

A Critical Discourse Analysis of Joe Biden's and Boris Johnson's choice of certain grammatical constructions including the use of certain pronouns, and modal verbs.

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## ABSTRACT

This study aims to investigate the use of lexical items and their possible ideological implications in the speeches of American president Joe Biden and the British prime minister Boris Johnson's during the Russia and Ukraine war crisis. In addition, it analyses their speeches to identify the usage of certain grammatical patterns including modal structures, and certain pronouns. The procedure of this analysis required the use of a qualitative method of analysis. Therefore, to achieve these objectives of the study, three speeches delivered by Joe Biden and two of Boris Johnson's speeches were analysed according to Fairclough's (1995) three-dimensional model of Critical Discourse Analysis. The results concluded that both leaders were successful in illustrating the ideologies of dominance, supremacy, and national priority. Furthermore, the speeches of both characters tended to reflect egoism, superiority, and nationalism due to the frequent use of the pronouns "I" and "we".

تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى التحقق من الآثار المحتملة لاختيارات الرئيس الأمريكي جو بايدن ورئيس الوزراء البريطاني بوريس جونسون لبعض العناصر اللغوية في خطابتهما خلال أزمة الحرب بين روسيا وأوكرانيا. بالإضافة إلى ذلك، وكذلك أكدت على تحليل بعض الأنماط النحوية بما في ذلك الهياكل الوضعية، والضمائر. و تطلب اجراء هذا التحليل باستخدام طريقة التحليل النوعي ولتحقيق هذه الأهداف، تم تحليل ثلاثة خطابات ألقاها جو بايدن وخطابين لبوريس جونسون وفقاً لنموذج فيركلاف لتحليل الخطاب النقدي ثلاثي الأبعاد. توصلت النتائج إلى أن كل من الشخصيات كانا ناجحين في توضيح أيديولوجيات الهيمنة والتفوق و الأولوية الوطنية. وبالإضافة إلى ذلك، وجدت الدراسة أن جو بايدن يستخدم التعابير التي تعكس التمجد الذاتي والثقة بالنفس. تميل خطابات جو بايدن للتعبير عن الأنانية والقومية نظراً للإشارة المتكررة إلى الضمائر الشخصية "أنا" و "نحن"

## 1.0 Introduction

Language is considered the most powerful tool of communication. It has the ability to convince, manipulate and achieve various communicative functions. According to Simpsons and Mayr (2009) language refers to "the abstract set of patterns and rules which operate simultaneously at different levels in the system. (Simpsons & Mayr,

2009: P. 5). Language itself has no power alone, however “language can be used to challenge power, to subvert it, to alter distributions of power in the short and long term. Language provides articulated means for differences in power in social hierarchical structures” (Wodak, 2001, p. 11). This thesis aims to examine the political implications of powerful leaders and their choice of specific linguistic terms to reflect their superiority, supremacy, and self-glorification. In addition, it concentrates on analysing the different ideologies, perspectives and attitudes of both powerful politicians Joe Biden and Boris Johnson. It aims to examine their speeches in order to prove how politicians try to justify their actions and convince their audience that they are doing the best for their country.

## 2.0 Literature Review

### 1.2 Discourse Analysis

According to Wodak, discourse is language use in speech and writing which is a form of social practice”. (Wodak, 2002: 7) Therefore, discourse is different from ordinary text because it includes other linguistic processes beyond the grammatical and phonological structures. Discourse includes anything from history, narratives, text, talk, a speech, topic-related conversations; stretching the meaning of discourse from a genre to a register and to a code and language (Wodak and Meyer, 2009: 3). Furthermore, Crystal (2006) defines discourse as a "continuous stretch of (especially spoken) language larger than a sentence," "it is a set of utterances which constitute any recognizable speech event" (Crystal, 2006:148).

Discourse is what makes ordinary text (on paper) have function and convey specific goals. Without discourse, language becomes pointless and functionless. Through discourse, change can happen either positively or negatively, therefore discourse has a function, and it can convey particular goals. Discourse overall is the process of analysing text between the writer and the reader or the speaker and the listener. However, practically discourse analyses the speech in order to explain and show how the writer or the speaker is able to persuade or manipulate the ideologies of others.

Moreover, Gee (1990) believes that discourse is the way in which language is applied in a social context. Henceforth, it is a way to discuss language beyond the sentence level, which permits analysts to think about a number of the things that happen in the language. It is the analysis of language in depth to reach and discover the hidden meaning. Therefore, Martin and Nakayama (2010) view discourse as a social process, "the language used, the words and the meanings that are communicated depends not only on the context but also on the social relations that are part of that interaction" (p. 233).

## 2.2 Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA)

This thesis draws attention towards the field of critical discourse analysis (CDA), one of the major methods of analysis in the world of research. It is known as an approach that is based on the union of language studies and social theory (Fairclough, 1992). CDA is an interdisciplinary approach that examines questions like how and why the interaction in society forms the textual structure (Widuna, 2018). Widdowson (2007) defines CDA as "an approach that is interested with the use (and abuse) of language for the exercise of socio-political power, ideology and social belief. CDA investigates texts in order to find out what "structures, strategies or another properties of text, talk, verbal interaction or communicative events that play a role in production or reproduction of uneven power relations" (van Dijk, 1993a: 250). The study of CDA allows linguists to investigate how powerful groups use language to sustain power and to discover power relations and social inequality. Halliday (1973) states that "Language plays a central part, both as determiner and has determined: Language is controlled by the social structure, and the social structure is maintained and transmitted through language" (Halliday, 1973:90). Power is considered CDA's major concern reproduced in the text and speeches of those who aim to maintain power over others. The absence of CDA would mean that oppression, and inequality would be unnoticed without being critically analysed. Critical discourse analysis is considered to be a variety of text analysis. It differs from the original text analysis by the fact that critical discourse

analysis builds a relation between the text and the social context. In addition, it doesn't tackle the written or spoken text in isolation, rather it analyzes the text in relation to the real world. Most importantly, it provides an empirical study by actually studying the relation among the political, social and cultural domains. It does not only deal with the immediate environment where the text is produced, rather it includes all the cultural, political and social facets. Moreover, Wodak (2001: 32) indicates that the focus of CDA is on the context of language use as a central dimension that tackles the relation between language, power and ideology. This presents the language of discourse as "a form of social practice" that affects others and forces them to change their attitudes, views, and stances (Fairclough and Wodak, 1997:258).

### 2.3 Power and CDA

The main purpose of CDA is to find how the spoken or written texts are organised, and investigates the hidden ideological features and power relations by analysing the characteristics of language and structures in the text. Through the use of CDA, oppression, inequality and biasness can be recognized and analyzed critically. According to van Dijk, the term power is essential in the field of CDA is analysis the language of powerful people who are accountable for the inequalities found in society. (van Dijk, 2001: 352) Language is not powerful on its own, but gains power by the use of powerful people. Individuals have a source of power, that is used to make it productive. There is a close relationship between power and discourse. In addition, "Power does not derive from language, but language can be used to challenge power, to subvert it, and to alter distributions of power" (Wodak and Meyer, 2001: 2). The power of any discourse is acquired from the various social practices (different social institutions) that generate that discourse. Power is defined as the person's ability to manipulate and influence the behaviour of others, while discourse is the use of language in a social situation. It exists in the social world and that power relations inform, structure, and account for discourse practices in social contexts.

## 2.4 Ideology and CDA

Ideology is defined as "a systematic body of ideas, organized from a particular point of view" (Hodge and Kress, 1993: 6) It can also be referred to as the belief system which strengthens the relationship between members of the society by allowing to build shared values and beliefs. Fowler (1991) defines it as "the sum of the ways in which people think, say and interact with the society" (Fowler,1991:92). Van Dijk believes that ideology serves as a guide to help people act and behave in certain ways according to the situation and what they perceive to be 'correct' or 'right'. "Ideology contains the person's beliefs, disposition and expression of feeling (nonverbal) "(van Dijk, 1998). Furthermore, Wodak (1996) gives asserts that: "ideologies are particular ways of representing and constructing of society which reproduce unequal relations of power, relations of domination and exploitation" (Wodak, 1996:18). According to Mayr, "ideology is defined as meaning in the service of power. It means that ideology serves the interest of certain groups with social power, ensuring that events, practices, and behaviours come to be regarded as legitimate and common-sense (Mayr, 2008:11)." Additionally, van Dijk (1998: 8), defines ideology as "the basis of social representations shared by members of a group". Ideology has an impact on what is understood and accepted as right or wrong depending on the person's world view.

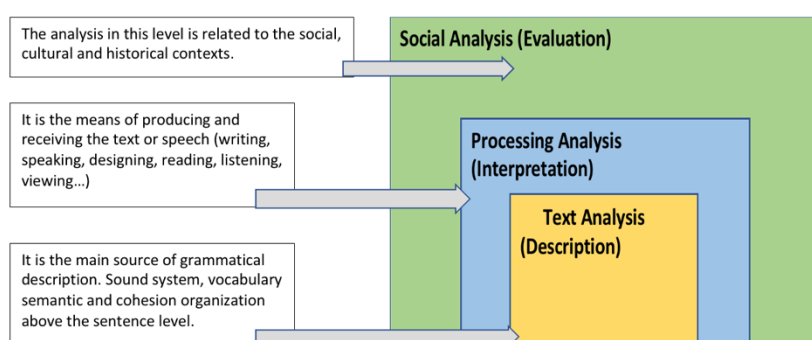
## 3.0 Methodology

This thesis is qualitative research, because it based on words for data collection rather than statistical data. Denzin and Lincoln (2000) state that qualitative research is an interpretive and naturalistic approach: "This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or to interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them" (Denzin and Linclon,2000: 3). Additionally, The researcher analyses the ideological stands, word choice, and the use of certain pronouns. This qualitative research adopts Fairclough's (1995) model which

consists of three dimensions of description, interpretation, and explanation. The following figure provides an understanding of the model of analysis:

*Figure 1: Fairclough's (1995) Three-dimensional Model of CDA*

In the description stage, the researcher deals with the linguistic property of the text. Moreover, interpretation deals with the relationship between the discursive process of



Fairclough's (1995) Three-dimensional Model of CDA

production and interpretation of the text. The stage of explanation deals with the relationship between the processes (production and interpretation) and the social conditions surrounding the text. The speeches in this thesis are randomly selected from the beginning of the war. A collection of five speeches are selected for the purpose of analysis and are mentioned below. The speeches were collected in form of transcripts and downloaded in form of videos during the press conferences. The researcher aims to focus on word choice and identify the use of personal and plural pronouns "I" and "we" and reveal the hidden meaning behind their usage.

The following table includes the selected speeches for analysis:

Speech Title	Date of Speech
Joe Biden Provides an Update on the Ukraine-Russia Situation	February 22, 2022



Remarks by President Biden on Russia's Unprovoked and Unjustified Attack on Ukraine	February 24, 2022
Joe Biden Provides an Update on U.S. Support for Ukraine	April 28, 2022
Boris Johnson Address to the Parliament of Ukraine	May 3, 2022
Prime Minister Boris Johnson gives a speech in Ukraine.	August 25, 2022

## Data Analysis and Discussion

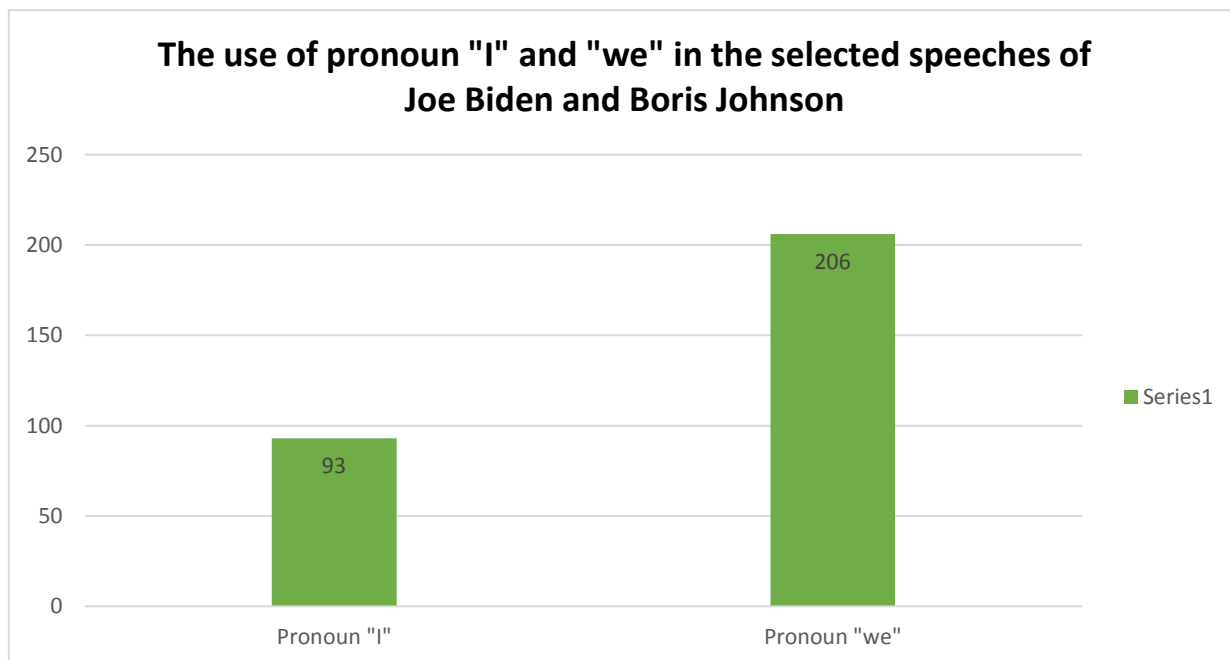
### 4.0 Introduction

The aim of the study is to investigate the lexical choice and the hidden ideologies in the speeches of the American president Joe Biden and the British Prime Minister Boris Johnson during the Russian and Ukrainian war crisis.

#### 4.1 The Analysis of the use of the pronoun "I" and "we"

The researcher aims to identify the use of certain grammatical constructions such as pronouns and modal verbs to identify concealed ideologies. The results show that both Joe Biden and Boris Johnson frequently use the pronoun "I" and "we" more than any other pronoun. This reflects egoism, national pride and superiority. The pronoun "I" is mentioned in the five speeches selected ninety-three times in both the speeches of Joe Biden and Boris Johnson. In contrast, the pronoun "we" is used two hundred and six times in the same speeches. The pronoun "I" can be used to show off power by separating the President from the rest of the members of his community and send a message to the audience that the president has the highest authority and is the most dominant. Most importantly, it is used to distinguish self from other and to put oneself

in the most positive light. However, the pronoun “we” is the most frequently used pronoun in the selected speeches of Joe Biden and Boris Johnson. The pronoun “we”



represents the institutional identity of the United States and the United Kingdom, and therefore is more commonly used than the pronoun “I” in the speeches of both Biden and Johnson. The use of “we” creates a sense of unity between members of the community. Joe Biden and Boris Johnson use “we” as a technique to convey the idea of everyone being part of one team, and all share equal responsibilities towards their country. In addition, the use of the pronoun “we” takes the pressure off the speaker in case of negative consequences in the future. The following is a graph that represents the usage of the two personal pronouns:

*Figure 2: The use of pronoun "I" and "we" in selected speeches*

#### 4.2 The Analysis of the use of modal verbs

The researcher explores the use of modal verbs in the selected speeches of Joe Biden and Boris Johnson. The purpose behind this analysis is to discover speaker’s intentions and degrees of certainty, and most importantly their future hopes, predictions and desires of the speaker. The modal verbs “should”, “have to”, “may”,



“could”, “can”, “will”, “would” are investigated. The figure below shows the frequency of modal verbs used in the five speeches:

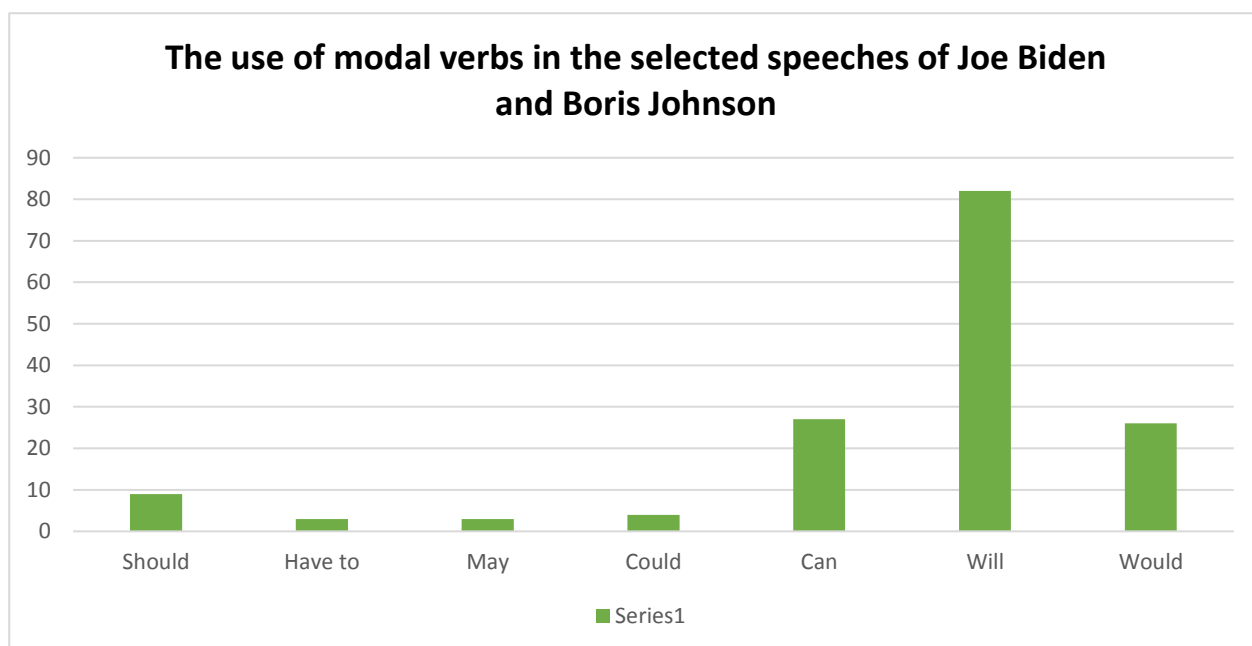


Figure 3: The use of modal verbs in selected speeches

According to the figure and depending on these frequencies the modal verb “will” is the most frequently used modal verb in the speeches of Joe Biden and Boris Johnson. It is used eighty-two times in all five speech conferences. The purpose behind the usage of the modal verb “will” is to prove that the speakers are powerful prominent figures who are able to achieve their goals, to support Ukraine and end the disastrous war of Putin. The results revealed that Joe Biden and Boris Johnson used the modal “will” often in their speeches for the purpose of showing authority, power and dominance. Furthermore, the speakers use the modal “can” in their conferences to express ability, request, and possibility. The modal “can” in these speeches mostly represent the ability to emphasize that the United States and the United Kingdom have the ability to offer tremendous support and end the Russian war. Concerning the modal verb “would” it is the past form tense of will. It has various sentence functions such as expressing polite offers, invitations, desires, requests, etc. In addition, it may aim to indicate the consequence of a hypothetical situation or event. He uses the modal verb “would” to convey a hypothetical situation. Johnson conveys a message that Putin and Russia is a worldwide threat. If no end is put to these acts of Putin, this will be the

beginning of many other oppressions, wars and disasters. Therefore, he insists on worldwide collaboration to put an end to this war and prevent any similar future situations.

Moreover, “should” is another modal verb used in the speeches of Joe Biden and Boris Johnson. It expresses “advice”, “recommendations”, and “expectations”. For example, in the quotation below Boris Johnson advises the audience that they are the leaders of their future and that they are in no need for a tyrant like Putin to have control and destroy their lives with this pointless destructive war.

*“You are the masters of your fate, and no-one can or should impose anything on Ukrainians.” (Boris Johnson/ May 3, 2022)*

In addition, the modal “could” was one of the least present modals in the five speech conferences. It expresses a past ability, degree of certainty, polite request, and suggestion. Joe Biden used this modal to express a degree of certainty as in:

*“And just as Putin chose to launch this brutal invasion, he could make the choice to end this brutal invasion.” (Joe Biden/ April 28, 2022)*

Joe Biden is certain that if Putin wishes to end the war, he could immediately end it. However, he chose to go on with his plan to take over Ukraine and enlarge Russian territory. Furthermore, the modal “have to” is used only a few times in the speeches of Joe Biden and Boris Johnson and is preceded by the pronoun “we” to indicate both the speaker and his audience sharing responsibilities and working together as a team in order to end and survive this war crisis. The modal verb “must” is used to express strong obligation or compulsion and logical necessity. The following example expresses strong obligation:

*Russia is the aggressor, no ifs or buts about it. Russia is the aggressor, and the world must and will hold Russia accountable. (Joe Biden/ April 28, 2022)*

## 5.0 Conclusions

The results concluded the existence of the sense of nationalism, and superiority of both America and Britain as recognised from the speeches of Joe Biden and Boris Johnson. Furthermore, both leaders were successful in using particular linguistic terms that reflect concepts and notions of equality, supremacy, caring for other nations, national priority and the importance of citizen involvement. The study found that Joe Biden uses expressions that reflect self-glorification, and confidence. In addition, the speeches of Joe Biden tended to reflect egoism and nationalism due to the frequent use of the pronouns “I” and “we”. Furthermore, the results also detect the frequent use of the pronoun “we”. The speakers tend to convey the ideology that they audience involvement is necessary. Therefore, frequently use the pronoun “we” to convey a message that superior leaders are powerless without the support and encouragement of their audience. The speakers try to show that they are members of their community and the decisions they give are based on shared decisions between themselves and their community.

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