

KEYWORDS, SYMBOLIC WORDS, PRECEDENT UNITS IN BRITISH-UKRAINIAN POLITICAL DISCOURSE

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Abstract

In this article, the author examines the utilization of “keywords,” “symbolic words,” and “precedent units” in the British-Ukrainian political discourse through an analysis of public speeches by British politician Boris Johnson on the X social network (formerly Twitter). In the context of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, the study seeks to elucidate the linguistic aspects of how political narratives and messages shape public opinion. In the contemporary digital era, social media platforms have become influential tools for politicians to interact with their audiences and shape political discourse. Boris Johnson’s use of X as a communication platform highlights the significance of analyzing his posts to comprehend the prevailing political topics and issues within the British-Ukrainian political discourse. The author tries to shed light on the prerequisites and causes of the formed political discourse, as well as to establish the cause-and-effect relationships that made the formation of the mentioned linguistic units in the British-Ukrainian political discourse. Boris Johnson’s speeches and social media posts address various political subjects, including the Russia-Ukraine war, and the keywords within his communication convey the United Kingdom’s stance and support for Ukraine. The study contributes to a deeper understanding of the dynamics shaping the British-Ukrainian political discourse and its role in influencing public opinion.

Keywords: keywords, symbolic words, precedent units, Boris Johnson, political discourse, communication, rhetoric.

Introduction

The Russian invasion of Ukraine led to the start of a brutal war aimed at the destruction of the Ukrainian state and its people. It exerted a massive influence on world society, its opinion regarding the role and place of Ukraine in the world order, contributed to the creation of a powerful information front in support of our state. The influence of propaganda and mass media on the population is traced through the linguistic aspect of the war. Public speeches of foreign politicians with certain narratives regarding the specific context of the Russian-Ukrainian war shape public opinion and are a powerful tool used by world politicians.

The intersection of language and politics represents a significant field of study, where the manipulation and utilization of language play a vital role in the exercise of political influence. Language's impact on politics extends from the use of persuasive rhetoric to the dissemination of political agendas, molding public discourse, and shaping perceptions. Discourse analysis provides a structured method for comprehending the utilization of language in political contexts. It involves a deep exploration of the structure and substance of political discourse, revealing underlying power dynamics, ideological positions, and the construction of narratives. This article provides an examination of political speeches, media content, uncovering the subtle mechanisms by which political authority is established and preserved. The article examines "keywords", "symbolic words" and "precedent units" in the British-Ukrainian political discourse based on the public speeches of the British politician Boris Johnson on the X social network (formerly Twitter). The context of British-Ukrainian political discourse refers to the specific circumstances and issues that are related to each other, and the interaction between states, politics and debates between Great Britain and Ukraine.

In the modern digital age, where propaganda and mass media wield tremendous power in shaping public perception, social media have become powerful platforms for politicians to engage with their audiences and shape political discourse. Boris Johnson, a prominent figure in British politics, used X (formerly Twitter) as a means of communicating his messages and influencing public opinion. The analysis of B. Johnson's posts in the social network will allow for an explanation of the general narrativization in relation to Ukraine and will allow an explanation of the prerequisites and reasons for such word formations in order to gain a deeper understanding of the prevailing political topics and problems in the British-Ukrainian political discourse (Boris Johnson, 2015).

Accordingly, "keywords", "symbolic words" and "precedent units", which are important components of political discourse and play one of the key roles in shaping the public's understanding of political issues and the manipulability of the perception of specific situations. In the context of the British-Ukrainian political discourse, such concepts refer to elements that are used in the process of communication to form certain meanings and influence public opinion. Given the similarities and nuances inherent to these concepts, a comprehensive clarification is warranted to navigate their critical roles effectively.

The Role of Language in Politics

The intersection of language and politics is a great area of research where the manipulation and use of language is integral to the exercise of political power. The influence of language in the political arena extends from the use of persuasive rhetoric to publicizing political agendas, shaping public discourse, and shaping perceptions. Discourse analysis offers a systematic approach to understanding the use of language in political contexts. It delves into the structure and content of political discourse, revealing underlying power dynamics, ideological stances, and narrative construction. By examining political speeches, media content, and official

documents, discourse analysis unveils the subtle mechanisms by which political power is established and maintained.

Human beings engage in linguistic communication through the utilization of media, thereby extending the reach of linguistic interactions. Consequently, they partake in extensive interactions, ultimately giving rise to large-scale communities and contributing to the dissolution of smaller “tribal” structures in favor of the establishment of organized states. Language assumes a multifaceted role in the state-building process, influencing various aspects, including state formation, governance, and the fostering of a collective state identity. In essence, language serves as a tool for state formation and is implemented in diverse ways to fulfill political objectives. Through the facilitation of communication among a vast number of individuals, language becomes instrumental in the creation of states. Given that language underpins the very foundation of communication, its influence significantly impacts the realm of politics (Xing, 2013).

Language influences how the public perceives political figures, events, and issues. The choice of words, framing, and narrative construction can forge public opinion. There is a prevailing notion that within language communication, there exists a dynamic interplay in the roles of the speaker and the listener, creating a sense of equilibrium in their interaction. This interchange involves the use of pronouns such as “I” and “you,” which switch back and forth during a conversation, and these pronouns are referred to as “shifters” (Yaguello, 1998).

The current state of the relationship between politics, the media, and the public has been a subject of considerable scrutiny within the fields of communication studies, political communication, and discourse analysis. Scholars in these areas often express reservations and skepticism regarding the fulfillment of democratic ideals. These ideals envision a scenario in which the media serve as impartial, rigorous, and free channels of information, providing the public with comprehensive insights into political decisions and issues. Simultaneously, they are expected to act as a check on political actors by demanding transparency in the political process and justifications for political decisions to the public. However, critics contend that the media has, instead, succumbed to rigid routines, primarily driven by constraints related to time and other production pressures. Consequently, this has led to oversimplification of intricate political matters. Moreover, commercial pressures, such as the pursuit of higher audience ratings or increased circulation figures, have been accused of compelling the media to make political discourse more engaging by resorting to practices such as trivialization, personalization, dramatization, and conversationalization. In essence, there is a perception that the media, under these influences, have resorted to “boulevardizing” a domain that is reliant on an informed public or electorate for the effective functioning of democracy (Mohammed, 2019).

Politicians, on the other hand, are not exempt from criticism. They have been accused of leveraging mass media not merely to provide factual information but to sway public opinion. In doing so, they often employ professional public relations strategies and engage in the practice of “spinning” the information they share (Cook, 1998).

Decoding Political Discourse Using Keywords, Symbolic Words, Precedent Units

“Keywords” are specific words or phrases that are important in a particular context or discourse. In the field of political discourse, keywords reflect certain political areas, values, or issues. The main purpose of keywords is to shorten complex ideas and form a political stance on a certain issue. These words help convey the main theme of the speech and the priorities of the political figures involved. Keywords in political discourse play the role of summary concepts that identify the main themes and principles of political parties and their leaders. These words are used to emphasize the values and principles on which the policy is based. Keywords have a high frequency of use in context (Holianych et al., 2012).

Within the political arena, keywords serve multiple functions, such as:

- **Summarizing complex ideas.** Political issues are often intricate and multifaceted. Keywords enable politicians to encapsulate these complex ideas in a single word or phrase, making it more accessible to the general public.

- **Forming a political stance.** By using keywords, political figures can establish their position on an issue or express support for certain policies. These terms are often aligned with the values and principles of their respective political parties.

- **Identifying Main Themes.** Keywords act as summary concepts, representing the primary themes and principles of political parties and their leaders. They help define the core focus of a political agenda.

- **Emphasizing Values.** Keywords emphasize the values and principles on which a political policy is based, making it clear to the audience what the policy aims to achieve.

- **High Frequency of Use.** Keywords are characterized by their high frequency of use within a specific political context. This repetition reinforces the significance of the associated concepts in the discourse.

“Symbolic words” are expressions with a strong emotional tone and appeal to national symbols, history or culture. The specified type of statements are used to create resonance with the audience and involve collective emotions and feelings, to form perception and engage support. Also, symbolic words in political discourse are used to create an emotional or impressive effect (Kolesnykova, 2015).

These words serve several functions in political discourse:

- **Eliciting Emotional Responses.** Symbolic words evoke strong emotional reactions among the audience, leveraging the power of sentiment in political communication.

- **Creating Resonance.** They connect with the collective emotions and experiences of the audience, forming a sense of resonance and unity.

- **Forming Perception.** Symbolic words play a crucial role in shaping the public's perception of political issues, imbuing them with cultural and emotional significance.

- **Engaging Support.** By evoking emotions and creating an impressive effect, symbolic words can mobilize public support for particular policies or causes.

“Precedent units” are words, phrases or constructions that have a fixed or generally accepted use in a certain context or genre of speech and reflect a fixed language code. These units serve as guidelines by which people interpret current political events and react to them based on established norms and expectations.

British-Ukrainian political discourse in the matter of precedent units may include events of a historical nature, diplomatic agreements and notable political speeches that have shaped the way certain issues, such as international relations or conflicts, are discussed (Levko, 2020).

Key functions regarding precedent units include:

– **Historical Significance.** Precedent units frequently incorporate historical events, diplomatic agreements, and notable political speeches that have shaped the way certain issues, particularly international relations and conflicts, are discussed.

– **Establishing Language Codes.** These linguistic units reflect fixed language codes and are vital in ensuring that communication is clear and consistent, as individuals use them to interpret and react to current political events.

In accordance, the mentioned linguistic units are strategically employed by politicians to convey their ideas, aiming to captivate maximum attention and ensure audience comprehension, laying the groundwork for the discussion of complex topics within the context of political discourse.

How Keywords Shape British-Ukrainian Relations

In numerous speeches and social media posts, Prime Minister of the United Kingdom Boris Johnson addressed various political topics, including those related to Russia's war against Ukraine. The keywords in his speeches and social media publications reflect the United Kingdom's stance on the conflict and its support for Ukraine. Analyzing the British-Ukrainian political discourse based on Boris Johnson's posts on Social Media X, the following keywords can be identified:

Sovereignty. Boris Johnson, like other Western leaders, frequently emphasizes Ukraine's sovereignty. He underscores the importance of respecting Ukraine's territorial integrity and its right to make independent decisions

“It was an honor to see President Zelenskyy in Kyiv and to reaffirm my absolute commitment to the *sovereignty* and independence of Ukraine.” (Boris Johnson, 2023a).

The sovereign right of Ukrainian society to statehood, which enables the capacity to independently make decisions that determine domestic and foreign policies, has been realized through a centuries-long struggle for national liberation. Therefore, this topic has become of utmost importance to the Ukrainian people. Boris Johnson, in his speeches, places a strong emphasis on sovereignty as a means of preserving national identity, encouraging the Ukrainian audience and constructing meanings for the British audience, and the global community as a whole.

Putin's war. Keywords associated with the Russian war against Ukraine are often used in discussions of ongoing military actions and the necessity of a peaceful resolution. Even a year after the onset of Russian aggression against Ukraine, Boris Johnson employed the term “Putin's war,” which misleads the average reader by creating an image of a single culpable individual in this war, contradicting the reality of events, considering that an entire Russian population is voluntarily involved in the war against Ukraine, rather than a specific politician.

“The suffering and loss of life caused by *Putin's war* must be remembered forever, as should the bravery of the Ukrainian people.” (Boris Johnson, 2023b).

This concept has been adopted by numerous media structures and is often utilized in their own resources. It carries a destructive nature that distorts the perception of russia as an aggressor country, as the emphasis on one individual distorts the objective reality. A similar example can be found in the broader European political context, where the war is referred to as the “Ukrainian crisis”, which distorts the logos of such a name, although the speaker’s ethos can persuade the opposite. In the author’s view, the established names, “Russian invasion of Ukraine” or “Russian-Ukrainian war”, should be firmly established in the source base and accordingly used in the context of any political discourse referring to those events in order to avoid inaccuracies and potential wordplay that alter facts.

Peace. The term “peace” and related concepts such as “ceasefire” and “negotiations” are employed to underscore the United Kingdom’s commitment to seek a peaceful resolution to the conflict and halt military operations.

“The UK will work tirelessly with our allies to bring enduring *peace* to the people of Ukraine.” (Boris Johnson, 2022).

The position of peaceful negotiations is appealing to the European audience, which believes that, in the context of russian-Ukrainian relations, it will resolve all issues. Unfortunately, the logos in this case can not be applied, as russia has always perceived peace as a sign of weakness and has used this time to amass military forces for interventions in other countries. Therefore, a ceasefire with russia at this stage of the Russian-Ukrainian war is impossible, as it already amounts to ultimatums. However, the word “peace” can be interpreted in various ways. Peace can be achieved even on the battlefield. Consequently, each person, based on their individual experience and societal practices, will interpret the possibilities of “peace” differently.

Russia. Boris Johnson may reference “russia” in the context of the war, specifically discussing its destructive role and war crimes.

“To the people of *Russia*: I do not believe this war is in your name.” (Boris Johnson, 2022a).

“... struggle against *Russia*’s barbaric campaign.” (Boris Johnson, 2022b).

The use of the keyword “russia” in the context of British-Ukrainian relations is understandable. Boris Johnson seeks a possible “voice of reason” among his potentially russian-speaking audience. However, the context makes it clear that this is a call to stop the aggression of their country. Consequently, in the second example, he likens russia to barbarians as a whole country.

Sanctions. The United Kingdom has imposed sanctions against russia in response to its actions in Ukraine. The terms “sanctions” and related concepts may arise in discussions concerning diplomatic pressure on russia.

“The UK will introduce *sanctions* against Putin and Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov imminently, on top of the sanctions package already announced.” (Boris Johnson, 2022c).

Sanctions are measures taken by one or several countries, international organizations, or other entities in international relations to restrict or punish other countries or entities for specific actions or policies that they consider unacceptable or hostile. Throughout the entire Russian-Ukrainian war, sanctions have been a potent tool for discussions and have been actively debated in British-Ukrainian discourse.

Support. Support is utilized to underscore the extent of assistance provided by the United Kingdom to Ukraine, both in political terms and through various forms of material supply.

“Now is the moment to accelerate our *support* for Ukraine and give the heroic Ukrainian military the tools it needs to finish the job.” (Boris Johnson, 2023c).

Boris Johnson highlighted the support of the United Kingdom for Ukraine, which encompassed the provision of humanitarian aid, financial assistance, and military cooperation. In this speech in support of Ukraine, one can observe his confident demeanor and gestures, which add to the impact on the audience.

European security. The United Kingdom is interested in supporting European security and stability, advocating for insulation from Russian interference, and endorsing the strengthening and unity of Europe for its security.

“*European security* has been shaken by Russia’s attack on Ukraine. We will take action to ensure we’re insulated from Russian interference, emerging stronger and more united than before”. (Boris Johnson, 2022d).

Emphasizing European security is a significant argument in Ukrainian-European discursive acts. EU countries must understand the price Ukraine pays for the entire Europe to live in peace. Thanks to British-Ukrainian political discourse, this topic remains relevant for discussion and motivates other countries to provide logistical support to Ukraine.

These keywords are often used by Boris Johnson to categorize the themes of messages about the position of the United Kingdom regarding the war in its specific context and sphere. In Boris Johnson’s discursive acts, the degree of the United Kingdom’s influence in international communities regarding the resolution of the Russian war against Ukraine is also demonstrated. However, in British-Ukrainian political discourse, incorrect names for the war were frequently used, potentially creating a breakdown in sense-making and understanding of key figures and opponents in the war. Some may still consider it simply a “conflict” within a country, while another audience will perceive only the president of the Russian Federation as the specific aggressor, whereas the facts indicate a specific war between two nations. The direct accusation of the Russian people in Boris Johnson’s rhetoric is only partially recorded in the context of the use of keywords.

Influence and Emotions of Symbolic Words

The symbolic words used by Boris Johnson in the British-Ukrainian political discourse during the Russian-Ukrainian war reflected important symbolic and emotional aspects of the relationship between Great Britain and Ukraine:

Solidarity. This term reflects the support and unity in the fight for common values and rights. Through the call for moral support for Ukrainians, the politician creates conditions for friendly relations between both countries at the societal level.

“Russia’s barbaric and illegal invasion of Ukraine has led to millions of Ukrainians losing electricity, water and vital supplies. I am supporting the #hourforukraine tonight at 8pm in solidarity with them. Victory to Ukraine!” (Boris Johnson, 2022e).

In this example, the manifestation of solidarity is the creation of conditions in which Ukrainians themselves lived at the time of publication of this post. Accordingly, Boris Johnson urged the audience to understand what civilians felt during the destruction of civilian infrastructure. This technique of solidarity demonstrates the rhetoric of the British: “we are the same as you, we are with you”.

Independence. “Independence” symbolizes the importance of one's own path and the right to self-determination. Boris Johnson’s expressive statements resonate with Ukrainian society as they emphasize how much Ukrainians have done and continue to do for the freedom of their country. Complimentary expressions are also used in this context.

“On Ukrainian *Independence* Day our hearts go out once again to the heroic men and women of Ukraine who are fighting for their country and for freedom everywhere”. (Boris Johnson, 2023d).

Freedom and democracy. As symbols of democratic values, freedom and people’s power reflect the desire to shape their own path to the future and hold great value in Western countries, which is emphasized in Boris Johnson’s speeches.

“We must do all we can to help Ukraine win this war, and to defend *freedom and democracy*”. (Boris Johnson, 2023e).

Those symbolic words reflect important values that are relevant in the context of the Russia-Ukraine war and highlight the rhetoric of support on the socio-political level by the United Kingdom for Ukraine.

Inspirational leadership. Volodymyr Zelenskyy, the President of Ukraine, has emerged as a prominent figure on the international stage, especially in the context of his country’s resilience and ongoing struggle for sovereignty. His leadership style and approach to governance have attracted considerable attention and praise in British-Ukrainian political discourse.

“President Zelenskyy’s *inspirational leadership* and the heroism of the Ukrainian armed forces are for the benefit of the whole world”. (Boris Johnson, 2023f).

This is a strategically employed symbolic phrase that leverages emotional resonance and narrative framing to communicate President Zelenskyy's leadership qualities and their significance in British-Ukrainian political discourse. It serves to shape public perception and generate international support, making it a crucial linguistic element in this context. The phrase suggests that his leadership benefits not just Ukraine but the entire world, highlighting the broader implications of his actions.

Sacrifice. It is a highly symbolic word in British-Ukrainian political discourse for a reason.

“It was humbling to meet the brave soldiers undergoing rehabilitation treatment there. Their *sacrifice* reminds us of the importance of a Ukrainian victory.”

The word “sacrifice” is often used to commend the heroism and bravery of the Ukrainian armed forces and civilians who have faced the challenges of war. This reflects a deep appreciation for the Ukrainian people’s resilience and commitment to sovereignty. It conveys the message that the Ukrainian people are willing to endure hardships and personal loss to preserve their country's independence. This symbolism resonates with the British audience and strengthens the bond between the two nations.

How Past is Shaping the Future with Precedent Units

Precedent units used by Boris Johnson in the British-Ukrainian political discourse during the Russia-Ukraine war reflected significant events, decisions, and positions that defined the cooperation between the United Kingdom and Ukraine and the response to the conflict:

Condemnation of Aggression. Boris Johnson actively condemned Russia's aggression against Ukraine and violations of international law.

“Putin must fail and must be seen to fail in this *act of aggression*.” (Boris Johnson, 2022f).

Boris Johnson's outspoken condemnation of Russia's aggression against Ukraine underscores the UK's commitment to international norms and principles. By explicitly denouncing such actions, Johnson has sent a clear message that international norms and laws must be upheld, and aggression will not be tolerated. This stance has influenced British-Ukrainian political discourse by framing the conflict within the context of international law and order. The condemnation of aggression communicates a clear moral position. It places the UK as a nation that stands for justice, human rights, and the protection of nations against aggression.

International community. The politician references international agreements or treaties, such as the United Nations Charter or NATO, as precedent units to emphasize commitments.

“This week's *NATO* summit in Vilnius must atone for decades of fatal ambiguity – and offer a clear path for Ukraine's membership of the *North Atlantic Alliance*.” (Boris Johnson, 2023g).

“The *international community* has a responsibility to ensure that Putin's bloodthirsty venture ultimately ends in total failure”. (Boris Johnson, 2022g).

International organizations play a crucial role in the British-Ukrainian political discourse for various reasons. Participation in international organizations allows countries to collaborate on addressing global issues and enhance their political influence on the international stage. It can also facilitate the lobbying of their own interests and positions within international organizations. The rhetoric of “Ukraine – NATO” or “Ukraine – EU” is particularly significant, primarily for Ukrainian society, as it directly relates to security, economics, and development matters. Boris Johnson criticizes the fact that Ukraine was not admitted to NATO much earlier and has a clear supportive stance regarding Ukraine's accession to the alliance. Overall, Boris Johnson's rhetoric calls on the global community to cooperate with Ukraine on all political matters.

Finest hour. Boris Johnson refers to iconic speeches by Winston Churchill, such as the “Finest Hour” speech during World War II, to underscore the UK's unwavering support for Ukraine in its time of crisis.

“This is Ukraine's *finest hour*, an epic chapter in your national story.” (Boris Johnson, 2022h).

This particular phrase is used to convey a powerful and emotionally charged message. Let's break down its meaning:

– “This is Ukraine's finest hour”: This part of the phrase suggests that the current moment or period is a time of great significance and achievement for Ukraine. It implies that Ukraine is facing a momentous challenge or opportunity,

and how it responds will define the pinnacle of its history. This notion invokes a sense of national pride and the idea that the country is rising to the occasion.

–“An epic chapter in your national story”: Here, the word “epic” implies that the current events are of heroic proportions, with great drama, importance, and impact. It portrays the situation as a significant and unforgettable part of Ukraine’s history, one that will be recounted for generations. It emphasizes that the actions and decisions made during this time will shape the narrative of Ukraine’s past, present, and future.

The listed examples illustrate terms that have a precedent nature in political discourse. They have denoted important decisions and positions that defined the role of the United Kingdom in responding to the Russo-Ukrainian war and supporting Ukraine during this period.

Conclusions

In the midst of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, political discourse has played a pivotal role in shaping the international response to this war. By analyzing “keywords,” “symbolic words,” and “precedent units” communicative units in Boris Johnson’s publications on X, we can identify a common narrative regarding the Russo-Ukrainian war, connected with his political decisions and actions in the British-Ukrainian political discourse. The public speeches of Boris Johnson has provided valuable insights into the complex dynamics of this global issue. This information can help assess the effectiveness of Boris Johnson’s communication strategies and evaluate his impact on public opinion. The conducted analysis can also assist in determining the extent to which Boris Johnson’s communication resonates with his followers and influences public opinion.

Keywords, as specific words or phrases, have served as concise tools for encapsulating complex ideas and shaping the political stance on the conflict. They not only reflect important political values and issues but also emphasize key themes within political discourse. These keywords have been frequently used by Boris Johnson to underscore the United Kingdom’s support for Ukraine and its commitment to principles such as “sovereignty,” “peace,” and “security”.

Symbolic words, on the other hand, have evoked emotions and national sentiments, creating resonance with the audience. Terms like “solidarity,” “independence,” and “freedom” have been instrumental in generating empathy and expressing support for Ukraine in the British-Ukrainian political discourse. They have reinforced the belief in shared values and the significance of self-determination.

Precedent units, representing established norms and past events, have been invoked to emphasize the condemnation of aggression and the importance of international commitments. Boris Johnson’s condemnation of Russia’s aggression against Ukraine and his advocacy for Ukraine’s membership in international organizations like NATO have shaped the discourse surrounding the conflict.

Overall, the study of these linguistic elements in political discourse has shed light on the nuanced ways in which politicians communicate their ideas and influence public opinion. The British-Ukrainian political discourse, while playing a crucial role in conveying support and international solidarity, has also revealed

instances of misleading terminology, potentially hindering a comprehensive understanding of the complex realities of the Russo-Ukrainian war.

As the war continues, the power of language in diplomacy remains paramount. Understanding the use of keywords, symbolic words, and precedent units in political discourse is essential not only for academics but also for policymakers and the broader public. By decoding these linguistic elements, we gain a deeper understanding of the prevailing political topics and problems in the British-Ukrainian political discourse and the strategies used to engage and influence global audiences.

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