

Multi-Level Approach for Critical Discourse Analysis: Boris Johnson's Statement on Ukraine to the House of Commons on 24 February 2022

Abordagem multinível para uma análise crítica do discurso: a declaração de Boris Johnson sobre a Ucrânia para a Câmara dos Comuns em 24 de fevereiro de 2022

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Abstract: This study addresses methodological issues of critical discourse analysis and shows how an analytical multi-level approach we developed can be useful in adding theoretical resources and systematization to its methods. The analytical approach is grounded on the macrostructure of human activity (activity, actions, operations) and appropriates resources from text linguistics and sociolinguistics. We crossed this approach with historical and positioning discourses to identify ways of talking, foregrounded, and concealed meanings and ideologies in the statement of the ex-Prime Minister of the United Kingdom Boris Johnson as delivered to the House of Commons on Ukraine on 24 February 2022. Our results point out he established an agreement with the House through an explanatory statement with the predominance of the use of informing discursive procedures, which corresponded for almost half of his procedures. Most of the time Johnson spoke in the future tense through the intense use of the modal auxiliary verb “will”. These, among other linguistic choices, collaborated to conceal the United States and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization's roles in the invasion of Ukraine, framing responsibility solely on the president of Russia. In conclusion, we comment on the contributions and limitations of the analytical approach.

Keywords: critical discourse analysis methodology; discursive procedures; cultural-historical activity theory; text linguistics; sociolinguistics' contextualization cues; political statement.



Resumo: Este estudo aborda questões metodológicas da análise crítica do discurso e evidencia como uma abordagem analítica multinível que desenvolvemos pode ser útil para acrescentar recursos teóricos e sistematização a seus métodos. Nossa abordagem analítica é fundamentada na macroestrutura da atividade humana (atividade, ações, operações) e apropria recursos da linguística textual e da sociolinguística. Combinamos essa abordagem com discursos históricos e de posicionamento para identificar formas de falar, significados e ideologias destacados e ocultos na declaração do ex-Primeiro-Ministro do Reino Unido Boris Johnson proferida na Câmara dos Comuns sobre a Ucrânia em 24 de fevereiro de 2022. Nossos resultados apontam que ele estabeleceu um acordo com a Câmara por meio de uma declaração explicativa com a predominância do uso de procedimentos discursivos informativos, que corresponderam a quase metade de seus procedimentos. Na maior parte do tempo, Johnson falou no tempo futuro por meio do uso intenso do verbo auxiliar modal “will”. Essas, entre outras escolhas linguísticas, colaboraram para ocultar o papel dos Estados Unidos e da Organização do Tratado do Atlântico Norte na invasão da Ucrânia, atribuindo a responsabilidade exclusivamente ao presidente da Rússia. Para concluir, comentamos as contribuições e limitações da abordagem analítica.

Palavras-chave: metodologia de análise crítica do discurso; procedimentos discursivos; teoria da atividade histórico-cultural; linguística textual; pistas de contextualização da sociolinguística; declaração política.

1 Introduction

Critical discourse analysis (CDA) is established as an interdisciplinary field of research in the humanities and social sciences (Breeze, 2011; Wodak, 2013), and is considered a recent school of discourse analysis (Blommaert; Bulcaen, 2000; Liu; Guo, 2016). Its theory and methods were developed mainly by Fairclough (1992, 2001, 2003, 2013), Van Dijk (1993, 2005, 2008), Wodak (1995, 2001), Kress (1996, 2010), and others. Halliday’s view of language as a “social act” is of centrality to many critical discourse analysts (Chouliaraki; Fairclough, 1999). Fairclough (1992) considers that discourse is a form of social practice that transforms and maintains social struc-

tures in society via power relations, which are linked to the ways that people and institutions construct roles, identities, and ideologies.

The CDA approach has been used to explain and perform a critique of how language is used to create ideologies in discourse and texts, contributing to reveal power relations and abuses, social inequalities, and manipulations in domains such as politics, media, and education (Wodak, 2013). In this enterprise, analysts look for the ways that linguistics and non-linguistics choices are used to conceal, background, foreground, and give agency or passivity to authors, participants, objects, processes, and phenomena, thus creating and recreating power relations in societies, groups, settings, and associations (Machin; Mayr, 2012). The analyses are carried out through techniques such as grammar, quoting verbs, transitivity, ways of representing people, semiotic choices, nominalization and presupposition, modality and hedging, rhetoric, and metaphors (Semino, 2008; Cameron, 2003; Fairclough, 2003; Halliday, 1994; Van Dijk, 1993).

This approach has rendered important results and ways for researchers and people to develop awareness concerning issues that otherwise would be not available to them. However, there are limitations to CDA methods as pointed out by Widdowson (1995, 1998), such as the problem of interpretation in support of belief, which consists of an interpretation of data carried without consistent theory and methods. According to Breeze (2011), several criticisms have pointed to inconsistencies within the field of CDA, such as problems with the epistemology and theoretical framework, mainly with “the instrumentalization of theory and the failure to establish an objective standpoint for research [...] and the type of linguistic methodology that is often applied” (Breeze, 2011, p. 494).

Many scholars agree that there are flaws and limitations in the CDA theory and methodologies. As Tenorio noted,

[t]he merits and demerits of CDA research have been the object of a certain amount of critique. The problems that have been picked up concern context, cognition, partiality, and the linguistic model employed. Most critics do not call into question the existence or epistemological relevance of CDA [...] but are aware of its shortcomings: Its theoretical foundations are quite tangled in many cases, and the use of concepts and categories may seem to be inconsistent, which does not encourage the production of a systematic theory. Eclecticism, if lacking in justification, can be a source of contradiction. (Tenorio, 2011, p. 194-95).

According to Wodak,

CDA cannot be regarded as a discrete academic discipline in any traditional sense, with a fixed set of theories, categories, assumptions or research methods. Instead, CDA can be seen as a problem-oriented interdisciplinary research programme, subsuming a variety of approaches, each drawing on different epistemological assumptions, with different theoretical models, research methods and agenda (Wodak, 2013, p. xix).

Concerning these shortcomings in theory and methods and the fact that CDA is not constituted by a well-established set of theories, categories, and research methods, the purpose of this article is to show how a multi-level mapping analytical approach can assist in new ways

the accomplishment of researchers' studies on political statements. The proposed analytical approach offers both a theoretical model and a set of coherent methods for the CDA agenda.

For this purpose, we show how the analytical approach is a useful coherent framework to perform a critical discourse analysis of ex-Prime Minister of the United Kingdom (UK) Boris Johnson's statement on Ukraine to the House of Commons on the day Russia launched the invasion of Ukraine – 24 February 2022.

Vieira & Kelly (2014) developed a multi-level method to analyze classroom discourse, articulating the psychological, sociocultural, and linguistic-structural components of human activity. This method was adapted and used as a basis for our multi-level mapping approach for expanding CDA methods and concepts for analyzing political statements.

For the grounding, definition, and articulation of the levels of analysis, we used the psychological macrostructure of human activity (activity, actions, operations), asserted by Leontiev (1978) within his activity theory framework. Resources from text linguistics (Bronckart, 1999; Adam, 2008) were used to analyze how speech is organized at the level of individuals' actions, establishing the construction of argumentations, explanations, narrations, injunctions, and descriptions, which include open-ended and authoritarian goals, identities, norms, and functional discursive procedures (Vieira et al., 2017).

According to Vieira & Kelly (2014), at the level of the operations, people accomplish micro-speech acts through convergent propositions-utterances (proposition-utterance is the smallest unit of communication according to Adam, 2008). We call a "discursive procedure" the means through which a micro-speech act is accomplished, and includes the conscious and unconscious people's choices, based on their experiences, speech fluency, cultural background, goal of the action, and personalities. For this analysis and following Gumperz (1982, 2008), we used sociolinguistics' contextualization cues (pauses, intonation, eye gaze, gestures, proxemics) to interpret Boris Johnson's procedurals conveyed meanings.

In our multi-level mapping approach to CDA, each level of analysis is concerned with answering a specific question. Analysis at the activity level answers the question "why was an activity carried out?" Analysis at the action level answers the question "what individual or collective actions realized the activity and what conscious goals are at stake?". Finally, analysis at the level of operations (discursive procedures) answers the question "how and by what methods was the action carried out?".

We argue that this approach adds to CDA methods and techniques in purposefully creating a "mapping process" to sample, organize, and analyze the production of meanings and ideologies created and recreated by people's interactions in domains such as politics, media, and education. In the next section, we describe the theoretical resources that ground our approach.

2 Theoretical resources and method

2.1 Cultural-historical activity theory, activity, needs, and motives

The Cultural-Historical Activity Theory (CHAT) is rooted in soviet psychology grounded on sociocultural studies of human functioning, mainly in Leontiev's shared works with Vygotsky

and Luria at the beginning of the 20th century. Throughout his career, Leontiev systematized activity theory and asserted the psychological macrostructure of human activity. Later, Engeström (1999) developed the concept of a network of activity systems, highlighting how different activities interact with each other.

According to Leontiev (1978), any human activity can be conceived from the point of view of three constituting levels of human psychological macrostructure: activity, actions, and operations. He explains that activity is a non-additive process. From this perspective, actions and operations are not special parts of an activity. If we abstract actions from the activity they translate to reality, nothing will remain.

Activity has its origins in a need, a common need shared among people that must be satisfied. The needs are the departure point to any activity, but they are not capable, alone, of starting an activity and giving it a specific orientation. This only happens when a need meets one object that can satisfy it. This object can be material or ideal and is called the motive of activity. Leontiev (1978) calls this process “an objectification of the need”, which is the filling of the need with content of the objective world. The motive is the stimulating agent of the activity, and it is the distinctive factor among different activities. Motives are often a matter of dispute, which includes power relations and ideologies.

The needs are the departure point for the emergence of power relations within a society. Needs are satisfied through motives, but those motives are not determined only by the needs of people but also through the use of power to determine which motives will satisfy the needs. Power relations are framed within a dominant ideology that shapes people’s interests, inclinations, and attitudes. This is a complex process that often hides the ideologies that select, justify, and realize which motives are imposed on people’s needs. One of the questions CDA poses is: how does language contribute to this process? In our multi-level analytical approach, this question is addressed by analyzing linguistic choices at the level of goal-oriented actions. This analysis is crossed with an analysis of the network of activity systems to study how linguistic choices are framed by history and positioning authors. Historical, positioning knowledge and analysis of linguistic choices are complementary in cueing analysts to identify the motive of the activity and the conveyed ideologies.

2.2 Actions, goals, sequences, and discursive orientations

Leontiev (1978) claims that activity is realized by previous or emergent conscious goal-oriented actions. Actions may not be directly oriented to the motive of activity. When analyzing just one’s action, the analyst may find it might appear to be against the motive of the activity, as is the case when a far robber scares away a woman in an empty street. Alone, this action may be seen as nonsense, or even against the motive of robbing. It is in coordination with other robbers’ actions that the first action acquires its true significance. For instance, while the woman is running away from the robber who scared her, she turns the corner of the street and finds herself in an ambush made by the other robbers, who were waiting to intimate her with knives to order her valuable belongings. Therefore, activity is realized by coordinated sets of actions. It is necessary to uncover the motive of the activity to interpret why certain actions are carried out. The woman’s valuable items in the possession of the robbers are shared among all

of them, satisfying their need for robbing. In another activity, the robbers may sell the items to buy illegal drugs, thus constituting a chain of activity systems.

With this example, we described how actions are coordinated and oriented to the motive of the activity they translate to reality. The verbal procedure, that is, ordering the woman her valuable belongings, is included in the concept of “injunction”. Scholars from the field of text linguistics (Bronckart, 1999; Adam, 2008) call this concept a “sequence”. Bronckart (1999) recognizes six types of sequences: argumentation, explanation, narration, description, injunction, and dialogue. Sequences are modes of text and speech organization beyond the level of the phrase. Each sequence has a prototype that represents its typical structure which is formed by macro-propositions which are themselves constituted by a set of propositions (Bronckart, 1999). For instance, Toulmin’s argument pattern (Toulmin, 1958) can be considered a viable prototype for an argumentative sequence, and it is widely used in studies of classroom argumentation (Jiménez-Aleixandre; Erduran, 2008).

Vieira & Kelly (2014), and Vieira, Kelly & Nascimento (2012) created the concept of “discursive orientation”, grounded on the notion of sequences prototypes. Since in real texts and speech there is little space for “pure” sequences, we can at least identify a dominant discursive orientation within an action, which offers possibilities and constraints for the action and procedures. Therefore, the modes by which individuals engage in discourse in socially appropriate ways are dependent on the discursive orientation at stake. Thus, we can speak of argumentative actions, explicative actions, injunctive actions, narrative actions, and so on. In addition, each discursive orientation within an action creates opportunities for the emergence of determining types of goals. For instance, argumentation and dialogue evoke open-ended goals, while explanation, injunction, and narration evoke authoritative goals (Vieira et al., 2017). Thus, people act and talk in distinct ways when engaged in different discursive orientations – that is, the structure and meanings of the individuals’ propositions-utterances and their discursive procedures are shaped by the developed discursive orientation which affords possibilities and constraints to human action.

2.3 Operations, discursive procedures, and sociolinguistics’ contextualization cues

According to Leontiev (1978), operations are determined by immediate conditions and are the methods for the accomplishment of an action. There is a relative independence of actions and operations: one action can be accomplished by different operations, which depend upon the immediate conditions. Additionally, the same operations can accomplish different actions. To accomplish an operation the individual needs to know how to perform it. Operations can be conscious or unconscious. They are usually unconscious.

An individual may initially form operations through conscious processes. Over time, these processes begin to structure more complex chains of actions. This leads the individual to not recognize the intentional aspects of such processes, which become automated in the form of an operation. In this way, the individual learns to accomplish the operation without the need for intentional effort (Leontiev, 1978).

What we have called “discursive procedures” are operations from the perspective of discourse. A discursive procedure is how an individual uses linguistic resources to conduct and

manage speech. As we mentioned, propositions-utterances are the smallest units of communication (Adam, 2008), conveying syntactic and semantic micro-units of linguistic choices. Discursive procedures are identified by grouping a set of convergent propositions-utterances (convergent in the sense they are 'doing' or 'signifying' similar processes). Such categorization is the core of the microanalysis we offer in this study. We focus on discursive procedures, instead of phrases or clauses because a discursive procedure is a means through which a micro-speech act is accomplished, with its related micro-purpose, either conscious or unconscious.

Although humans know the goals of their actions, Gee (1999) noted that people are not completely aware of the meanings they construct when they talk and act, and that these meanings orient the participants' interactions. Related to this perspective, a sociolinguistic approach (Gumperz, 1982, 2008) provides resources to understand how participants signal to each other (and thus to analysts) ways of orienting attention and focus on conversations.

For the purposes of our analytical approach, we used sociolinguistics' contextualization cues (pauses, intonation, eye gaze, gestures, and proxemics) and other linguistic criteria (i.e., the presence of verbs of change and speech cohesion) to identify Boris Johnson's propositions-utterances which were afterward grouped into discursive procedures. The propositions-utterances and discursive procedures analysis are shown in a small segment of the "propositional frames" (Table 1). The propositional frames were constructed for the whole statement of Boris Johnson. By watching the video and listening to the audio, real pauses and variations in intonation were added to the transcription provided by the website. The content of Johnson's discursive procedures was previously established, and he read his statement in a notebook, but this in no way constrained the modes by which he emphasized the conveyed meanings and oriented the audience toward his propositions-utterances and discursive procedures through his contextualization cues.

We explained in detail each one of the macrostructure levels of activity (activity, actions, operations) and how they articulate with theoretical resources from text linguistics and sociolinguistics to compose the method of analysis. In the next section, we present the procedures of data collection and results of applying the multi-level method to critically analyze Boris Johnson's statement to the House of Commons on 24 February 2022.

Table 1 – A small segment of the “Propositional Frames” (The discursive procedures are underlined, followed by their specificities. The inclusion of commas signals the speaker’s silent pauses. Words into [brackets] are other speakers’ talk)

Boris Johnson explanatory statement-action	Propositions-utterances (Smallest units of communication identified through contextualization cues, speech cohesion, and verbs of change)	Discursive procedures (Set of convergent propositions-utterances “signifying” or “doing” the same processes)
His stated goal: Update the House on the response of G7 to Russia’s invasion of Ukraine	1. Thank you Mr. Speaker	1-3. <u>Contextualizes</u> the audience regarding his previous activity
	2. I have just come from a meeting, of G7 leaders	
	3. joined, by Secretary General Stoltenberg of NATO,	
	4. and with permission	4-8. <u>Informs</u> the goal of his statement
	5. I will update the House	
	6. on our response to President Putin’s, onslaught,	
	7. against a free,	
	8. and sovereign European nation	
	9. Shortly after 4 am this morning	
	10. I spoke to President Zelenskyy of Ukraine,	9-11. <u>Informs</u> he spoke with Ukraine’s president during the attack on his country
	11. as the first missiles struck his beautiful and innocent country and its brave people,	
	12. and I assured him,	
	13. of the unwavering support, of the United Kingdom [members of the House say “yeah”]	12-13. <u>Informs</u> he ensured the support of the UK to Ukraine
	14. And I can tell the House,	
	15. that at this stage,	
	16. Ukrainians are offering a fierce defense of their families,	
	17. and their country,	14-17. <u>Informs</u> how Ukrainians are acting concerning the war
	18. and I know that every Hon Member will share,	
	19. my admiration for their, resolve,	18-19. <u>Injunction – giving an order</u> (‘every Hon member will share’)
	20. Earlier today,	
	21. Putin delivered another televised address	
	22. and offered the absurd pretext	
	23. that he sought the “demilitarization,	
	24. and denazification,	
	25. of Ukraine”,	20-25. <u>Negatively qualifies</u> Putin’s reasons for invading Ukraine

Source: the authors

3 Data collection procedures

We made a search for historical and positioning discourses for the past and afterward of Boris Johnson's statement to the House of Commons on Ukraine 24 February 2022. Wikipedia was used as a source of historical information, and two positioning speeches were selected to provide grounded opinions concerning the Russian invasion and war in Ukraine. This analysis provides a network of activity systems that were used to support our interpretations and explanations of Boris Johnson's statement-action (hereinafter also called "action") and his discursive procedures and linguistic choices.

We refer to a positioning speech of war responsibility provided by John Mearsheimer (2022) the R. Wendell Harrison Distinguished Service Professor of Political Science at the University of Chicago, on June 23. A response article to Mearsheimer's positioning was provided by Joe Cirincione (2022), US (United States) National Security Analyst, on July 29.

We analyzed the video, audio, and transcription of Boris Johnson's statement to the House of Commons as published on the Gov.uk website (2022) on February 24. In this website his statement was intentionally organized through line spaces between sets of propositions-utterances, giving the reader a better experience in understanding Johnson's communicated meanings and themes. Each set of propositions organized by the website corresponded almost exactly to our categorization of a discursive procedure, except for a few instances. This is an indicator that a discourse analyst or linguist may have done the grouping-categorization of the propositions on the website.

Another source of his statement was provided by the UK Parliament's official website (2022), on February 24, which organized the transcription in other ways, tending to organize propositions into larger groups than the previous source of transcription. In addition, this source provides the whole transcription of the collective activity in the House, with a dialogue-explanation session of questions and responses following Johnson's statement.

In this article, we do not develop a description of the motives of the Russian-Ukrainian war because such an account deviates from the scope of our purposes. The reasons and conditions through which the war was established can be found in many international historical sources, including Wikipedia, which highlights Russia's annexation of Crimea as the beginning act of the wider Russian-Ukrainian war in Donbas, in April 2014. Our main purpose is to apply the multi-level analytical approach to critically analyze Boris Johnson's action in the context of the House activity emphasizing the roles of his discursive procedures and his linguistic choices in creating, concealing, and foregrounding meanings and ideologies.

4 Analysis and results

4.1 House activity and Boris Johnson's statement-action

The activity to which Johnson's action contributed was a "debate" session of the House of Commons on Ukraine on 24 February 2022. Need of the activity: Agreement regarding the

G7 (Group of Seven) and NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization) decisions concerning the Russian invasion of Ukraine. Motive: Collective explanation

Johnson made a short television statement to the UK nation at noon, on the same day he delivered his statement to the House at 5 pm. The House met at 9:30 am. The “debate” activity on Ukraine began with Boris Johnson’s statement-action. According to our analysis, although on the official site of the UK Parliament the activity was labeled as a “debate”, it was not indeed a debate. Instead of being a true debate (an argumentation) concerning the subject of Ukraine, as is usual for the House in their working meetings on a variety of subjects, what was truly developed was a collective explanation (the motive of the activity), started by Boris Johnson’s explanatory action (his statement) followed by a dialogue-explanation session of questioning and answers. The need/motive answers the question concerning “why” this activity took place in the House. The reasons for considering the activity as a collective explanation are found in the following discussion.

Bronckart (1999) considers the explanation to have origins from the consideration of an indubitable phenomenon by the interacting parties. The fundamental difference between argumentation and explanation is the controversial or non-controversial character of the statements. If presented as an argument, a statement becomes a controversial opinion (Billig, 1996) while, in explanation, a statement is considered a shared instance between the parties – meaning it is presented as something that cannot be disputed, such as an assertion, but that might require development or widening of concepts due to gaps in knowledge. Thus, the explanation implies a greater asymmetry between the parties (Charaudeau; Maingueneau, 2004). One of the involved is viewed as a spokesperson for a particular subject. The spokesperson has authority, which would come from a privilege of social status or the higher knowledge and comprehension of a particular topic.

This was the case for Boris Johnson’s explanatory statement – he was the Prime Minister (PM), which conferred authority to him due to his social status. Also, at the time of his statement, he had just come from a meeting with the G7 leaders joined by the general secretary of NATO, which confers authority to him regarding the subject at stake. The conveyed statement was considered indisputable, given all the agreements from members of the House (when they said “yeah” in several moments of Johnson’s action in a concerted agreement with him). In addition, after his statement (his action), there was a long session of questions and comments from several members of the House and the responses from the PM.

In this session, there was almost a full agreement of all the House members who spoke with the PM and a few solicitations for clarification of certain points. The only exception to the agreement was from Neale Hanvey, from Alba Party, who commented (1) in the middle phase of the questioning and answers session that followed Johnson’s statement.

(1) This morning we woke to the worst possible news. I make no apology in hoping for a diplomatic solution [...].

Johnson replied to Hanvey (2).

(2) I must say I disagree profoundly with what the hon. gentleman has to say about negotiating now. I do not think that that option is open to us. We must do our best

to support and protect the people of Ukraine, working with our international friends and allies to constrict what Vladimir Putin can do [...].

In his words, Johnson showed no belief in diplomatic venues for the resolution of the situation. There were almost no contrapositions of ideas and the whole House agreed on an indisputable issue in this context: The unfairness of the Russian invasion of Ukraine. These were the reasons why we considered the “collective explanation” as the motive for the activity. In this activity, Boris Johnson’s action was to deliver a statement, an explicative statement of the situation of the invasion of Ukraine by the Russian Federation. The decisions communicated by the PM were taken by the G7 group, composed of the most industrialized countries, in a previous activity in the early morning of the same day, whose motive was to make decisions and establish a common approach and discourse regarding the invasion.

4.2 Boris Johnson’s discursive procedures in his statement-action

From the analysis with the support of the propositional frames, that were constructed for Boris Johnson’s entire statement-action, that is, considering the roles the propositions-utterances played in Boris Johnson’s action, the analysts categorized them into discursive procedures which comprised his conveyed meanings and ways of talking. Thus, the analysts had access to the full set of discursive procedures established in his action considering the goal it was aimed for and the related explicative discursive orientation that oriented the action.

We present the total number of discursive procedures and the number of occurrences of each we identified through analysis with the propositional frames. One discursive procedure accomplishes a micro-speech act, whose micro-purpose is cued by the discursive procedure itself (underlined):

- ◆ Total of discursive procedures: 90
 - ◆ Informing: 35 (almost half of the total of discursive procedures)
 - ◆ Asserting: 10
 - ◆ Directing his speech to a specific public: 5
 - ◆ Presenting a point of view: 4
 - ◆ Highlighting information: 4
 - ◆ Negatively positioning: 4 (all related to Putin)
 - ◆ Adding: 2
 - ◆ Specifying: 2
 - ◆ Praising: 2
 - ◆ Contextualizing: 2

- ◆ Warranting: 2
- ◆ Calling for unit or attention: 2
- ◆ Concluding: 2
- ◆ Repeating: 2
- ◆ Negatively qualifying: 1
- ◆ Negatively defining: 1
- ◆ Commending: 1
- ◆ Sharing: 1
- ◆ Manifesting a desire: 1
- ◆ Reminding: 1
- ◆ Justifying: 1
- ◆ Positively positioning: 1
- ◆ Including: 1
- ◆ Detailing: 1
- ◆ Describing: 1
- ◆ Giving an order (injunction): 1

As can be noted, the most recurrent discursive procedures were the informing and asserting ones. This result is in alignment with our evaluation that Johnson's statement-action established an explicative discursive orientation, once informing and asserting discursive procedures can be seen as indisputable given their factual and imposition nature, respectively. Therefore, this is evidence of Johnson's statement being an explanatory and uncontroversial action given the immediate public, that is, the House members.

4.2.1 Johnson's informing discursive procedures

Since the informing discursive procedures were the most frequent ones, by far ahead of the others, we present a short analysis of their usage by Boris Johnson. Given this result, we conclude that the conscious goal of his action was to inform (update) the House about the decisions taken with G7 leaders. This is in coherence with his own stated goal (3) and with our evaluation that his action established an explicative discursive orientation. Therefore, he had an authoritative goal for his action – informing what has already been decided – and did not expect counter-positions from the members of the House as the UK is one of the G7 members.

- (3) I will update the House on our response to President Putin's, onslaught, against a free, and sovereign European nation.

The analysis of his informing discursive procedures reveals that most of the time Johnson presented the decisions made by the US, UK, and NATO regarding the Russian invasion of Ukraine, mainly the economic sanctions imposed on Russia (a total of 14 of 35 informing discursive procedures). However, he informed very little about the reasons for the invasion and, when he did so, he blamed Putin, positioning him as the only Russian leader responsible for the invasion of Ukraine. Instead, according to Wikipedia source (2023), the decision to invade Ukraine was made by Putin and a small group of Russian politicians, including Putin's Chief National Security Adviser Nikolai Patrushev, and Minister of Defense Sergei Shoigu. Moreover, Johnson said nothing about the roles of NATO, the US, and the UK in the development of the conflict.

4.2.2 Analysis of Johnson's discursive procedures in his explanatory statement-action

With the support of the analysis with the propositional frames and the historical and positioning references we referred to, the following presents a synthetic analysis of Boris Johnson's action, for which the discursive procedures selected for presentation in the text are underlined. For this, we divided his episodic explanatory action into three main phases: opening, development, and closure phases. The main theme was the Russian invasion of Ukraine. This main theme branched into five more specific subthemes as pointed out in the analysis of each phase of his action, which had a total duration of 11min09sec.

1 – Opening phase (propositions-utterances 1 -19, time duration: 51sec) – Explanation function: Establish the object to be explained. Subtheme: Contextualization of the invasion of Ukraine.

Johnson delivered his statement reading it in his notebook placed on the center table of the room. He first contextualized the House regarding his previous meeting with the G7 leaders joined by the general secretary of NATO. He then went in a sequence of four informing discursive procedures, contextualizing his speech on the issue of the Ukraine invasion. For this, he first informed the goal of his action to update the House of the response (decisions) they (he and the other members of the previous meeting) had taken.

Then, he informed his conversation with the president of Ukraine, Volodymyr Zelensky, informing the House he ensured the UK support to the country and informed how fierce Ukrainians were to defend their country. He concluded this phase of his action by giving an implicit order (an injunction) (4), which is evidence of his authority as a spokesperson in this context and hence the establishment of an explanatory action.

(4) I know that every Hon Member will share, my admiration, for their resolve.

Compared with the development phase, this opening contextualization phase was short. This phase fulfilled the role of establishing the object to be explained in his statement action: The support of the G7, NATO, and the UK to Ukraine.

2 – Development phase (propositions-utterances 20-229, time duration: 7min55sec) – Explanation function: The core of the explanation of his action. Subthemes: Disqualification of Vladimir Putin as solely responsible for the conflict; New imposed economic sanctions on Russia.

This was the core of his explanation and was a long phase, with a diversity of discursive procedures. He presented the reasons why giving support to Ukraine, beginning the development phase by disqualifying the president of Russia, Vladimir Putin, in a sequence of five discursive procedures, in which Putin is positioned as (5), and raising his tone when pronouncing the word “aggressor”, to emphasize it. In the following, Johnson positioned Putin as the sole Russian leader responsible for the decision to invade Ukraine, positioning the UK and allies as the “goods” trying to avoid bloodshed (6).

(5) [a] bloodstained *aggressor*, who believes, in imperial conquest.

(6) In fact he is hurling the might of his military machine against, a fre(eeee) and peaceful neighbour, in breach of his own explicit, pledge, and every principle of civilized, behaviour between states spurning the best efforts of this country and our allies to avoid bloodshed”.

Why did Johnson position Putin with imperial conquest goals? Indeed, neo-imperialistic ambitions have been attributed to Putin’s regime, according to Wikipedia source (2023). However, the motives of Russia’s invasion of Ukraine are all hidden under this “imperial” general umbrella. Boris Johnson, in his statement, never informed the reasons for the Ukraine invasion, which, according to Mearsheimer (2022) and Cirincione (2022), had a direct relation to the US and NATO expansion and empowerment of Ukraine near Russian borders, hence bringing consequences to Russia politicians’ security concerns.

According to the contrasting analysis we made between the discursive procedures of Boris Johnson’s statement and the historical and positioning discourses we refer to (Mearsheimer, 2022; Cirincione, 2022; Wikipedia, 2023), Johnson concealed in his statement about the roles the US and NATO had in establishing tensions in the Ukraine border with Russia, with military training and weapons supply to the country by the US, aiming to transform Ukraine into a NATO’s member despite all the warnings Putin raised around the issue, insisting that this would be a threat to Russia security.

To this end, Johnson’s strategy was focusing his speech on the present and mainly on the future, avoiding speaking of past events, which inevitably should touch on the relationships and tensions among Russia, the US, and NATO. When he did speak in the past, he just mentioned the failure of Russia to accept diplomacy as a solution to the problems. However, he never specified what these kinds of problems were. Most of the time Boris spoke in the future tense, as can be noted by his intense usage of the modal auxiliary verb “will” in this developing phase, mainly informing the economic sanctions to be applied to Russia, to weaken their military machine, and in predicting Russia’s failure. Therefore, this linguistic

choice (the intense use of modality employing the auxiliary verb “will”, speaking mainly in the future tense) collaborated to sharing an ideological stance committed to concealing the US and NATO roles in the conflict and in showing Johnson’s commitment to his discursive procedures and the decisions taken by the G7 and NATO. In some passages he overused silenced pauses at the same time he increased his tone, fulfilling the role of emphasizing the importance of the information being communicated (7).

- (7) Russian stocks, are down by as much as, 45 percent, wiping \$250 billion, from their *value* (he raised his tone when saying the italicized word “value”) in *the biggest, one, day, decline, on record* (he raised his tone when saying the expression italicized).

In the following, Johnson informed negative statistics concerning the Russian economy and informed the ruble plummeted against the dollar. These sets of linguistic choices served the purpose of ideological empowerment of the US and NATO over the Russian Federation in the context of the House activity.

To end the development phase, Johnson re-informed the goal to eliminate Russia from the global economy. For this, he used the metaphor (8), informed (9), and positioned again Putin as a leader with imperial conquest goals.

- (8) Squeeze Russia from global economy.

- (9) [The UK] will tell the truth about the war

He also informed the UK and its allies will work together (10), framing ideologically the UK and its allies as the “goods” that will protect other countries against Putin.

- (10) [The UK and its allies will work together] on the urgent need, to protect other European countries that are not members of NATO and could, become targets of Putin’s playbook of subversion, and aggression.

He concluded his explanation up to this point with the demand to strengthen NATO’s defenses, which makes us infer that the pretension is to prepare more NATO for a potential in-contact war with Russia.

3 – Closure phase (propositions-utterances 230-299, time duration: 3min21sec)
-Explanation function: Conclude his action. Subthemes: Global economic repercussions; Failure of Russian invasion.

Johnson began the closure phase by reminding that the invasion would have global economic consequences and warranted that the UK government will provide all the actions to safeguard nationals from repercussions of the crisis. He then presented his point of view that the Russian invasion of Ukraine should fail and that this is the UK’s goal concerning the invasion. He directed his speech to the Russian people asserting he believes the invasion was not made in their name, and then directed his speech to the Ukrainians, asserting the UK and NATO are at their side. Finally, he concluded his action by giving a strong sense of unity among the members of the House by sharing a cliché (11) and commended the statement to the House while closing his notebook where his speech was written. Many members of the

house said (12), and Mr. Speaker said (13), showing explicit commitment to Johnson's conveyed meanings.

(11) And in that spirit (he hits the table at this moment to emphasize the *cliché*), I join you, in saying 'slava Ukraini' (Ukrainian national greeting).

(12) Yeah.

(13) I could not believe the opposite.

5 Discussion

We unfolded ideological inequalities in Boris Johnson's explanatory statement-action, such as concealing the US and NATO roles in the Ukraine invasion and framing the war responsibility solely on Vladimir Putin, who was depicted as a bloodstained aggressor leader interested in imperial conquest. Johnson framed the UK, the US, NATO, and Ukraine as the "goods" and Putin (and not the group of Russian leaders, which includes Putin, who decided to invade Ukraine) as the "bad", as an emblem of the conflict and war.

As Mearsheimer (2011) pointed out about lying in international politics, politicians on opposing sides often do not lie to each other but lie essentially to their own public. Putin delivered speeches warning that bringing Ukraine to NATO would have a response from Russia since Russian leaders considered it an existential threat to Russia's security. In the same via, the military training of Ukraine and the US sending weapons to the country increased the tensions with Russian politicians. According to Mearsheimer's delivered speech on June 12, 2022:

To deal with this growing threat, Putin stationed ever-increasing numbers of Russian troops on Ukraine's border between February 2021 and February 2022. His aim was to coerce Biden [the president of US] and Zelensky [the president of Ukraine] into altering course and halting their efforts to integrate Ukraine into the West. On December 17, 2021, Moscow sent separate letters to the Biden administration and NATO demanding a written guarantee that: 1) Ukraine would not join NATO, 2) no offensive weapons would be stationed near Russia's borders, and 3) NATO troops and equipment moved into eastern Europe since 1997 would be moved back to western Europe, [US] Secretary of State Antony Blinken responded by simply saying, 'There is no change. There will be no change.' (Mearsheimer, 2022, linking section, paragraph 36)

The presented information makes clear that the increasing tensions were due to both sides, which was completely concealed in Johnson's statement and his insistence on framing Putin as solely responsible for the increased tensions, which is not a realistic frame considering other discourses on this issue. Although in disagreement with Mearsheimer's conclusions, Cirincione accepts key points of his argument. Cirincione recognized in his response article on July 29, 2022, to Mearsheimer's speech: "NATO enlargement was problematic; I warned against it at the time and have criticized it more recently [...]. Some US policies have

not taken into account legitimate Russian security concerns [...]” (Cirincione, 2022, linking section, paragraph 5).

Our findings point to the need for more authentic statements from politicians who have a global influence on their activities and actions, in the sense to avoid worsening the situation. Indeed, Putin was unquestionably the one who had a crucial role in determining the invasion and the war. Therefore, Boris Johnson was right in this direction, but wrong in creating a story for the sake of ideological empowerment of NATO and allies instead of a statement depicting more realistic frames of the invasion.

We showed how Johnson constructed biased ideological frames of the invasion through microanalysis of his discursive procedures informed by a macroanalysis of historical and positioning discourses crossed with an analysis of the macrostructure of the House activity. He performed an explanatory action, aimed to inform, assert, and increase knowledge, about decisions already made, instead of establishing an opening to counterpose different opinions of other politicians of the House of Commons concerning the issue that might have established a debate and furthering alternative possibilities for the conflict.

Given the results we found, we are drawn to highlight that the true motive of the activity in the House was to construct a collective consensual explanation of a biased instance of war responsibilities. Boris Johnson delivered his statement-action in biased ways, serving the interests, positions, and power of the G7 and NATO which were aligned with the purposes and interests of the House. This is unsurprising since the UK is a member of these both global organizations. However, such a membership should not bias shape Johnson’s statement-action and confine the House in a collective agreement. This is our main criticism concerning Johnson’s action and all the agreements with him by the members of the House, who avoided furthering the discussion and reflecting more about NATO, the US, and the UK’s roles in the conflict and possible ways of ending it.

6 Conclusions

We comment on the uses of the multi-level analytical mapping approach we applied in this study. The approach is based on the levels of analysis for the House activity (activity, actions, operations, cf. Leontiev, 1978), thus providing macro and microanalysis for Boris Johnson’s statement-action. The application of sociolinguistics’ contextualization cues (Gumperz, 1982, 2008) and other linguistic criteria (the presence of verbs of change and speech cohesion) provided us with insights to segment Johnson’s proposition-utterances and hence his discursive procedures as the methods of accomplishment of his action. Such an analysis answered the question of “how” the action was accomplished. The text linguistics resources (Bronckart, 1999; Adam, 2008) provided ways to comprehend that his action established an explicative discursive orientation with a related authoritative goal: inform (update) the House about the decisions taken by the G7 and NATO leaders, which shaped his discursive procedures in certain ways, as was the case of most of his discursive procedures being informing and assertive ones.

The crossing of the analytical approach with historical and positioning discourses was useful for analyzing critically Boris Johnson’s statement. The analysis showed that his statement-action contributed to the accomplishment of an activity at the House of Commons, with its specific motive, a collective explanation, that stimulated the activity in addressing

a new urging need, that is, agreement regarding the G7 and NATO decisions regarding the Russian invasion of Ukraine. Thus, the analysis at the level of the activity explained “why” the collective activity and Johnson’s action took place in the House. The analysis at the level of the operations that realized his action, that is, his discursive procedures, provided insight into how Johnson foregrounded and concealed meanings, how he communicated a biased ideology, and which micro-speech acts and related micro-purposes were at stake.

Important linguistics choices were made explicit by the analysis, such as how Johnson used modality to situate events mainly in the future, showing his commitments with the US and NATO ideologies, avoiding giving explanations of the roles they played in the Russian-Ukrainian war, thus concealing their responsibility on the conflict. Instead, and in the vision of furthering diplomacy as the core of relations in this case, he could have pictured a more realistic frame of the situation and offered ways to deal with it via diplomatic relations and less aggressive discourse toward blaming Putin as solely responsible for the tensions in the region and the war.

According to Fairclough, CDA “is not just descriptive, it is also normative. It addresses social wrongs in their discursive aspects and possible ways of righting and mitigate them” (Fairclough, 2013, p. 11). Therefore, following Fairclough (2013), our critical discourse analysis, via the application of the multi-level analytical mapping approach, assessed what exists, what might exist, and what should exist in the political statement of Boris Johnson considering our political stance on strong diplomatic efforts as a crucial privileged way to deal with such a delicate issue as the invasion of Ukraine by the Russian Federation. We criticize his statement-action in the terms in which he did not provide or request diplomatic alternatives to mitigate relations with the Russian Federation.

Finally, we comment on the limitations of the multi-level analytical mapping approach. First, the approach was useful for analyzing how Johnson’s statement-action was consumed by the House through agreement via a collective explanation-oriented activity, but we did not analyze how his statement was interpreted by other relevant people, including UK nationals and foreign people, such as Russian politicians and Russian people, what could raise counter positions to his statement-action. Second, it still needs to be introduced into the analytical approach about how to unfold the interplay of motives at stake in the network of activity systems, showing in detail how motives can be masked, concealed, and construed by individuals, and how these motives can be subtly imposed to people’s lives and activities through ideologies conveyed by politicians’ discourses. Third, we recognize the importance of applying the multi-level analytical mapping approach to other data and in crossing and refining the approach with other relevant methods of CDA.

Authors’ contributions

Eman Riyadh Adeb idealized the proposal, wrote the text, analyzed the data, and added references. Rodrigo Drumond Vieira wrote the text, analyzed the data, and added references. Both authors revised the text.

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