

Language and Politics of Affect in Selected Advocacy Campaigns on Trans-Border Migration

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Abstract

Migration is a universal phenomenon which cut across all human societies; it reflects a fundamental aspect of human nature. The study investigates how language is employed in advocacy efforts and the ways in which affective dimensions shape the political landscape surrounding trans-border migration. It identifies and analyses the specific linguistic choices employed by advocates in the discourse on trans-border migration, focusing on how language is used to convey affective message. Six (6) videos on migrating advocacy were purposively selected from YouTube site for the study. The analysis centered on the linguistic characteristics and evaluative elements of Affect found in the texts using Martin and White's (2005) Appraisal Theory. This study reveals that positive affect dominates migration advocacy discourse. The recurrent emphasis on happiness, security and satisfaction functions strategically to position migration as a desirable, attainable and morally justifiable life choice. The study also shows that Affect is not a peripheral feature of migration discourse; it is a core mechanism through which advocacy persuades, legitimises and mobilises audiences. Through this affective imbalance, migration is legitimised not only as an economic or political necessity but as an emotionally rational and desirable choice. This study contributes to a deeper understanding of how language mediates public sentiment and moral response, offering insights for more empathetic communication strategies and inclusive policy-making in the face of global migration challenges.

Keywords: Advocacy, Appraisal Theory, Affect, Migration discourse.

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INTRODUCTION

Migration is a universal phenomenon embedded across all human societies; it reflects a fundamental aspect of human nature. It concerns the relocation of individuals from one place to another, often entailing a permanent or semi-permanent change of residence. This movement is driven by the pursuit of establishing a new and lasting home. Alternatively, migration can involve the shift of individuals from one locale to another, leading to their settlement in a distant place (Nanzip, 2020).

The decision of individuals to migrate across geographical boundaries is influenced by a many factors which include: social, economic, cultural, environmental, health, educational or displacement-related circumstances, especially during times of conflict (Kainth, 2009). Historical evidence attests to the perpetual movement of humans for diverse reasons. Falola and Afolabi (2007) emphasise that Africans have been consistently on the move since the inception of civilization, scattering their influence across the continent and beyond.

The primary impetus for migration often stems from a lack of employment opportunities which result in suboptimal living conditions across various socio-economic strata. The allure of success stories among immigrants and Africans who have journeyed to European countries serves as a driving force for the general African population and specifically, Nigerians. Despite accounts of setbacks such as crashes, poverty, crime and squalor in countries like America and other parts of Europe, the American dream continues to captivate individuals as well as drawing them towards the elusive pursuit of happiness.

Scholars believe that migration is not arbitrary, they classify its causes into two categories: push and pull factors (Nanzip, 2020; Lee, 1966). Push factors encompass adverse conditions within one's current environment, such as limited job opportunities, unsafe surroundings, poor agricultural yields, environmental challenges, persecution, slavery, natural disasters, poverty and war. Conversely, pull factors comprise favourable conditions in other environments which include better job opportunities, higher wages, increased wealth, superior services, a more appealing climate, reduced crime rates, political stability, security, better agricultural yields and a lower incidence of natural disasters.

Ojaide (1998) sheds light on the stark realities faced by immigrants abroad; he challenges the idealised perceptions of their adopted environments. Contrary to the romanticised notion of America as a paradise, he depicts it as a harsh terrain characterised by hunger, thirst, loneliness, and even death. Despite these challenges, Africans, particularly Nigerians, remain undeterred in their willingness to migrate, they were driven by campaigns designed to portray life on the other side as superior and to provide persuasive reasons for migration.

In light of this context, the main thesis of the study is to investigate the intricate relationship between language, politics and emotions in advocacy efforts surrounding trans-border migration. The study aims to understand how the use of language and affective strategies shapes public perceptions, influences policy decisions and contributes to the discourse on migration. By exploring the rhetorical and emotional dimensions of advocacy materials, political discourse and public reactions, the research seeks to uncover the persuasive power of language in shaping the narrative around trans-border migration and inform more effective and empathetic communication strategies in this critical and complex domain.

Previous linguistic studies on the discourse of migration have largely focus on the factors that propel youth to engage in migration which are considered as bad governance, economic, social and political factors (Nwosu, *et al.*, 2022, Abuh, 2014, Joshy, *et al.*, 2021). The approach of advocacy advertising migration has been largely neglected, especially from the

linguistic perspective. Paying attention to the linguistic nuances in the advocacy discourse on migration within the purview of appraisal theory will reveal social, critical and linguistic engagement of the thematic issues in the advocacies that are used by the producers to lure people into migrating. This study aims at filling this gap. The objectives are to identify and analyse the specific linguistic choices employed by advocates in the discourse on trans-border migration, with a focus on how language is used to convey affective message. This research holds significance in providing insights into the persuasive power of language and emotions in advocating for a nuanced understanding of trans-border migration. Understanding these dynamics can inform more effective communication strategies and contribute to the development of policies that are not only rational but also empathetic.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The Appraisal Framework is a valuable tool within the broader theory of Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), initially developed by Halliday (1985). It offers a structured approach to understand how speakers and writers express attitudes, negotiate positions and manage interpersonal relationships through language. Appraisal Theory is concerned with how people evaluate, adopt stances and align or disalign with others in communication, especially through texts and spoken discourse (Fortanet-Gómez, 2022). As Martin and White (2005, p. 9) describe, the framework explores “how evaluation is established, amplified, targeted and sourced.” One of the foundational ideas of the Appraisal Framework is that language is not neutral; rather, it carries with it a subjective presence. This means that in any given text, a speaker or writer is not just presenting information but is also positioning themselves, showing how they feel about the topic and how they expect the audience to respond. This interpersonal aspect of discourse is central to Appraisal Theory. It allows us to explore how values, emotions and judgments are conveyed and how they shape the meaning and tone of communication (Martin and White, 2005, p. 1).

The framework is divided into three main subsystems: Attitude, Engagement and Graduation. The first and arguably most central subsystem is Attitude, which deals with the expression of feelings and values. It is concerned with how speakers express emotion (Affect), how they evaluate people's behaviour in moral or ethical terms (Judgment), and how they assess things like objects, performances or ideas in terms of value or aesthetics (Appreciation) (White, 2001; White, 2015). Affect refers to emotional responses, such as happiness, anger, or fear. This could be as direct as saying “I was devastated,” or as subtle as describing a situation as “frustrating”. Judgment evaluates human behaviour in terms of social norms, whether someone is seen as honest, brave or deceitful, for instance. Such evaluations often carry implicit cultural values and expectations. Appreciation refers not to people but to things and phenomena such as art, ideas or actions that are judged in terms of beauty, worth or effectiveness. One important aspect of Attitude is that it can be either explicit (what Martin and White call “inscribed”) or implicit (“invoked”). For example, saying “She was courageous” is an explicit judgment. But describing someone who “rushed into the burning building to save the child” implies courage without stating it directly. This implicitness allows speakers to embed values subtly within narratives or arguments.

The second subsystem is engagement which relate to how speakers or writers interact with other voices and viewpoints. Rather than simply stating a fact, language often reflects a dialogue with other perspectives. Engagement looks at how a speaker might align with or distance themselves from certain positions. This includes strategies like acknowledging another point of view (“Some argue that...”), denying a claim (“It is not true that...”) or strongly affirming a stance (“Clearly, this is the case”). These choices reveal how the speaker

anticipates and manages agreement or disagreement. The last sub-group is graduation which deals with the scaling of meaning i.e. how speakers intensify or downplay evaluations. This can be seen in the difference between “very good” and “good,” or between “a disaster” and “a minor issue.” Graduation works through two mechanisms: Force, which adjusts the intensity of a feeling or statement and Focus, which sharpens or blurs category boundaries (e.g., describing something as a “real” or “typical” example of a category). The Appraisal Framework provides a nuanced way of understanding how language does more than communicate facts but also constructs relationships, builds solidarity or marks distance and expresses value-laden attitudes. By focusing on the affective dimension, which this study aims to do, we can uncover how individual words or phrases carry emotional weight and influence readers’ or listeners’ interpretations, particularly in persuasive contexts like advocacy. Through its categories and sub-systems, Appraisal Theory allows us to trace the subtle interplay between language, evaluation and meaning-making in discourse.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Advocacy is broadly defined as the active support of an idea or cause, operationalised through strategies and methods aimed at influencing opinions and decisions of individuals and organizations (Sprechman and Pelton, 2001). At its core, advocacy seeks to empower individuals by facilitating access to information, promoting understanding of rights, encouraging autonomous decision-making and ensuring that voices are heard. Importantly, advocacy is distinct from, although sometimes overlaps with, other forms of support such as mediation, counseling or advice-giving (Patient and Client Council, Northern Ireland, 2012). In the realm of advocacy, language is often marked by the use of emotional and compelling rhetoric with the intention of persuading and motivating individuals and groups to rally behind a particular cause or perspective (Malkawi and Fareh, 2023). While advocacy remains a multifaceted and evolving field, the establishment of standards and emerging evaluation frameworks offer a pathway towards greater accountability and evidence-based practice.

Studies have been conducted on advocacy from various disciplinary perspectives. For instance, Malkawi and Fareh (2023) investigated the role of language in advocacy by analysing rhetorical and linguistic devices employed in one of Hanan Ashrawi’s speeches in support of the Palestinian cause. Adopting the Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) framework, their study qualitatively examined the thematic patterns within the speech, the study focused on the semiotic dimensions of text analysis such as contextual, semantic and lexico-grammatical features. The findings underscored the significance of rhetorical strategies such as metaphors, repetition, parallelism and nominalisation in enhancing the persuasiveness of advocacy discourse. Notably, the study identified a strong correlation between the thematic content and the dominant process types utilised in the speech, such as Material processes in discussions of U.S. policy towards Israel and Palestine and Mental processes in articulating hope and resilience amid systemic oppression and injustice.

In a related study, Okesola (2024) examined social advocacies embedded in the musical compositions of Segun Akinlolu (popularly known as Beautiful Nubia). The study employed a blend of critical sociolinguistics and the Discourse-Historical Approach (DHA) of critical discourse studies; the research analysed how linguistic devices such as symbolism, imagery, juxtaposition, rhetorical questions and irony are deployed to foreground social advocacy themes. The study concluded that music, for Beautiful Nubia, is not merely an artistic expression but a strategic tool for sociopolitical awareness and societal transformation. Similarly, Oyebamiji (2018) explored advocacy discourse and visuals related to human trafficking and terrorism in Nigeria. The study engaged the analytical tools of critical

stylistics to examine the linguistic and visual resources employed in constructing advocacy campaigns. The analysis highlighted the potential of advocacy discourse in Nigeria to illuminate pressing social issues and contribute meaningfully to the formulation of solutions. The study concluded that such discourse serves as a critical lens through which the nation's sociopolitical challenges can be interrogated and addressed.

Burge (2020) explored the value of centering literature in migration studies. He argued that literary texts offer unique insights by countering dominant narratives, challenging nationalist ideologies, providing historical perspectives and offering therapeutic functions. The study also highlighted under-theorised areas within migration literature that may be of particular interest to social scientists seeking interdisciplinary approaches. Complementing this, Amare, *et al.* (2021) investigated youth migration in Nigeria by analysing urban growth patterns through satellite-derived night light intensity data and Living Standards Measurement Study (LSMS) surveys. Their findings revealed that urban expansion significantly shapes youth migration decisions, though effects vary by gender, education and household composition underscoring the complex, heterogeneous nature of migration responses.

Jesline (2021) adopted a systematic review methodology guided by PRISMA to examine the socio-psychological impact of circular migration during India's COVID-19 lockdown. The study investigated the acute adversities migrants faced such as financial instability and restricted mobility; it called for enhanced mental health support and ethical collaborations among state actors to reform migration policies. While these studies significantly contribute to our understanding of migration from socio-economic, psychological and literary perspectives, they often overlook the nuanced role of language and meaning-making in migratory experiences. To address this gap, the emerging field of “migration linguistics” has been introduced and offered an interdisciplinary framework for examining the interplay between language and mobility. It revealed that language acquisition, usage and transformation are intrinsic to the migratory process and calls for linguistic inclusion in migration policy and practice.

Distinct from prior studies, the present study approaches migration advocacy through the lens of affect a subfield of appraisal theory, it highlights the emotional and evaluative dimensions of migrant discourse. This novel perspective seeks to bridge the divide between linguistic theory and the lived experiences of migrants, thereby contributing to a more holistic understanding of migration.

RESEARCH METHOD

The study employed both qualitative and quantitative discourse-analytic design grounded in affect framework. This design is appropriate because the study seeks to uncover how language, emotion and ideological positioning are mobilised in advocacy discourse surrounding trans-border migration. YouTube videos were selected as the primary data source because the platform has become a central site for contemporary activism, digital storytelling and public meaning-making about migration. The dataset consists of six (6) advocacy-oriented YouTube videos focusing on trans-border migration. In addition, YouTube was deliberately chosen due to its multimodal affordances (speech, visuals, music, gesture and on-screen text) which enable rich affective performances and persuasive strategies. The analysis was guided by affect a sub category of appraisal theory.

DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

Affect in Trans-Border Migration Advocacy Discourse

This section analyses selected advocacy texts on trans-border migration using the Affect subsystem of Appraisal Theory (Martin & White, 2005). Affect concerns the linguistic realisation of emotions, feelings and emotional dispositions, affect is particularly salient in advocacy discourse where persuasion relies on emotional alignment rather than purely informational content. The data, drawn from migration advocacy videos on Ireland, the United States and Canada, reveal systematic deployment of affect to construct migration as desirable, secure and morally justified. Following Martin and White (2005), Affect is analysed under the three major subcategories of Un/Happiness, In/Security and Dis/Satisfaction, with attention to both positive and negative instantiations.

Affect as Un/Happiness: Hope, Fulfillment and Emotional Well-Being

The subcategory of Un/Happiness captures emotions related to joy, sadness, hope, pleasure and emotional fulfillment. In the data, positive happiness dominates, reflecting the persuasive aim of portraying migration as emotionally rewarding. Clear instances of positive happiness appear in expressions that emphasise relief, enjoyment and improved quality of life:

Excerpt 1:

- “I love the fact that Canada is still the best place on earth to live.”
- “I’m so blessed that I’m here in Canada.”
- “You’re going to enjoy the summer here in Alberta.”
- “About a million people decided to relocate ... in the hope of a better life.”
- “More money, a better lifestyle, a better work-life balance, better education for your kids.” “Diversity is fun.”
- “Meeting people from different cultures is oddly fulfilling.”
- “You will find a place of belonging.”
- “I don’t have to worry about money to pay the hospital.”
- “Some succeed while others don’t.”

While the data overwhelmingly foreground positive happiness, a closer interrogation reveals that such affective choices are selective, strategic and ideologically loaded. Lexical items such as *love*, *blessed*, *enjoy*, *fun*, *fulfilling* and *belonging* do not merely describe emotional states; they function as evaluative resources that naturalise migration as an emotionally superior life choice. The producer of advocates repeatedly encoding happiness as the expected outcome of migration, the discourse constructs an affective norm in which emotional fulfillment is positioned as both attainable and guaranteed through relocation.

Notably, happiness is realised predominantly through explicit affect, rather than implicit or invoked affect. This explicitness (“*I love...*”, “*I’m so blessed*”) reduces interpretive ambiguity and strengthens persuasive force, as audiences are invited to directly align with the speaker’s emotional stance. The heavy reliance on first-person narration further personalises affect, transforming individual emotional experiences into model trajectories for prospective migrants. In this sense, personal happiness becomes collectivised and projected as a shared emotional future.

The repeated framing of migration as undertaken “*in the hope of a better life*” is particularly significant. Although *hope* is categorised as positive happiness, it simultaneously indexes lack, insufficiency or dissatisfaction in the migrants’ point of origin. This duality reveals an

important ideological tension: happiness in the destination is discursively constructed through the suppression of unhappiness at home. The absence of detailed emotional suffering in origin contexts allows advocacy discourse to imply hardship without confronting its structural causes, thereby depoliticising the conditions that necessitate migration.

Similarly, evaluative lists such as “*more money, a better lifestyle, a better work-life balance*” function as compressed affective arguments. The repetition of the comparative *better* intensifies positive happiness while discouraging critical reflection on the uneven accessibility of these benefits. Emotional well-being is thus framed as a predictable outcome of migration rather than a contingent or uneven experience shaped by class, race, or legal status.

Negative happiness (unhappiness) is notably marginal and largely backgrounded through contrastive framing. Statements such as “*I don’t have to worry about money to pay the hospital*” rely on negated affect, where anxiety is invoked only to be immediately cancelled. This strategy allows advocacy discourse to acknowledge emotional hardship while simultaneously neutralising it, ensuring that unhappiness functions solely as a rhetorical foil for happiness. Likewise, the vague assertion that “*some succeed while others don’t*” introduces potential failure without emotional depth, this expression minimises its affective impact and protecting the dominant positive narrative.

The act of foregrounding happiness as individual emotional achievement shifts the discourse attention away from structural inequalities and policy constraints that shape migrant experiences. Happiness becomes a matter of personal outcome rather than political struggle, aligning the advocacy discourse with neoliberal ideologies of self-improvement and emotional self-management. The Affect of Un/Happiness in the data does not simply reflect migrants’ emotions but actively constructs an affective politics of migration. Positive happiness is amplified, normalised, and moralised, while unhappiness is silenced, softened or rendered abstract. Through this affective imbalance, migration is legitimised not only as an economic or political necessity but as an emotionally rational and desirable choice.

Affect as In/Security: Safety, Fear Reduction and Emotional Stability

In/Security relates to emotions of fear, anxiety, confidence and safety. This is the most dominant affective category across the data, reflecting the centrality of security in migration decision-making. Positive security is repeatedly foregrounded through explicit lexical choices:

Excerpt 2:

- “You feel safe.”
- “It’s a safe environment, clean, fresh air, low crime rate.”
- “I don’t feel scared because people might kill me.”
- “You feel like secure no matter who you are.”
- “Better political stability.”
- “A safe haven for individuals looking to settle down.”
- “Canada is a safe country.”
- “84% of Canadians said that they feel safe in their country.”

The repeated use of safe, secure, and not scared encodes strong positive security, constructing destination countries (Canada, Ireland, the U.S.) as emotionally stable and protective spaces. This affective framing implicitly contrasts these destinations with unnamed home countries, which are presupposed as insecure or unstable.

Although the data presents positive security as a self-evident and dominant emotional outcome of migration, closer scrutiny reveals that security is discursively produced through intensification, contrast and strategic erasure. Lexical choices such as safe, secure, safe haven, stable and not scared do not merely report emotional states; they actively construct destination countries as morally and politically superior spaces of protection. Through repeated affirmation, security is normalised as an inherent attribute of these destinations rather than as a historically and institutionally contingent condition.

The prevalence of explicit affect (“You feel safe”, “Canada is a safe country”) reduces ambiguity and functions persuasively by pre-empting doubt. Rather than inviting audiences to evaluate safety independently, the discourse asserts emotional certainty, encouraging affective alignment through declarative statements. This strategy transforms security from a subjective experience into an assumed collective truth.

Notably, security is frequently realised through negated fear, as seen in expressions such as “I don’t feel scared”. Here, fear is invoked only to be immediately cancelled, allowing insecurity to remain present yet discursively subdued. This indirect invocation of fear performs important ideological work: it acknowledges the possibility of danger while simultaneously reassuring audiences that migration resolves it. As a result, insecurity becomes a rhetorical background against which security gains heightened emotional value.

The contrastive construction of security is further reinforced through presupposition. References to “better political stability” and “safe haven” implicitly construct origin countries as politically unstable and emotionally unsafe, without naming or analysing the structural causes of such instability. This silence depoliticises insecurity in origin contexts, shifting attention away from global inequalities, conflict, or governance failures that produce forced or economically compelled migration. Security is thus framed as something to be accessed elsewhere rather than collectively addressed.

The use of statistical evidence “84% of Canadians said that they feel safe” is particularly significant. By embedding affect within numerical representation, the discourse blends emotional evaluation with epistemic authority, giving security the appearance of objectivity. This hybridisation strengthens persuasion by presenting safety not merely as felt but as socially verified, thereby legitimising the emotional narrative through quantification.

Importantly, the discourse constructs security as universally accessible, as evidenced in claims such as “you feel like secure no matter who you are.” This universalising move suppresses differential experiences of insecurity faced by migrants along lines of race, legal status, class, or ethnicity. By erasing these distinctions, advocacy discourse promotes an idealised vision of emotional stability that obscures the uneven realities of migrant precarity.

Affect as In/Security functions as a powerful political resource in the data. By foregrounding safety, minimising fear and universalising emotional protection, migration is framed as a rational emotional response to insecurity rather than as a complex political process shaped by structural constraints. Security, in this sense, is not simply an emotion but an ideological promise, mobilised to legitimise trans-border migration and align audiences affectively with destination states.

Negative security (insecurity) appears implicitly rather than explicitly, often through denial or contrast:

Excerpt 3:

- “I don’t have to worry.”
- “You don’t need to worry about paying.”
- “I know what it feels like ... to live through political turmoil and try to build your life in a politically unstable country.”
- “People don’t feel the need to be hostile towards strangers.”

Such constructions rely on negated fear, a common advocacy strategy whereby insecurity is evoked indirectly to heighten the value of safety elsewhere. This reinforces the political narrative that migration is a rational emotional response to insecurity. Although insecurity is rarely expressed through overt lexical items of fear or anxiety, it remains a powerful affective presence in the data through negation, contrast, and presupposition. Expressions such as “I don’t have to worry” and “you don’t need to worry about paying” rely on negated affect, where anxiety is linguistically evoked only to be immediately cancelled. This strategy allows speakers to acknowledge fear while simultaneously neutralising it, ensuring that insecurity functions as a background condition rather than a focal emotional experience.

The political effect of this strategy lies in its subtlety. By avoiding explicit references to fear, violence, or deprivation, advocacy discourse maintains an overwhelmingly positive emotional tone while still activating audiences’ awareness of risk. In this sense, insecurity is not erased but discursively managed, carefully controlled so as to intensify the desirability of safety elsewhere without generating discomfort or moral unease. More explicit negative security emerges in contrastive narratives such as:

Excerpt 4:

- “I know what it feels like ... to live through political turmoil and try to build your life in a politically unstable country.”

Here, political turmoil and unstable encode negative security; however, these conditions are framed retrospectively and vaguely. The absence of specific geopolitical contexts or responsible agents depersonalises insecurity, transforming it into an abstract emotional state rather than a politically produced reality. This abstraction enables advocacy discourse to mobilise fear affectively while avoiding critical engagement with its causes. Similarly, statements like:

Excerpt 5:

- “People don’t feel the need to be hostile towards strangers.”

Presuppose hostility as a normalised emotional condition in other spaces. The negation (don’t feel the need) constructs emotional calm and tolerance as exceptional qualities of the destination, while insecurity is displaced onto unnamed elsewhere contexts. This binary opposition reinforces a moral geography in which destination countries are affectively safe, and origin contexts are implicitly dangerous.

Importantly, the reliance on implicit insecurity positions migration as a rational emotional response rather than as a coerced or structurally constrained decision. Fear is framed as something that can be resolved through individual mobility, aligning with neoliberal narratives that locate emotional safety in personal choice rather than collective political reform. In this way, insecurity is instrumentalised to justify migration without interrogating the systemic conditions that generate it.

The implicit negative security operates as a persuasive affective resource. By invoking fear indirectly through denial and contrast, advocacy discourse amplifies the emotional value of safety while maintaining a positive, reassuring tone. In doing so, it reinforces the political narrative that trans-border migration is not only economically sensible but emotionally necessary and morally justified.

Affect as Dis/Satisfaction: Relief, Gratitude and Institutional Trust

The Dis/Satisfaction category concerns feelings of frustration, contentment, relief and fulfilment arising from processes and outcomes. In the data, positive satisfaction overwhelmingly outweighs dissatisfaction. Positive satisfaction is evident in expressions of relief and gratitude toward institutions and migration systems:

Excerpt 6:

- “I’m so thankful for that.”
- “This visa is designed to attract highly skilled people.”
- “You can apply your own visa just with a job offer.”
- “This is one of the best options.”
- This is the easier way to get into other countries.”
- “Canada has one of the best immigration policies in the world.”
- “There are over a hundred immigration programs to choose from.”

These instances encode satisfaction with migration structures, legal frameworks and government support. The language constructs destination states as efficient, fair and benevolent, thereby legitimising their migration regimes. The Dis/Satisfaction category in the data extends beyond mere emotional description, it functions as a key discursive mechanism for legitimising migration systems. Positive satisfaction dominates, shaping migration not only as an emotionally rewarding experience but also as a rational engagement with seemingly trustworthy and efficient institutions. Lexical items such as thankful, best options, easier way and best immigration policies encode gratitude, relief and contentment, aligning affective response with institutional endorsement. These linguistic choices are highly evaluative: they position governments and legal frameworks as benevolent actors in the migration process, thereby producing an affective economy in which institutional authority is naturalised.

Relief, in particular, operates as a recurrent affective strategy. Expressions like “This is the easier way to get into other countries” or “You can apply for your own visa just with a job offer” construct migration as a problem-solving process in which legal and bureaucratic obstacles are effectively mitigated. Relief is inherently comparative: the discourse implicitly evokes the frustration and uncertainty associated with more restrictive or complex migration regimes elsewhere. This contrastive construction of satisfaction versus dissatisfaction intensifies the appeal of migration as an emotionally safe and efficient pathway, while subtly discrediting the home or alternative systems without naming them.

Gratitude further reinforces institutional trust. Statements like “I’m so thankful for that” or “Canada has one of the best immigration policies in the world” personalise bureaucratic processes, turning abstract policy frameworks into objects of affective engagement. The first-person narration is crucial here: it creates a direct alignment between the speaker’s emotions and institutional practices, enhancing the persuasive force of the discourse. By foregrounding the speaker’s positive affective experiences, dissatisfaction is marginalised; negative

evaluations of bureaucratic or migration processes appear only fleetingly and are either negated or reframed as minor obstacles relative to overall satisfaction.

Critically, the deployment of Dis/Satisfaction operates ideologically: it constructs migration as not just desirable but morally and rationally justified. Positive affect is aligned with institutional efficiency and fairness, suggesting that compliance with legal frameworks and migration systems leads to both emotional and practical rewards. In doing so, the discourse naturalises trust in state authority, reinforcing the idea that successful migration is contingent on adherence to formal systems and highlighting the state as an emotional guarantor of personal well-being.

Dis/Satisfaction in the data functions as a dual rhetorical tool: it generates an emotional orientation of contentment and relief in potential migrants, while simultaneously legitimising the authority and procedural efficiency of destination-country institutions. The affective framing shifts migration from a purely logistical undertaking into an emotionally rationalised and socially sanctioned project, making satisfaction with institutions a central persuasive lever in the discourse.

Although **positive satisfaction dominates**, the data does not entirely ignore dissatisfaction. Instances such as:

Excerpt 7:

- “Some people are still complaining not enough but for me I’m okay.”
- “Don’t worry, you’re not alone.”
- “Your chances of ending up poor are much lower.”
- “There are thousands of immigrants that struggle finding a job.”

Acknowledge potential sources of frustration or unmet expectations. However, these negative affects are systematically mitigated, reframed or contextualised, which diminishes their discursive weight. For example, expressions like “*but for me I’m okay*” and “*you’re not alone*” function to normalise minor dissatisfaction, implicitly signalling that negative experiences are either exceptional, temporary or manageable. Similarly, statistical hedges such as “*much lower*” situate structural risks (poverty, unemployment) as minor or tolerable compared to the overall benefits of migration.

This selective acknowledgment and downplaying of dissatisfaction performs a clear ideological function. By conceding the existence of challenges but immediately minimizing them, the discourse preserves a dominant narrative of institutional efficiency and emotional well-being, discouraging critical engagement with systemic shortcomings. Dissatisfaction is rendered affectively subordinate, ensuring that potential migrants’ attention remains focused on opportunity, security, and the promise of improved quality of life.

Furthermore, the mitigation of negative affect reinforces the persuasive authority of the narrator. The speaker appears knowledgeable, empathetic and rational, capable of assessing both risks and rewards, yet guiding the audience toward an optimistic and confident stance. This mirrors what Wetherell (2012) describes as an “affective alignment strategy,” whereby the speaker manages audience emotions to support ideological positioning in this case, the notion that migration is not only desirable but also emotionally safe and institutionally reliable.

The discursive treatment of dissatisfaction acknowledged but downplayed strengthens the whole affective appeal of migration advocacy. Negative experiences are acknowledged

enough to appear credible, yet strategically minimized, maintaining affective dominance of satisfaction and trust and constructing migration as both rational and emotionally rewarding.

SUMMARY OF FINDING

Across the data, Affect emerges as a central semiotic resource through which migration is framed not merely as a matter of economic mobility but as a deeply emotional, morally resonant and politically rational choice. The pervasive dominance of positive happiness, security and satisfaction signals a deliberate advocacy strategy, whereby emotional persuasion is foregrounded over neutral information-sharing. Migration is positioned as a pathway not only to material improvement but also to personal fulfilment, safety and institutional trust.

Furthermore, emotions in the discourse are collectivised and normalised. Statements such as “millions of people are trying to make the move” transform personal feelings of hope, relief and aspiration into shared emotional experiences; they also reinforce the notion that these outcomes are typical rather than exceptional. This collectivisation diminishes perceptions of personal risk, aligns individual affective responses with broader social norms and strengthens ideological coherence. Potential migrants are invited to see themselves as part of a collective movement, creating both affective and social legitimacy for migration.

Furthermore, affect is intricately tied to political and institutional values. By linking migration to safety, inclusivity, welfare and reliable governance, the discourse constructs destination countries as emotionally and politically superior spaces. Positive security (safety and stability) and satisfaction (trust in institutions) serve not only to reassure audiences but also to moralise the act of migration, framing it as a rational, ethical and socially endorsed choice. In this way, affect operates as both a persuasive and legitimising mechanism, enabling advocates to mobilise audiences by appealing simultaneously to emotional desires and political sensibilities.

Summary of Affect Categories Identified

Affect Category	Dominant Polarity	Discursive Function
Un/Happiness	Predominantly Positive	Frames migration as emotionally rewarding, hopeful, and fulfilling
In/Security	Strongly Positive	Constructs destination countries as safe, stable, and protective
Dis/Satisfaction	Predominantly Positive	Builds trust in immigration systems and legitimises institutional support

This summary demonstrates that positive affect dominates migration advocacy discourse. The recurrent emphasis on happiness, security and satisfaction functions strategically to position migration as a desirable, attainable and morally justifiable life choice.

CONCLUSION

This study has revealed that trans-border migration advocacy relies heavily on emotional meaning-making to shape both perceptions and decisions regarding migration. By foregrounding happiness, security and satisfaction, advocates construct migration as

emotionally safe, socially rewarding and politically legitimate; they present it as a rational and morally sound choice. Negative affect, when present, is often mitigated or reframed to reinforce this narrative, highlighting the persuasive management of emotional experience. The study showed that Affect is not a peripheral feature of migration discourse; it is a core mechanism through which advocacy persuades, legitimises and mobilises audiences. By strategically leveraging collective emotions and linking them to institutional and political values, migration advocates create a discourse that simultaneously reassures, motivates and normalises trans-border mobility. This analysis emphasises the centrality of emotional persuasion in contemporary migration advocacy, revealing affect as a key site where political, moral and personal imperatives converge.

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