CONSTRUCTING IMMIGRATION ETHICS IN FRANK-WALTER STEINMEIER'S NATURALISATION CEREMONY SPEECH

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Abstract
This article discusses the discursive construction of ethics in Frank-Walter Steinmeier's naturalization ceremony speech. Steinmeier's discourse helps understand that language can help construct particular representations of immigration. Thus, immigration is not simply adding demographic value but beneficial. The study explores the linguistic and ideological construction of immigration ethics in Frank-Walter Steinmeier's naturalization ceremony speech. Moreover, it seeks to show how discursive constructions serve to legitimize the formation of national identity and integration. The analysis is anchored in Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis approach and it uses a qualitative method. It reveals that these ethical constructions are intended to influence public perceptions of migration. The findings show that immigration ethics is discursively constructed through legitimacy, democratic values and identity construction.
Keywords: beneficial, ethics, immigration, naturalization, speech.

RESUME

Cet article porte sur la construction discursive de l'éthique de l'immigration dans le discours prononcé par Frank-Walter Steinmeier. Le discours de Steinmeier permet de comprendre que le langage peut contribuer à construire des représentations particulières de l'immigration. Ainsi, l'immigration ne se résume pas à un simple apport démographique, mais est perçue comme bénéfique. L'étude explore donc la construction linguistique et idéologique de l'éthique de l'immigration dans le discours prononcé par Frank-Walter Steinmeier lors d'une cérémonie de naturalisation. L'analyse s'appuie sur l'approche de l'analyse critique du discours de Fairclough et utilise une méthode qualitative de collecte de donnée. Elle révèle que ces constructions éthiques ont pour but d'influencer la perception qu'a le public de la migration. En outre, les résultats montrent aussi que l'éthique de l'immigration est construite discursivement à travers la légitimité, les valeurs démocratiques et la construction identitaire.
Mots-clés : bénéfique, éthique, immigration, naturalisation, discours.

INTRODUCTION

Immigration is the relocation of individuals from one country to another in which they are not native. Immigration comprises not only a demographic and legal puzzle but also a social and political reality of which the meaning depends on our public discourse. Political discourse does not merely describe immigration but contributes to defining it. That is to say, how migrants, citizenship, belonging, and their place within the host society are understood. In this respect, language constructs particular representations of immigration by attributing values, responsibilities, rights, and identities to both migrants and the receiving society. It is within this discursive perspective that Frank-Walter Steinmeier's naturalization speech is analyzed.

Frank-Walter Steinmeier's discourse represents immigration not simply as the entry of people, but as a matter of recognizing migrants, integrating them into German national community. According to this, the analysis takes three intertwined dimensions: The discursive construction of immigration ethics, values and identity. The study explores the linguistic and ideological construction of immigration ethics, and how these constructions serve to legitimize national identity formation and integration. In order to fulfill such objectives the following questions are asked: In which way does Frank-Walter Steinmeier's naturalization ceremony speech construct immigration ethics? ·How are immigration, citizenship and integration constructed in his discourse? What are the ideological and social meanings of immigration ethics that emerge from immigrant discursive construction in speech?

The objective is to explore the linguistic and ideological construction of immigration ethics and to see how these discursive constructions permit to legitimize the formation of national identity and integration. The research process is based on Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA proposed by Fairclough. Its significance lies in its contribution to broader debates about migration, citizenship, identity and public perceptions. In addition, examining the ethical construction of immigration can help determine how immigrants are viewed and how their presence within the national community can be justified. This study is accordingly divided into three sections. The first piece centers on the discursive construction of immigration ethics. This section points out how Steinmeier embeds immigration as an otherwise legitimate. It can be read into it, socially productive process for nation-building. The second part is concerned with the discursive construction of immigration values. In this section, Steinmeier demonstrates not only how immigration is constitutively framed through ethical arguments of legitimacy and responsibility, but also as a matter embedded much more widely within value. The final component looks at how immigration identity is discursively constructed. Here Steinmeier elaborates the discourse of immigration not just as a legal or political issue but also one of identity, belonging and membership in the community.

1. DISCURSIVE CONSTRUCTION OF IMMIGRATION ETHICS

Steinmeier constructs an ethics of immigration in his address at a naturalization ceremony. He envisages immigration as a legitimate process and one that is socially useful for national development.

1.1. Immigration as a Legitimate and Practical Policy

Steinmeier deems the naturalization ceremony; that results from immigration, a moral phenomenon. In the following statement, he posits immigration as a moral and legitimate process:

> (1) I expressly wish to make the point just how important and right it is that people who have been living in our country for a long time and who want to remain here can become naturalised citizens. Only then do they completely belong, can they vote or stand for election, can they fully participate in political life…" **(**Steinmeier, August 25, 2026**)**

Steinmeier evaluates naturalization through the adjectives "important" and "right." In so doing, he constructs citizenship acquisition as both socially desirable and morally legitimate. These adjectives have a function-oriented use and do more than express the speaker's approval. In fact, according to S. Hunston and G. Thompson (2005, p.5), evaluation is "the expression of the speaker or writer's attitude or stance towards viewpoint on or feelings about the entities or propositions he or she is talking about" Thus, these evaluative words position the naturalization of long-term residents as an appropriate response to their established presence in German society. Within the institutional context of a presidential naturalization ceremony, this positive evaluation gives public authority to the recognition of migrants as prospective full members of the national community. The subsequent assertion that naturalized citizens lies in "can vote or can stand for election" and "can fully participate in political life." These further connect naturalization with democratic participation. From Fairclough's (1995, 2003) perspective, the choice of these evaluative adjective helps legitimize citizenship acquisition in this institutional and sociocultural context. Steinmeier thus frames naturalization not merely as an administrative procedure but as a legitimate means of extending political membership to people who have established their lives in Germany.

The repeated use of the deontic modal verb "must" in the statement (2) "We must take these concerns seriously and must resolutely counter hatred and discrimination" (Steinmeier **,** August 25, 2026**)** constructs the protection of migrants against discrimination. M. Halliday and C. Matthiessen (2014) view modality as expressing the speaker's judgment or assessment of the validity and probability of events and propositions. The use of the modal "must" reflects Steinmeier's ethical view on immigration. Thus, migrants must not be discriminated on this basis.

Moreover, the first-person plural pronoun "we" establishes a collective agent, while the expression "as a state … but also as a society" extends responsibility from public institutions to the wider social community. Together, these linguistic elements represent the rejection of discrimination as a shared moral and political duty. One can comprehend that modals as used express obligation and the pronoun "we" constructs collective responsibility. Discursively, Steinmeier's presidential address presents the protection of migrants as a legitimate public commitment. At the sociocultural level, this representation challenges the treatment of discrimination as a private or isolated matter and places migrant inclusion within a broader framework of democratic responsibility. In Fairclough's (1995, 2003) terms, the utterance therefore connects linguistic choices with the institutional articulation of social obligations and the normative principles governing relations between migrants and the receiving society. Steinmeier provides a moral and legitimate justification for the assignment of citizenship to immigrants.

The ethical and legitimate representation of immigration by Steinmeier is achieved through V. Leeuwen (2008) rationalization strategy. V.Leeuwen (2008, p.108) asserts that rationalization is interpreted as the cognitive interpretation of current understanding while creating a sense of approval or credibility. On the basis of D. Stone's (2004) instrumental rationalization as a way of presenting political choices as rational, objective, and oriented toward particular practical ends, Steinmeier specifies the reasons of accepting immigration.

1.2. Discursive Construction of Immigration as a Moral Obligation

Immigration ethics, is firstly constructed based on legitimacy and usefulness. Steinmeier's discourse also constructs immigration ethics through moral responsibility. From this perspective, immigration and the integration of migrants i**s** an ethical responsibility. This ethical responsibility derives from a historical memory, democratic principles, and the rejection of discrimination. It involves moral responsibility and accountability when the past does become a normative referent for social relations. This moral aspect emerges in the following statement: (3) "This commitment is without doubt also the best way to live up to the special responsibility that arises from our history... Whoever becomes a German takes on our country's historical legacy." " (Steinmeier **,** August 25, 2026**)**

At the outset, this ethical construction of immigration is present in the word **"**commitment" that indicates a will. It suggests active involvement and moral engagement. The expression "special responsibility" with the adjective "special," deepens the meaning of this responsibility. In fact, Germany has historically had a special experience, which gives rise to an especially ethical duty. Such historical memorialization frames moral obligation as coercive in this endeavor. Thus, Steinmeier links immigration ethics to Germany's historical memory.

This moral obligation towards migrants is expressed through explicit deontic modality: (4) "We must take these concerns seriously and must resolutely counter hatred and discrimination, as a state, it goes without saying, but also as a society." The obligation is constructed of the modal verb "must". " (Steinmeier **,** August 25, 2026**)**

The deontic modal verb "must" functions as a marker of obligation. According to J. Saeed (2003, p.135), modality is a "semantic category that allows speakers to express varying degrees of commitment to, or belief in a proposition". Specifically concerning modality, C. Kreidler (1998, p.241), admits that deontic modal expresses the necessity of a person to do or not to do in a certain way. It shows the speaker's desire for the proposition expressed by the utterance. So, the repetitive modal "must" strengthens the act of naturalizing. This action forces states to an obligation to provide fair treatment of migrants. It expands responsibility beyond governmental institutions and assigns it to society as a whole. This is in accordance with the argument brought forth by N. Fraser (2008) who argues that justice in multicultural societies requires not only redistribution but also recognition as revealed in the expression such as **"**as a state… but also as a society". Steinmeier's state that migrants deserve to be protected in their dignity and identity.

The dignity and identity of immigrants must be protected. Steinmeier's references in the context of naturalization are heavily embedded in a glimpse to immigration. The use of the pronominal "we" reflects this awareness. Steinmeier draws up collectivizing agents to that moral obligation. Furthermore, the opposition between the verbs "fear" and "are worried" creates a clear moral boundary that resists to this required moral imperative. Steinmeier's speech proceeds from a two-fold moral logic: migrants are deserving of acknowledgement as they add value to society; and society must protect their honor or dignity. From this, it can be observed that principles of immigration are legitimized from historical responsibility, ethical grounds and human coexistence. Steinmeier addresses immigration ethics at the intersection of legitimacy, responsibility, and recognition.

2. DISCURSIVE CONSTRUCTION OF IMMIGRATION THROUGH DEMOCRATIC VALUES

In Steinmeier's naturalization speech, immigration is not only constructed through ethical arguments about legitimacy and responsibility, but also through a broader lens of values.

2.1. Lexical and Syntactic Construction of Democratic Values in Immigration Discourse

In this speech, Steinmeier portrays citizenship acquisition as a process through which migrants enter a normative life. This existence turns on constitutional norms, civil liberties, and civic engagement. In this regard, naturalization assumes the nature of a legal process through which immigration is acknowledged according to democratic principles. Through the lens of a naturalization ceremony, Steinmeier constructs immigration as predicated on some underlying value. This construction is articulated in the following statement: (5) "Every decision to become a naturalized citizen is at the same time a commitment to our constitution and to the values on which it is based, the values it expresses, the values it seeks always to protect." " (Steinmeier **,** August 25, 2026**)**

The recurrent reference to values in tripartite formulations of the type, "the values on which it is based, the values it expresses, the values it seeks always to protect", links immigration with democratic value. In this repetition, Steinmeier promotes citizenship as the institutional avenue through which migrants access this equality and obtain recognition as full political stakeholders. The way Steinmeier's naturalization speech articulates immigration is as a constitutional right done through proceduralism. Thus, it can be seen that the domain of immigration stands upon the connection between constitution, citizenship, and democratic identity. The use of the noun "commitment" indicates its construction.

Steinmeier points by this lexical choice, citizenship is an active embrace of democratic ideals: the citizenship is a reciprocal relation of which the state grants membership, while the individual dedicates herself to values upholding and perpetuating the political community. Such a discursive construction accords with Habermas's (1998) vision of constitutional patriotism. He indicates that fatherland should be based primarily on allegiance to constitutional ideals as opposed to ethnic, cultural or blood kinship. Immigration is thus uniquely legitimate because it takes place within the frame of democratic norms.

The noun "commitment" converts citizenship from a passive status to an active relationship between individual and political community. The notion itself carries inscribed the information of obligation, connection and waking up-treatment. The naturalized citizen is thus here depicted as a political subject who does not simply obtain membership but takes on the obligations of upholding the ideals which underpin this very membership. Steinmeier's discourse situates the ground of belonging in the constitution itself. This allows for an integration to the national community of numerous migrants, without any demand on them to scorn their previous cultural identity.

There is therefore a link between immigration and democratic values. In elaborating on these principles, Steinmeier lists them explicitly yet one by one: (6) "Freedom of opinion, freedom of speech, freedom of belief and religion, freedom of science and the arts are some of the non-negotiable values set out in this constitution". " (Steinmeier **,** August 25, 2026**)**. This build-up of "freedom of" is

a syntactic parallelism that shares an equal significance among equally vital individual freedoms. “Freedom of” acts as a powerful value marker that compresses larger notions of human dignity, personal autonomy, and democratic engagement. Therefore, in the sense outlined by N. Fairclough (2003), such lexical choices can act as ideological keywords. The word “liberty” evokes human rights, political traditions and the dignity of individuals all at once. As a result, immigration becomes linked with democracy and not just the alteration of demography.

The adjective “non-negotiable” gives this ideological construction, additional power. These “freedoms” are imaged as inviolable so that they can arise only as absolutes. This reading is bolstered by the self-contained prefix structure of the word “un-bargainable.”It means, freedom cannot be a subject for political negotiation. Steinmeier thus frames democratic values as universal fundamental principles which set the boundaries of legitimate membership in society. Steinmeier represents immigration as a path to democratic incorporation. This means migrants are often portrayed less as citizens in waiting and more as members of a constitutional community. Therefore, immigration values are based on the ideals of freedom, equality, and participation and shared public entitlements.

2.2. Discursive Construction of Diversity and Social Coexistence

In this speech, Steinmeier offers another reading of the values of immigration. He represents it as a source of diversity and a basis for renewed social coexistence in the following excerpt:

(7) Our society is characterized by great diversity, by difference. This is thanks not only to the people who have come here from all over the world, with their different cultural or religious backgrounds. ” (Steinmeier **,** August 25, 2026**)**. Steinmeier constructs immigration as something through which there is an alteration of the social community itself. Thus, with the terms “diversity” and “difference,” one can observe a lexical field of plurality. Steinmeier sees diversity as a significant consequence of immigration and an intrinsic beneficial component of German society. In addition, the phrase “people who have come here from all over the globe,” helps shape immigration in a positive way. It does not simplify migrants into administrative categories, including “foreigners” or “immigrants.” Simultaneously, the spatial expression of “from all over the world” expands the symbolic limits of national community even wider.

Steinmeier’s use of “diversity” and “difference” constructs cultural plurality as an established feature of German society rather than as an inherent obstacle to national cohesion. This representation is reinforced by the statement that the Basic Law provides “the best foundation for the peaceful coexistence of different opinions, confrontations and conflicts”. The metaphor “foundation” represents the constitution as the institutional basis upon which social relations can be organized, while “coexistence” frames difference as compatible with a shared political community. These lexical

choices give positive value to plurality and present the constitution as a source of stability. This address connects democratic integration national cohesion based on shared constitutional principles rather than complete cultural uniformity. Thus, the language choice of Steinmeier articulates a particular relationship between social difference, political membership, and national unity and constructs a normative vision of how a plural society ought to function. Steinmeier' construction of immigration can also be associated with N. Fraser's (2008) notion of recognition as one dimension of justice in plural societies.

3. DISCURSIVE CONSTRUCTION OF NATIONAL BELONGING THROUGH IMMIGRATION.

Steinmeier's discourse constructs immigration not only as a legal or political process but also as a question of identity, belonging, and membership. He presents citizenship as a process through which newcomers become part of a shared national identity.

3.1. Pronominal and Evaluative Construction of National Identity and Belonging

R. Wodak et *al*. (2009) argue that identities are discursively produced, using linguistic strategies to create boundaries between "national sameness and uniqueness" and different collectivities. Moreover, B. Anderson (1983) describes the nation as an "imagined political community." This permits to highlight the fact that national belonging is contingent on a common sense of membership and not direct personal relations between all members. In this light, Steinmeier´s discourse can be perceived as a linguistic renegotiation of the parameters that define membership. We can see this through this sentence: (8) "I like to imagine that all of you who are now citizens of our country, also think 'We Germans' when we hear that." " (Steinmeier **,** August 25, 2026**).**

The expression "We Germans" is central to Steinmeier's discursive construction of national belonging. By inviting newly naturalized citizens to identify with this collective designation, Steinmeier extends the category of Germanness beyond ancestry or birthplace towards a conception of membership grounded in citizenship and shared political affiliation. According to B. Anderson (2006, p.xvi), the nation is an imagined political community; and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign. Here, Anderson draws attention to the understanding that national belonging rests on a shared sense of membership rather than the actual personal relations between each and every member.

Seen this way, Steinmeier's discourse represents an effort to use language to reframe the boundaries of German national identity and membership. The "Yes" word is metaphorically used to speak of naturalization, as an identification and bet by an explicit way. Specifically, the adverbs of

intensification “clear,” “public,” “decisive” and “well-founded” allow to comprehend the intentional and conscious character of this identification. Tajfel’s (1981) defines identity as part of an individual’s self-concept which derives from his knowledge of his membership of a social group together with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership. It follows that Steinmeier announces that migrants and native Germans share a collective national identity; meaning there is no distinction.

The first-person plural pronoun “we” establishes this collective identity, while the designation “Germans” provides the national reference through which that identity is articulated. In the institutional context of the naturalization ceremony, this formulation performs an inclusive function. It addresses the new citizens not simply as recipients of legal status but as potential participants in a shared national community. In this context, these pronominal and lexical choices frame inclusion and also define membership. This standpoint is in accordance with R. Wodak et *al*. (2009) that national identities are discursively constructed through language by using rhetorical techniques to create both ‘identical sameness’, and ‘national distinction’. Social integration constructs immigrants’ identity. The same belonging is therefore contributive to emergence.

3.2. Discursive Construction of Pluralism and Inclusive Belonging.

Steinmeier does not only view national identity. He acknowledges diversity brought by immigration as beneficial. For R. Wodak et al., (1999, p.4) “there is no such thing as one national identity.” Here R. Wodak focuses on the fact that there are different identities and these different identities are constructed according to the audience, context, topic, and communicative situation. Immigration, thus constitutes a context of identity construction. Steinmeier’s discourse similarly presents German as an identity that incorporates multiple origins while maintaining a common sense of national belonging. This conception is also compatible with W. Kymlicka’s (1996) argument that modern societies have an increasingly “multicultural fabric” in which ethnic and national minorities seek recognition and support for their cultural identities. Thus, Steinmeier’s discourse constructs immigration as compatible with national cohesion by representing cultural difference and common citizenship as complementary rather than contradictory. This complementarity is a value for the host country. The following excerpt makes it more explicit: (9) “You come from very different places: Eritrea, Syria, the Philippines, Ukraine, Côte d’Ivoire... Today you are all saying... ‘Yes’ to your new homeland.” ” (Steinmeier **,** August 25, 2026**)**. The enumeration of countries” “Eritrea, Syria, the Philippines, Ukraine, Côte d’Ivoire,” permits Steinmeier to construct pluralism as something positive and useful. The referential identification connects individual citizens to different geographical and cultural backgrounds.

This discursive strategy of enumeration aims at explicating the plurality of the origins of the new citizens and what they can bring to host country. In addition, in the collective expression "you are all,**"** the quantifier "all" goes from plurality towards collective membership. In proceeding this way, Steinmeier establishes a relationship between difference and sameness. In other words, the new citizens come from different places, but they are equally addressed as members of the same belonging. This conception of pluralism and its benefits also stem from: (10) "Integration succeeds well where the prevalent atmosphere is one of relaxed self-confidence, a calm sense of identity... By the way, perhaps more than any other German city... Cologne has seen people arrive from afar..."(Steinmeier , 2026**)**

In this statement, Steinmeier establishes a relationship between integration and confidence in national identity**.** The expressions "relaxed self-confidence" and "a calm sense of identity" are evaluative formulations. They construct a positive representation of a society secure enough to accommodate newcomers. The adjective "relaxed" contrasts implicitly with representations of immigration as threatening or destabilizing. At the same time, "calm" suggests that national identity does not need to be defended through exclusion. Steinmeier therefore constructs an alternative model of nationalism in which a strong national identity can coexist with openness towards people from different backgrounds. The reference to Cologne reinforces this argument through a historical and spatial representation of immigration. By stating that the city has "seen people arrive from afar," Steinmeier presents the arrival of foreigners as something that has already formed part of the city's experience. The verb "seen" gives immigration the status of an observable and established social phenomenon, while the expression "from afar" acknowledges geographical difference without assigning negative characteristics to those who arrive. Immigration is consequently normalized through reference to the historical experience of a German city.

Steinmeier represents the arrival of immigrants as part of the continuing development of the national community; rather than as an external disruption to German society: (11) "New citizens of Germany, I wish you that same joy... when, now and in the future, you say 'and I am here." (Steinmeier **,** August 25, 2026**)** The expression "I am here" gives individual immigrants a discursive voice within the German national space. The first-person pronoun "I" indicates individual presence, while the deictic adverb "here" establishes a relationship between the speaker and the national territory. Steinmeier does not categorize "immigrant" but represents them as legitimate individuals who participate in German society. In addition, the temporal sequence "now and in the future" suggests continuity and permanence. This foregrounds future useful perspectives of immigrants for Germany's future. Steinmeier redefines the national community as a space in which different histories and origins can coexist under the shared framework of citizenship. Immigration thus becomes part of

the ongoing construction of German identity, making national belonging a dynamic process capable of incorporating diversity rather than excluding it.

CONCLUSION

This analysis demonstrates that Steinmeier's naturalization speech constructs immigration through the interrelated discourses of ethics, values and identity. Immigration is portrayed positively as legitimate and a beneficial. Thus, migrants are presented as deserving recognition, involvement and protection. In a word, immigration deserves inclusion. Concurrently, inclusion requires integration, constitutional obligation and social engagement. In this way, Steinmeier sheds light on a tension between inclusion and regulation. Migrants are welcomed into national community but their belonging is also framed in specific normative terms. Concerning identity, Steinmeier uses a language of non-exclusion to integrate them in German culture. This points to movement away from a solely origin-based idea of belonging towards a more civic and participatory one.

Yet the analysis also invites a bigger question: can inclusion ever really be inclusive when it brings with it assumptions about how newcomers should conduct themselves, assimilate, or identify as citizens of the country? Future research will compare Steinmeier with other German political speeches or explore how these particular constructions of belonging are interpreted by migrants themselves. These lenses would similarly illuminate the connections between the rhetoric of politics, the ethics governing immigration, and shifting lines on national identity.

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