

Immigration Articles in Two Newspapers: A Multimodal Discourse

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Choose two news articles addressing the same event or topic, but from publications that differ in some socially significant way (e.g. political orientation, audience, country of publication). Critically discuss the differences between these articles, focusing on some of the following points:

- the narrative structure of the articles;
- the ways 'news values' influence the production of news;
- the underlying system of values/ideologies which shapes each report;
- the ways social actors are represented;
- the visual illustrations that accompany the texts.

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1.0 Introduction

News is not just what people speak about, but what the media themselves speak about.

(Catenaccio et al 2011)

While the retrieval and systematic dissemination of news in written form has existed for centuries, the combination of technology and mass media now allows us to gather news from more sources and locations than ever, providing constant and extensive coverage. Taking into account the innumerable events that occur around the world daily, it is unsurprising that individual news outlets regard different things as news. This raises the question of what criteria determines whether one such event should be elevated to the status of a news story (Bell 1991).

While news outlets may be entrusted to operate with neutrality (Khalid 2013), the reality is that news narratives are more likely to focus on framing information in a captivating way that is *seen* to be objective (Teo 2000). Indeed, much of the existing research into news discourse points to the idea that real life occurrences are selected, used and exploited by news outlets for external reasons (Jaworski and Coupland 1999; Barkho 2007; Barkho and Richardson 2010; Rashdi and Rasti 2012 amongst others).

Using two news articles addressing the same event, this study critically explores how the language of news discourse, whilst serving as a snapshot of society, can also be used as an instrument in shaping the reader's interpretation of the given facts, and hence their wider beliefs (Reah 2002; Mahfouz 2013). To achieve this, the paper considers the news values that inform each article, the underlying reasons for the newspapers' editorial decisions in the context of the story and how both of these are linguistically realised.

2.0 Literature Review

2.1 Critical discourse analysis

Two news articles based on the same event will be examined using critical discourse analysis (henceforth referred to as CDA), and in particular the model established by Norman Fairclough (2003). This framework explores in depth the relationship between the choices in grammar and vocabulary, and the wider social and interactional factors that underpin these decisions (Jones 2013).

In the case of this paper, adopting Fairclough's approach allows us to understand how the Daily Mail and Daily Telegraph newspapers can use the same news event to construct news stories that are at times sharply contrasting and, consequently, what these differing narratives denote in terms of the papers' ideological perspectives (Teo 2000:9). These views, whether obscured or explicitly stated, are used to understand and explain the workings of society (Izadi and Saghaye-Biria 2007 citing Hall, 1996).

2.2 Definitions of critical discourse analysis

CDA stems from a critical theory that perceives the use of language as a form of social practice (Fairclough 2003, Fairclough, Mulderrig and Wodak 2013:357). Although the methods and specific areas of investigation in Critical Discourse vary greatly, analysts are united in their principle task of:

...laying bare [of] how language and discourse are used to achieve social goals and [effect] social maintenance and change.

Caldas-Coulthard and Coulthard (1996)

It is worth drawing attention to the two closing points of this definition. News discourse, while typically considered reactive, i.e. offering only a reflection of society, it is also a tool with which to shape it (Conboy 2010:4). By adopting a particular stance through language, speakers are said to create and maintain power relations between the parties involved: speakers and subjects, readers and writers.

Fairclough (2003) describes discourse as having internal and external relations. External relations refer to the way in which the text represents the social practices and structures of which they form a part. Social practices are the environments, customs or expressions that to which particular style of discourse is linked: conversations, billboards, lectures and complaint letters, for instance. Because discourse always occurs in the context of social practice, this makes text a social event (Fairclough 1989, 1992). Social structures are essentially an abstract concept but they outline the potential for the types of discourse that will be possible – the stable and established form of political government being the foremost example of this.

The internal relations of a text are concerned purely with the language itself: the semantic, grammatical and lexical aspects of a text, and how these are employed to give meaning. CDA further divides this category into the areas of action, representation and identification. The first of these relates to the interactive format of text, be it implicative, interrogative, persuasive or declarative. Secondly, representation is the way in which people, actions and events are recalled as the text reflects or, indeed, frames and re-contextualises the world around it. Finally, identification refers to the social position the author assumes through their linguistic choices – this includes the way in which other speakers and organisations are presented as the producer of text seeks to adopt a particular stance on the event in question.

2.3 Functions of critical discourse analysis

CDA, then, primarily addresses social problems. It is concerned with the implications for relationships of social and political domination, and hence how the interests of particular groups are served or, indeed, overlooked through text.

By placing a social problem at its core, Mahfouz (2013) believes that CDA is effectual in revealing “how texts are constructed so that particular (and potentially indoctrinating) perspectives can be expressed delicately and covertly”. In this regard, CDA can be considered a rejection of neutrality in discourse. Instead it contends that our use and structuring of language is seldom arbitrary and in fact possesses an implicit social ‘positionality’.

According to Wodak (2009), CDA is equally valid as a constructive and a deconstructive tool. By adopting a critical approach to what are essentially social problems, it is possible to expose power structures that would otherwise remain concealed (Fairclough 1992, 1995). The reciprocal, according to Van Dijk (1985), is that by heightening an awareness of these linguistic characteristics, CDA can offer insight into how change can be effected in the given area of discourse.

Van Dijk (1993) contends that although CDA is firmly focussed on issues of authority and structures of power, it does not necessarily hold the view that there must be a unilateral, 'top-down' rule of dominance being forced upon others. As such, the critical analysis of a given discourse can expose relationships where all parties are compliant to varying degrees in sustaining both asymmetric distributions and abuses of power. Although Fairclough's approach primarily looks to the elite in identifying how language is appropriated in social practices, it also enables us to critically understand the ways in which subordinates are implicated in the legitimisation and reproduction of such structures.

2.4 News values

In their in-depth study, Galtung and Ruge (1965, cited by Brighton and Foy 2007) put forward a number of contributing factors with which to assess newsworthiness – the rules that determine what is news, and hence the degree of prominence that the writer and audience will give a story – can be assessed. These 'news values' are thresholds that an event must cross if it is to be registered as newsworthy.

Ksiazek and Webster (2008) contend that in news discourse the greatest resonance is achieved when the narrative and the reader exist in the same cultural and linguistic sphere. Van Dijk (1988:19) and Busà (2013:25) go further, stating that producers of news discourse aim to create a relationship based on the reader's assimilation of interests, social expectations and tenets, which are said to become shared values.

Of course, news stories cannot be disconnected from those who create them. The values that govern reporting decisions – the selection, writing and organisation of news narratives –

will have a discernable impact on how the article is linguistically framed. Hence, certain news values can be selected in order to mould and perpetuate opinion, and to establish norms that remain unchallenged by its readership (Teo 2000, Bednarek and Caple 2012).

Since its creation, the original criteria have been augmented to account for and distinguish between factors that are concerned with the news cycle, the newsgathering process and actual news text (Bell 1991, Richardson 2007, Brighton and Foy 2007, Cotter 2010). This extended list is detailed in Appendix 3 and will be referred to throughout this paper.

3.0 An overview of the texts

This paper is concerned with texts taken from two British national daily newspapers. Both articles detail the findings of the report by the UK Office for National Statistics into recent trends in migration and also the current state of the country's border control. The first text, *500,000 MIGRANTS GET SOCIAL HOUSING* (Appendix 1), is taken from the 26 July 2013 edition of the Daily Mail; the second, *Official migration statistics 'little better than a guess', says report* (Appendix 2), comes from the 28 July 2013 edition of The Guardian.

The Guardian (henceforth referred to as TG) is a centre-left and social-liberal leaning broadsheet that covers serious politics, business and sport. It has the third largest national broadsheet circulation and a predominantly middle class readership. The Daily Mail (henceforth referred to as DM) is a populist conservative-to-right wing tabloid. Geared towards lower-middle and working class readers, it has the UK's second largest tabloid circulation. The paper covers human interest and celebrity stories along with some major political events.

To put the articles and the events they recount into context, it should be remembered that news narratives do not exist in isolation and are effectively being written into the continuum of issues, events and beliefs that surround them (Bednarek 2006; Cotter 2010, 2011). The debate about UK immigration has remained highly a divisive one, particularly in the wake of a Labour government that, in the late 1990s, introduced policies to improve economic cohesion and access to foreign labour markets. The articles in this paper are primarily

concerned with British border control, but they play out against a backdrop of wider concerns: national identity, socioeconomic disparity, social disintegration and the conflict between a cohesive European Union and national sovereignty, amongst others. News stories of this nature consequently become part of a larger narrative about several overlapping issues and societal beliefs.

4.0 Analysis

4.1 Vocabulary and grammar

The CDA investigations of Barkho and Richardson (2010) draw attention to ‘the latent and explicit power of language to label and categorise either positively or negatively’.

Joye (2010, citing Richardson 2007) asserts that if there are to be readerships of a specific class, profession, age, gender, political partisanship and so on, it follows that there will be commonality in the selection and application of certain linguistic features in each case that is in no way incidental, but selected to attract and enforce that culture. It is necessary, therefore, to identify the differences in the representation of events and what they might suggest.

Essentially, to analyse the text is to analyse the choices made by the authors of that text in their bid to reach, retain and influence the minds of its intended (and often imagined) audience.

4.1.1 Headlines and Leads

The distinction in language use is evident from the outset, with the DM and TG adopting sensationalist and rationalist positions through their respective headlines.

The DM headline begins with the subjective verb ‘revealed’, and proceeds to use statistics from the report to create an image of UK families being denied rightful access to social services by immigrants. A bullet-pointed summary then heralds a forthcoming ‘clampdown’

to combat these apparently harmful and unwanted developments. A strong degree of authorial assertion is conveyed through the modal verb *will* – this absolutist claim is reiterated later in the narrative.

In the TG the power in the words ‘official’ and ‘statistics’, which would otherwise be accepted by the reader as authoritative, is deliberately subverted by the direct quotation that follows it (‘little better than a guess’, says report). It too orients the reader, setting the expectation that what follows is likely to contradict or at least challenge some of the findings addressed in the report. The lead goes on to cite MPs (albeit unnamed ones) who support this statement: This conveys a greater sense of certitude in an opinion that forms the foundation of the remainder of the article.

4.1.2 Representation

There is significant divergence in the ways that events are linguistically represented in each article. The foremost of these is the way in which the function of the census report is contextualised. Where the DM reports that the data will exacerbate fears about pressure on public services, this is directly contradicted in TG, which renders the information worthless in determining the social and economic consequences of migration. Essentially, each news narrative is built around the respective statements, both of which are injected by the narrator.

Much of the value of the DM narrative is derived from its facticity, a news value that uses facts and figures to authenticate the article's views. The migrant population and the total cost of housing them are numbered in the millions (the third most frequent keyword) and billions respectively. Bell (1991: 202) and Feng (2013: 265) claim that foregrounding such information greatly enhances the empirical claims of the story, along with its credibility and merit as news. Throughout the text there are sixteen numerical references to these factors in comparison to TG's five.

The vocabulary used by the DM to describe the report's findings evokes a sense of scale and unabated growth (Table 4.1.2). The pre-modifying of nouns and phrases in particular suggests of a spiralling influx of foreigners that threaten the rights of UK residents seeking

social housing. This claim is apparently substantiated in the succession of statistics that follow.

The prominence of such language is in almost diametric contrast to TG, which mainly employs pre-modifiers to de-emphasise the extent, exactness and threshold of the situation (Table 4.1.2). The figures are presented as a '*blunt* instrument' involving '*random* interviews' that have yielded only '*decent* (i.e. passable) estimates' and '*uncertain* statistics'.

Daily Mail (large scale)	The Guardian (small scale)
record numbers	little more than a guess
record highs	a tiny number
mass migration	lowest level
large-scale migration	steadily falling numbers
huge costs	only around 5,000 [people]
as high as one in five	just 5,000 migrants
the rise in Eastern European immigrants	

Table 4.1.2: Opposing emphases in adverb and noun phrase usage

In TG, the effect of casting such aspersions on the data is three-fold. Firstly, it reduces the cultural proximity of the event: if migrants are presented as a small and dwindling group, the issue loses resonance and is not perceived as having an imminent or direct consequence on the reader (compare the DM's underlining of relevance in '*taxpayer-funded* homes' and '*priorities for local* people'). Secondly, the language is unlikely to inspire confidence in the rigour of the research and its subsequent findings. Finally – and perhaps most crucially – this tone sows enough doubt to allow the writer to shift the focus of the article and introduce more subjective assessments.

This change of representation in TG narrative is most clearly seen through the emphasis given to *net migration* figures (the difference between those leaving and entering the country), which number in the tens of thousands. Indeed, the phrase 'net migration' has the highest keyword density in the article and forms the subject of much of its second half. In contrast, the exact figures for migration are not given until the fourth paragraph and even

then are qualified with stance adverbials such as *'only', 'just' and 'merely'*, reflecting the narrator's position on the severity of the situation.

4.1.3 Opposition

Playing on the human tendency to view the world in terms of binaries (Moritz 2010), both papers juxtapose opposing concepts to accentuate their differences and ultimately reduce complex issues to 'discrete, dichotomous 'facts'' (Sassure 1959, cited in Izadi and Saghaye-Biria 2007). The DM uses these parallel structures as a device to polarise the two social groups in the piece (emphasis added):

...immigrants have been given taxpayer-funded homes
Local people will be given priority... and migrants... will only be eligible after two years

TG adjoins contrasting terms in an attempt to diffuse the potentially charged issue by backgrounding the statistics to reduce its proximity, for instance (emphasis added):

Official migration statistics are "not fit for purpose"
Immigration figures... offset by nationals leaving

This illustrates the importance of the news value 'meaningfulness'. Based on the distance put between the situation and the reader, engagement and attention given to the story is heightened and diminished respectively (Joye 2010:589, Frosh and Wolefield 2007:121).

Where the DM's narrator inculcates anxieties over the advancement of immigrants at the expense of British-born residents, TG downplays this argument, firstly by diminishing the credibility of the relevant statistics and then by looking to explore ways in which migration (rather than its effects) can be better understood.

4.2 Social actors and quotations

Teo (2000:18) identifies quotation and the use of social actors as means of lending credence to the words of a newsmaker. This observation recognises that voices aired in the news can (and will) be selected and manipulated to support an already established view. According to Caldas-Coulthard (1994), only 'parts of the exchange that are significant for [the reporter] according to his/her view of the world' are reported. Therefore, quotation renders some voices more powerful than others and, in the absence of dissenting views, can transform them into what is thought of by the reader as 'incontrovertible fact'.

The DM's declarative style joins together many of the research findings without reported speech verbs. These direct quotations are considered a 'dramatization of expression' (Calsamiglia and Ferrero 2003) where, without a speech verb or credited speaker to colour it, the quotation can be used to establish an opinion that becomes more difficult to challenge.

One notable exception is the quotation taken from the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC). Although it finds no evidence of partiality, it is preceded by the verb *claimed*, which detaches responsibility for averral from the writer and evaluates the assertion as unconvincing. The speech is also placed in single inverted commas, even though it is reported indirectly: this often elucidates the writer's feeling that an item is 'discordant... or not fully accepted' (Quirk et al. 1989). In other words, it is incongruous with a pre-existing view based on factors that exist outside of the text.

In TG the majority of utterances are reported directly using the illocutionary verb 'said'. This reverts averral to the speaker and presents the information as unmediated, thereby giving a greater sense of authenticity to the statements. A number of these quotes come from either Government sources (a group unnamed MPs) or the Office of National Statistics itself; this portrays TG as a neutral spokesperson, although ultimately, this position is being assumed in order to support the argument that the writer puts forward.

With regard to social actors, TG's narrative employs its social actors (unspecified MPs, the reporting committee's chairman and a London councillor who gave evidence) to question and, at times, openly criticise the viability of the data gathering process rather taking issue with migrants directly. Only in the closing paragraphs of the article is a Home Office

spokesman granted opportunity to speak briefly in support of the findings, at which point the dominant voice of those who discredit them has been firmly rooted in the reader's mind.

In the DM, social actors are used to establish in- and out-group identities. The article's most outspoken critic of immigration is introduced as 'Sir Andrew Green, of the Migrant Watch think-tank', portraying him as a forward-thinking, independent expert. Green goes on to decry the 'immigration *lobby*', evoking negative connotations of parochial self-interest (Taliaferro and Ruggiano 2013), he pejoratively assesses those at variance with his view.

This polarisation is also evident in the use of emotive language, such as 'British born', and 'local people'. The latter term in particular is quite ambiguous, but is deliberately used to affect the audience's objective judgment of the situation.

The DM article is also forthright in its naming of East European immigrants as the agents in the narrative, leaving an impression that Bulgarians, Romanians and Poles are both the cause and main beneficiaries of an apparent social injustice. The latter are singled out in the following adverbial phrase (emphasis added), written several times throughout the text :

More than 100,000 [immigrants]... joined the EU in 2004, *mostly Poles*.

Through repetition, such over-lexicalisation becomes an unmarked norm, understood by the audience as 'part of the nature of things' (Frosh and Wolefield 2007:123). As the association between 'Polish people' and 'immigrants' crystallises it can be mentioned in passing with the intended connotations still intact.

TG makes no direct references to specific nationalities in its report, instead using terms such as 'visitors' and 'non-UK residents'; these phrases project a clearer sense that migrants can abide lawfully without posing any threat to the livelihood of British residents.

4.3 Multimodal discourse

Multimodal discourse refers to an extension of Halliday's theory of language as proposed by Kress and van Leeuwen (2006:186-192, citing Halliday 1994). It contends that, just as aspects of language can be analysed as discourse and their intertextual functions identified, a similar approach can be taken to visual design. These elements can be viewed as another channel through which meaning is added and ideological messages conveyed (Reah 1998:24).

Caldas-Coulthard (1996:264) writes that texts cannot be analysed without taking into consideration the combination of semiotic resources that come with them – modes such as text, images, layout and so on. Indeed, because of this interplay and interdependence, it may be that the mode of language performs only an auxiliary role (Jones 2013).

In the first of the DM's four photographs (Appendix 1), queues at an airport (labelled in the caption as immigrants) form a vector into a vanishing point beyond a 'UK Border' sign, making the audience (UK residents as the collective 'Self') wary of being intruded on by an unidentifiable 'Other' (van Dijk 1988; Joye 2010).

The second image shows another queue, this time standing under a brightly illuminated sign carrying the stars of the EU flag and the words 'Passports, UK, European Union'. There is congruence between the direction of the queue and the signage, both of which lead the eye from left-to-right and out of the frame – this allows for speculation as to the total number of 'immigrants' in the queue.

The DM also includes side-by-side pictures of Prime Ministers Tony Blair and David Cameron. The accompanying caption credits Blair – static, aging and gazing past the reader into the middle-distance – for *encouraging* mass migration. In contrast, Cameron appears engaged in conversation and is said to have *launched* a directive to prioritise 'local people'. A left-to-right reading of the two semiotic modes in combination evaluates Mr Cameron as the 'after' to Mr Blair's 'before': more proactive and responsive to the needs of the intended audience, and therefore worthy of more attention.

In TG image (Appendix 2), a customs officer stands alongside a UK Border sign checking a passport. The picture immediately follows the somewhat disparaging headline and lead; taken in tandem, the officer's inspection could be seen as perfunctory, and the picture as emblematic of the lax state of UK border control in general.

The overarching theme in all four DM images is one of culpability and political allegiance. The reader is explicitly shown where to apportion blame (queuing 'Polish' immigrants, the EU and the Labour ex-Prime Minister) and who can be trusted to reverse the situation (the Conservative Mr Cameron). Meanwhile, TG uses the visual mode to establish its focus on the inefficacy of the migration monitoring process itself, as opposed to the effects of its shortcomings.

5.0 Conclusion

It is apparent from the discourse analysis in this paper that what is digested as news is, in reality, an amalgam of 'facts' and voices that are highlighted, expelled, re-voiced and mediated before reaching the audience. What this paper has found is that embedded within the final retelling are linguistic and ideological features that aim to address concerns far removed from constructing impartial, factual reports, if indeed this were ever possible.

Though readers may choose to grant news 'an aura of objectivity' (McCabe and Heilman 2007, cited in Khalid 2013) the treatment of news content in this example reflects how serving the interests of dominant voices is a fundamental factor in newsworthiness and news discourse. Ultimately, the articles are not just being written for different audiences; in each case the news event is being co-opted as part of social vehicles serving different purposes. Hence the lexical, grammatical and visual decisions are the result of an evaluation and re-contextualisation to these ends.

The choices made in the DM – those of quantification and naming in particular – create an image of an imminent threat to social order, the effect of which is greater solidarity within the 'in group' that the article speaks to, and marginalisation and condemnation of those outside. TG makes different linguistic decisions; although it does not expressly support

large-scale immigration, its comparatively liberal stance manipulates the news event by delegitimising the statistics in order to foreground net migration and a call for greater understanding of migration and improved record keeping at UK terminals.

The divergence between the discourses reveals the imbalance of power between the groups and voices involved. It also illustrates the power of news discourse as an ideological tool, as this calculated use of language enables news media to succinctly instil and promulgate attitudes that it believes should be shown towards people and situations in news narratives.

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7.0 Appendices

7.1 Article 1 (The Daily Mail)

Revealed: How 500,000 immigrants have been given social housing

- **1.8million families are now on the waiting list on social housing**
- **Nearly 470,000 of the 4million migrants who arrived in the last ten years were given council homes**
- **David Cameron launched plans to give local people priority on waiting lists**
- **Clampdown will see migrants only become eligible for social housing after two years in the UK**

By Steve Doughty, Social Affairs Correspondent

Nearly half a million immigrants have been given taxpayer-funded homes over the past decade.

The revelation comes as the number of families on the waiting list for social housing hits a record 1.8million. Most are British born.

Of the four million migrants who arrived between 2001 and 2011, 469,843 were allocated council or housing association properties.



New figures reveal 469,843 of the 4 million migrants who arrived in the UK between 2001 and 2011 were given council homes

Around 1.2million foreigners now live in social housing – one in eight of the total. In London the figure is thought to be as high as one in five.

The national census statistics, which were released yesterday, highlight fears about increased pressure on public services when Romanians and Bulgarians win free access to jobs in this country in January.

The figures also show the effects of the large-scale immigration encouraged by the Tony Blair and Gordon Brown governments.

According to the census, 105,506 of the immigrants who found social housing after 2001 were from Eastern European states that joined the EU in 2004, most of them Poles.

In the mid-2000s, Whitehall officials estimated that the cost to taxpayers of maintaining a single social housing unit was £620 a year.

Assuming each unit is occupied by four people, that would put the housing costs of post-2001 migrants at between £5billion and £8billion.

Sir Andrew Green, of the MigrationWatch think-tank, said: ‘The figures serve to underline the huge costs of mass immigration – costs often ignored by the immigration lobby.’

In 2009, a report by the Equality and Human Rights Commission claimed there was ‘no evidence to support the perception that new migrants are getting priority over UK-born residents’.



National census statistics chart the rise in Eastern European immigrants given social housing after 2001. More than 100,000 were from states that joined the EU in 2004, mostly Poles



Census figures from the last decade reveal the effects of the large-scale immigration encouraged by Tony Blair (left). In March, David Cameron (right) launched plans to prioritise local people on social housing waiting lists

The research found no evidence of abuse of the system such as queue jumping or providing false information.

But in March David Cameron announced a clampdown, including plans for a local residence test.

Local people will be given priority on waiting lists for social housing and migrants will become eligible only after two years.

Councils say the fundamental flaw in the plan is they will still be obliged to help any EU migrants who present themselves as homeless.

Mike Jones, of the Local Government Association, says: 'If we don't house them that means we are going to have to deal with them under the homeless laws which cost us a great deal more.'

7.2 Article 2 (The Guardian)

Official migration statistics 'little better than a guess', says report

MPs say figures on how many non-UK residents enter and leave the country are mostly based on 'random interviews' at ports



The coalition aims to reduce net migration to the tens of thousands by 2015. Photograph: Gareth Fuller/PA Press Association, Sunday 28 July 2013 09.27 BST

Official migration statistics are "not fit for purpose" and leave assessments of the government's progress in reducing net migration as "little better than a best guess", according to a scathing report.

Analysis on how many non-UK residents are entering and leaving the country is primarily based on "random interviews" of travellers at ports and airports that were introduced to examine tourism trends, the public administration select committee found.

Just 5,000 migrants a year were identified through the International Passenger Survey and many "may be reticent to give full and frank answers", it said.

Although the Office for National Statistics (ONS), which uses the research to draw up its migration estimates, has "done its best" to produce informative statistics, the survey "is not fit for the purposes to which it is put" and ministers must find new ways to gather information, MPs said.

In the year to June 2012, immigration was estimated at 515,000 while emigration was estimated at 352,000. The coalition aims to reduce net migration – the difference between the two figures – from the hundreds of thousands down to the tens of thousands by 2015.

But MPs said the government was at risk of ending up with an "inappropriate" immigration policy if it based its target level of net migration on such an uncertain statistics, "which could be out by tens of thousands".

ONS migration estimates contained no information on the immigration status of migrants while statistics produced by the Home Office did not indicate the number of visa holders with valid leave to remain in the UK or the number who overstay their leave to remain, the report said.

Statistics produced by both organisations were "blunt instruments" for measuring, managing, and understanding migration, it added.

The committee said migration figures could be considerably improved if the Home Office and ONS properly recorded and linked the data they already gathered.

MPs called for the e-borders system to be used for measuring immigration, emigration and net migration as quickly as possible.

The committee chairman, Bernard Jenkin, said: "Most people would be utterly astonished to learn that there is no attempt to count people as they enter or leave the UK. They are amazed when they are told that government merely estimates that there are 500,000 immigrants coming into the UK each year.

"This is based on random interviews of around 800,000 people stopped and interviewed at ports and airports each year. Only around 5,000 of those are actual migrants, many of whom may be reticent to give full and frank answers, to say the least.

"Some experts will say that this report is understated. As an island nation, with professional statisticians and effective border controls, we could gain decent estimates of who exactly is coming into this country, where they come from, and why they are coming here.

"As it is, the topline numbers for the government's 100,000 'net migration' target are little better than a best guess – and could be out by tens of thousands. Clearly these statistics are not fit for purpose in the longer term."

The International Passenger Survey also fails to garner the type of information needed to work out the social and economic consequences of migration, such as demand for the National Health Service or schools.

MPs raised concerns about the potential loss of the census, arguing that it provided the most accurate information at a local level about migration.

Jenkin added: "There is also the problem that few people understand what 'net migration' is. It tells you nothing about how the nature of the UK population is changing, because the total immigration figure is partly offset by large numbers of UK nationals leaving.

"And if you try to work out, say, how many Egyptians or Syrians came to the UK last year, any numbers are virtually meaningless, because they are based on the tiny number of Syrians or Egyptians who were actually interviewed – assuming they felt able to tell the truth when they answered the questions.

"Some would say that successive governments have hardly been trying to fix this – they didn't want people to know the truth. Even now, the really useful information from e-borders data is at least five years off. Given the importance of immigration as a potentially explosive issue, this ought to be given a much higher priority."

The Westminster city council leader, Philippa Roe, who gave evidence to the committee, said: "When I gave evidence to this committee I said Disney World has better technology to keep track of its visitors than we as a country do, and I am pleased this report accepts that the current system is a blunt instrument which is patently not up to the job.

"Today's report is damning of a system which has grown up over the last decade. It should provide a platform for the Home Office to take the action we need to take."

A Home Office spokesman said: "We disagree with the report's conclusions. Government reforms on immigration are working and the statistics do show that net migration is at its lowest level for a decade.

"The government is determined to build a fairer system and to address the public's concern about immigration. We are committed to getting net migration down from the hundreds of thousands to the tens of thousands, and we want to be judged against the very best available evidence.

"Net migration is at its lowest level for a decade and the numbers have been steadily falling quarter by quarter."

7.3 Appendix 3: News values

These new values do not represent an exhaustive list, but rather a collection of values as identified by Galtung and Ruge (1965) and expanded on in subsequent studies by Bell (1991) and Richardson (2007), Brighton and Foy (2007) and Cotter (2010).

News Value	Definition
Frequency	Sudden and conveniently timed events are more likely to be reported
Negativity	Bad news is more newsworthy than good news
Unexpectedness	Events that are out of the ordinary are favoured
Unambiguity	Events that rely on complex background information are less favourable
Personalisation	Individual-centred 'human interest' stories will be more attractive
Meaningfulness	The cultural proximity that subjects have to the readers
Reference to elite nations	Stories involving global powers supersede those with less influential nations
Reference to elite persons	Stories concerned with the rich, powerful, famous and infamous get more coverage
Conflict	Stories with conflict and opposition of forces are often quite newsworthy
Consonance	Media readiness to report an item that is incongruous with its expectations
Continuity	A pre-existing story gathers a kind of inertia and reduces ambiguity
Composition	The need to provide a balance of news across the newspaper
Competition	The exclusivity of a story
Co-optation	A marginal story may be covered if it is related to a major running story
Prefabrication	A story that is marginal in news terms but written and available may be preferred over a newsworthy story that requires research
Predictability	An event is more likely to be covered if it has been pre-scheduled
Time constraints	Deadlines and news cycles call for stories that can be researched and covered quickly

Logistics	The ability to deploy reporters to cover a story can affect coverage
Relevance	The effect on the audience's own lives or closeness to their experience.
Facticity	The amount of facts and figures that support the story
Competition	The exclusivity of the story compared to rival media
Composition	The a mixture of different news in the newspaper overall
Predictability	The pre-scheduling of an event