

The New Migration Discourse: How Migrants Are Depicted on the Web

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Abstract

This study addresses the United Nations Migration Agency's online platform 'I am a migrant' (IAAM) to investigate the discursive and multimodal representation of migrants. The corpus analysed consists of migrants' narratives in English and Italian, as well as of their pictures found on IAAM. The written representation of migrants is investigated through a cross-linguistic corpus-assisted discourse studies approach (Baker et al. 2008). In addition, pictures are analysed using multimodal discourse analysis, based on the work of Machin and Mayr (2012) and Ledin and Machin (2018). The discourse on migration taken from this platform counters the dominant discourse of politics and the media, which attaches migrants labels such as violent, desperate and illiterate. By contrast, IAAM proves to be a major resource to support the promotion of accurate and human terminology which goes beyond the excessively general, unfair and incorrect categorisation of migration as a threat, a plague or a plight in order to recognise, respect and re-humanise the subjectivities of individual migrants. A new discourse emerges from the IAAM platform, which is free from the constraints of ordinary discourse, where other people (e.g., politicians, journalists, etc.) usually speak on behalf of migrants. Instead, the platform gives voice to individual migrants who are finally able to show their own face and give their own side of the story.

Keywords

biographies, pictures, corpus-assisted discourse studies, critical multimodal, discourse analysis, English, Italian