The Defence of Children's Rights in the United Nations' International Days Themes: a Transitivity Analysis

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Abstract

This paper is an investigation of the themes of the United Nations' observances. The latter are specific days "as occasions to mark particular events or topics in order to promote, through awareness and action, the objectives of the Organization" (UN 2023). Many observances are supported by yearly themes, in form of slogans or indirect requests. This study aims at describing and interpreting the process types used by the UN in its defence of children's rights. The data consist of 58 themes collected from 2015 to 2020. Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) in general and transitivity analysis in particular are used to interpret these themes. It shows that *educate* is not only the most used process, but also it is used for ideological purposes.

Keywords: children's rights, transitivity, adultism, United Nations, international days, Critical Discourse Analysis

1. INTRODUCTION

The need to protect and educate children is as old as humanity, but the recent centuries have seen an increasing interest in so-called 'children's rights'. Schools, hospitals, playgrounds, etc. are built all over the globe, childhood specialists (including teachers, paediatricians, priests, and authors) are trained, laws are voted, and so on. Conversely, cases and stories of *child abuse* are more and more documented in news and Non-Governmental Organizations' (NGOs) reports (Badye 2021, 2022). In the forefront of this battle against child abuse is the United Nations (UN) with its organs (particularly the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)) and treaties (the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and the Optional Protocol on the involvement of children in Armed Conflict (OPAC).

Terms such as *child abuse* and *children's issues* can be used to refer to this topic, but its fierce advocates prefer 'children's rights'. In fact, what the UN and NGO-partners oppose and document are violations of children's rights as well as acts of 'adultism'. The latter is "the

oppression experienced by children and young people at the hands of adults and adult-produced/adult-tailored systems" (LeFrançois 2013). It has been shown that adultism exists in discourse too. It consists of talking 'about children without children' (Badye 2022: 141).

The present study attempts to see how much the UN involves children in its themes; more precisely in the processes (e.g. eradicate, achieve, build, empower, listen, etc.) it uses in its themes. It is clear that some processes are more likely to be performed by adults than by children. For example, themes such as "Youth building peace" and "Children are taking over and turning the world blue" sound nice, but are unlikely. The study's aim is to find out the processes that are suitable for children, as members of the society.

2. METHODOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS

This study is an analysis of the themes of the United Nations' international observances (Mulamba and Badye: 2015). The latter are the international days, world days or universal days considered by the UN. For example, *Universal Children's Day*, *World Day against Child Labour*, and *International Day of the Girl Child*. While an observance keeps one date (e.g. June 16), themes vary each year (e.g. 2015: *No to child labour*; 2016: *End child labour in supply chains*; 2017: *Protect children from child labour*). Unlike mottos and proverbs which are often timeless, UN's themes change with trends and practices. Most of these themes are indirect requests of the world elite to developing countries' leaders.

The data consist of 58 themes collected from the UN's website from 2015 to 2020 (see the appendix). All of them are about children's rights no matter the observances. They have been selected on the basis of lexical field, viz. key words about children. For example, *child*, *kid*, *youth*, *education*, *adolescent*, *girl*, etc. It should be mentioned that the data herein are technically known as 'discourse analyst's data' (Brown and Yule 1983: 20). They are not a set of single sentences or 'grammarian's data'.

With regard to the interpretation of the UN's themes, we used Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). The analysis opens with two underlying structures of the UN's themes along van Dijk's (1993a) Socio-Cognitive Approach (SCA), then emphasizes on transitivity (Halliday and Matthiessen 2004). The latter focuses on process types as well as circumstances and participant roles. According to Cruse (2006), these roles include the following elements:

- *agent* (the animate 'doer' of the action),
- *instrument* (something inanimate used by an agent in carrying out an action),

- *force* (an inanimate doer),

- *experiencer* (an animate participant in an event affected in a characteristically animate way),

- *beneficiary* (an animate participant for whose sake an action is performed),

- *location* (the place most relevant to an event),

- *patient* (the inanimate participant affected by an event, but which does not undergo a change of state),

- *theme* (the inanimate participant affected by an event and which undergoes a change of state).

These participant roles have been chosen among numerous ones proposed by various authors. Cristal (2008), for instance, emphasizes on agent and patient whom he calls *macro-roles* or *proto-roles*. He writes, "In the sentence *Roger milked the cow* the entities are related by the action described by the verb: *Roger* as the volitional instigator is often termed the agent; and the *cow* as the affected entity, the patient" (Crystal 2008). Since agent is the macro-role in CDA, both adult and child are agents in the study.

3. ANALYSIS OF THE UN'S THEMES

As Wodak and Meyer (2009: 3) observe, "CDA is characterized by the common interests in demystifying ideologies and power through the systematic investigation of semiotic data (written, spoken or visual)". As mentioned above all –*isms* are not ideologies. Some unfair treatments also end in –*ism*, for instance *racism*, *sexism*, and *adultism*.

3.1. Underlying Structures of the UN's themes

For van Dijk (1993a), discourse structures are often informally divided into *surface structures* and deep or *underlying structures*. The latter are "usually associated with meaning or interaction, and sometimes with cognitive phenomena, such as mental representations or strategies of understanding and production" (van Dijk 1993a: 103). He emphasizes that although surface structures are less and less easily controlled by speakers than 'content' or meaning, they are required by meaning structures and are crucial in the comprehension of discourse. Surface structures have numerous synonyms, including 'formal markers' (Badye 2021: 47-53).

Throughout the six steps of Socio-Cognitive Approach (SCA) – context, interaction, schema, meaning, surface structures, rhetoric (van Dijk 1993a, Wodak 2009, Baxter 2010) – some underlying structures are worth analysing. They include reversals and indirectness.

The term 'reversal' is simply a change of something so that it is the opposite of what it was. van Dijk (1993a: 133) presents a conservative who associates liberals with polluters, and yet "it is precisely the extreme Right that is politically closer to industrial pollution". In brief, reversal consists in presenting the loser as the winner, the victim as the torturer, the poor as the rich, etc.

In its defence of children's rights, the UN reverses the statuses of adults and children as shown in the following themes:

(1) a. <u>Men</u> in Charge? Gender Equality and Children's Rights in Contemporary Families

b. EmPOWER <u>Girls</u>: Before, during and after Crises

c. It's a #<u>Kids</u>TakeOver

d. <u>Youth</u> Engagement for Global Action

It is clear that the topics of children's and women's rights are closely related. Symbolically, there is a woman lifting up a child in the logo of UNICEF. For methodological purposes, however, only children's rights will be disserted in the present study. (1a) presents the reversal 'men's rights vs. children's rights', i.e. thanks to children's rights, adults are no longer the heads of 'contemporary families'. Moreover, it is necessary to note that the UN uses 'families' (in plural) both in the observance (*International Day of Families*) and the theme, certainly to include the other forms of families (e.g. *one-parent*, *homoparental*, *reconstituted*, etc). In its Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), the UN (1948: Article 16) connects the notion of 'family' to marriage as follows:

1. Men and women of full age, without any limitation due to race, nationality or religion, have the right to marry and to found a *family*. They are entitled to equal rights as to marriage, during marriage and at its dissolution.
2. Marriage shall be entered into only with free and full consent of the intending spouses.
3. The *family* is the natural and fundamental group unit of society and is entitled to protection by society and the state.

In sum, men and women have the right to marry in order to found a family which is the natural and fundamental group unit of society. Conversely, in its CRC, it uses the term 'parents' in collocation with *legal guardians*, *any other persons*, *other members of the family*, *other caring for the child*, and *other persons having financial responsibility for the child*. These politically correct terms actually constitute the UN's permission to adoption, foster care, and other 'contemporary families'.

In (1b), a reversal is performed between adults who are responsible for crises and children who are among their hopeless victims. The term 'crises' itself can be interpreted as the euphemism or doublespeak term for *wars*. In that case, 'girls' imply atrocities such as rapes, hence the necessity for their empowerment.

In (1c), a reversal is seen between children's takeover and adults who must accept it. Another theme is clearer: "Children are *taking over* and turning the world blue". Like *takeover* (noun) and *take over* (verb), such derivations are used with *power*, *empower*, and *empowerment*. In addition, the UN resorts to a special spelling (e.g. a #KidsTakeOver and emPOWER) probably in order to appeal to the youth who have new writing practices in social media. In general, the UN launches many of its campaigns (including # children, not soldiers (Badye and Mulamba 2019, Badye 2022)) via the internet.

Finally, in (1d) the reversal is made between adults who pollute the globe (global action refers to global warming) and children who engage to save the planet and future generations. There are many young celebrities in the ecological movements.

After reversals in UN's themes, let us move to indirectness.

Speech acts can be direct or indirect (Searle 1975). Yule (1996: 54-5) briefly explains them as follows, "Whenever there is a direct relationship between a structure and a function, we have a *direct speech act*. Whenever there is an indirect relationship between a structure and a function, we have an *indirect speech act*". About the parliamentary debate, he analysed, van Dijk (1993a: 123-5) notes, "Most of Mr. Fox's speech consists of *assertions*. However, indirectly, he also *accuses* and *attacks* his Labour opponents". From this passage, it can be deduced that assertion is the direct or apparent speech act while accusation and attack are the indirect ones. As far as reading and listening are concerned, many authors teach to go

beyond what is actually written and uttered. They include Carter and Nash (1990), West (1994), Tannen (1999), and Lutz (1999).

Similarly, the UN resorts to indirect speech acts in its defence of children's rights. Consider the themes below:

(2) a. Youth & Radio: Celebrating Radio by Youth for Youth in Safety and security

b. In conflicts and Disasters, protect children from Child Labour

c. Children shouldn't work in fields, but on dreams!

d. End child labour in supply chains – It's everyone's business!

Yule (1996: 53-4) classifies speech acts in five categories: declaratives, representatives, expressives, directives, and commissives. (2a) is a representative. The UN believes that youth deserve to participate in the celebration of radio (on World Radio Day) the way 'the people' is invited to exercise power in democracy (the power *of* people, *by* people, *for* people). Considering the power relationship between the speaker (the UN) and the hearer (developing countries), it is a directive (command, request, order, etc). The UN means: Celebrate radio by youth for youth in safety and security. Other *-ing* forms of the corpus include *eradicating*, *empowering*, *responding*, *transforming*, *learning*, *unleashing*, *inspiring*, and *putting*.

In (2b), there is a directive. Out of the 58 themes, there are only 8 directives (or 13.5%):

- *Say* NO to child labour,
- *End* child labour,
- *Listen* to the young voices,
- *Protect* children from child labour,
- *Listen* first,
- *Learn* to love forests,
- *Stop* attacks on children,
- *Protect* children from child labour, now more than ever.

In sum, the UN resorts to directives in case of sensitive causes (e.g. child labour, forests, fauna, and child abuse).

In (2c), there is an expressive. The UN thus expresses its indignation with adults who use children in agriculture. Indirectly, it is a directive: *Stop* using children in fields, *send* them to school. Out of the 58 themes, there are only 2 expressives (3.4%).

Lastly in (2d), we have two successive speech acts: a directive and an expressive. In fact, the latter simply reinforces the former. To sum up, the UN directly uses representatives (83.1%), directives (13.5%) and expressive (3.4%). Its commissives can be inferred from words such as 'future' and others. It seems not to resort to declaratives in its themes. Indirectly, however, it can be concluded that all its themes are directives.

Let us thus move on to transitivity analysis.

3.2. Transitivity in UN's themes

Halliday and Matthiessen (2004: 170) define transitivity as "the grammatical system by which the clause is achieved". In clearer terms, there is transitivity in every clause. Leech (2006: 17) notes, "The verb phrase is the most central and crucial element of a clause, so it is helpful to identify a clause by identifying its main verb". The verb is therefore at the centre of 'transitivity analysis'. Instead of *verb*, Halliday and Matthiessen (2004: 170) prefer the term *process*. According to these scholars, "The transitivity system construes the world of experience into a manageable set of process types". It is thus possible to interpret experiences through the analysis of processes.

Material, behavioural, mental, verbal, relational, and existential are the six process types in English according to Halliday and Matthiessen (2004: 170-173). These process types can be illustrated as follows:

Process type	Example (Process + participants underlined; Process in bold; circumstances in italics)
Material	*During the European scramble for Africa*, Nigeria **fell** *to the British*.
	And the British **ruled** it *until 1960*
Behavioural	People are **laughing**.
Mental	The Ibos **did not approve of** kings.
Verbal	So we **say** → that every fourth African is a Nigerian
	Can you **tell** us *about the political and cultural make-up of Nigeria?*
Relational	That every fourth African **is** a Nigerian.
Existential	So *today* there'**s** Christianity *in the south*

Figure 1: Examples of different process types

Halliday and Matthiessen (2004: 171) state that the above examples are from an interview of Chinua Achebe used as text illustration. Applied to our corpus, transitivity analysis will go through all the six process types, but with a particular emphasis on the main ones (viz. material, mental, and relational).

The boundaries among the process types are not clear-cut, as Halliday and Matthiessen (2004: 172) put it, "The regions are continuous, sharing into one another, and these border areas represent the fact that the process types are fuzzy categories". Cruse (2006: 68) uses the term 'fuzzy boundaries'. In short, linguistics is not an exact science.

Let us begin this transitivity analysis with 'material processes'.

3.2.1.   Themes with Material Processes

Halliday and Matthiessen (2004: 179) define 'material' clauses as: "Clauses of doing-&-happening: a 'material' clause construes a quantum of change in the flow of events as taking place through some input of energy". In other words, material processes express the 'outer' experience, i.e. that of actions and events. Below are some UN's themes with material processes:

1. **Eradicating** Poverty and **Achieving** Sustainable Consumption and Production
2. (**Go**) Towards Sustainable Futures Through Multilingual Education
3. **Transforming** the world: Parity and Science
4. **Empowering** Women and Girls with Autism
5. Youth **Standing Up** for Human Rights
6. COVID-19: **Protect** children from child labour, now more than ever

The above themes comprise 7 material processes. Five of them are transitive verbs (*eradicate*, *achieve*, *empower*, *protect*, *transform*) while two of them are intransitive: *go* and *stand up*.

Concerning participant roles, let us begin with the *agents*. The first ones are *we*, i.e. the international elite, in themes 1, 3 and 4. It can be noticed that these processes are in the ing form and the agent *we* is implicit: *we are eradicating poverty*; *we are achieving sustainable consumption*; *we are transforming the world*; *we are empowering women and girls with autism*. The second agents are the implicit *you* – the leaders of developing countries

– in imperative mood of themes 2 and 6: *protect* children from child labour. In 2, however, *go* is implicit. It has been deduced from the preposition *towards* which generally requires verbs of movement such as *come* and *move*. As can be seen, implicitness is crucial in political discourse, as Carter and Nash (1990: 132) point out, "Political language in all its forms turns all references into abstractions; when and if it becomes concrete and specific, it loses its power to suggest power". The third agents are *children* in theme 5: *youth* building peace, *children* are taking over, *children* shouldn't work in fields, etc. The terms 'children' and 'youth' are considered as synonyms in the present study. A question arises about children's agency: can they be actors in politics and development?

The following group of participants are *forces*, viz. inanimate doers. There are what the UN presents as 'positive' forces, for example *sustainable consumption and production*, *human rights* in themes 1 and 5. According to the UN such forces deserve to be achieved, built, stood up for, unleashed, and safeguarded. Conversely, there are 'negative' forces such as child labour, poverty, and attacks on children in themes 1 and 6. These ones must be 'ended', 'eradicated', 'stopped' and 'protected from'. However, this negative-positive polarization can merely be ideological.

Children who undergo attacks are experiencers, but in many themes they are depicted as beneficiaries who need protection and empowerment. In this context, *to empower* means "to give somebody more control over their own life or the situation they are in (e.g. the movement actively empowered women and gave them confidence in themselves)" (Hornby 2015). In short, it is a verb mostly used in political discourse. The question asked above arises again: As minors, do children need empowerment? The other participants presented as beneficiaries (in themes 8 and 12) are women, families and communities.

In 3 there is a participant called 'theme'. The UN argues that the *world* is being transformed. Finally, 2 and 6 contain circumstances: *towards sustainable futures* and *now*. Concerning location, Cruse (2006: 68-69) mentions *source* (e.g. from child labour), *path* (e.g. through multilingual education) and *goal* (e.g. towards sustainable education).

Before moving to the second main processes, let us consider the two following themes:

1. Youth & Radio: **Celebrating** Radio by Youth for Youth in Safety and Security
2. **Responding** to the trafficking of children and young people

To *celebrate* and to *respond* are behavioural processes, viz. "those that represent the outer manifestations of inner workings, the acting out of processes of consciousness and physiological states" (Halliday and Matthiessen 2004: 171). In 1, *youth* is the agent while radio is an instrument. It can be rephrased as an indirect request: "Youth must/should celebrate radio for themselves in safety and security". In 2, *we* are the agents while *trafficking* is a 'negative' force and *children* are experiencers. It can be reformulated as a declaration followed by an implicit order: "We are responding to the trafficking of children, do the same". As mentioned above, these themes are indirect requests of the international elite (*we*) to developing countries' leaders (*you*).

3.2.2. Themes with Mental Processes

Mental processes express the inner experiences of emotions. Below are the UN's themes with mental processes:

1. Girls' Progress = Goals' Progress: What **Counts** for Girls
2. **Listen** to Young Voices
3. Forests and Education – **Learn** to **Love** Forests
4. Mountains **Matter** for Youth
5. **Learning** for people, planet, prosperity, and peace
6. **Inspiring** the Next Generation

There are six mental processes in the above themes. Two of these processes (*inspire* and *love*) are transitive whereas the remaining four ones (*matter*, *count*, *listen* and *learn*) are intransitive.

As in the previous section, the participants include agents *we* (in 5 and 6) and *you* (in 2 and 3) as well as the instrument *voices* (in 2). There are only 'positive' forces: *progress*, *mountains*, *planet*, *prosperity*, and *peace* (in 1, 4 and 5). Since a few decades, the UN spread all around the world the ideologies of progress, prosperity, peace and planet even if there is a contradiction between the ideology of progress and that of planet protection. It is known that 'progress' requires natural resources, i.e. the destruction of the planet. In the same vein, forests in 3 are *themes* insofar as they have been destroyed by humans. Through the indirect request "Learn to love forests", the UN invites the developing countries' leaders to keep forests as *patients*, viz. in their original state. The beneficiaries are youth, the next generation,

girls and the people (in 1, 4, 5 and 6). In fact, the request "Learn for people" is interesting because the *aim* of knowledge must be the development of people, not machines, prosperity or economy. The latter are simple *means*. In the framework of the present study, *learn* is "to gain knowledge or skill by studying, from experience, from being taught, etc." (Hornby 2015). Consequently, its other meanings (e.g. discover, memorize, gradually change attitude) are ruled out. Children are the main agents in learning: they learn.

Similarly, before tackling the third main processes, it is necessary to mention the theme: "No to Child Labour – Yes to Quality Education". The full indirect request should actually read, "*Say* no to child labour, yes to quality education". To *say* is the only verbal process of the corpus. It is the process of saying and includes *tell*, *agree*, *accuse*, *declare*, *claim*, etc.

3.2.3.   Themes with Relational Processes

Relational processes are those of identifying and classifying. As Halliday and Matthiessen (2004: 170) put it, "We learn to generalize – to relate one fragment of experience to another: this is the same as that, this is a kind of the other". Consider the following themes:

1. The power of the Adolescent Girl: (**is** the) Vision for 2030
2. The Road to 2030: (**is**) Eradicating Poverty and Achieving Sustainable Consumption and Production
3. Education and training **are** key determinants of success in labour market
4. The right to education **means** the right to a qualified teacher
5. GirlForce: (**is**) Unscripted and Unstoppable
6. My Voice, (**is**) Our Equal Future

In the above themes, *be* is explicitly used three times (in 3) while in 4, *mean* is considered as its synonym. It is omitted in the remaining themes. As it is in headlines. In their analysis of the New York Times' 2007 News Reports of Darfur Conflict, Abu-Alama and Al-Tayib (2020: 16-17) found seven similar headlines. For example, *Chinese Leader (is) to Visit Sudan for Talks on Darfur*, *2 Face Trials (are) at the Hague Over Darfur Atrocities*, *(Darfur Conflict is) An Atrocity that Needs no Exaggeration*, etc. In the above themes, however, it can be seen that punctuation marks help to detect the presence of *be*. Colons are used in 2 and 5 while a comma is used in 6.

With regard to participants *adolescent girl* and *qualified teacher* are *agents* in 1 and 4. *Instruments* include listening, education, training and voice in 3 and 6. There are many forces in these themes with relational processes, including the fight against child labour, the road to 2030, progress, the right to education, education as well as the so-called 'GirlForce'. The latter is similar to 'youth power' (see the theme "Unleashing Youth Power") and 'Black Power' (a movement supporting rights and political power for black people). This confirms the ideological nature of children's rights.

In this discourse of children's rights, *education* plays at least three participant roles. It is presented as a force, an instrument or as theme (see "Transforming Education"). It is necessary to ask ourselves: What is the best role of education in a person's life?

Circumstances are found in 2 and 3: *for 2030* and *in labour market*. The phrase 'for 2030' actually refers to the document entitled 'Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development' adopted by the UN General Assembly on 25 September 2015. Briefly, it is a plan of action for people, planet and prosperity to be achieved in 2030. The previous plan was called '2015 development agenda'. Finally, the term 'labour' has a negative connotation in 'child labour', but a positive one in 'labour market'. In other words, the UN fights against the former and presents the latter as the aim of education: children are educated in order to get the top jobs. In that case, the children of billionaires, kings and presidents would not study, and yet they do. Education is a universal right; it "shall be directed to the full development of the human personality" (UN 1948: article 26). The first target of 'development' should be the humans.

Let us move to the themes with existential processes. Consider the following:

1. It's a # KidsTakeOver
2. CRC (has **existed** for) 30 years
3. COVID-19 (**exists**): Protect children from child labour, now more than ever

The UN informs us that at the moment, a children's *takeover* (act of taking control of a country by force) would be going on. Another theme reads, "Children are *taking over* and turning the world blue". The problem with the term 'takeover' is that it has a negative connotation in democratic societies. It is synonymous to *coup d'état*. Then, the UN recalls that the CRC was adopted in 1989; consequently in 2019, it had existed for 30 years.

However, the UN does not recall that CRC's article 38 was contested and revised in 2000 in a treaty called OPAC. CRC has thus been weakened unlike the UDHR which is unchanged since 1948.

In the third theme, the UN declares that COVID-19 exists (this verb is implicit) and concerns everyone (adults as well as children). When the disease began to spread all around the globe, numerous stories were heard in social media: conspiracy theories, biological weapon, lie, etc. Above all, it is World Health Organization – a UN organ – which announced the explosion of that pandemic.

3.2.4.   Themes with no Explicit Processes

Within the 58 themes collected in the framework of this study, there are phrases which lack processes, but which must be analyzed because political discourse is seldom clear. Here are some of them:

1. Maritime **Education** and Training
2. Quality **Education**, Language(s) of **Instruction** and *Learning* Outcomes
3. Indigenous peoples' Right to **Education**
4. Occupational safety health (OSH) vulnerability of young workers
5. With Her: A Skilled GirlForce
6. Sustainable infrastructure, services and social protection for gender equality and the empowerment of rural women and girls

In fact, nominalization (see 3, 1, 5 above) has been performed to in order to change processes in nouns. The latter include *training* and *empowerment* in 1 and 6. These themes can be replaced into material clauses such as: youth *engage* in civic movements; *train* for seas; *eradicate* poverty; *empower* rural women and girls; *invest* in women. However, there is omission of the verb *fight* in 5: fight with her for a skilled girlforce.

Some mental processes have also been nominalised. It is the case of *education, remembrance,* and *discrimination* in 1: *educate* about forests; *remember* and *educate* about holocaust for global justice; don't *discriminate* against women. The remaining mental clauses can be obtained by using the process *matter* or *count* as in, "language matters" and "goals' progress counts for girls". Theme 2 can be rephrased that way: gender equality and children's rights *matter*, quality education *matters*, evacuation drills *matter*, safety and health *count*, the

plight of children born of war *counts*, etc. Therefore, no matter the structure (e.g. *educate* through and with language vs. inclusive education *matters*), to educate is undoubtedly the mental process mostly used in the corpus. According to Hornby (2015), this verb has two meanings: first, it is to teach somebody over a period of time at a school, university, etc; second, it is to teach somebody about something or how to do something (e.g. Children need to be educated on the dangers of drug-taking; the campaign is intended to educate the public to respect the environment). It is clear that, in its themes, the UN uses 'to educate' in its second meaning, i.e. for ideological purposes.

It is necessary to note that in the corpus *educate* is systematically nominalised. It appears 14 times next to its synonym *instruct* which is used once. Conversely, *learn* appears 3 times, and it is nominalised only once (in 7: 'Learning Outcomes'). These two processes are crucial in this study just as adults and children play the macro-roles. *Educate* and *learn* are relational antonyms. Adults educate, children learn or adults *provide* knowledge to children; children *receive* knowledge from adults. Therefore, both are agents, but from the opposite perspectives.

Finally, themes 3 and 4 can be rephrased as relational clauses: *indigenous people have right to education*; *young workers are vulnerable*.

In all, there are 74 processes in the themes analyzed in the present study: 30 material processes (i.e. 40.5%), 3 behavioural ones (4%), 23 mental ones (31%), 1 verbal one (1.3%), 14 relational ones (18.9%) and 3 existential ones (4%). Consider the diagram below:
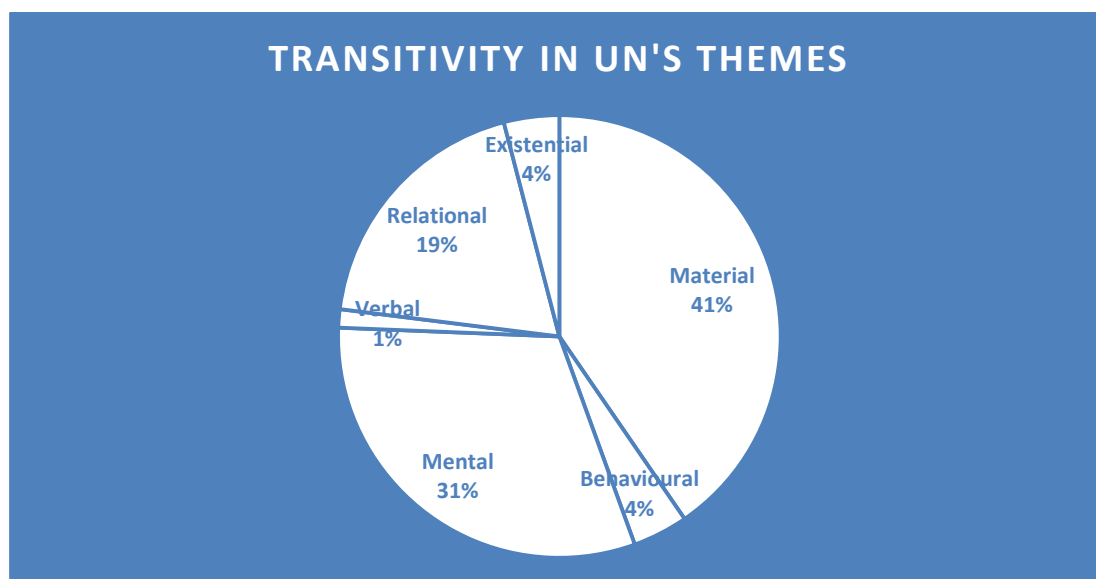

TRANSITIVITY IN UN'S THEMES

Existential 4%
Relational 19%
Verbal 1%
Material 41%
Mental 31%
Behavioural 4%

Figure 2: Transitivity in UN's themes on children's rights (2015-2020)

In a similar figure (which they call 'the grammar of experience: types of progress in English'), Halliday and Matthiessen (2004: 172) relate the main process types (material, mental, relational) successively to the physical world, the world of consciousness, and the world of abstract relations. Therefore, through its themes the UN would request the developing countries' leaders to *do* (e.g. protect, empower, transform, etc.), *sense* (e.g. educate, learn, listen, etc.) and *be* as far as children's rights are concerned. Of the 74 processes found in the corpus, the verbal one is used only once (Say no to child labour, yes to quality education). And yet, 'doing politics' is based on speech. As van Dijk (1997: 18) argues, "Most political actions (such passing laws, decision making, meeting, campaigning, etc.) are largely discursive". In other words, leaders should understand that they are requested to do (viz. protect, empower, transform) through language.

4. CONCLUSION

This study has been an investigation of the themes of UN's observances. The latter (e.g. Universal Children's Day) are often reinforced by slogans or catchphrases (e.g. 2017 theme: it's a #KidsTakeOver) which vary each year. As the subject or main idea in a talk, the term 'theme' should ignite debates and fruitful exchanges among social actors. As used by the UN, however, themes are indirect requests (e.g. End child labour in supply chains). Furthermore, it has been noticed that the topic of children's rights is not restricted to the observances explicitly dedicated to children. For instance, in 2015 the theme of World Radio Day was 'Youth & radio', the proof that the UN wants to teach its ideologies to persons as early as possible. As data, 58 themes have been collected between 2015 and 2020.

It first analyzed the UN's themes underlying structures. The latter include *reversals* such as "Men in charge?" via which the UN advocates for the leadership of women and children in 'contemporary families'. *Indirectness* is crucial because most themes are actually indirect orders. *Reproduction* occurs through the justification of this discourse of human rights. *Positive-self presentation* concerns the world elite whereas *negative-other presentation* aims at developing countries' leaders. *Us/them polarization* can be summarized as, "WE listen first to OUR children, THEY ignore THEIRS". Figurative language is seen in a theme such as "Children are turning the world blue".

With regard to transitivity analysis, it classified the processes into material, behavioural, mental, verbal, relational, and existential. Material processes consist of 40.5% of all the processes of the corpus. They include *end*, *eradicate*, *protect*, *build*, *transform*, *act*, etc, the evidence that the UN demands achievements in the physical world. Mental processes represent 31%, including *educate*, *learn*, *listen*, etc. which are impacts in the world of consciousness or ideological world. Relational processes cover 18.9%, based on *be*, showing that the UN also expects realizations in the world of abstract relations.

The participant roles have also been analyzed. The agents include *we* (e.g. *we are eradicating*, *we are transforming*, *we are unleashing*), *you* (*end*, *go*, *protect*), *men, adolescent girl, qualified* and *young teachers*. The forces have been grouped in two categories: positive ones (e.g. sustainable consumption, progress, prosperity, education) and negative ones (e.g. child labour, poverty, attacks on children). Children are mostly depicted as beneficiaries of this advocacy of children's rights.

In sum, this study shows that the two mental processes *educate* and *learn* connect adults and children: both are agents from opposite perspectives. One of the best ways of defending their rights is to tell children explicitly that learning makes them great social actors. It is adultism to present *them* as passive beneficiaries of adults' actions while it is ideological to depict them as political actors. Requests to adults should not be "Empower children" but "Teach them knowledge". It is with this knowledge that they will be able one day – before or after 18 years old – to achieve material processes (*end*, *eradicate*, *protect*, *build*, *transform*, etc). Therefore, schools should be places of science, not ideologies.

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6. ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

7. APPENDIX

The following corpus has been retrieved from the UN website in the rubric 'observances' between 2015 and 2020. Observances and their themes have been selected on the basis of lexical field, viz. key words about children. For example, *child*, *kid*, *youth*, *education*, *adolescent*, *girl*, etc.

Year	Day/Month	Observances	THEMES
2015	13/2	World Radio Day	Youth & Radio: Celebrating Radio by Youth for Youth in Safety and Security
	21/2	International Mother Language Day	Inclusive Education through and with Language – Language Matters
	15/5	International Day of Families	Men in charge? Gender Equality and Children's Rights in Contemporary Families
	12/6	World Day against Child Labour	NO to Child Labour – YES to Quality Education
	12/8	International Youth Day	Youth Civic Engagement
	24/9	World Maritime Day	Maritime Education and Training
	11/10	International Day of the Girl Child	The power of the Adolescent Girl: Vision for 2030
	22/11	Africa Industrialization Day	Small and Medium Enterprises for Poverty Eradication and Job Creation for Women and Youth
2016	21/2	International Mother Language Day	Quality Education, Language(s) of Instruction and Learning Outcomes
	12/6	World Day against Child Labour	End child labour in supply chains – It's everyone's business!
	9/8	International day the World's Indigenous People	Indigenous Peoples' Right to Education
	12/8	International Youth Day	The Road to 2030: Eradicating Poverty and Achieving Sustainable Consumption and Production
	11/10	International Day of the Girl	Girls' Progress = Goals' Progress: What Counts for Girls

		Child	
	5/11	World Tsunami Awareness Day	Effective Education and Evacuation Drills
2017	21/2	International Mother Language Day	Towards Sustainable Futures through Multilingual Education
	3/3	World Wildlife Day	Listen to the Young Voices
	15/5	International Day of Families	Families, education and well-being
	12/6	World Day against Child Labour	In Conflicts and Disasters, Protect Children from Child Labour
	26/6	International Day against Drug Abuse and Illicit Trafficking	Listen First – Listen to Children and Youth is the First Step to Help them Grow Healthy and Safe
	15/7	World Youth Skills Day	Education and training are key determinants of success in the labor market
	12/8	International Youth Day	Youth building peace
	11/10	International Day of the Girl Child	EmPOWER Girls: Before, during and after Crises
	20/11	Universal Children's Day	It's a #KidsTakeOver
2018	27/1	International Day of Commemoration in Memory of the Victims of the Holocaust	Holocaust Remembrance and Education: Our Shared Responsibility
	11/2	International Day of Women and Girls in Science	Transforming the World: Parity in Science
	2/4	World Autism awareness Day	Empowering Women and Girls with Autism
	28/4	World Day for Safety and Health at Work	Occupational safety health (OSH) vulnerability of young workers
	12/6	World Day against Child Labour	Generation Safe & Healthy
	19/6	International Day for the Elimination of Sexual Violence in Conflict	The Plight and Rights of Children Born of War
	30/7	World Day against Trafficking in persons	Responding to the trafficking of children and young people
	12/8	International Youth Day	Safe Spaces for Youth
	5/10	World Teachers' Day	The right to education means the right to a qualified teacher
	10/10	World Mental Health Day	Young people and mental health in a changing world
	11/10	International Day of the Girl Child	With Her: A Skilled GirlForce
	15/10	International Day of Rural women	Sustainable infrastructure, services and social protection for gender equality and the empowerment of rural women and girls
	20/11	Universal Children's Day	Children are taking over and turning the world blue
2019	11/2	International Day of Women and Girls in Science	Investment in Women and Girls for Inclusive Green Growth
	21/3	International Day of Forests and the Tree	Forests and Education – Learn to Love Forests
	12/6	World Day against Child Labour	Children shouldn't work in fields, but on dreams!
	12/8	International Youth Day	Transforming Education
	5/10	World Teachers' Day	Young Teachers: the future of the Profession
	11/10	International Day of the Girl Child	GirlForce: Unscripted and Unstoppable
	17/10	International Day for the Eradication of poverty	Acting Together to Empower Children, their Families and Communities to End Poverty
	20/11	Universal Children's Day	CRC 30 years
	10/12	Human Rights Day	Youth Standing Up for Human Rights

	11/12	International Mountain Day	Mountains Matter for Youth
2020	24/1	International Day of Education	Learning for people, planet, prosperity, and peace
	27/1	International Day of Commemoration in Memory of the Victims of the Holocaust	75 years after Auschwitz – Holocaust Education and Remembrance for Global Justice
	6/2	International Day of Zero Tolerance for Female Genital Mutilation	Unleashing Youth Power
	1/3	Zero discrimination Day	Zero Discrimination against Women and Girls
	23/4	International Girls in ICT Day	Inspiring the Next Generation
	4/6	International Day of Innocent Children Victims of Aggression	Stop attacks on children
	12/6	World Day against child labour	COVID-19: Protect children from child labour, now more than ever
	11/7	World Population Day	Putting the brakes on COVID-19: how to safeguard the health and rights of women and girls now
	15/7	World Youth Skills Day	Skills for a Resilient Youth in the Era of COVID-19 and Beyond
	12/8	International Youth Day	Youth Engagement for Global Action
	11/10	International Day of the Girl Child	My Voice, Our Equal Future
	20/11	Universal Children's Day	This year, the COVID-19 crisis has resulted in a child rights crisis