

# CORPUS-INFORMED MEDIA LITERACY PEDAGOGY: ADDRESSING STIGMATIZATION IN ALBANIAN MEDIA DISCOURSE

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## ABSTRACT

This paper examines how corpus-assisted discourse analysis can inform media literacy pedagogy through the study of stigmatization in Albanian media discourse. Drawing on the STI(G)MA corpus of Albanian newspaper articles published between 2021 and 2024, the analysis identifies recurrent discursive mechanisms through which stigmatizing meanings are constructed and normalized, including implicit evaluation, presupposition, gendered framing, moral labeling, metaphor, and boundary marking. Building on these findings, the study translates corpus evidence into an analytical toolkit designed to foster critical language awareness within media literacy education. The toolkit is implemented with undergraduate students from the BA “English Language” programme and graduate students from the MSc “Teacher of English Language” programme at the Department of Foreign Languages, Faculty of Education and Philology, Fan S. Noli University, Korça, Albania. Through guided analysis of authentic media excerpts, students learn to recognize how seemingly neutral journalistic language can reproduce evaluative, polarizing, and stigmatizing interpretations. The study contributes both to empirical research on media discourse and to the development of pedagogically grounded, corpus-informed approaches to critical media literacy.

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## 1. Introduction

Stigmatization in media discourse plays a central role in shaping public perception and normalizing social exclusion. Media texts do not simply report events but actively construct meanings through recurrent lexical choices, evaluative patterns, and framing strategies. Linguistic analysis is therefore essential for identifying how stigmatizing interpretations are produced and circulated, particularly in contexts where such meanings are embedded in apparently neutral reporting. At the same time, media literacy research increasingly emphasizes the need for analytically grounded approaches that support critical engagement with media language.

This study investigates stigmatization in Albanian media discourse using a corpus-assisted discourse analytical approach. The analysis is based on the STI(G)MA corpus, which comprises systematically sampled articles from two national Albanian newspapers published between 2021 and 2024. The longitudinal and balanced design of the corpus allows for the identification of recurrent and normalized discursive patterns rather than isolated instances of bias.

While previous research on media stigmatization has largely relied on qualitative or critical discourse analysis, corpus-based studies, particularly those linked to media literacy pedagogy, remain limited in the Albanian context. This study addresses this gap by combining quantitative corpus techniques with qualitative discourse analysis to examine how stigmatization is constructed through routine linguistic practices.

The study makes a dual contribution. Empirically, it provides a corpus-based account of stigmatizing discourse in contemporary Albanian media. Pedagogically, it demonstrates how corpus findings can be translated into classroom activities that foster critical language awareness and media literacy among undergraduate and graduate students.

## 2. Stigmatization and media literacy: a discourse-oriented framework

Stigmatization is increasingly understood as a relational and discursively mediated social process rather than as an inherent attribute of individuals or groups. A widely cited sociological framework is offered by Link and Phelan, who define stigma as emerging when “elements of labeling, stereotyping, separation, status loss, and discrimination co-occur in a power situation” (Link & Phelan 2001, p. 367). This definition foregrounds labeling as a foundational mechanism, making it particularly relevant for the analysis of media discourse, where social actors are routinely named, categorized, and evaluated. Importantly, stigma is produced through acts of social designation rather than discovered in the stigmatized subject, a distinction that prevents the naturalization of stigma as an intrinsic quality (Link & Phelan 2001, pp. 367–368).

This relational understanding aligns closely with Critical Discourse Studies (CDS), which conceptualize discourse as “language use in speech and writing as a form of social practice” (Fairclough & Wodak 1997, p. 258; Wodak & Meyer 2015, p. 5). From this perspective, media discourse does not merely reflect social realities but actively contributes to the reproduction of power relations and systems of inequality. Discursive practices are thus not neutral; rather, they may “have major ideological effects” by normalizing evaluative meanings and exclusionary frames (Fairclough & Wodak 1997, p. 258). In the context of stigmatization, such effects become visible in the routinized use of evaluative lexis, metaphor, presupposition, and framing strategies that render stigmatizing representations commonsensical.

Within this discourse-oriented understanding of stigma, media literacy can be conceptualized as a form of critical language awareness concerned with how meaning, evaluation, and power are constructed in media texts. Critical approaches to media literacy emphasize not only access to media but also the ability to analyze representation and ideology. Kellner and Share describe critical media literacy as an approach that expands literacy to include media culture while deepening learners’ capacity to interrogate relationships between media, information, and power (Kellner & Share 2007). Similarly, the Aspen Institute defines a media-literate person as someone who can decode, evaluate, analyze and produce both print and electronic media (Aufderheide 1993, p. 1).

Moreover, media educators understand some basic precepts in common: media are constructed, and construct reality; media have commercial implications; media have ideological and political implications; form and content are related in each medium; receivers negotiate meaning in media (Aufderheide 1993, p. 2). Within this body of literature, media literacy is thus consistently linked to the analysis of representation, evaluation, and ideology in media discourse.

From an applied linguistics perspective, media literacy intersects strongly with Critical Language Awareness (CLA), which is concerned with understanding how language conventions and language practices are invested with power relations and ideological processes that people are often unaware of (Fairclough 1992/2014, cited in Taylor et al. 2017, p. 3). CLA emerged from dissatisfaction with decontextualized approaches to language teaching and from calls for explicit instruction that enables learners to read texts critically and to recognize how lexical and syntactic choices can position texts as authoritative and influence interpretation (Taylor et al. 2017, pp. 2–3). Within this body of work, applied linguists argue that learners require guided, age-appropriate pedagogical support to develop awareness of how seemingly neutral language choices may carry persuasive or ideological effects, emphasizing the educational importance of making such mechanisms accessible through instruction.

Language awareness research further emphasizes that developing sensitivity to language involves active learner engagement rather than the transmission of fixed linguistic knowledge. Svalberg frames language awareness by posing questions about whether individuals can become better language users, learners, or teachers through deeper understanding, and whether such understanding can enhance their “ability to see through language that manipulates or discriminates” (Svalberg 2007, p. 288, citing the ALA website). Within this body of work, language awareness is described as an ongoing process of investigation that involves learners in exploration, discussion, and discovery of how language works in use, rather than as awareness of a stable set of rules or facts (Svalberg 2007, pp. 296). This pedagogical orientation highlights the importance of engaging learners directly in analytical activities that draw attention to meaning–form relationships and to the effects of linguistic choices in texts.

Taken together, these perspectives position media literacy not as a purely functional skill but as a form of critical literacy grounded in analytical engagement with texts.

Buckingham defines media literacy as the knowledge and competencies required to use and interpret media, emphasizing analysis, evaluation, and critical reflection, and situating media education within traditions of linguistic and semiotic analysis (Buckingham 2003). This emphasis aligns closely with language awareness research, which conceptualizes learning as an ongoing process of investigation rather than the acquisition of a fixed body of knowledge and stresses the importance of involving learners directly in exploration and discovery of how language works in use (Svalberg 2007). Within this body of work, the development of sensitivity to evaluation, representation, and power in discourse is closely linked to pedagogical practices that engage learners in analytical activity and in noticing the effects of linguistic choices in authentic texts.

### 3. Corpus and methodology

The analysis is based on the corpus compiled within the national research project STI(G)MA, designed to investigate stigmatization in Albanian media discourse. The Albanian media discourse corpus (AlMeDiCo) consists of 960 journalistic articles published between January 2021 and December 2024 in two national newspapers, *Gazeta Shqip* and *Gazeta Bota Sot*. Articles were systematically sampled (ten per newspaper per month), resulting in a longitudinal and balanced dataset that enables the identification of recurrent and normalized discourse patterns rather than isolated cases. All texts were collected in their original Albanian form and organized into newspaper-specific subcorpora. The corpus was processed and analyzed using Sketch Engine (Kilgarriff et al. 2014). The analysis combined standard corpus-linguistic techniques, including frequency analysis, keyness, collocation, and concordance examination. Quantitative measures were used to identify salient lexical and evaluative patterns, while concordance analysis enabled qualitative interpretation of their discursive functions in context.

The identification of stigmatizing language followed a data-driven approach informed by sociological and discourse-analytical accounts of stigma (Link & Phelan 2001). Linguistic items were considered stigmatizing when they recurrently associated social actors or groups with deficit, deviance, threat, or moral inferiority, either explicitly or through implicit mechanisms such as framing, presupposition, metaphor, and evaluative prosody. Interpretation of findings was guided by Critical Discourse Studies,

conceptualizing discourse as social practice with ideological effects (Fairclough & Wodak 1997; Wodak & Meyer 2015). Analytical reliability was ensured through the consistent application of procedures across the entire corpus and repeated examination of concordance lines.

#### **4. Corpus findings: discursive patterns of stigmatization**

Corpus-assisted discourse analysis of the STI(G)MA corpus reveals that stigmatization in Albanian media discourse is constructed through a set of recurrent and interrelated linguistic mechanisms rather than through isolated instances of explicit bias. Across texts, topics, and time, stigmatizing meanings emerge through routine patterns of evaluation, framing, metaphor, and presupposition, which collectively normalize negative interpretations while maintaining an appearance of neutrality or factual reporting.

A central mechanism is evaluation, which operates predominantly in implicit form. Social actors are repeatedly embedded in negatively charged semantic environments through stable collocational patterns associated with deficiency, danger, or moral failure. Moral labels further intensify evaluative positioning by condensing judgment and situating individuals or groups within frameworks of blame, deviance, or betrayal, often without explicit justification. Through repetition across texts, such evaluative positioning becomes normalized and taken for granted.

Stigmatization is also produced through framing strategies that regulate social categorization and processes of othering. Lexical, grammatical, and syntactic choices systematically distribute agency, responsibility, and legitimacy unevenly across social actors, representing some as active and authoritative while framing others as passive, dependent, or problematic. Group-based references, including those related to gender or ethnicity, frequently reinforce implicit boundaries between a normative in-group and a stigmatized out-group, guiding interpretation without overtly negative language.

Metaphorical language contributes to stigmatization by enabling discursive distancing. Metaphors drawn from domains such as threat, disorder, or pathology recast social actors as abstract risks or problems rather than human subjects, reducing proximity

and empathy. Although less frequent than evaluative or framing devices, such metaphors cluster around topics of social anxiety and exert a powerful normalizing effect.

Finally, presupposition plays a key role in stabilizing stigmatizing discourse. Factive verbs, causal constructions, and concessive structures embed evaluative assumptions as backgrounded information, limiting alternative interpretations. Because these meanings operate below the level of explicit assertion, presuppositional strategies are particularly effective in naturalizing stigma while preserving the appearance of objectivity.

Taken together, these findings demonstrate that stigmatization in Albanian media discourse is sustained through routine linguistic practices whose underlying mechanisms remain stable across the four-year corpus and across both newspapers. This pattern-based perspective underscores stigmatization as a normalized feature of journalistic discourse and provides the empirical foundation for the corpus-informed pedagogical framework presented in the following section.

## **5. From corpus evidence to media literacy pedagogy: A corpus-informed analytical toolkit**

This section builds on the corpus findings in Section 3 by translating recurrent discursive mechanisms of stigmatization into corpus-informed analytical activities designed to support media literacy through critical language awareness. Drawing on the study's conceptual framework, the proposed toolkit operationalizes key patterns identified in the STI(G)MA corpus, such as implicit evaluation, framing, presupposition, moral labeling, and metaphor, through structured analytical tasks. All activities follow a shared design and are illustrated with authentic corpus examples, ensuring methodological coherence while addressing distinct mechanisms of stigmatization in media discourse.

### *5.1 Tone detector: identifying implicit evaluation*

**Analytical focus:** Implicit evaluative tone in institutional media discourse.

**Corpus input:** Concordance lines containing abstract nouns and risk-related expressions extracted from the STI(G)MA corpus

**Task description:** Learners are presented with short media excerpts that appear factual and descriptive. They are asked to identify lexical items that frame a situation as problematic or concerning without expressing explicit opinion or assigning blame. The task directs attention to abstract nouns, comparative intensifiers, and expressions of risk that subtly orient interpretation.

**Analytical goal:** To help learners notice how evaluative meaning can be conveyed through restrained lexical choices in apparently neutral reporting.

**Critical outcome:** Learners develop awareness of how tone operates independently of overt judgment, enabling them to question how “objective” language shapes perception.

**Example:** *Kishte dalë një problem edhe më shqetësues: Fondacioni për Menaxhimin e Butrintit, autoriteti i cili do të administronte sitin në dhjetë vitet e ardhshme, rrezikonte të mbetej jashtë kontrollit, për shkak se nuk klasifikohej autoritet publik.* (Gazeta “Shqip”, Tetor, 2022)

**English translation:** An even more troubling problem had emerged: the Butrint Management Foundation, the authority that would administer the site over the next ten years, risked remaining outside public control, as it was not classified as a public authority. (Gazeta “Shqip”, October 2022)

Rather than advancing an explicit argument, the excerpt frames the situation as concerning through lexical choices such as *problem*, *më shqetësues*, and *rrezikonte* (Eng. *problem*, *more troubling*, *risk*). No actor is directly criticized, yet the overall tone clearly guides the reader toward a negative interpretation. This makes the example effective for illustrating how evaluative meaning can be embedded in institutional language while maintaining an appearance of neutrality.

**Students’ feedback:** Students report that the passage initially reads as purely informational. After closer attention to word choice, however, they recognize how tone is shaped by a small number of evaluative terms, helping them understand how media discourse can influence interpretation without overt commentary.

### *5.2 Presupposition hunt: uncovering taken-for-granted meanings*

**Analytical focus:** Presupposition and backgrounded assumptions in media discourse.

**Corpus input:** Concordance lines containing impersonal constructions, nominalizations, and temporal–causal sequencing extracted from the STI(G)MA corpus

**Task description:** Learners are presented with media excerpts in which evaluation is not expressed through overt judgment but is embedded in what is treated as already known or self-evident. They are asked to identify linguistic elements that signal presupposition and to reflect on how grammatical choices allow assumptions to be presented as uncontroversial background information. Attention is drawn to impersonal observation (*vërehet*), nominalization (*implikimet*), and temporal sequencing, which guide interpretation without explicit argumentation.

**Analytical goal:** To show how presuppositions enable evaluative or delegitimizing interpretations to be normalized by presenting them as factual context rather than claims open to discussion.

**Critical outcome:** Learners develop awareness of how assumptions can be embedded in grammatical structure, allowing evaluative meanings to circulate while maintaining an appearance of neutrality.

**Example:** *Në javët e fundit vërehet shtimi i një presioni të konsiderueshëm nga mazhoranca përkundrejt këtyre institucioneve dhe specifikisht ndaj SPAK-ut, sapo ai institucion preku mega-afërën e parë qeveritare. Implikimet e nënkuptuara të ankesës që mazhoranca ka ndaj SPAK-ut paraqesin një pretendim shumë shqetësues.* (Gazeta “Bota Sot”, Qershor, 2022)

**English translation:** In recent weeks, an increase in considerable pressure from the parliamentary majority towards these institutions, and specifically towards SPAK, has been observed, following the moment when that institution touched upon the first major governmental scandal. The implied ramifications of the complaint that the majority has against SPAK constitute a highly troubling claim. (Gazeta “Bota Sot”, June 2022)

In this example, presupposition shapes interpretation by presenting political pressure as an observable fact rather than a contested claim. The impersonal formulation *vërehet shtimi* (Eng. an increase has been observed) removes any explicit evaluator, while the temporal construction *sapo ai institucion preku mega-afërën e parë qeveritare* (Eng. the moment when that institution touched upon the first major governmental scandal) suggests causality without arguing for it. The nominalized phrase *implikimet e nënkuptuara të ankesës* (the implied ratifications of the complaint) further shifts attention away from whether the complaint is justified toward how concerning it appears. Together, these choices embed evaluative meaning within grammatical structure rather than explicit stance.

**Students' feedback:** Students note that the passage initially reads as descriptive and objective. Through analysis, however, they identify how assumptions are built into the grammar of the text, helping them recognize how presupposition can guide interpretation without overt accusation.

### *5.3 Gender frame split: agency and vulnerability in representation*

**Analytical focus:** Gendered distribution of agency and dependence in media discourse.

**Corpus input:** Concordance lines containing gendered nouns (“gratë”, “burrat”, Eng. women, men) and verbs of decision, hesitation, and delegation extracted from the STI(G)MA corpus.

**Task description:** Learners are presented with media excerpts that discuss social or economic issues involving both women and men. They are asked to observe how agency is distributed grammatically and discursively: who is presented as deciding, acting, or controlling resources, and who is described as hesitant, dependent, or delegating responsibility. The task encourages learners to focus on recurring patterns across sentences rather than on isolated claims, noting how repetition and generalization contribute to normalized gender frames.

**Analytical goal:** To help learners recognize how gendered representations of agency and vulnerability are constructed through routine explanatory language, even in texts that appear informative, balanced, or evidence-based.

**Critical outcome:** Learners develop awareness of how media discourse can normalize unequal distributions of agency by repeatedly framing men as decision-makers and women as hesitant, dependent, or self-limiting, without explicit judgment or overt discrimination.

**Example:** *Kur bëhet fjala për të investuar para në fonde apo aksione, gratë shpesh druhen dhe ua lënë këtë gjë burrave. Në rrjetet sociale ka mjaft influencers që japin rekomandime. Por a mund t'u besosh këshillave të tyre? Gratë e kanë të vështirë të bëjnë karrierë, gratë paguhen mesatarisht më pak se burrat dhe gratë janë më të rrezikuara nga varfëria. Shkurt: gratë janë ende në disfavor. Çudia është megjithatë, se edhe në ato fusha ku gratë mund të reagojnë të pavarura, nuk e bëjnë këtë. Për shembull kur bëhet fjalë për të investuar paratë e tyre në fonde apo aksione. ... Bashkëshorti vendos shpesh për kapitalin. Shumë gra ua japin vullnetarisht të drejtën për të marrë vendime për pasurinë e tyre, burrave. Shumica e grave në botë, rreth dy të tretat e tyre, ua lënë bashkëshortëve marrjen e vendimeve financiare afatgjata. (Gazeta “Shqip”, Janar, 2023)*

**English Translation:** When it comes to investing money in funds or shares, women often hesitate and leave this matter to men. On social networks, there are many influencers who give recommendations. But can their advice really be trusted? Women find it difficult to build a career, women are paid on average less than men, and women are more exposed to the risk of poverty. In short, women are still at a disadvantage. What is surprising, however, is that even in those areas where women could act independently, they do not do so. For example, when it comes to investing their own money in funds or shares. .... The husband often makes decisions about capital. Many women voluntarily grant men the right to make decisions about their assets. The majority of women worldwide, around two-thirds of them, leave long-term financial decision-making to their husbands. (Gazeta “Shqip”, January, 2023)

In this example, gender framing emerges through the cumulative distribution of agency across the text. Men are repeatedly associated with verbs of decision and control (*vendos, marrjen e vendimeve* – Eng. decide, decision-taking), while women are described through verbs and constructions expressing hesitation, difficulty, and delegation (*druhen, e kanë të vështirë, ua lënë, ua japin vullnetarisht* – Eng. hesitate, with difficulty, leave, voluntarily). Notably, women’s behavior is explained through psychological and social factors (lack of confidence, socialization), whereas men’s role

as decision-makers is presented as unmarked and self-evident. Through repetition rather than overt judgment, the text constructs a normalized gender frame in which agency is aligned with men and vulnerability or dependence with women.

**Students' feedback:** Students often remark that the passage initially reads as informative and explanatory. When guided to focus on grammatical roles and repeated patterns, however, they notice how women are consistently framed as hesitant or dependent, while men appear as default decision-makers. This shift in attention helps learners understand how gendered representations can be produced through routine language use rather than explicit bias.

#### *5.4 Moral label trigger: from description to condemnation*

**Analytical focus:** Moral labels and evaluative polarization in media discourse.

**Corpus input:** Concordance lines containing morally charged terms extracted from the STI(G)MA corpus. Task description: Learners are presented with media excerpts in which moral labels are introduced to frame political or social positions. They are asked to identify the moral terms activated in the text and to observe how these labels organize evaluation by defining what is presented as legitimate, acceptable, or condemnable. Particular attention is paid to cases in which a moral label is explicitly rejected or denied, prompting learners to consider how moral categories can shape interpretation even when they are not affirmed.

**Analytical goal:** To show how the introduction of moral labels shifts discussion from descriptive or policy-based evaluation toward questions of moral legitimacy, thereby intensifying polarizing or stigmatizing interpretations.

**Critical outcome:** Learners become aware that moral judgment in media discourse does not rely solely on open accusation. Instead, it can be triggered through the very mention of morally loaded terms, which establish the boundaries of acceptable positions in advance.

**Example:** *Zhvillimi ekonomik dhe mirëqenia e qytetarëve të një rajoni nuk mund të konsiderohet si tradhti. Nacionalizmi simbolik është karakter tipik i shprehjes së patriotizmit te vendet e varfra, por patriotizmi i vërtetë është ai i vendeve të zhvilluara.*

*Patriotizmi i këtyre qeverive bazohet në zhvillimin ekonomik të vendit dhe mirëqenien e qytetarëve të tyre.* (Gazeta “Shqip”, Gusht 2021)

**English translation:** The economic development and well-being of the citizens of a region cannot be considered an act of betrayal. Symbolic nationalism is a characteristic form of expressing patriotism in poorer countries, whereas true patriotism is that of developed countries. The patriotism of these governments is based on the country’s economic development and the well-being of their citizens. (Gazeta “Shqip”, August 2021)

Although the label *tradhti* (Eng. betrayal) is explicitly rejected, its introduction places the discussion within a moral frame from the outset. The text does not simply describe economic development or policy choices; instead, it positions them in relation to moral categories such as betrayal and patriotism. The contrast between *nacionalizmi simbolik* (symbolic nationalism) and *patriotizmi i vërtetë* (true patriotism) further organizes interpretation by ranking political orientations along an implicit moral scale. In this way, disagreement is framed less as a matter of policy effectiveness and more as a question of ethical legitimacy.

**Students’ feedback:** Students often observe that the passage initially appears reassuring because it denies the accusation of *tradhti* (betrayal). When prompted to focus on the function of moral labels, however, they recognize how the term continues to shape interpretation by defining the moral stakes of the argument. This helps learners understand how moral framing can influence evaluation even when it is used defensively rather than accusatorily.

### *5.5 Boundary markers: metaphorical and collective framing*

**Analytical focus:** Metaphorical language and collective reference as mechanisms of symbolic boundary construction in media discourse.

**Corpus input:** Concordance lines containing metaphors of threat or damage and collective references to social groups extracted from the STI(G)MA corpus

**Task description:** Learners are presented with media excerpts in which social phenomena are described through metaphor and collective framing. They are asked to identify figurative expressions and generalized references that transform individual actions into a collective process. The task focuses on how metaphors drawn from domains such as medicine or natural phenomena, together with aggregate nouns and plural subjects, contribute to the construction of social boundaries by framing processes as threatening, uncontrollable, or destabilizing.

**Analytical goal:** To show how metaphorical and collective framing can recast complex social realities as boundary-defining phenomena, shaping perceptions of risk and belonging without explicit blame or moral judgment.

**Critical outcome:** Learners become aware that media discourse can produce symbolic distance and a sense of threat through ordinary descriptive language, using metaphors and collective references to organize interpretation and implicitly define who or what lies inside or outside the social “body.”

**Example:** *Ky është një fenomen, që po e hasin dhe shtete të tjera të Europës, si Çekia, apo Kroacia, Polonia, Bullgaria etj., thonë anëtarë të tjerë të qeverisë. Po, është e vërtetë, emigracioni është një proces normal, që do të ekzistojë gjithnjë dhe asnjëherë nuk mund të frenohet plotësisht. Por, në Shqipëri është kthyer në një hemorragji të pandalshme. Shqetësimi nuk është tek ikja në vetvete, por te ritmet e larta me të cilat njerëzit po largohen, arsyet për të cilat ata po largohen. Të rinjtë, ashtu si në vitet '90, nuk ngurrojnë që të rrezikojnë jetën, duke ikur drejt Mbretërisë së Bashkuar me gomone. Në një vend që zyrtarisht ka 2.8 milionë banorë (jo zyrtarisht nuk dihet, pasi Censi po shtyhet vazhdimisht, si të mos duan ta dinë se çfarë po ndodh realisht në vend), fshatra dhe qytete të tëra të vogla po zbrazen. Shqiptarët ikin më shumë dhe se nga vendet që janë në luftë, apo në konflikte etnike. (Gazeta “Shqip”, Tetor 2022)*

**English translation:** This is a phenomenon that is also being encountered by other European countries, such as the Czech Republic, Croatia, Poland, Bulgaria, and others, say other members of the government. Yes, it is true: migration is a normal process that will always exist and can never be completely stopped. But in Albania it has turned into an unstoppable hemorrhage. The concern is not migration in itself, but the high rates at which people are leaving and the reasons why they are leaving. Young people, as in the

1990s, do not hesitate to risk their lives by heading towards the United Kingdom in small boats. In a country that officially has 2.8 million inhabitants (unofficially the number is unknown, as the census is repeatedly postponed, as if there were no desire to know what is really happening in the country), entire villages and small towns are being emptied. Albanians are leaving in greater numbers than from countries that are at war or experiencing ethnic conflict. (Gazeta “Shqip”, October 2022)

In this example, metaphor and collective framing work together to construct a powerful boundary narrative. While migration is initially described as a “normal process,” the metaphor *hemorragji e pandalshme* (unstoppable hemorrhage) reframes it as a form of bodily damage, implying loss, danger, and urgency. At the same time, individual decisions are aggregated into collective movement through plural and generalized references (*njerëzit, të rinjtë, Shqiptarët* – Eng. people, young people, Albanians), which erase individual motivations and present migration as a mass phenomenon. Through these linguistic choices, the text constructs a sense of a national “body” under strain, defining social boundaries implicitly and without direct attribution of blame.

**Students’ feedback:** Students often note that the passage appears informative and explanatory at first reading. When prompted to focus on metaphor and collective reference, however, they recognize how the language transforms migration from a social process into a threatening condition affecting the collective. This helps learners understand how boundary marking can occur through ordinary descriptive language rather than overt exclusionary rhetoric.

In summary, the analytical activities outlined in Section 4 demonstrate how stigmatizing meanings in media discourse are produced through a range of routine linguistic mechanisms rather than through overtly hostile or accusatory language. By focusing on implicit evaluation, presupposition, gendered distributions of agency, moral labeling, and metaphorical and collective framing, the toolkit equips learners to recognize how interpretation is guided, boundaries are drawn, and social meanings are normalized in everyday media texts. Crucially, these mechanisms often operate below the level of conscious attention, reinforcing stigmatizing or polarizing interpretations while maintaining an appearance of neutrality, objectivity, or common sense. In this way, the corpus-informed toolkit provides a practical foundation for developing critical language

awareness and media literacy, preparing learners to engage more reflexively with public discourse examined in the following discussion.

## Conclusions

1. Stigmatization in Albanian media discourse is primarily realized through implicit linguistic mechanisms.

Corpus evidence shows that evaluation, framing, presupposition, metaphor, and moral labeling embed stigmatizing meanings within apparently neutral and factual reporting.

2. Presupposition and grammatical backgrounding are central to the normalization of stigma.

Impersonal constructions, nominalizations, and causal sequencing present evaluative assumptions as taken-for-granted context, limiting alternative interpretations.

3. Gendered representations display systematic asymmetries in agency and responsibility.

Men are more frequently associated with decision-making and institutional control, while women are recurrently framed as hesitant or dependent, typically through explanatory rather than overtly discriminatory language.

4. Moral labels function as powerful discursive triggers regardless of affirmation or denial.

The invocation of moral categories reframes political and social issues in terms of legitimacy and ethical judgment, shaping interpretation even when accusations are explicitly rejected.

5. Metaphorical and collective framing contributes to symbolic boundary construction and social distancing.

Metaphors and generalized references transform complex social phenomena into abstract risks or destabilizing forces without explicit attribution of blame.

6. Corpus-assisted discourse analysis provides a robust method for identifying normalized forms of stigmatization.

The combination of quantitative corpus techniques and qualitative discourse analysis reveals recurrent mechanisms that may remain obscured in isolated text analysis.

7. Operationalizing corpus findings enhances critical language awareness and media literacy.

The corpus-informed analytical toolkit demonstrates how empirical findings can be translated into pedagogical practices that support reflective and critical engagement with media discourse.

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### Author Contributions

- Eriola Qafzezi: Conceptualization, methodology, formal analysis, corpus compilation, writing – original draft, writing - review and editing.
- Dorela Kaçani: Methodology, corpus compilation, writing – original draft, writing - review and editing.

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