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Afro-pessimism reframed?

The study of Africa's media representation in Hungarian online news

Abstract

Since 2015, migration has been one of the most dominant topics of the Hungarian political and public agenda. In the light of migration statistics, the question of how the image of issuer regions - in this case Africa – in online news can be examined becomes relevant, since news portals serve as a source of information for society and indirectly affect recipients' attitudes towards African citizens and Hungarian-African relations. The paper presents three methods that are suitable for the linguistically embedded analysis of media representation, thus outlining and categorising the frames used in online news and exploring the topics that the leading Hungarian news portals link to the continent. The study's presumption, according to which Africa's media representation operates with negative images, maintaining the phenomenon of Afro-pessimism, is based on the international literature. The sentiment, headline and verb analyses conducted on 382 news units revealed that Africa's media representation does not exclusively operate with negative images, certain topics are framed explicitly positively. Nevertheless, the analysed leading news portals tend to convey a negative image of Africa.
Keywords: Africa, media, representation, framing, news

1   Introduction

When discussing the major phenomena of the twenty-first century, one of the most common features is global mobility, which is a very diverse concept. Global mobility covers a wide range of elements, including but not limited to global tourism and undocumented work, human trafficking, and refugees displaced by natural, social or technical disasters (Castles, de Haas & Miller 2014: 6). All these population movements have led and are leading to changes in the structure and institutions of global political, economic and social relationships.

The statistics published by the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (2017) highlight the changes in the international migrant stock.[1] While in 2000 the number was 172 million, the amount increased to 220 million by 2010 and reached 257 million in 2017. This means that migrants make up 3.4% of the world's population. As far as the European Union is concerned, recent studies (Eurostat 2017a) distinguish between two major

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[1]   According to the definition of the United Nations (n.d.), a *migrant* is a person, who changes his/her habitual place of residence, regardless of cause or legal status. There is a differentiation between short-term or temporary migration, which lasts for 3-12 months, and long-term or permanent migration, which entails an at least year-long stay.

demographic trends: one involves aging society and the other increasing migration flows. This study focuses on the latter.

The phenomenon, widely referred to as the migration crisis, has been emphasized by the literature since 2015, when the European Union welcomed a record 1,255,600 asylum seekers[2] from outside of the region, double the inflow seen in previous years (Eurostat 2016: 1). The number increased further in 2016 but showed a significant decline in 2017 (European Parliament 2017).

2015 was also an outstanding year for Hungary, as the second largest number of asylum seekers among the EU Member States was registered in Hungary (174,400 or 14%). Even more significant is the fact that the number of registered people compared to the population of the receiving country (17,699 / 1 million people) was the highest in Hungary (Eurostat 2016: 2). The 14% share fell to 2.3% in 2016 (Eurostat 2017b) and to 0.5% in 2017 (Eurostat 2018a). The effect of these movements can be felt up to this day, considering that migration has been one of the most dominant topics on the Hungarian political and public agenda since 2015 (Bajomi-Lázár 2018: 67).

Finally, for the purpose of the study, it is important to list the continents and countries of origin of asylum seekers. Looking at 2015, Syria, Afghanistan and Iraq rank first in the list of issuing countries (Eurostat 2016). They are followed by several African countries, such as Eritrea, Nigeria, Somalia, Sudan and several Sub-Saharan countries on the top ten list. Moreover, 30% of non-EU nationals who acquired EU citizenship in 2016 came from Africa (Eurostat 2018b: 16).

A study published by the European Commission's Joint Research Centre and the European Political Strategy Centre (2018) highlights the relationship between population growth and Africa, recording 40% of the continent's population moving towards Europe. About 1.4 million Africans leave their homeland each year, but it is estimated that this number will grow to 2.8-3.5 million by 2050. Projections show that it will take 30-40 years before most African countries reach the GDP per capita threshold at which emigration rates fall. In addition, the continent's population will double by 2050. For instance, Nigeria will become the third most populous country in the world, while the populations of Chad and Niger will triple in number (Population Reference Bureau 2018: 1).

In the light of the above data and in the absence of similar Hungarian research, the question of how the image of issuer regions - in this case Africa - transmitted by online media can be examined becomes relevant, since news portals serve as a source of information for society and indirectly affect recipients' attitudes towards African citizens and Hungarian-African relations.

2   The news genre

Given that the study examines Africa's media representation in the light of leading Hungarian news portals, a brief introduction to the news genre is necessary. Below is the definition of genre and news, news features, with a special focus on online news. Finally, the chapter briefly introduces Hungarian news consumption habits.

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[2]   According to the United Nations Refugee Agency (n.d.), an *asylum-seeker* is a person who after leaving his/her habitual place of residence, legally requests sanctuary in another country.

2.1   News and genre

Hungarian scholar Mónika Andok (2015: 75) mentions genre as a type of media content, the definition of which is approached from different angles by different disciplines. The author offers two ways to summarize these: one is to think of genre not in a textual theory framework, but in a broader one, while the other initiates the expansion of the concept of text. Both options lead to communicative interaction, considering that genres are social constructs, and their content are rooted in social situations.

The news genre has been defined by many scholars from many perspectives throughout time, but the present study does not intend to set up a preferential list, so it only touches upon a few. News can be thought of as a press event, as a construct in the human mind, as a report, as an event of interest, as a hybrid genre etc. (Andok 2015: 51).

The style of the given news is highly dependent on the topic (politics, economics, culture etc.) and the knowledge of the audience. In the traditional sense, news texts are indifferent or elaborate, descriptive, and strive for factuality (Andok 2003: 68). Further characteristics include timeliness, unexpectedness, significance, curiosity and being shaped by values (McQuail 2003: 293–294). However, today's media industry is characterised by the softening of news, as a result of which news channels and news portals increasingly follow the principle of infotainment, that is, transmitting information in an entertaining way (Andok 2015: 51).

One of the main forms of telling different stories is through the means of news, which offers an understanding of the world, organizes our knowledge and gives meaning to the chain of events (Andok 2015: 72). Moreover, narratives provide a point of reference for decisions and coordinate our perception. Due to the different ways in which reality is presented, Fulton et al. (2005: 1) refers to narratives as powerful framing tools and as significant manifestations of representation.

The possibilities of storytelling via news have expanded in the digital space. More and more tools are available to structure information and events, and thus provide different interpretations. However, Fulton et al. (2005: 3–4) notes that there is a business interest behind media narratives, hence the satisfaction of advertisers is as important if not more important than the satisfaction of readers. The latter finding is an especially important aspect in the life of online news sources, which leads us to the next subchapter.

2.2   News in the online space

With the advent of the digital age the history of news entered a new phase, in which recipients can consume more information through more channels than ever. In addition, the potential for news production has expanded: almost anyone can become a content creator. In a sense, traditional news media no longer dominates, but rather the audience decides what counts as news (Anderson, Downie Jr. & Schudson 2016: 100–101).

We encounter hybrid genres on a daily basis in the convergence culture[3] outlined by Jenkins (2008: 3–4), which is exemplified by the repertoire of online space. Content flows through several media platforms, media consumption is concentrated, while technologies are converging. In the world of media convergence every story can be told, and every brand can be

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[3]   "By convergence, I mean the flow of content across multiple media platforms, the cooperation between multiple media industries, and the migratory behaviour of audiences who will go almost anywhere in search of the kinds on entertainment experiences they want." (Jenkins 2008: 2)

sold. However, the content flow depends on the active participation of users, who interpret and internalize information bits, which they then share with the community through social interaction and thus contribute to the given image.

Potter (2015: 206, 214) summarizes the effect of convergence on news in three points: loss of readers, loss of advertisers, and increased turnout. The author emphasizes that news is a construct that develops in the practice of journalism. In addition, he draws attention to the media literate approach of handling news and articles in the online space. The necessary skills can be grouped along four dimensions:

- cognitive: the skill of analysing news, comparing statements, judging reality and balance;
- emotional: the skill of sensitive and empathetic perception and interpretation;
- aesthetic: the skill of analysis from a professional and artistic perspective and comparison with a different formal framework;
- moral: the skill of analysing ethical considerations, comparing sources and judging journalistic ethics.

Internet as a medium allows greater interactivity, while links provide instant connections. Online journalism is less formalized and requires a new kind of expertise. Its practice follows the principle of the digital media pyramid: it starts with the most essential information (the lead answers the *who, what, when, where, why, how* questions), refers back to previous articles published in the given topic and reports, illustrates, potentially places advertisement to then finish the article with references (Andok 2013: 166).

The three phases of online news production are distinguished by Chung, Nam & Stefanone (2012: 172). The first is the reproduction of traditional print materials. The second is complemented with the creation of original content and linking, while the third includes the willingness to rethink the online community and try new forms of storytelling.

Furthermore, the development of digital media prioritises the aspect of immediacy and primacy in the news competition (Anderson, Downie Jr. & Schudson 2016: 62–63). A similarly important aspect is newsworthiness, which Andok (2013: 172) defines as a liaison concept. It facilitates the work of editors when choosing between events and highlighting the ones that are worthy of publication. The violation of norms or negativity, immediacy, closeness, relevance, harmony, unexpectedness, superlatives, and sense of eliteness can all constitute news-worthiness. Then, news selection is followed by the framing practice as it creates new reports and readings by highlighting specific events.

Sensationalism is another term which is mentioned quite frequently when describing the practice of news production and newsworthiness. According to Teneboim and Cohen (2015: 213), sensational headlines that evoke emotions and arouse interest in the blink of an eye bring the highest number of visitors. Examples include crime, violence and accidents, and catastrophes, which can increase the arousal level of readers, thus achieving that readers spend more time on the given article.

2.3   Hungarian news consumption trends

Given that the present study concerns the online segment of the Hungarian media market, it is necessary to briefly mention the news consumption habits of the population. Based on the results of a representative survey commissioned by the Mérték Media Analysis Workshop (2017), the patterns of media consumption and information acquisition are unchanged.

The main source of public news occurs in the form of televised new, which is closely followed by the internet, overtaking the radio and print market. The online space is especially prevalent among the youth and professional classes. The internet-centred information acquisition characterises 36% of the population, while 40% of respondents get their news intake form online sources at least once a week (Mérték Media Analysis Workshop 2017: 4, 12).

It is interesting to compare the findings of the Hungarian research with the results of the Digital News Report 2018, as there are proportional differences in several points. Most prominently, the latter attributes 87% to online news consumption, followed by television (70%). However, it is premised that the online survey method usually underestimates the latter source. Nevertheless, the report highlights the Hungarian population's strikingly low trust in news (Reuters Institute 2018: 84–85).

The differences are probably due to the different methodological approaches. While the Hungarian research reported exclusive rates, its international counterpart determined percentages in the light of parallel consumption. From the point of view of the present study the most important trend is the growth of the online segment, which thus validates the chosen field of research.

2.3   Media effects and the online media

The evolution of internet resulted in the end of the opinion-forming hegemony of traditional media, such as television, radio and newspapers. The internet does not only offer a possibility to check information, but it also gives room for expressing diverse opinions (Bajomi-Lázár, 2006: 62). These characteristics generate a tremendous amount of information and increased information noise, the handling of which requires cognitive capacity and energy investment. Various search optimization engines, algorithms and other practices take advantage of this with the goal of making the processing easier.

The analysis of the media's agenda-setting role remains a prominent field of research. The importance of this role can be seen in modern political communication, more precisely in parties' agenda-making ambitions. A tangible example is migration, the trigger of this study, which has been one of the most dominant topics on the Hungarian political and public agenda since 2015 (Bajomi-Lázár 2018:67).

One of the creators of the theory, McCombs already drew attention to the growing importance of platforms offered by the internet in 2005, however, he saw a striking resemblance between online and traditional media agendas. In a later study, McCombs, Shaw & Weaver (2014) consider the categorization of thematic processes to be necessary due to the steady increase in content and the number of communications channels and reject the previous unified approach.

The presence of the agenda-setting theory forms the focus of Ninkovic-Slavnic's (2016) study, who approached the phenomenon of the internet as a challenge with regard to thematization. Her hypothesis, according to which vertical media (which targets the whole population) plays a dominant role in setting the online agenda, while horizontal media (which targets

a specific audience) modifies this agenda based on the needs of the audience, seemed to be justified.

Framing, another theory of key importance, is a highly researched concept in several fields of study. Linguistic and media framing are central to this particular paper. To frame is "to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation for the item described" (Entman 1993: 52). Although there are different definitions of the concept, they all agree that frames help construct the often abstract, elusive reality that surrounds us through cognitive representations (Benczes & Benczes 2018: 1). Frames are deeply rooted in our use of language, using a word associated with a frame can activate the entire frame.

This attribute is especially relevant in the case of news, where the role of the chosen words and expressions is even greater, as they are able to offer whole frames for the interpretation of a given event. The frames used by journalists, editors are frequently referred to as "media frames", while journalistic practice relies on "framing devices" that include important lexical choices (Benczes & Benczes 2018: 2–3).

This perspective on framing is elaborated in detail in Fillmore's (1982) work on frame semantics. He states that the meaning of words can be accessed through frames and that access to background information rooted in the semantic frame is required for the interpretation of a word. Consequently, the analysis of words and expressions used in news along with the frames they evoke is essential.

Several studies investigate the framing of different events in the light of online media (Benczes & Benczes 2018; Meraz & Papacharissi 2013; Tian & Stewart 2005). Based on the research of Cacciatore, Scheufele & Iyengar (2016: 20), framing theory is still highly relevant, but they emphasize that the changing media environment requires the constant rethinking of framing theory. In conclusion, the international and national examples confirmed the relevance of the research question and outlined the adequate methodological choices.

2.5   Africa in international news

Usually, the media makes the news that may be unknown to recipients understandable and conceivable by framing distant events in a way that is relevant and engaging to the audience. However, such presentation often leads to simplified broadcasting that combines true and false elements (Gurevitch, Levy & Roeh 1991: 206).

A considerable amount of research has concluded that Africa and the developing world is featured less in the international news flow than the global north (Ogola 2015: 22). In addition, the representatives of the critical approach emphasize that news articles covering the world's poorest regions are characterised by misinformation. For instance, Africa's representation tends to convey the message of alienation, distance, and diversity based on generalization. Ebron (2002: 2) argues that the continent is in many cases framed by global news as a scene of ethnic struggle, famine and unstable political systems.

Nonetheless it is important to acknowledge that the definition and interpretation of Africa is a complex task. The mediated representation of the continent gives way to different inter-pretations and perceptions. As Mudimbe (1988: 23) explains, Africa as a coherent ideological and political unit was born during the European expansion, but this image has since undergone

many reinterpretations by local and diasporic intellectuals, ideological apparatuses, educational institutions, traveller reports and the media.

Critics accuse news reports about Africa of being episodic, simplistic and negative in tone, which homogenise the continent, overemphasize humanitarian missions, simplify ethnicities, and highlight "rescue operations" led by the West (Bunce 2015: 42). Moreover, these reports operate with sensationalism, cover reports about catastrophes, tribal conflicts and frame non-African actors as either victims or helpers (Palmberg 2001: 9). Representation based on the former characteristics is both powerful and dangerous: it deepens negative stereotypes, reinforces neo-colonial power inequalities and undermines intercultural togetherness (Bunce 2015: 42). Furthermore, Mengara (2001: 8) notices a certain western fascination with Africa which objectifies, exoticizes and contrasts the continent with the "Enlightened West" based on difference.

In practice, the homogenisation of Africa can be understood as the "reduction" of the continent to a country (Kayser-Bril 2014). When news articles mention 'Africa', in many cases they refer to a certain country or region but still use the continent's name as a buzzword and thus activate distinct frames. By doing so, articles make sense of a segment of the world about which many have no personal experience.

The process is based on the part-whole metonymy, in which Africa, that is, the whole, stands for part. According to Kövecses and Radden (1998: 41), metonymy is a natural part of everyday language use. Besides its social-communicative function, metonymy can be used as rhetoric device with the aim of evoking humour, sensation or liking. From the point of view of African news, it is capable of the simplification and generalization of an event across the continent.

On the other side of the coin are the news-producing media outlets, which only rarely have the budget to send correspondents to different parts of the world. Many opt for local journalists, who, in turn, have drawn attention to two major limitations in Bunce's (2015: 48–49) in-depth research. Firstly, they are expected to produce marketable and newsworthy articles. Secondly, media outlets are not willing to employ locals who do not follow the main norms of international journalism, such as the principle of objectivity. As a result, it is common practice to rely on materials from a country's news agency and/or the world's leading news agencies (Bunce 2015: 49). Consequently, it can be concluded that the representation of Africa is constantly evolving through a complex network of relationships.

3   Methodology

The research set out to present the linguistically embedded methods of analysing media representation – in this case, the representation of Africa in the online media. It is clear from the above that most media platforms link frames and pictures with negative connotations to Africa. Considering that Hungarian news portals follow similar sourcing practices and frequently rely on articles published on foreign sites, the study's presumption is that Africa's media representation operates with negative images, maintaining the phenomenon of Afro-pessimism.

In order to shed light on the possible methods of analysis, the research follows a combined methodology, which is based on a descriptive content analysis and is complemented by the novel sentiment analysis. The content analysis used qualitative variables: it categorised the units of analysis into topics and contrasted them with the sentiments in the texts.

The units of analysis were chosen from the leading Hungarian news portals of the 2015-2017 period, that is, 24.hu, Index and Origo (DKT 2015, 2016, 2017). The research focused on the headlines and the leads of the articles considering the limitations and the statistically proven fact that users generally only read the first part of articles, meaning that they only consume headlines and potentially leads in today's information flood (GO-Gulf 2018). During the sampling process articles with headlines and/or leads containing the words *Africa*, *African* or *other African country, nationality (e.g. Botswana/Botswanan)* were chosen from the "Africa" tag. The restrictions made it possible to list all units of the population using a census, therefore 382 articles published between January 1, 2015 and December 31, 2017 were analysed.

It is important to note that the choice of the three news portals served the purpose of wider sampling, the comparison based on political orientation was not the aim of the research. At the same time, one should not go by the fact that two of the selected news portals are openly anti-government (Index, 24.hu) and one is pro-government (Origo). Although the objectives did not include the separation and comparison of conservative and liberal approaches, in a future research it may provide additional information for interpreting different conceptual frameworks that the corpus under study consists of articles written from such different perspectives.

Sentiment analysis[4] is an area of natural language processing that helps to understand the set of views and opinions that lie in or behind texts (Liu 2012: 7). Among others, the method is capable of detecting the polarity of expressions, that is whether a given text operates with positive or negative words. Moreover, with the help of sentiment analysis an unstructured data set becomes structured and analysable.

For the purpose of this study, it was of heightened importance to choose a method that can bypass the human factor to determine the positive/negative tone of the units of analysis. The input was offered by the Hungarian Sentiment Lexicon, which lists 1,748 positive and 5,940 negative words (Szabó 2014: 219–224). Although the method is limited and, in some cases, needed manual correction, it produced very fruitful and informative results.

The second presented method, the headline analysis targeted title choices, but the approach necessitated the inclusion of leads in two-thirds of the units, and even the inclusion of the whole text in a few cases. This variable examined whether the words *Africa* or *African* are present in headlines, and if so, what they denote: the whole continent, or metonymically a certain country or region. If none of the buzzwords were mentioned in the headlines, the analysis was continued in two ways.

In one case, a particular country or nationality was included in the title, while in the other case, no area denotation was included. If a particular country or nationality was included, the focus was on how many of the continent's 54 countries are represented in the articles. If the headlines were general, the focus was shifted to at which point in the article the reader finds out about the discussed region. The latter focus was also important when analysing headlines that feature the words *Africa, African* with the aim of finding out whether it is enough to read the lead to find out if the topic concerns Africa as a whole or a smaller unit.

Besides the statistical consideration mentioned above, according to which 90% of readers' attention concentrates on the beginning of articles, the separate analysis of headlines is inevitable in the online sphere. On the one hand, good title selection is considered to be the most effective framing tool and, on the other hand, the key to long-term memory (Benczes &

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[4] According to the Cambridge Dictionary (n.d.), a sentiment is "a thought, opinion or idea based on a feeling about a situation, or a way of thinking about something".

Benczes 2018: 6). Furthermore, some platforms only offer headlines (and potentially featured images that do not form part of this study), therefore users can only rely on them when deciding to read on or not. Thus, the function of the title is to grab attention and to anticipate the expected reading experience (Piotrkowicz, Dimitrova, Otterbacher & Markert 2017: 656). Because of this consideration and the size constraints, headlines posed as the units of analyses in the above and below presented segments.

The final method approached the analysis of headlines from a holistic perspective. The analysis of the titles containing verbs of action or occurrence revealed that, according to the interpretation of leading Hungarian news portals, negative or positive events were more likely to be linked to Africa. State of being verbs and non-verbal titles were excluded from the analysis. In addition, if multiple verbs were present in a headline, they were all part of the study, without distinguishing between subordinate and coordinate structures.

The reason behind the choice of word-class is that verbs are capable of activating the entire frame to which they belong (Fillmore 1982; Benczes & Benczes 2018). Kim and Hovy (2006: 3) refer to verbs as powerful opinion-bearers, while Klavans and Kan (1998: 681) state that the verbs used in the text contribute to the conceptual map of actions and events.

In the shared social space, the sentiment-based polarity of a text depends on the semantic composition of sentences and words. From a linguistic point of view, verbs play an important role in the semantics of a sentence. From the point of view of sentiments, verbs of either positive or negative tone are frequently referred to as "opinion verbs", which provide information about the nature of actions and events (Karamibekr & Ghorbani 2012: 329). Consequently, comparing the verbs with the lists of the Hungarian Sentiment Lexicon provided additional information about the negative or positive tone of the analytical units.

4   Results

4.1   *Topics and sentiments*

The results of the sentiment analysis show that slightly more than half (58%) of the analytical units were dominated by negative sentiments, the proportion of positive sentiments was much lower (26%), while neutrality, that is to say an equal proportion of negative and positive sentiment values, occurred in sixty units (16%).
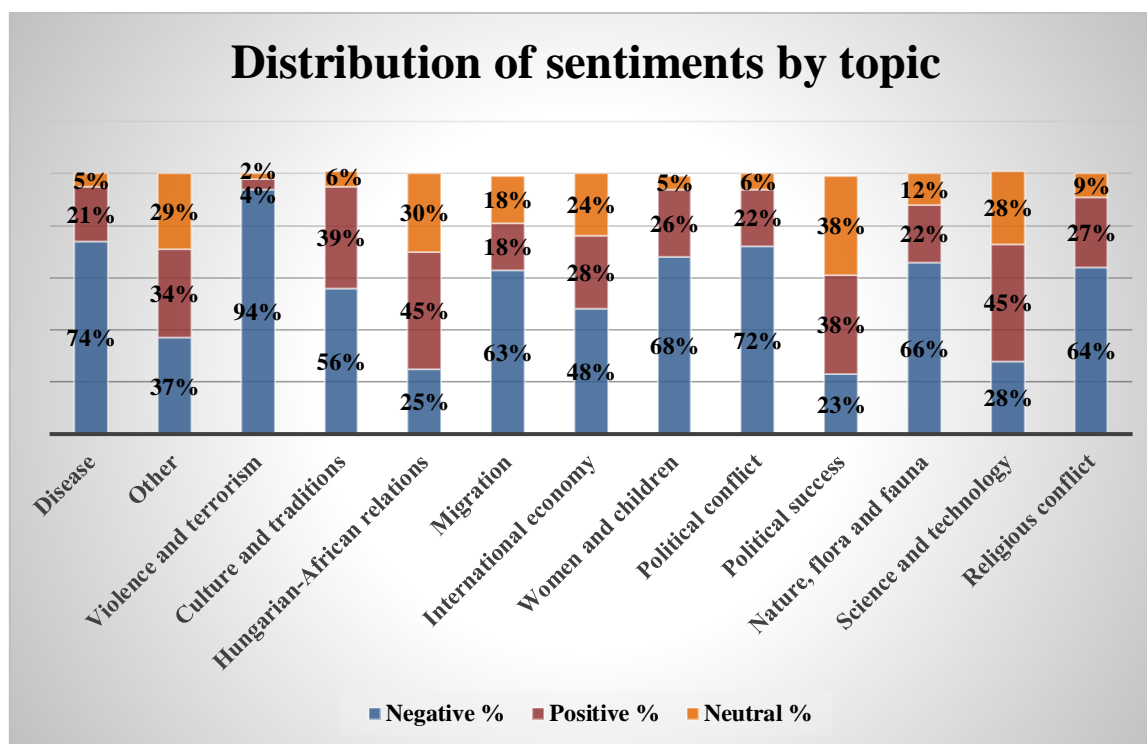
Figure 1. The distribution of sentiments by topic

The most prevalent topic, *Violence and terrorism*, is absolutely dominated by negative sentiments. The second most common *Nature, flora and fauna* theme is also characterised by negative sentiments; however, the applicable ratio is not as dominant as in the previous case. For instance, words of negative tone, such as *victim, death, terror* are featured in the first theme's units of analysis, whereas the negative tone of *captivity, poaching, hunting* is somewhat balanced by positive sentiments such as *beautiful, help* in the second most prevalent topic.

The most balanced topic is *Other*, with similar proportions of negative, positive and neutral tones, that is, units that have equal negative and positive sentiment. This validates the value, which served as a "container" of miscellaneous units for the easier and more transparent handling of results, and did not distort the overall picture, neither positively nor negatively.

The topic of *Migration* is quite varied. 63% of its units are characterised by negative words, but positive and neutral sentiments were also detected in 18%-18%. In practice this means that the words range from *danger*, through *illegal* to *opportunity*. The moderate number of units of analysis indicates that in the migration-oriented context discussed above, no significant results and decisive answers can be obtained by examining only this topic. Therefore, even though special attention was paid to the topic, the analysis treated it equally to the other themes with the objective of seeing the bigger picture.

Only three topics, *Hungarian-African relations, Political success* and *Science and technology* were dominated by positive sentiments. These three topics account for 19.1% of all news coverage. What makes the first theme interesting is that the result coincides with the Hungarian government's southern opening policy that frames the African continent as an attractive business and economic destination. The positive tone of *Political success* partly validated the former separation of the topic of politics, while the units of *Science and technology*

mostly concern inventions, innovations and the introduction of technological novelties. However, the positiveness of these is somewhat mitigated by the causal relationship, according to which innovation and advances are caused by underdevelopment and poverty.

Finally, the prevalence of negative sentiments in the *Political conflict* and *Religious conflict* topics validate the use of the word 'conflict'. The *Disease* topic also has a notable proportion of negative sentiments, for instance, *death*, *epidemic* and *infection*. The rest of the themes are also characterised by a great amount of negativity, though, not so dominantly, with a majority of 48%–68%.

4.2   Headlines and sentiments

The separate analysis of the headlines was conducted with the aim of highlighting potential metonymic relations, the variety of country representation and the ratio of general titles. The results show a mixed picture: the words *Africa, African* were found in 37% of headlines, specific country or nationality denotation in 24%, and general patterns in 39% of titles.

Regarding the first option, *Africa* and/or *African* referred to the whole continent or a particular region in 50%–50%. The latter option, that is when Africa did not refer to the whole continent, was divided into two more categories: 9% denote "some" Africa (West Africa, Sub-Saharan Africa, etc.) and 41% denote a specific country. An example of the previous is the "EU would stop the refugee influx with African investment" headline, in which the word *African* refers to North Africa, as the article later explains. An example of the latter is the "NBA to open academies in Africa and India" headline, in which *Africa* actually denotes Senegal.

This pattern is based on the part-whole metonymy, where the whole (Africa) replaces the part (particular country, region). Although drawing far-reaching conclusions would be wrong, important patterns can be seen from the trend. On the one hand, it is a form of simplification, which does not assume the ability to differentiate between African countries. On the other hand, the pattern maintains Afro-pessimism: if an event of negative connotation happens in "Africa", even though it only affects one country or region, it is generalized for the whole continent via metonymy.

The second option is based on the presupposition derived from international sources, according to which news reports only cover a small segment of the continent's countries. However, the analysis revealed that the 2015–2017 sample mentioned 36 countries out of 54 in the headlines. In fact, this number increases to 45 when including units of general title but specified lead. Based on these findings, it can be said that in the analysed period, the media representation of Africa covered most of the continent.

The last option of general headlines was the most prevalent in the sample. Although the use of buzzwords, hints and frames is present, there was no denotation in these units of analysis. They are characterized by generalizing, but attention-grabbing headline selection. There could be many reasons for this, ranging from hoping for greater reach, through conveying a sense of familiarity to deliberate simplification. However, given that the research is not intended to reveal the motivations of the issuer, it would be a mistake to draw far-reaching conclusions from this pattern.

A further curiosity is that in the case of the first and third option (either *Africa, African* or nothing in the title), 83% of the leads revealed the exact topic of the article. Considering that according to the above detailed statistics, users tend to read the lead, chances are they will get

accurate information on the concerned segment of the continent. The remaining 17%, on the other hand, requires reading through the articles for accurate orientation.

4.3   Verbs and sentiments

The analysis of the verbs used in headlines further specified Africa's Hungarian, online image. At the end of the multi-stage process, the verbs that are found in the Hungarian Sentiment Lexicon were highlighted and presented in the form of a word cloud. In this way, value association once again happened in an objective manner. Due to the pre-set criteria, more than half of the units – precisely their headlines – dropped out, because they featured verbs that are not listed in the lexicon.

A total of 145 sentiment verbs can be classified in the remaining titles. 79% of them are negative and 21% are positive. The verbs were first extracted in their original forms, then all of them were transformed into 3rd person singular, and lastly, a separate column was dedicated to the verb stems. The verbs and their frequencies are presented in the form of a word cloud for better illustration. In most of the cases the verb stems were used, except for verbs, where the meanings are modified by the prefixes (e.g. lemond vs. mond – to resign vs. to say) or in cases, where the stems are rarely used on their own (e.g. meghal vs. hal – to die).
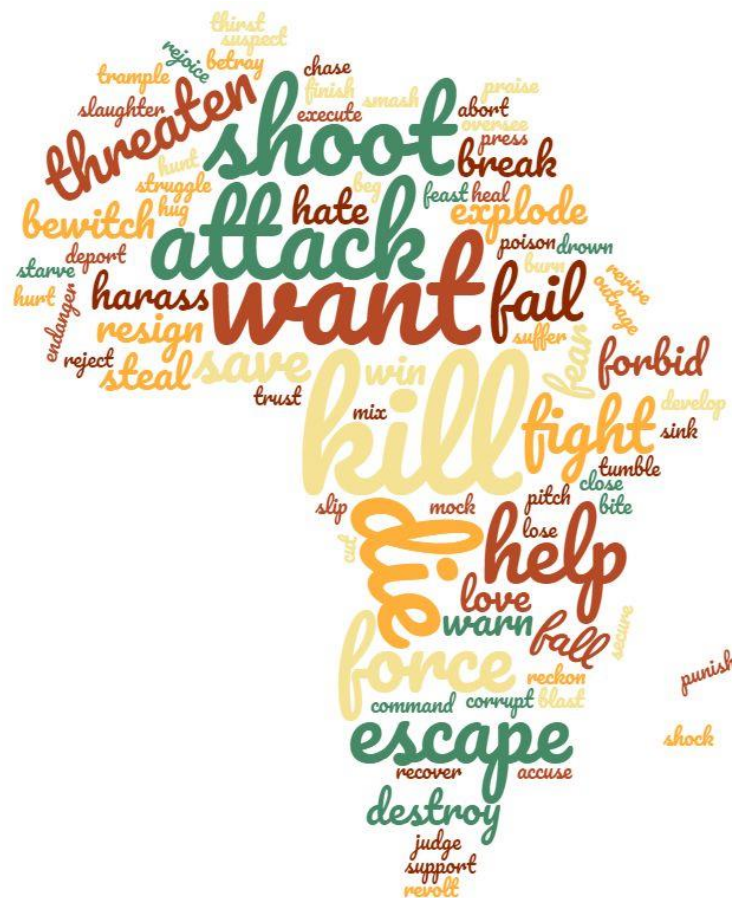

Figure 2. Africa's word cloud based on the sentiment analysis of verbs (direct translation of the original Hungarian verbs)

As the word cloud demonstrates, the most frequent verbs in the headlines, such as *die, kill, attack, want, shoot* are all negative in tone. These negative sentiments are mostly characteristics of the *Violence and terrorism, Political conflict* and *Nature, flora and fauna* topics' headlines. Out of positive verbs, *escape, help, save* were found more than once, while the rest of the verbs are scattered all over the cloud. Positive verbs were primarily indicative of title selection in *Hungarian-African relations, Culture and traditions* and *Disease (as a positive outcome).* Based on the conducted verb analysis, the continent is clearly characterised by negative actions and events, but the interpretation of the result is only appropriate when managed together with the other research components.

5   Discussion

Referring to the examples highlighted from the international literature, the Hungarian sample also shows negative representation trends, even if not exclusively. Besides, the frames of

- *Africa as the scene of instable political systems,*
- *scene of struggle and violence,*
- *victim image,*
- *remoteness,*
- *homogeneous entity,*
- *exotic continent with peculiar flora and fauna* appeared in the analysed sample.

The results show an interesting correlation with the phenomenon of Afro-pessimism that frequently occurs in sources. Although researchers do not completely agree on the meaning of the concept, Nothias (2012: 54) encourages the use of the aspect as a central element in studies of the relationship between news media and Africa. Afro-pessimism is most often referred to as a type of pessimist attitude towards the continent's ability to cope with poverty, underdevelopment, governance and health problems, and is seen as a feature of Western media representation. However, the author draws attention to the necessity of a wider and more thorough approach, and suggests five components to evaluate the Afro-pessimistic nature of any research results:

1. The phenomenon includes the possibility of generalization, which unites the 54 states as one entity. As it can be seen in the chapter discussing the results of the headline analysis, the trend is realized through metonymic title selection in the Hungarian sample, although it is not exclusive, since most of the countries were included in the news of the period under review. Moreover, it is important to state that Afro-pessimism can also emerge from the coverage of a particular African country or region.

2. When news media refers to a topic as "African", in many cases, it does not refer to people living in a geographically demarcated area, but rather to more prominent "black" parts and individuals, thus applying racial categorization (Nothias 2012: 55). Even though Black Africa or Sub-Saharan Africa occurred in several Hungarian news articles, it was not the focus of this research, therefore it does not provide any detail about this second aspect.

3. It follows from the first two aspects that the news coverage of Africa is selective, which reflects the theories of agenda-setting and framing presented in the theoretical overview.

Furthermore, the selection process usually highlights negative events, which, though not unanimous, appeared in the Hungarian online media.

4. According to Nothias (2012: 56), the fourth aspect approaches the continent's development from an ethnocentric perspective and depicts it as a postcolonial phenomenon. Considering that the analyses of the present paper emphasized other factors, the results do not reveal this aspect either.

5. The last component of Afro-pessimism is the prediction, which forecasts a dark future and slow development for the continent. The underdevelopment frame appeared in the articles of the *Science and technology* topic, which predominantly covered the state of innovations in Africa.

Providing further interest is the presence of new narratives emerging in Africa's media representation, which may be able to counterbalance Afro-pessimism, but other studies are needed to assess the true extent of the change (Nothias 2012: 59–60). Nevertheless, two new narratives – the role of China and "Africa rising" – appeared in the Hungarian sample. The *International economy* topic mostly covers Chinese endeavours, while some units of the same topic along with *Hungarian-African relations, Science and technology, Political success* frame Africa as a resource-rich, aspiring and growing region.

Summarizing the appearance of Afro-pessimism in Hungarian news portals, it can be stated that the phenomenon manifests itself in the form of generalization and selection. In addition – according to the most cited definition – a negative attitude towards the continent's ability to cope with poverty (*scene of struggle and violence* frame), underdevelopment (*Science and technology* topic), governance (*Africa as the scene of instable political systems* frame, *Political conflict* topic) and health problems (*Disease* topic) is a recurring feature of the Hungarian sample. However, the postcolonial and racialised approach does not characterise the leading Hungarian news portals.

Afro-pessimism could also stand as a separate research direction, the importance of which has been pointed out by international Africa researchers in several works (De Beer 2010; Nothias 2012, 2018; Scott 2017). A future research could focus on the phenomenon beyond news media or aim to shed light on the motivations behind Afro-pessimistic choices.

Referring to the chapter about news production it can be stated that the softening of news is characteristic of the analysed news portals, as well. Regarding Africa, newsworthiness is embodied in the from of violation of norms, negativity, use of superlatives and unexpectedness. Moreover, headlines implying violence or catastrophes – let it be natural, economic or social – function as effective attention-grabbers. Although the research focused on the issuer side and the results do not allow us to draw conclusions regarding the emotions evoked in the recipients, it is likely that sentiments establish the level of emotional involvement and arousal.

To summarize, the results of the research show that Africa's media representation does not exclusively operate with negative images, certain topics are framed explicitly positively. The combined methodology revealed that the analysed leading news portals tend to convey a negative image of Africa. Furthermore, the study presented three methods that are suitable for the linguistically embedded analysis of media representation, thus outlining and categorising the frames used in online news and exploring the topics that the leading Hungarian news portals link to the continent.

6   Conclusion

Global mobility has led to ever greater levels of population movement that affects the structure and institutions of political, economic and social relations. The caused changes have called for the scientific need to examine the role media plays in depicting the issues that determine the political and public agenda.

The underlying motivation of this research is the combination of today's migration statistics, and the studies and personal interest of the paper's author. Based on these factors, the study raised the question of how Africa is represented in the Hungarian online media, and how this representation can be examined through linguistic means.

The research revealed the topics and frames along which news portals provide information, paying special attention to the proportion of positive and negative sentiments. Moreover, it was highlighted that phenomenon of Afro-pessimism manifests itself in the form of generalization and selection. The research also outlined the characteristics of news production in light of the studied Hungarian news portals.

It can be concluded that even though Africa's media representation is not exclusively negative – certain topics are framed explicitly positively – the analysed leading news portals tend to convey a negative image of Africa. Nevertheless, it is notable that the three topics that included a higher ratio of positive sentiments account for one-fifth of all news, which implies a more differentiated picture than described in the previous literature.

In addition, the analysis of headlines unveiled that simplification via metonymic title selection is only partially characteristic of the Hungarian sample, general but attention-grabbing headlines were more common. Moreover, the analysis of verbs revealed that the most common verbs in titles, which can be classified with the method of sentiment analysis, are predominantly negative.

However, it is important to emphasize that the media representation of a continent is a complex issue, since many different actors are involved in how the wider world sees the image conveyed through different channels. Defining Africa and thus interpreting it is not an easy task. The continent's mediated image gives rise to different interpretations and perceptions.

The image of Africa is constantly evolving through a complex network of relationships. Therefore, it is clear that the complexity of the geographical area makes it almost impossible to examine a uniform representation for the whole continent. It is probable that Egypt or Tunisia are on the periphery of the association net connected to Africa, while the Democratic Republic of the Congo or Botswana are more central. North Africa, Sub-Saharan Africa and the Republic of South Africa are difficult to put under a single media representation "hat", but the knowledge of these limitations, the detailed examination of literature and critical thinking have enabled relevant and reliable choices throughout the research.

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