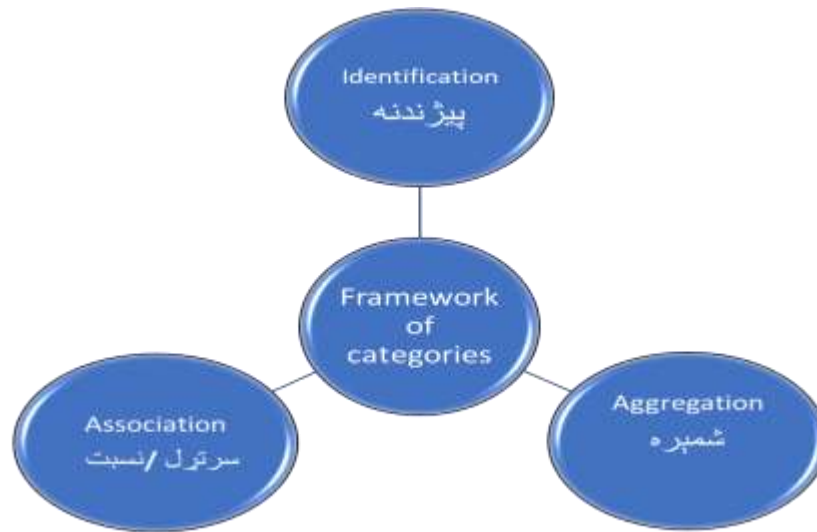


Figure 1: Framework of three categories

The above fig. 1 shows the framework of categories designed for the current study. These three categories were used to find out how the Pashto newspapers represent Afghan refugees living in Pakistan. These categories are based on the network of categories created by Van Leeuwen (1996) to recapture the representation of the social actors in different discourses. According to the theory of Van Leeuwen (1996), the first category “identification” in fig. 1 helps the researchers to identify the description of social actors (such as Afghan refugees) concerning to their social, personal, physical and geographical status. The second category “association” is defined by Van Leeuwen (1996) as certain types of actions/activities bracketed to the social actors or aliens living in a host country which add negativity or positivity to their image among the host communities. Finally, according to Leeuwen, the third category “aggregation” is meant to discuss or describe refugees in terms of numbers or “rhetoric of quantification” to create a situation of disarray by their growing population within a host community.

3. Results

4.1 BBC Pashto

The frequently occurred keywords in the corpus of BBC Pashto were Afghan “افغان” (248), refugees “كډوالو” (203), Pakistan “پاکستان” (184), Afghanistan “افغانستان” (168), country “هېواد” (80), Iran “ايران” (61), Government “حکومت” (61), women “ښځې” (56), Taliban “طالبانو” (37), Myanmar “ميانمار” (36), and Rohingya “روهينګيا” (29).

The analysis of the corpus is based on the concordance lines of the term “Afghan” within the corpus of BBC Pashto which appeared 248 times with a frequency of 7563.74 per million. The term “Afghan” was used as a node word in the corpus of the BBC Pashto to find out ± 5 collocations to its left and right. The following table shows the frequently occurring collocates ± 5 to the left and right of the term “Afghan”:

SN	Lemma	Occurrences in corpus	T-score	MI score	F/M
1	Refugee کډوال	73	8.36	5.57	2,226.42
2	Pakistan پاکستان	32	5.41	4.52	975.97
3	Government حکومت	21	4.48	5.51	640.48
4	Officials چارواکي	8	2.77	5.65	243.99
5	Taliban طالبان	7	2.54	4.64	213.49
6	Iran ايران	7	2.47	3.92	213.49
7	Illegal غير قانوني	6	2.38	5.24	182.99
8	Country دولت /	6	2.20	3.31	182.99
9	War جګړه	5	2.15	4.67	152.49

Table 3: Collocates of the term “Afghan”

In the following section, these findings will be elaborated with the help of examples from the actual articles’ texts following the Van Leeuwen (1996) network of categories.

4.1.1 Identification

The Afghans are mainly discussed and identified here as individuals involved in the phenomena of refuge and cross border movement. As shown in table 3, Afghans are mainly discussed regarding their social status in Pakistan. This newspaper takes interest in discussing Afghans’ stay, extension in stay, and delay in their repatriation:

پاکستان لوري پکې په مشروط ډول ومنله چې د افغان کډوالو د اوسېدو موده به د ۲۰۱۸ “کال تر پایه وغځوي”

Pakistan has agreed on extending the stay of Afghan refugees till the end of 2018 (BBC Pashto, 22 March 2018)

The collocate *country* appears in contexts where there is discussion of the return of Afghan refugees to their own land – note the use of *their country* in the following example:

“پاکستان اعلان وکړ د همدې میاشتې تر پایه دې افغان کډوال خپل هېواد ته ستانه شي”

Pakistan has announced that Afghan refugees should return back to their country till the end of this month (BBC Pashto, 19 April 2018)

4.1.2 Association

The BBC Pashto does not use many words that could relate *war* and *terrorism* to the lemma *Afghan*. However, the collocates *Taliban* ‘طالبان’ and *Afghan* ‘افغان’ appear 7 times, mainly highlighting the negotiation process between Afghan government and Taliban:

“سعودي د افغان حکومت او طالبانو ترمنځ خبرو کې خنډ واقع”

Saudi is a hurdle in the negotiation process of Afghan Taliban and Afghan government (BBC Pashto, 17 November 2018)

4.1.3 Aggregation

The newspaper BBC Pashto seems less harsh and uses *thousand* “زره” and more exact numbers including the word *hundred* ‘سل’ to define the number of Afghan refugees:

“کابل او اسلام اباد هوکړه کړې چې په پاکستان کې میشتو نژدې ۷۰۰ زره کډوالو ته د “پیژندنې کارتونه وپیشل شي”

Kabul and Afghanistan have decided that Pakistan will issue identity cards to eight hundred Afghan refugees (BBC Pashto, 27 June 2018)

4.2 Mashal Radio

The frequently occurred collocates in the corpus of Mashal radio were refugees “کډوالو” (353), Pakistan “پاکستان” (309), Afghan “افغان” (298), Afghanistan “افغانستان” (150), government “حکومت” (101), country “هېواد” (69), assistance “مرستی” (60).

The keyword “Afghan” appeared 298 times in the corpus of Mashal Radio with a frequency of 11,984.25 per million. The collocations ± 5 to the left and right of the node word “Afghan” are

SN	Lemma	Occurrences in corpus	T-score	MI score	F/M
1	Refugee کډوال	116	10.41	4.89	4,314.67
2	Pakistan پاکستان	31	4.95	3.18	1,153.06
3	Government حکومت	27	4.98	4.59	1,004.28
4	Registered راجسټر	24	4.78	5.35	892.69
5	Based میشته	22	4.60	5.67	818.3
6	Country هیواد/دولت	15	3.68	4.29	557.93
7	Thousands زرگونه	11	3.16	4.40	409.15
8	Embassy سفارت	6	2.43	6.50	223.17
9	Officials چارواکي	4	1.86	3.85	148.78

listed below in the following table:

Table 4: Collocates of the term "Afghan"

The following section discusses the findings of the study in terms of the Van Leeuwen (1996) framework of three categories designed for the current study.

4.2.1 Identification

This newspaper described Afghan refugees in terms of their social status. This newspaper covers the news about their status in Pakistan, their repatriation process, and the government policies regarding their repatriation:

“افغان کډوالو خپل وطن ته د واپسی لپاره هلې ځلې تیزې کړې دي د پاکستان”

Pakistan has speeded up the process of Afghan refugees’ repatriation
(Mashal Radio, 14 January 2018)

4.2.2 Association

There is no association found in the corpus with war and the issues related to war such as terrorism and crimes, nor are Afghan refugees associated with any other phenomenon. There is a discussion of Afghan repatriation that somehow shows Pakistan’s interest in sending the Afghan refugees back to their country:

افغان کډوال به د تل لپاره په پاکستان کې پاتې نه شي

Afghan refugees will never settle in Pakistan forever (Mashal Radio, 16 March 2018)

4.2.3 Aggregation

Similarly, in the corpus of another Pashto online newspaper Mashal Radio the Afghan refugees are aggregated using the word *thousands* “زره”:

”له پاکستان او ایران نه څه د پاسه ۱۷ زره او ۲۰۰ افغان کډوال هېواد ته ستانه شوي دي“

Approximately, 18,200 Afghan refugees returned to their country from Iran and Pakistan (Mashal Radio, 19 May 2018)

4. Discussion

This current study took great interest in observing the attitude of Pashto news media towards Afghan refugees living in Pakistan. After a profound quantitative analysis of the corpora this study found that the term “افغان” was the most frequently occurred keyword with our search terms “کډوال”, “مهاجر”, “پناه غوښتونکی”, in the combined corpora of BBC Pashto and Mashal Radio, where “افغان” appeared 248 times in the corpus of BBC Pashto and 298 times in the corpus of Mashal radio. Furthermore, the researcher used the term “افغان” as a node word in the corpora of both the newspaper to get the ± 5 collocates to both left and right of the node word and also to look at their concordances to observe how the newspapers represented Afghan refugees in terms of the framework of categories (Van Leeuwen, 1996) designed for the current study.

This study also found that both the Pashto newspapers identified Afghan refugees in terms of their social status in Pakistan. In table 3 and 4, it can be seen that the frequent occurred collocate to the right or left of node word “افغان” is mostly “کډوال”. The term “کډوال” appeared 73 times as collocate with the lemma “افغان” in the corpus of BBC Pashto and 116 times in the corpus of Mashal radio as shown in fig. 2 below:

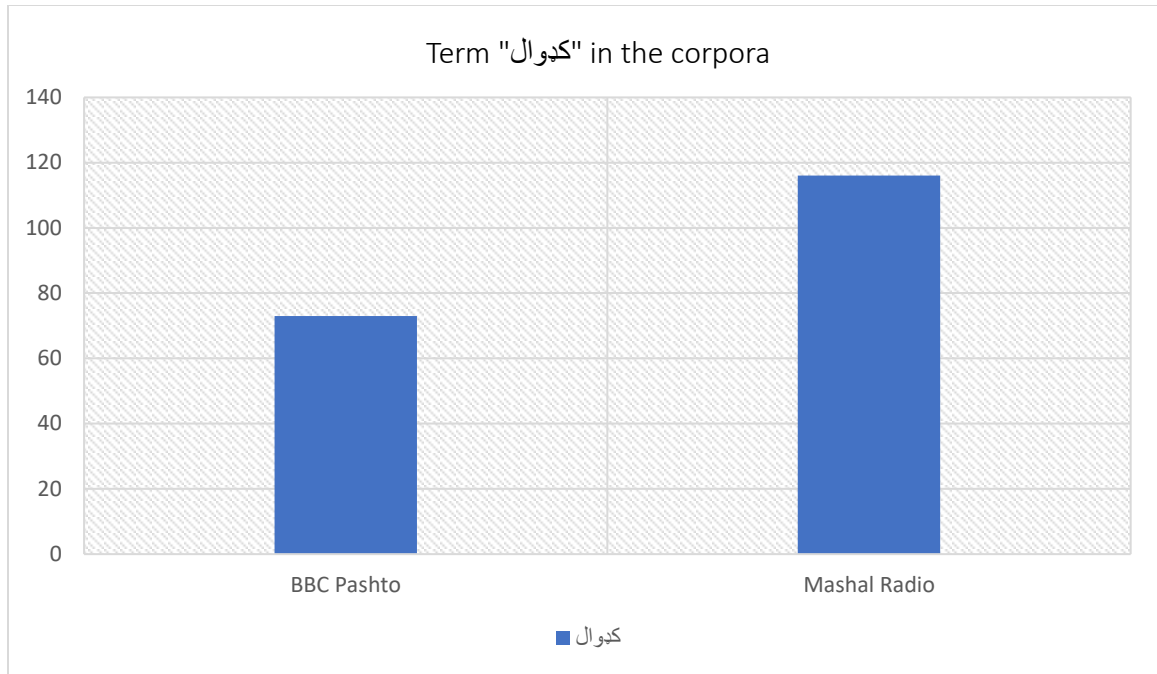


Figure 2: Occurrences of term "كدوال" in BBC Pashto and Mashal Radio Corpora

As shown in fig. 2 above, it is clear that both these newspapers highlighted the social status of Afghans as refugees and discussed their repatriation process. These newspapers also highlighted the problems in their repatriation process and the approaches made by the Pakistani government about their safe return.

On the other hand, both these newspapers seemed quite neutral in associating Afghan refugees with illegal activities (Castello, 2015; Brouwer, Van der Woude, & Van der Leun, 2017; Batool, 2019) despite the association of lemma "Taliban" with the keyword "Afghan" by the BBC Pashto. This association of "Taliban" and "Afghan" creates negativity and a terror image of Afghan refugees though there is nothing negative found during the analysis of the corpus but the term "Taliban" itself is a word that pertains higher negativity post 9/11 and US-Afghan war as the word "Taliban" is mainly associated with militancy and terrorism (Khan, 2005).

The media creates the terror of migration by aggregating migrants (Baker et al. 2008) and similarly in the current study both the Pashto newspapers used the rhetoric of quantification to discuss Afghan refugees in terms of numbers. Both these newspapers used "زره" or "زرگونه" and "سل" for the quantification of Afghans living in Pakistan. In a similar study, Baker et al. (2008, p287) referred to the rhetoric of quantification as "the number category" which according to

them is “dehumanizing” human characters with numbers (*millions, thousands*), *flood, influx, stream* and *waves*. In addition, Parker (2015) in his study concluded that the use of the rhetoric of quantification can create higher negativity among the locals or host community about the impacts of refugees’ involvement in their labor markets. And also, to draw attention towards their legal status, registration process and their repatriation process. However, in the current study, the analysis of the data didn’t reveal any negativity pertained through the rhetoric of quantification but still discussing refugees in numbers creates negativity (Baker et al. 2008).

5. Conclusion

This corpus-assisted qualitative and quantitative discourse study relied on understanding the behaviour of the Pashto press in framing Afghan refugees living in Pakistan. In a similar study, Batool (2019, p. 466) analyzed a corpus of newspapers’ articles of Pakistani English newspapers (the Dawn and the Nation) to observe how the print media represent Afghan refugees in Pakistan. Her study found that despite some negative association of Afghan refugees with terrorism, overpopulation and economic crisis, the media in Pakistan usually stay neutral or highlight the issues related to Afghan refugees in Pakistan.

Similarly, the current study also found that mostly the Pashtun media stayed neutral despite the use of some words “طالبان”, “زرگونه”, “غير قانوني” which pertained higher negativity and creating a gloomy picture of Afghan refugees concerning the internal situation of Pakistan which got worst due to the presence of Afghan refugees for a longer time (Baker & McEnery, 2005). However, the Pashtun media usually sympathizes with Afghan refugees by highlighting the major problems in their camps, registration, and repatriation processes (Batool, 2019). This study concludes in the end that the sympathy of both these newspapers with Afghan refugees might be affected by their same cultural and lingual background (Afghan refugees living in Pakistan are mostly Pashtuns). And the untold harshness in the reports of these newspapers could be coming from concerning the internal economic and social situations and communal integration.

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