Speech Acts in Strategic Diplomacy: An Analysis of Joe Biden's Address on the Israel–Hamas Conflict

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ABSTRACT

Political speeches influence the formation of public opinion, the construction of ideological narratives, and the direction of international diplomacy. This study aims to identify and analyze the illocutionary acts in U.S. President Joe Biden's Oval Office address on the Israel–Hamas conflict and to examine how language is used to articulate political stance and strategic diplomatic positioning. Using Searle's typology of assertive, directive, commissive, expressive, and declarative acts, this research employs a descriptive qualitative method based on the official transcript published by The New York Times and the corresponding video released by Sky News. The findings show that assertive acts dominate the speech, functioning to reinforce factual claims, establish credibility, and clarify the United States' foreign policy orientation. Commissive and expressive acts appear frequently to project moral commitment, empathy, and alignment with selected stakeholders, while directive and declarative acts are used sparingly to encourage support without demanding immediate action. These results indicate that Biden's speech employs speech acts strategically to balance assertive leadership with humanitarian rhetoric in a high-stakes diplomatic context. The study contributes to pragmatic research on political discourse by demonstrating how speech acts operate as strategic tools for managing international crises. Future research may extend this analysis by examining audience reception and the perlocutionary effects of such political communication.

Keywords: Illocutionary acts; Israel-Hamas War; Joe Biden; Political discourse; Speech act analysis

1. Introduction

The conflict between Hamas and Israel had long been a topic of international concern, and its escalation on October 7, 2023, further intensified global attention. The conflict had been accompanied by mass casualties, especially among Palestinian civilians, including women and children. Politicians, scholars, activists, and international agencies voiced their views, shaping public opinion worldwide. Among these actors, U.S. President Joe Biden held a central position because his wartime statements carried significant diplomatic and geopolitical implications. His speech, *"Deliver Oval Office Address on Israel–Hamas War,"* delivered a dual message: the U.S. pledge to secure Israel while acknowledging the humanitarian crises in Palestine. Such duality reflected broader patterns in U.S. foreign policy, where the United States had consistently supported Israel while attempting to address the humanitarian

consequences of its actions in the region (Khidhir, 2021). Given the role of presidential speeches in defining international perceptions of conflict, it is necessary to analyze the pragmatics of speech convincingly. As established by research, for instance, Joe Biden's discourse on conflict is significant for its strategic formulation of confirming self-representation while denying others' legitimacy, especially while addressing Vladimir Putin at the Geneva summit (Linkevičiūtė, 2021). Similarly, the analysis of his discourses while speaking on Afghanistan withdrawal indicates his rhetorical devices to have strong affiliations to broader ideology-driven objectives and demonstrated his use of speech for justification and legitimation of actions at the international level (Amin Mohammad, 2024). It was established in preliminary studies that legitimation strategies for discourse formulation in official preparations for speech, for example, at Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs Communication, influence international perceptions and attitude formulations toward conflict (Simonsen, 2019). Emotional expressions for policies formulated during speeches also formulated international attitude formulations toward foreign policies to maintain established opinions (Kupatadze & Zeitzoff, 2019).

While these contextual factors were important, a more focused issue concerned the linguistic mechanisms through which political leaders constructed wartime narratives. Various studies examined illocutionary acts in political speeches and demonstrated how these acts shaped rhetoric, influenced audiences, and exercised authority. Strukowska (2024) identified how assertive acts built ideological credibility; Ayeomoni and Akinkuolere (2012) highlighted the mobilizing function of directive acts in inaugural speeches; Al-Shboul et al. (2024) showed that Biden employed motivational acts to influence public opinion; and Astiandani et al. (2022) demonstrated how commissive acts advanced peace values and strengthened commitments in Biden's victory speech. Beyond single-speech analyses, broader studies explored the pragmatic purposes of political speech acts. Atolagbe (2008) showed how declarative acts maintained political legitimacy, while Radulović and Mišić Ilić (2015) examined how commissive and expressive acts established emotional stance and commitment.

Nevertheless, most of these studies centered on domestic politics rally speeches or peacetime rhetoric discourse. While there are some studies on wartime communication and speech acts, pragmatic analysis of illocutionary speech acts within speeches intervening directly in any ongoing international conflict, especially among leaders of major world powers, had been rather limited until now. This is further supported by the highly complex character of speech acts within conflict scenarios and their strategic formulation to the point that their illocutionary meaning cannot easily be discerned accurately (Radulović & Mišić Ilić, 2015). Moreover, speech acts analysis is highly dependent on contexts during conflict situations and tends to variably differ among scenarios and audience to the point of making rather problematic or rather complex any attempt to pragmatically analyze them (Webber & Kyriacou, 2008). It should also be noted that current frameworks for analysis may have been rather inadequate for covering and addressing the multi-layer or multi-utterance character of complex speech acts as presented by wartime rhetoric discourses themselves (Hamad et al., 2022).

Hence, the current study closes this gap by focusing on wartime speech by former President Joe Biden as Israel was being fought by Hamas and exploring his use of

illocutionary acts to position America in a crisis-oriented foreign politics setting while persuading his audience. Using Searle's typology of assertive, directive, commissive, expressive, and declarative acts, this study identified the linguistic patterns Biden used to represent the war, articulate the U.S. position, and advance diplomatic messaging. Previous scholarship emphasized that illocutionary acts shaped public attitudes and ideological interpretations (Saragi et al., 2019; Majeed, 2022) and revealed political intentions and obligations (Kayode-Iyasere & Ogidan, 2023). On the basis of these findings, this study analyzed the pragmatic role of speech acts performed by Biden within the very sensitive context of wartime diplomacy because rhetorical acts strategically shape opinion and policymaking (Khodijah, 2020).

Based on this background, the study was guided by two research objectives: 1) to identify the types of illocutionary acts used in President Biden's Oval Office address on the Israel–Hamas conflict; and 2) to analyze the pragmatic functions of these illocutionary acts in shaping diplomatic stance and political narrative during an international crisis.

2. Method

This study employed a descriptive qualitative approach to analyze the illocutionary acts present in Joe Biden's speech titled *"Deliver Oval Office Address on Israel–Hamas War."* The speech was selected because it represented a high-profile intervention by the President of the United States within an international conflict and thus held significant discursive power to influence international perceptions of the conflict. The speech analysis was conducted to interpret and determine illocutionary acts for insights into how speech acts by Joe Biden influenced strategic politics for international diplomacy. Existing studies on Biden's speeches, including those examining politeness strategies in his victory address, demonstrated that close attention to speaker intention can reveal important layers of meaning in political communication (Purba et al., 2023). In alignment with past studies applying speech act theory to politics (Kusmanto and Bahri, 2023; Khajavi and Rasti, 2020), this study used illocutionary acts as its point of analysis to probe persuasion and ideology within the broader context of politics and its influence on opinions (Buczowski and Strukowska, 2022).

The data for this study consisted of all utterances in Biden's address that contained potential illocutionary force. The primary data were the official transcript published by *The New York Times*, which was cross-checked against the video version uploaded by Sky News on 19 October 2023, with a duration of 15 minutes and 5 seconds. The secondary data comprised theoretical literature on speech act theory and prior studies on political discourse. The strategy to critically assess one speech was correct from a methodological consideration because it is a case study of significant communicative practice (Hussain & Khan, 2024): namely, this rarely occurring type of Oval Office speech during an internationally escalating crisis because it provided a point to critically analyze how one significant international actor constructed discourses of wartime through speech.

The process of data collection followed several steps to ensure accuracy and reliability. First, the video of the speech was viewed multiple times to gain a comprehensive understanding of its content and rhetorical context, which is a common qualitative practice to enhance data validity (Talha et al., 2020). Second, the transcript was obtained from *The New York Times*, and its accuracy was checked by

comparing it line by line with the spoken text in the video. Segments of the video were paused, rewound, and replayed to achieve an exact match between the spoken and written forms, in accordance with recommended practices for maintaining data integrity (Hou et al., 2022). Any discrepancies identified were noted and resolved through cross-referencing, following recognized procedures for verification and reliability assessment (Lamrini et al., 2024). The researchers also noted key phrases and timestamps to facilitate systematic coding, a practice that supported accuracy in qualitative analysis (Lazarova-Molnar et al., 2019).

Data analysis was conducted through a structured coding procedure. First, the verified transcript was segmented into clauses or sentences that could function as individual speech acts. Second, each segment was coded based on Searle's (1976) classification of assertive, directive, commissive, expressive, and declarative acts. Operational definitions for each category were developed using Searle's framework and insights from political discourse studies (e.g., Kusmanto & Bahri, 2023; Khajavi & Rasti, 2020). A segment was coded as an assertive when it expressed a statement of fact, belief, or evaluation; as a directive when it attempted to persuade or urge action; as a commissive when it conveyed a commitment to future action; as an expressive when it reflected psychological states such as sorrow, gratitude, or hope; and as a declarative when it performed an institutional action through the utterance itself.

Thirdly, after completing initial coding, all coded data were examined to ensure consistency and tighten boundaries of categories for refinement and reliability testing besides being indicative of validator coding for ensuring trustworthiness of conclusions reached. Not only was it necessary to ascertain the kind of speech act as and how particular acts were intended for statement-making or promise-making or command-making or expression of sadness or praise-giving, but also to see its role or objective within rhetorical intentions of particular acts of speech examined for its intended role and purpose for conclusion of broader objectives such as formulation of rhetorical devices adopted for addressing the Israel-Hamas crisis at both national and international levels for speech maker Joe Biden.

Despite this complexity, emphasis was also placed during analysis on the classification of speech acts rather than just focusing on their strategic use during wartime diplomacy. This approach is certainly supportive of past studies conducted to demonstrate politics surrounding illocutionary acts and their efforts to shape interpretations and opinions at the ideational level (Saragi et al., 2019; Khodijah, 2020; Majeed, 2022). This particular approach assisted during analysis to determine strategic use of speech acts by Joe Biden at the crisis communication level internationally.

3.   Findings
3.1.   Types of Illocutionary Acts in Joe Biden's Speech
The analysis of Joe Biden's speech identified five types of illocutionary acts based on Searle's (1976) classification: assertive, expressive, commissive, directive, and declarative. In political wartime addresses, these acts serve not only to convey information but also to strategically shape audience perceptions, reinforce ideological alignments, and maintain diplomatic positioning under crisis conditions. Biden's speech demonstrates a deliberate orchestration of these speech acts to project authority, establish moral legitimacy, and manage international responses.

As expressed in Table 1, assertive illocutionary acts were most commonly used, occurring 15 times. Assertives' dominance can be attributed to the speech's primary

purpose: presenting facts, setting up the conflict narrative, and enhancing credibility (Maulidiyah et al., 2021; Jatiningtyas et al., 2024). Assertive acts in the speech are mostly expressed as claims of facts containing concrete numbers, history, or universal moral obligations. For instance, that more than 1,300 individuals were killed in Israel, at least 32 of whom were American citizens, not only reports facts but also makes a political and emotional justification for U.S. intervention (Masrur et al., 2023; Majeed, 2022). The selective highlighting of American and Israeli casualty numbers, without comparative mention of Palestinian losses, demonstrates a strategic framing aligning U.S. interest with Israeli victimization (Song, 2024; Anshori et al., 2022). Another assertive act, that Israel and Palestinians both deserve to live in peace, dignity, and safety, presents a neutral humanitarian position. As a stand by itself, this act of assertion implies a balanced humanitarian approach. When placed in its larger speech context, however, this claim acts rhetorically to project fairness while quietly reinforcing U.S. favoritism to Israel, hence concealing power and victimization asymmetry (Rosyidi et al., 2019; Alam, 2023).

Table 1. Types of Illocutionary Acts

Types of Illocutionary Acts	Frequency
Assertive	15
Expressive	8
Commissive	7
Directive	4
Declarative	1

Expressive illocutionary acts appeared eight times, signaling an intentional emotional engagement strategy. These acts are marked by personal expressions of sorrow, empathy, or concern, aiming to humanize the speaker and foster an emotional connection with audiences. For instance, Biden's utterance, "*I am heartbroken by the tragic loss of Palestinian life, including the explosion at the hospital in Gaza, which was not done by the Israelis,*" blends sympathy with a strategic redirection of blame. While the initial clause evokes empathy, the latter part immediately absolves Israel, illustrating how expressive acts in political rhetoric often simultaneously perform persuasive functions rather than mere emotional disclosures.

Commissive acts that occurred seven times highlight Biden's strategic commitments to future action, predominantly for military and humanitarian aid. The acts often utilize the use of modal verbs like "must" and "will," emphasizing the inevitability and urgency of the vowed actions. A clear example is, "*We must ensure that they have what they need to safeguard their people today and always.*" In this case, the application of must heightens the pledge as a moral obligation rather than a political preference and positions assistance for the defense of Israel as a responsibility. Likewise, in the announcement that says, "*I will provide humanitarian aid to the Palestinian people,*" the U.S. stance supposedly finds a balance; however, the comparative frame and softer definitive tone in contrast to commitments to military support indicate a hidden asymmetry in diplomatic emphasis.

Directive acts happened in four locations and served significant purposes in coordinating political action among domestic constituencies, in this instance, lawmakers. The employment of imperative forms by Biden ("must approve," "must

condemn") conveys a sense of both urgency and non-negotiability. For instance, "*Congress must approve assistance to Israel and to the Ukraine,*" not only asserts the legislative sanction that relief requires but presents such support as an ethical and strategic imperative. His appeal to condemn antisemitism and Islamophobia also uses parallel construction to establish the impression of balance; but the disproportionate emphasis on antisemitism in the remainder of the speech renders the balance a rhetoric construction and not an honest balance in accordance with broader U.S. foreign policy narratives.

Declarative statements solely occurring once further demonstrate the strategic emphasis of the speech. The declarative, "*President Netanyahu and I spoke yesterday about the pressing requirement that Israel must conduct itself in accordance with the rules of war,*" serves diplomatically to underscore expectations for legality and morality without explicitly offering ramifications for noncompliance. This intentional lack of specificity enables Biden to retain diplomatic bargaining power without filling in the specifics of punitive actions, opting to leave itself open to negotiating the details in the future.

Strategic deployment and distribution of illocutionary acts in Biden's speech illustrate a very skilled rhetorical approach. Assertive acts of dominance assert power and frame conflict in a credible stance (Bano et al., 2023). Expressive acts are strategically woven into framing political statements more human-like in nature while inferentially supporting ideological positions. Commissive acts commit to the future but hierarchically structured to establish military aid as a priority for humanitarian need. Directive acts mobilize political mobilization through imperative content suppressing opposition, and the strategic use of declarative acts imports a circumventing of binding policy statements. In total, these illustrate that Biden's speech does not serve as informative; instead, it functions as a conductor of international discourse, a constructor of alliances, and a manager of geopolitical tensions through strategic linguistic choices (Yin & Chen, 2020; Aljarelah, 2024).

Analyzing Biden's pragmatic structure in his address, a striking uniqueness in comparison to past wartime speeches can be found when we examine his utilization of directive and declarative acts versus assertive and expressive acts. Unlike most political leaders, who would dominantly utilize directive and declarative acts during crisis to mobilize public action and declare policy change, Biden's rhetorical strategy revolves around assertive and expressive acts almost exclusively. It presents an intentional effort to place the conflict into an emotional and factual context, as opposed to direct calls to action. Biden's address creates a public vision of moral leadership and diplomatic prudence, distancing from explicit militaristic mobilization. His sparing deployment of directives and declaratives is a deliberate gesture aimed at keeping open options in international negotiations, something that is not usual in wartime rhetoric, where explicit mobilization is expected immediately. Biden's speech therefore illustrates a unique rhetorical balancing act: proclaiming commitments without taking options off the table.

The rhetorical approach employed by Biden in wartime communication stands out through its interweaving of emotive appeals and performative gestures, where individual loss and group mourning not only serve to anchor his leadership through constant recourse to self-referential pronouns and emotive descriptions but also, through subtle reinforcement, ensure political alignments and emphasize humanitarian commonalities. The style of his communication stands in contrast to

more typical nationalistic war rhetoric, which tends to depend on enemy demonization (Shovak and Petiy, 2023; Mishchenko and Lutsenko, 2022). By engaging in a multidimensional employment of rhetoric through a synthesis of elements of both pathos and deliberate ethical framing, Biden cultivates a transnational ethical union, framing America both as a reasoning being and a sympathetic actor on a world stage. Such employment of emotive and ethical pleas serves to elicit increased national support while, at the same time, augmenting international eminence (Shovak and Petiy, 2023). Furthermore, the balanced act between assertiveness and emotiveness bespeaks the utilization of ethical rhetoric in charting attributable political topographies, a pattern identified likewise in conflict stories by Mishchenko and Lutsenko (2022).

3.2. Functions of Illocutionary Acts in Joe Biden's Speech

The analysis of illocutionary acts in Joe Biden's speech highlights the strategic deployment of language to construct political narratives, shape audience perceptions, and drive policy initiatives. The predominant function identified was stating, categorized as assertive acts, which occurred fifteen times. This dominance underscores Biden's reliance on factual assertions to reinforce his political stance regarding the Israel-Hamas conflict. For instance, the assertion "*Israel and Palestinians equally deserve to live in safety, dignity, and peace*" initially appears as a neutral expression of humanitarian values. However, when situated within the broader context of the speech, this statement operates as a rhetorical mechanism to uphold a diplomatic balance while subtly reaffirming the United States' strategic commitments (Kusmanto et al., 2023; Xiang, 2022). Although acknowledging suffering on both sides, Biden avoids directly addressing the power disparities between Israel and Palestine, thus preserving the alignment with established geopolitical alliances (Jha & Kumar, 2023). This careful management of language illustrates how political leaders use assertive statements not merely to convey information, but also to project neutrality while embedding political allegiances beneath the surface (Ringrose, 2020).

Table 2. Functions of Illocutionary Acts

Illocutionary Act	Function	Frequency
Assertive	Stating	15
Expressive	Sadness	5
	Praising	1
	Thanking	1
	Wishing	1
Commissive	Promising	6
	Vowing	1
Directive	Commanding	3
	Requesting	1
Declarative	Deciding	1

Expressive acts primarily functioned to convey sadness, appearing five times, reflecting a strategic effort to engage the audience's emotions. Statements such as "*We mourn every innocent life lost*" evoke collective grief, positioning the speaker as a moral actor concerned with humanitarian values. However, the selective framing of this mourning, where Palestinian casualties are acknowledged but situated within broader narratives that emphasize Israeli suffering, reflects a rhetorical strategy to avoid direct

political accountability. This selective deployment of sadness subtly maintains the political positioning of the United States, offering empathy without altering underlying policy commitments.

Alongside sadness also came expressive acts of praise, thanking, and wishing all appearing only once. The utterance of the phrase "*Kyiv still stands because of the bravery of the Ukrainian people*" functions not only as a compliment to the resilience of Ukraine but strategically ties the war between Israel and Hamas to larger ideological battles between democracy and authoritarianism. This rhetorical effort expands the moral framework of the speech to justify the alignment of the conflict between Israel and Hamas along a Western-centric vision of upholding democratic values. Likewise, the solitary appearances of thanking and wishing work to humanize Biden's leadership identity to create an impression of solidarity and support for the audience along with legitimating the moral righteousness of the United States' role in the world.

Six times the president was found to have made commissive acts in the form of promise and only once a vow, to indicate a commitment to specific actions. A good example includes the phrase, "*I will send humanitarian aid to the Palestinian people.*" Although the phrase would seem to evidence concern for Palestinian civilians, its placement after stronger assurances for Israeli security implies hierarchical prioritization. The promise of humanitarian aid serves more as a rhetorical counterweight rather than a solid policy promise. Another commissive act, "*We need to ensure that they have what they need to safeguard their people today and forever*," reinforces absolute support for the defense of Israel. The deliberately vague language of "*what they need*" leaves Biden diplomatic leeway so that assistance can be calibrated in scope without political cost. This strategic ambiguity guarantees ongoing political support without requiring rigid commitments.

Directive acts that occur three times as commands and a single request also indicate Biden's attempt to shape legislative policy and public opinion. The directive that states "*Congress must approve funding for Israel and Ukraine*" puts financial and military aid in the context as an imperative moral need rather than a policy discretion. Through the use of commanding language, Biden puts opposition to the funding in the context of deviation from moral responsibility. In the same token, the request act "*We must without equivocation denounce antisemitism. We must also without equivocation denounce Islamophobia*" creates a parallel to condemn discrimination. However, the speech's stronger focus on antisemitism as opposed to Islamophobia also reveals a strategic prioritization that reflects the foreign policy aims of the U.S.

Finally, the only declarative act in Biden's speech served a deciding function through the statement "*We are committed to ensuring that Israel abides by international law.*" Although it appears to formalize a policy stance, the cautious wording and lack of enforcement mechanisms reveal that this act functions more as diplomatic reassurance than as a substantive policy commitment. By framing this commitment in broad, non-binding terms, Biden preserves the United States' diplomatic maneuverability in future dealings with Israel.

The results indicate that Biden's speech weaves a highly calibrated political discourse. Assertive acts serve to support credibility and political legitimacy (Kayode-Iyasere & Ogidan, 2023), while expressive acts humanize the speaker and strategically appeal to moral solidarity without undermining core alliances (Jameel & Sameer, 2021). Commissive acts selectively support policy commitments by balancing

diplomatic commitments with political maneuverability (Putra et al., 2020). Directive acts mobilize political action by framing support as an ethical imperative instead of a policy debate (Maskuri et al., 2019). The single declarative act maintains diplomatic maneuverability by eschewing rigid public commitments (Rasna et al., 2024). Overall, the strategic employment of illocutionary acts illustrates that Biden's speech goes beyond typical wartime rhetoric. Instead of solely referring to the Israel-Hamas conflict, the speech serves as a utilitarian and calculated discourse to strengthen alliances, uphold domestic and international credibility, and shape the framing of international conflict.

Illocutionary act functional distribution in Biden's speech demonstrates a strategic rhetoric balancing fact-assertion and appeal on an affective level through the employment of assertive for the most part to declare positions and assert facts and present an aura of rational leadership on the basis of moral certainty. Strategically introduced expressive acts serve to reinforce this aura to the extent that Biden becomes in a position to emotionally appeal to the audience without losing diplomatic posture. Both fact-assertion and controlled appeal constitute a balanced use of language as a tool of crisis communication wherein the speaker must reassure allies, contain national hope, and preserve international credibility concurrently. Unlike earlier warfare leaders who enticed the masses through overt pleas for participation, Biden employs a rhetoric inviting subjects to recognize in a spirit of communality as opposed to mobilization through aggression.

Additionally, the speech's exact blend of commissive and directives fortifies a pragmatic diplomacy. Commitments are articulated in pledge and vow, but also intend to preserve maneuver space for interpretative freedom in future policy action. Directive acts are there but are framed not as coercive orders but as moral duties informed by broad humanitarian ideals. Such rhetorical deployment is consistent with Biden's strategic maneuver to still have international cooperation and national consensus without ratcheting up narratives of war. In these pragmatic usages of illocutionary acts, the address by Biden consequently exemplifies a model of war-time diplomacy that unites credibility, sympathetic understanding, and strategic ambiguity in a unified act of speech.

3.3. The Use of Direct and Indirect Speech Acts

The analysis reveals that Biden's speech predominantly relied on direct speech acts, emphasizing clarity, authority, and an unambiguous stance regarding the Israel-Hamas conflict. The frequent use of direct speech, with fourteen instances noted, demonstrates Biden's deliberate strategy to present his message in a straightforward and unequivocal manner, aligning with the rhetorical expectations of political leadership during international crises (Zidni et al., 2024). Political clarity serves a critical function in crisis communication, limiting misinterpretation and ensuring that both domestic and international audiences clearly understand the administration's commitments (Sutkutė, 2024). Prior research confirms that direct and explicit messaging enhances comprehension, particularly in conflict-related discourse where ambiguity may generate multiple and potentially destabilizing interpretations (Angwaomaodoko, 2024). Thus, Biden's emphasis on direct speech not only reinforces his credibility but also serves as a strategic shield against diplomatic misrepresentation (Jangra, 2024).

Table 3. The Use of Speech Acts

Way of Speech Acts	Frequency
Direct speech	14
Indirect speech	0
Literal speech	0
Non-literal speech	0
Direct literal speech	10
Indirect literal speech	1
Direct non-literal speech	1
Indirect non-literal speech	0

An example of direct speech is: "*We stand with Israel.*" This explicit statement leaves no ambiguity regarding the United States' position. Its forceful commitment excludes any simultaneous acknowledgment of Palestinian concerns, thereby solidifying a firm political alignment while avoiding diplomatic vagueness that could weaken strategic positioning.

Moreover, the dominance of direct literal speech, with ten instances recorded, further reflects Biden's prioritization of clear and authoritative communication. Direct literal speech conveys meaning exactly as intended, minimizing opportunities for varied interpretation. A notable example is: "*Hamas unleashed pure, unadulterated evil in the world.*" This sentence unequivocally frames Hamas in moral terms, constructing a stark ideological binary that simplifies the conflict into clear categories of good versus evil, thereby fostering public support through emotionally resonant but rhetorically decisive language.

Although indirect literal speech and direct non-literal speech each appeared only once, their presence is noteworthy. For instance, Biden's statement "*Israel and Palestinians equally deserve to live in safety, dignity, and peace*" constitutes an example of direct non-literal speech. While appearing balanced, such a construction conceals political asymmetry between the parties. By stating an idealized symmetry, what was essentially a mitigative device uses humanitarian credentials while upholding a policy orientation that revolves around favoring Israel in most respects. Such balancing rhetoric enables Biden to make humanitarian appeals without making fundamental changes in U.S. foreign policy commitments.

The lack of indirect speech acts, literal or not, holds important significance. In political discourse, indirect speech acts tend to provide commitments implicitly and enable the speaker to preserve flexibility and accommodate future events. Biden's avoidance of indirectness signals a strategic attempt to present decisiveness and moral leadership when geopolitics called for clear leadership. While the approach reinforces credibility among important stakeholders, it risks diminishing diplomatic maneuvering room for fewer prospects of strategic ambiguity that could help to ease conflict through extra governmental channels.

The use of direct speech acts, supplemented by judicious but selective deployment of the non-literal elements, reflects Biden's strategic effort to reconcile forcefulness and diplomatic finesse. Blunt assertions project strength and decisiveness (Nurkhamidah et al., 2021; Abdulla, 2024), which are crucial to consolidate domestic

support and reassure foreign allies. However, the occasional deployment of the non-literal turns bespeaks a responsiveness to the need to appease diverse audience readings and to constantly preserve the illusion of humanitarian concern without trading off strategic interest (Ayuningtyas, 2021; Romadlani, 2024). Such a communicative tactic places Biden's speech not as a plain wartime rhetoric but as a multi-coded diplomatic performance that maneuvers strategically political alliance, public sentiment, and international expectations tactfully (Amanda and Handayani, 2024; Mahfoud and Khaldaoui, 2023; Siregar, 2021; Ariani and Anindita, 2024).

Analyzing Biden's use of direct speech acts, we find that his rhetorical approach is based on a conscious affirmation of clarity and ethical authority. Contrary to conventional crisis speeches, where indirectness serves to secure diplomatic maneuver space, Biden's speech prefers direct talk to secure credibility and determination. Such a style aligns to an extent with an awareness that during crises in geopolitics, there are clear expectations from actors to be clear-cut without wavering in how we characterize a situation. Through an emphasis on direct, literal speech, Biden presents America as a serious but resolute player, reinforcing domestic faith as well as foreign cooperation accordingly. The relative lack of indirect speech acts further emphasizes a conscious reduction of interpretive slippage, indicating that Biden puts more value in bolstering commitments than in keeping options open, i.e., maintaining plausible deniability.

Biden's rhetoric demonstrates a calculated interplay between assertive direct statements and deliberately used non-literal language, thus imbuing his speech with richly textured diplomatic undertones appreciated by international communities (Jesudas & Mohammed, 2024). Such calculated deployment serves to project humanitarian pleas without clouding his firm political position, a stance that sets his style apart from more ambiguous leaders who seek to mobilize vagueness as a negotiating ace card (Mustafa, 2023). Through a union of explicit assertions in conjunction with metaphorical framing, Biden develops a model of communication that not only enhances U.S. power but also fortifies an ethically inspired message, appealing to various geopolitical environments without weakening his message's clarity of expression. His rhetorical decisions thus present a model of painstaking communication during wartime in that the judicious employment of non-literal language amplifies both the emotional as well as strategic aspects of his political rhetoric (Amaireh, 2023).

3.4. Felicity Conditions in Joe Biden's Speech

The analysis of felicity conditions in Joe Biden's speech underscored a deliberate attempt to align his rhetorical strategies with sincerity and commitment, as evidenced by the prominence of sincerity conditions frequently fulfilled in his discourse. This reflected Biden's effort to present himself as an empathetic and morally engaged leader, an important dimension of political communication where emotional resonance significantly shapes audience perceptions (Renstrom & Ottati, 2020). In identifying these felicity conditions, the study followed Austin's and Searle's conceptual framework, examining each illocutionary act in terms of its propositional content, preparatory circumstances, sincerity condition, and essential condition. These analytical criteria align with prior scholarship showing that propositional content must correspond to the evaluative or truth-conditional expectations of the speech act (Hamza & Nordin, 2024), while preparatory conditions depend on shared social and contextual conventions that enable an act to be successfully performed (Oishi, 2021).

Additionally, the sincerity condition requires that the speaker genuinely hold the psychological state expressed, a requirement central to Searle's account of illocutionary force (Green, 2007).

Drawing on these theoretical principles, the study operationalized the four criteria to assess whether Biden's utterances met or violated the contextual and psychological prerequisites underlying their intended illocutionary force. The consistent fulfillment of sincerity conditions suggested that his speech was crafted to evoke an emotional connection with the audience, reinforcing the impression that his administration's stance on the Israel–Hamas conflict was driven by genuine moral concern rather than political calculation. Such empathetic communication has been shown to influence candidate evaluations by enhancing perceptions of trustworthiness and leadership authenticity. Moreover, the strategic use of expressive speech acts in political contexts illustrates how leaders convey intentions and values through carefully constructed rhetoric (Hadiati et al., 2023). Biden's rhetorical choices therefore demonstrated the importance of aligning speech acts with the emotional and ethical dimensions of political leadership, thereby strengthening the credibility and relatability of his message.

Table 4. Felicity Conditions in Joe Biden's Speech

Felicity Conditions	Frequency
Propositional context	1
Preparatory conditions	1
Sincerity conditions	11
Essential conditions	5

A key example of sincerity conditions is found in Biden's statement: "*I am heartbroken by the tragic loss of Palestinian life.*" This utterance functions as an expressive act intended to convey empathy. By framing his emotional response in personal terms, Biden aims to establish credibility as a leader who acknowledges the human cost of war. However, a critical reading reveals that while this statement expresses sympathy, it simultaneously reinforces a strategic narrative. The phrase "*tragic loss*" implies an external, almost inevitable consequence of war rather than a direct result of specific policies or military actions. Additionally, his assertion that the hospital explosion in Gaza "*was not done by the Israelis*" subtly shifts responsibility while maintaining an empathetic tone. This illustrates how sincerity conditions, while conveying emotion, can also function as political framing tools.

Essential conditions, which appeared five times, indicate that Biden's speech contained statements that align with his intended commitments. These utterances serve to reinforce credibility by explicitly tying words to actions. For example, Biden states: "*I am asking Congress to make sure we can continue to send Ukraine the weapons they need.*" This statement exemplifies an essential condition by signaling a concrete policy action. Unlike expressive sincerity conditions, essential conditions strengthen the performative nature of speech, ensuring that Biden's words are interpreted as direct commitments. This strategy is particularly significant in political discourse, where leaders must project both decisiveness and follow-through. However, the reliance on "*asking Congress*" rather than "*ensuring*" or "*providing*" introduces a degree of conditionality, leaving room for political maneuvering if congressional approval is not secured.

Preparatory conditions and propositional context conditions, each occurring once, reveal how Biden carefully framed his speech to provide necessary background before making commitments. A clear example of a preparatory condition is: "*More than 1,300 people were killed in Israel.*" This statement establishes a factual foundation that justifies subsequent policy proposals and expressions of solidarity. By foregrounding casualty numbers, Biden creates a sense of urgency, positioning U.S. support for Israel as a necessary response rather than a discretionary political move. However, the absence of similar preparatory statements for Palestinian casualties reflects an asymmetrical framing that privileges certain perspectives over others.

The limited presence of propositional context conditions, appearing only once, suggests that Biden's speech was not heavily reliant on pre-established contextual claims. Instead, the speech functioned as an assertion of policy positions rather than a detailed exposition of the conflict's historical background. This choice aligns with the broader strategy of direct speech acts, reinforcing Biden's preference for clarity and decisive messaging over nuanced contextual analysis.

The findings illustrate that Biden's speech was structured to assert factual information, express emotions, and reinforce commitments, primarily through direct and sincere speech acts. His use of assertive and commissive acts suggests an intention to strengthen public trust and policy legitimacy while strategically balancing expressions of empathy and political resolve, as evidenced in the analysis of his victory speech, which highlights the use of various speech acts to convey sincerity and emotional engagement (Purba et al., 2023). Prioritizing sincerity and essential conditions, Biden constructs a discourse that projects both emotional engagement and actionable policy stances, a strategy that aligns with previous studies on political discourse, where emotional appeals have been shown to enhance credibility and influence audience perceptions (Bhusal, 2024; Pilyarchuk, 2023). However, a closer examination reveals that while sincerity conditions create an impression of authenticity, they can also function as rhetorical devices that subtly shape audience perceptions, particularly when political decisions are framed within an emotional and moral narrative, as discussed in studies on political communication strategies (Yusanti et al., 2022). This complexity in linguistic strategies and political objectives within high-stakes international discourse demonstrates how the manipulation of language serves to navigate public sentiment and reinforce political legitimacy (Khalaf & Hiyali, 2023).

The projection of felicity conditions in Biden's speech also exemplifies a strategic confluence of political maneuvering and affective authenticity. The use of sincerity conditions betrays an attempt to present an empathetic leadership persona inasmuch as the use of personalized forms of sorrow serves to establish a sense of trust without explicitly revising policy stances. The emphasis on appeal to the emotions enables Biden to re-legitimate the political stance while nullifying possible critique for American involvement in the conflict. With the appeal to sensed sincerity, Biden manages to blend political pragmatism with affective engagement in order to establish a mode of address appealing both to humanitarian insight and strategic concern.

Moreover, the strategic use of essential conditions also serves to support Biden's effort to frame policy actions as obligatory moral imperatives rather than politicized voluntary choices. By relying on judiciously constructed commitments stated in the form of appeals to Congress rather than unilaterally made decisions, Biden has room

to maneuver diplomatically while still showing strong commitment to allies. Such a rhetorical form mitigates risks of overcommitment in international contexts characterized by uncertainty. Such restrictive use of preparation as well as propositional conditions also marks the Biden administration's tendency to demonstrate instant credibility rather than involved historical reasoning. The Biden administration's felicity condition moves, thus, marks a delicate balance between authenticity, strategic ambiguity as well as policy legitimacy when deploying crisis communication.

Biden's rhetoric uses strategically chosen essential conditions to present policy actions as moral obligations, as opposed to political decisions, crafting perceptions of compliance in a deliberate deployment of rhetorical devices (Fadhli and Rosita, 2023). By framing commitments as pleas to Congress, as opposed to executive decisions, he preserves diplomatic room for maneuver while, at the same time, sending a message of firm ally commitment, reducing inherent risks of over-promising in fluid international environments and in keeping with evidence on dealing with rhetorical ambiguity in multi-level political rhetoric. Additionally, the moderation in preparatory conditions, as well as propositional conditions, by the administration emphasizes a clear set of priorities in conveying instant credibility, a central component of public diplomacy that favors immediate and sincere appeals (Mor, 2011).

4.   Discussion

Based on the findings of this study, it was found that Joe Biden's speech on conflict between Israel and Hamas consisted mostly of strong illocutionary acts, which were observed to emerge fifteen times. This confirmed Searle's assertion on the role of assertives because Joe Biden mainly relied on assertions to establish the meaning framework for conflict instead of persuading his audience. Expressive illocutionary acts occurred eight times, representing Biden's efforts to convey sympathy and emotional positioning, while commissive acts appeared seven times, signaling commitments related to humanitarian and political support. Directive acts appeared four times and were limited to urging legislative or political action, whereas declarative acts appeared only once, indicating that the speech did not primarily aim to formally alter institutional states of affairs. These patterns showed that Biden's speech prioritized representational and interpersonal functions over transformative or institutional ones, a tendency consistent with crisis leadership communication where the clarification of stance often precedes direct action.

The predominance of assertive acts illustrated Joe Biden's efforts to establish his credibility while maintaining narrative structure, especially because he began his statement by delivering factual information such as *"More than one thousand three hundred people were killed in Israel, including at least thirty-two American citizens,"* which helped establish information credibility through verification or challengeability, a key mechanism identified by Strukowska (2024) for building audience trust; pragmatically, this use of assertives fulfilled its illocutionary purpose by reducing vagueness and creating a stable factual base for his subsequent commissive and directive acts, exemplifying Searle's observation that *"often assertives constitute the basis for acts of committing or directing others to do things."* Expressive acts such as *"I am heartbroken by the tragic loss of Palestinian life"* further supported the relational dimension of Biden's pragmatic strategy by demonstrating emotional concern and

fostering moral identification with his audience, echoing Radulović' and Mišić Ilic's (2015) claim that expressive acts enhance emotional alignment between political leaders and listeners, as suggested in their formulation *"in conveying feelings or emotions directly or indirectly related to his own feelings or emotions."* Likewise, commissive acts such as *"We must make sure that they have what they need to protect their people today and always"* illustrated Biden's efforts to project reliability and anticipated action, reinforcing the interpersonal trust necessary for effective political communication because such commitments supported his perceived trustworthiness and strengthened the pragmatic force of his speech acts by linking future-oriented promises with audience expectations.

When compared with previous studies on political speech acts, Biden's speech displayed both continuities and divergences. Ayeomoni and Akinkuolere (2012) argued that directives are central to mobilizing actual public participation, but Joe Biden's speech acts contain fewer directives than expected, thus pointing to his rhetorical strategy focusing much more on informational support rather than directives or prescriptive functions for its intended action to benefit from illocutionary forces prioritizing assertions or expression rather than directives for immediate action as demanded by its context of being based on addressing a complex international crisis where it is pragmatically required to take care while using its directing power. Al-Shboul et al. (2024) noted that motivational speech acts were prominent in Biden's campaign rhetoric, but the findings of the present study showed that motivational force in this wartime speech was embedded within assertive and expressive acts rather than within directives. The limited presence of declaratives contrasted with Atolagbe's (2008) analysis of Nigerian political speeches, where declaratives were more frequent due to highly institutionalized contexts. In regard to Biden's speech act itself, since it was one simple declarative statement, it was written more for its interpretation than for its institutional performance function and thus shows how illocutionary force is pragmatically mediated rather than simply intention-driven.

The theoretical implications of these findings contribute to pragmatic approaches to political discourse. This study supports Wijana's (2021) argument that illocutionary categories remain applicable across diverse political contexts, as Biden's speech reflected the full range of Searle's taxonomy even though some categories appeared infrequently. The integration of felicity condition analysis, particularly concerning sincerity and essential conditions, demonstrated how the speech fulfilled the pragmatic requirements for effective illocutionary force, supporting Hadiati et al.'s (2023) view that these conditions enhance interpretive credibility in crisis communication. Methodologically, the findings showed that speech act analysis can illuminate patterns of commitment, emotion, and representation in high-stakes political discourse without resorting to broad political interpretations beyond linguistic evidence. Practically, the results offered insights for political communication practitioners regarding how assertive, expressive, and commissive acts may be strategically combined to shape public understanding while maintaining rhetorical balance, as discussed by Lanas (2021) in relation to illocutionary performance in public communication.

Future research should extend the analysis by examining audience reception and perlocutionary effects, as suggested by Kryvoruchko et al. (2019), to understand how different illocutionary forces influence public interpretations across various media

environments. Since this study analyzed only one speech, its conclusions must be interpreted within the limits of a single-case pragmatic analysis rather than evidence of general patterns in wartime diplomacy, although the case illustrates how pragmatic strategies operate in high-profile international communication. Further comparative studies across multiple speeches or leaders would help determine whether the dominance of assertives and expre ssives is typical of crisis contexts or uniquely characteristic of Biden's rhetorical style. Overall, the findings show that Biden combined assertive, expressive, and commissive acts to inform, reassure, and position his administration's stance, illustrating a pragmatic emphasis on credibility-building and emotional alignment rather than direct mobilization. This contributes to a clearer understanding of how political leaders employ illocutionary forces to navigate public communication during international crises while remaining anchored in identifiable pragmatic structures.

5.   Conclusion

The findings of this study showed that assertive illocutionary acts predominated Joe Biden's address on the Israel–Hamas conflict, indicating that his rhetorical strategy relied more on presenting information and clarifying stance than on issuing direct calls for action. Expressive acts also played a significant role by allowing the speaker to construct an emotionally resonant tone while maintaining diplomatic balance. Rather than simply repeating descriptive observations, these results highlight that Biden's speech demonstrated how assertive and expressive acts can jointly function as tools for managing public interpretation during crisis communication, offering a nuanced illustration of how illocutionary force shapes audience expectations under high-stakes conditions. This study therefore contributes to pragmatic theory by showing how Searle's taxonomy can be operationalized to analyze speeches situated within international conflict, particularly by identifying how assertives can stabilize discourse while expressives modulate relational meaning. Practically, the findings suggest that political communicators may benefit from combining informational clarity with controlled emotional expression when addressing sensitive geopolitical issues, since such a pattern can project credibility while avoiding escalation-oriented rhetoric.

Even so, this work is limited because it examined only a single speech, which restricts the generalizability of its conclusions across broader contexts. A more systematic comparative design involving multiple speeches, leaders, or conflict situations would allow future research to determine whether the patterns identified here represent individual rhetorical preference or a wider pragmatic trend in crisis diplomacy. Additionally, audience-centered methods such as surveys or focus groups would enable a clearer understanding of perlocutionary effects, extending beyond the illocutionary analysis performed in this study. Such expansions would strengthen the explanatory power of speech act analysis in political communication by connecting illocutionary structure with measurable public responses.

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