

# A Pragmatic Study of Conflictives in Biden’s Political Speeches

Saad Badi Kadhim <sup>1</sup>

*Department of Tourism Studies, College of Tourism Sciences, Mustansiriyah University, Baghdad, Iraq*

## Abstract

This paper intends to shed light on how the American President, Biden, can use conflictive speech acts in his arguments concerning the war between Ukraine and Russia to condemn and underestimate Putin’s character and his allegedly malign actions against Ukraine. This is the effective strategy that draws on some mechanisms with the purpose of getting the audience worldwide dissatisfied with the latter’s wrongdoings, ignorance, offensiveness and disrespect for human rights. Throughout this qualitative study which is practically substantiated via illustrative figures alongside plethora of conflictive speech acts in randomly chosen samples from Biden’s speech referred to above.

This paper, in fact, aims at: (1) detecting the pragmatic structure of conflictive speech acts, (2) identifying the most common conflictive speech acts employed in political speech exclusively American ones; and how to differentiate between them, (3) showing the frequency of the acts in question that abounds in American political discourses, and (4) developing a new eclectic model for the pragmatic structure of a conflictive speech act with the aid of proposals and arguments raised by celebrated linguists and philosophers involved in their influential theories. After a pragmatic analysis of conflictive speech acts (SAs), the researcher espouses an eclectic model after reviewing the theories on pragmatics with the observations made by the researcher himself in order to point out the speech acts in question. An array of the most common speech acts of conflictives is also offered after a critical reading and considerable survey.

## Keywords

Conflictives, pragmatic, threatening, reprimanding, political

---

**Corresponding author(s):** Saad Badi Kadhim

**Contact address:** [saad.b.k.j@uomustansiriyah.edu.iq](mailto:saad.b.k.j@uomustansiriyah.edu.iq)

## Introduction

The current study intends to investigate the conflictive speech acts employed by Biden as an instrument of persuasion to belittle the role and attitudes of Russia as an influential player in the foreign policy and a significantly economic power.

Heavily relying on conflictives, the American president tries to isolate Russian from the world describing it as a terrorist state looking forward to invading not only Ukraine, but all the world states.

### Conflictives

Associated- with impositives, conflictives are a set of speech acts (SAs, henceforth) that create tension between interlocutors because the speaker's expression of social relationship is so rude that his utterance would engender clash and escalation on the part of the addressee. Pragmatically speaking, the interlocutor's communicative intentions would wrestle with social needs and statuses causing imbalance in the social equilibrium (Gino, 2001).

Involving commissives, expressives and directives, conflictives are meant to undermine the addressee's actions and personality and make them not desirable by the audience. Pragmatically speaking, the felicity conditions of a conflictive speech act can be summarized as follows:

The speaker should propose an action that cause harm to the addressee, irrespective of the truth value of the proposition.

- The proposed action should be aggressive and undesirable for the addressee.

- The recommended action provides, if any, very restrictive options of freedom on the behalf of the addressee.

- The addressee wants the speaker not to utter the act.

- The speaker is more powerful than the addressee (Levinson, 1983)

### A Model of Analysis

Considered as an eclectic model due to the diversity of the pragmatic theories aforementioned, this model pertains to the pragmatic structure and the strategies employed in the stages of conflictive SA formation. In fact, the model at issue offers three constituent stages, alongside their micro components, through which a conflictive SA passes so as to reach its final make-up. These are issuance stage (via reference to the nature of conflictive SAs), inappropriateness and relevance stage, and the interpretation and evaluative stage that would be discussed soon (Mirza, 2011).

#### 2.1 Issuance stage

This stage consists of two main components: pragma-rhetorical SAs and impoliteness strategy, which is badly needed in this stage to serve as the base on which the subsequent stages are built (ibid.).

##### 2.1.1 Pragma-rhetorical SAs

According to (Leech, 1983), conflictive SAs are those acts whose issuance brings about a clash between their illocutionary goal and the social goal. Involving threats, accusations, cursing and reprimanding as the typical acts standing for this group, conflictives are mainly associated with impositive SAs (or impositives) which severely restrict or conceal the addressee's freedom and optionality and, hence, count as impolite. As a case in point, the threat I'll kill your child if you do not give me your money, for instance, when issued by an armed bandit to a passer-by, compels the addressee to carry out the former's wish; otherwise, the latter may lose his life if he hesitates (Aitchison, 1999).

However, the assumption that all impositives are impolite turns out to be misleading because there are some impositive utterances that are quite polite because they guarantee some sort of advantage or benefit to the addressee as when someone says You must have another sandwich as a generous offer. Nevertheless, the vast majority of impositives render the propositional content of an utterance costly to the hearer. That is to say, the addressee is exercising some sort of cost whether this cost is material, psychological or mental (ibid).

[2]

### 2.1.2 Impoliteness

Characterized by aggressive overtones and absence of mitigation which is a very crucial element in communication, impoliteness is defined as a negative attitude adopted by the speaker towards the addressee's conduct in a certain context (Culpeper, 2011). Consequently, impoliteness is correlated to face-threatening speech acts which ultimately end up with an offensive outcome on the behalf of the addressee. Worded differently, conflictive SAs do not utilize politeness strategies that (Leech, 1983) argues keep communication channels open, but go on attacking the hearer's face and his social image since the speaker keeps on launching severe attacks against the addressee's personality and actions. Simultaneously, the receiver interprets the attacker's speech as something intentionally communicated to undermine the addressee's deeds and character. Alternatively referred to as rudeness, impoliteness produces no co-operative communicative conduct that yields emotional atmosphere of tension between the interlocutors.

Politeness, (Brown & Levinson, 1987) argue, is a universal property inherent in face management to avoid clash between participants to maintain face (the social image of the individuals involving in a conversational event). To do so, there are some politeness strategies to lessen or suppress friction arising from social interaction. They are listed as follows.

- Negative politeness. It is a strategy emphasizing the addressee's freedom of imposition or/and action. It is characterized by apologetic language and respect titles. Conflictives, due to its harsh nature, forces the addressee to do what the speaker proposed. Mr. John, for example when attacked by a conflictive SA, is, among other offences assigned to him, detached from his title as a sign of impolite remark (Leech, 1983).

- Positive politeness. This strategy recommends that individuals opt for mixing with the social group he feels at ease with to provide him his social identity. By contrast, speakers, once issued a conflictive SA, intend to disassociate the addressee from this social membership (ibid.).

- Off-record politeness. Tilted towards hints and vagueness, this strategy involves the indirect SAs that ensure avoidance of face-threatening acts of interactants such as requests. On the contrary, conflictive SAs are mostly direct causing interpersonal tension because it arises from communicatively wicked intentions for damaging the addressee. Consequently, it is hot here, when uttered in a scolding day, is an indirect request issued to someone sitting near the cooler to politely invite him to switch it on (Brown & Levinson, 1987)

Of these three strategies, the first one fits into conflictive SAs where the speaker deliberately violates the postulates

The second phase of development of a conflictive SA is inappropriateness and relevance stage which draws upon co-operative principle and relevance theory that will be discussed here in detail.

#### 2.2.1 Inappropriateness

Inappropriateness in communication, maintain (Brown & Levinson, 1987), refers to communicative messages that are out of favour for the receiver. In this regard, conflictives can convey messages that the receiver cannot easily decode.

This is because there is violation in either the co-operative principle or the tact maxim that represents the skeleton of politeness (Levinson, 1983). These two components, when integrated, constitute the framework

[3]

of a conflictive which  
can be completed later on by relevance.

· Co-operative Principle

An essential and indispensable component in communication is co-operative principle which serves to open channels of communication. (Aitchison, 1999) has proposed the co-operative principle which draws upon four maxims that should be observed by participants in a communicative event, arguing that they are assumptions rather than rules because violating any of them would not lead to a breakdown in communication. On the contrary, flouting a maxim would bring about additional meaning. These maxims can be summarized as follows:

1 Quantity maxim. It demands that the speaker provide the right amount of information, no more and no less.

2 Quality maxim. It requires the speaker to say what is true with the introduction of reasons and pieces of evidence.

3 Relevance maxim, which recommends that the speaker's arguments should be relevant to the topic under discussion, and

4 Manner maxim which focuses on the organization of the speaker's message with respect to its order and clarity (ibid.).

Concerning conflictive SAs, it is the maxim of quality that is to be violated simply because the propositional content of any conflictive SA is not established but a candidate suggested by the speaker for the audience to be implanted by the latter. That is to say, the addressee can refrain from the recommended action (Leech, 1983). One example comes from the following threat that is issued by the boss of the company to an employee by saying:

*I'll sack you if you comes late again (ibid.).*

Here, the speaker is not bound to carry out what he has said since the threatened person complies with the speaker's conditional proposition and, therefore, the quality maxim, is flouted (ibid.).

· Tact Maxim

People, in general, look for membership of the society in which they are raised. As such, they try to maintain the good relationship with others. This occurs when one avoids saying something offensive or disturbing. That is to say, a person should be tactful and this is the hallmark of politeness (Leech, 1983). In fact, tact maxim depends on two mechanisms: cost-benefit and indirectness.

1 Cost-Benefit

Following (Hernández, 2001), cost-benefit variable is a part and parcel of tact maxim since it determines the amount of politeness attributed to the speaker and addressee. This factor, in fact, varies inversely relative to the speaker and

[4]

addressee. That is to say what is costly to the addressee is beneficial to the speaker and vice-versa. Concerning conflictives, a great deal of harm or loss is assigned to the addressee and the speaker, therefore, is discourteous because the latter tries to defame the former's reputation, making him undesirable and hateful. In other words, this fierce attack would be detrimental to the addressee due to the conflictive speech acts used.

## 2 Indirectness

Evaluated in terms of degrees of optionality, indirectness is the hallmark of tact and politeness and should be necessarily evaluated in this paradigm in order to judge the value of SAs. Direct SAs, argues (Leech, 1983), provides no optionality to the addressee and restrict his freedom of response. Accordingly, conflictives count as tactless speech acts as they allow the hearer no opportunity to deny the propositional content of the speaker's messages which are wicked -intentioned ones.

## · Relevance

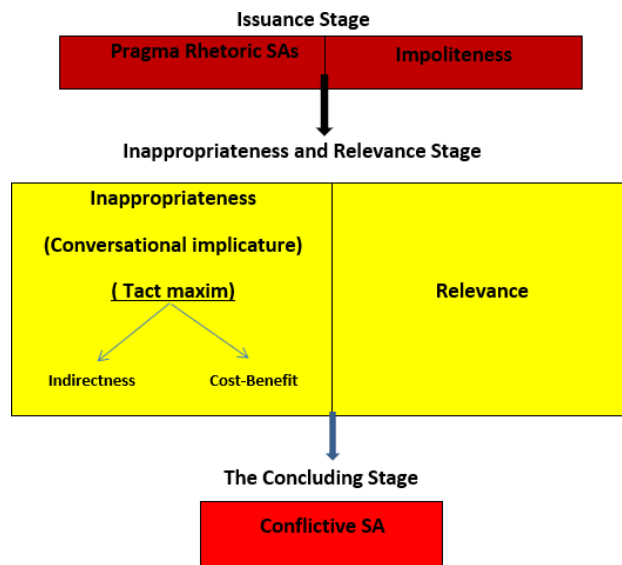
According to (Mey & Brown, 2009), a speech act cannot be communicated appropriately unless its form sparks so much relevance that it provokes the addressee's effort to process it with help of contextual factors. Here, the addressee is entitled to recover the speaker's message via inferences that are stemmed from the social environment in conjunction with the participants' cognitive abilities. Regarding conflictives, the addressee, because of the speaker's utterance, would recognize the coercive message involved in the SAs in question by virtue of the receiver's cognitive forces paired with the social norms and system (Blakemore, 2002). Stated differently, the utterances suggesting the conflictive SAs should be relevant enough to activate the addressee's effort to evaluate detrimental content that the speaker incorporates into his speech act to hurt the addressee and the context, including inferences. The event and accompanying tone will be of help in this concern for the receiver to choose the most suitable interpretation among others that might emerge then (ibid.).

### **2.3 The Concluding Stage**

Depending on the persuasive appeals as utilized by the speaker, this stage represents the outcome of a conflictive SA that the producer has been ultimately after by which he can convince the audience of the theses he presents in his argument (Halmari & Virtanen, 2005). The three persuasive devices that are used here are: pathos, ethos and logos. Pathos purses the audience's emotional predispositions and feelings to provoke an emotional reply in the receiver and makes him adopt an attitude towards a certain issue which fits in the public opinion. (Worthington, 2002). Regarding conflictives, the speaker tries to embody the person under attack as doing something terrible or criminal, which leads to hatred by

[5]

the audience towards the latter. The second channel of persuasive communication, ethos, inheres in the speaker's or writer's credibility, experience, trustfulness, worthiness, and conviction (ibid:34-6). In political speeches, arguments pertaining to conflictives, when made by presidents or prime ministers, are more effective for the audience. The last persuasive channel of logos consists in reasoning and the speakers, accordingly, has recourse to it because of its effectiveness and consistency in addition to the stamping evidence and logical theses that attract the audience's interest. Here, the speaker's arguments should be upheld by quotations, examples or statistics (Bloor & Bloor, 2013). As regards conflictives, the speaker refers to size and kind of losses and number of sacrifices which are allegedly attributed to the person under attack. (Leech, 1983) contends that there are four conflictive SA which are commonly



used in arguments and conversational interaction, viz. threatening, accusing, cursing and reprimands.

### 3.1 Threatening (Thr.)

Characterized by lack of politeness as a harsh act, threats, maintains (Leech, 1983), are listed lists within conflictives.

Following (Searle, 1969), threatening is a "pledge to do something to you not for you". Strongly upholding this view,

Hornby (1994: 916) states that threatening is a "statement of an intention to punish or hurt somebody if he doesn't do

as one wishes". In threats, the speaker expects that the addressee will exhibits some sort of reaction, which renders the

threatener tell the threatened person that the latter will have a cost (ibid.).

(Allan, 1986) points out that there is a symmetrical relationship between promises and threats in the sense that the

prosed action in both will be performed in the future. Nonetheless, threats are different in that the former should be

achieved since it is the speaker's commitment while the latter permits the speaker's withdrawal from what he has first

proposed. Accordingly, the threat utterance I am going to punish you, when issued by the father to one of his sons, is not

necessarily amenable to implementation. Put different, the son may get rid of punishment and set free due to the father's

retreatment. In accordance with (Hernández, 2001), the advantage of threatening is mainly devoted to the speaker's

[6]

interest, while the addressee is susceptible to one of two inevitable costs: undesired performance of the speaker's recommended proposition or severe punishment (ibid.).

### **3.2 Cursing (Curs.)**

(Hornby, 1986) argues that cursing is a "word, phrase or sentence" calling for punishment, injury or destruction of

something or somebody", stressing the rude nature of this SA. In support of this claim, (Austin, 1962) maintains that

cursing be accommodate within the framework of behabitives, e.g. in Damn it. This is so mainly because this act impels

the speaker to react other individuals' conduct in a publically expressed statement. In the same vein, (Searle, 1969) in-

corporates the act under scrutiny into expressives, an SA group which expresses the speaker's psychological attitudes

towards a state of affairs that the speech act includes.

Concerning the pragmatic structure of cursing, (Little, 1993) contends that there are three stages that construct the

identity of the act under scrutiny, namely introduction, operative and concluding stages. Introduction stage, which serves

as the issuance stage, touches upon the narrative events due to which the speaker voices his objection. The second phase,

operative phase, is associated with the pronunciation of the speech act in question against the offender. It is the speaker's

authority that determines the length of this period. The third stage of conclusion alludes to the closing stage where all

participants in the setting are expected to say "so be it".

### **3.3 Accusing (Acc.)**

Viewed as a statement by a person affirming that somebody else or institution has committed something wrong. The

person issuing the accusation is an accuser while the person against whom the accusation is directed is referred to as the

accused. It should be emphasized that accusation cannot be recognized apart from the context in which it occurs. That is

to say, accusing cannot be performed independently of the accuser, the accused and the participants involved in the

accusation process. Additionally, the accusation may be true or false (issued with no evidence) due to the speaker's

hatred for the addressee for belittling the latter's fame (Hughes et al., 2019).

Looked at from another angle, accusation is an SA analogous to warning in that both have a detrimental proposition

to be avoided by the addressee to be on the safe and get rid of a disastrous outcome. According to (Brown & Levinson,

1987), impositive speech acts, including accusation, cause face-threatening to the addressee because they violate his

negative politeness that recommends his freedom of imposition and expression should be observed. The accused, it

should be noted may not be aware that an accusation is imputed to him. On the other hand, the audience's evaluation

of the accused is affected by the size of accusation that the speaker directs against the former (Little, 1993).

Concerning the truth of accusing act, the accuser may issue an accusation with no proof as in US is accused of using

nuclear power against Japan. In this case, novelty is needed since the accusation is not influential if detached from the

[7]

context where the act is found. In the aforementioned example, the accusation is believable, to a great extent, owing to the disastrous consequences arising from this conflict in conjunction of other contextual factors that uphold this assumption (ibid.).

### **3.4 Reprimanding (Rep.)**

Reprimanding, argues (Hornby, 1986), is an official rebuke produced by someone in authority to someone else, whose institutional status is lower than that of the former, since the latter has just committed something illegal or wrong. Done in face-to-face interaction, reprimanding is evaluated as a face threatening SA the purpose of which is to quit the addressee's acting in a particular fashion; that is to say, the speaker offers an adverse evaluation about a certain action.

The felicity conditions of the act under discussion recommend that the speaker should be socially or institutionally more powerful than the addressee. In this paradigm, reference should be made to tone, as a contextual variable with regard to the speaker's attitude as (Roach, 2000) argues, which has bearing on shaping the identity of this act. Besides, the speaker should have the moral ground when making this act and this is demonstrated by the addressee's annoying reaction over the imputation proposed. In the same vein, the speaker is amenable to bitter criticism if his information is faulty or if he mistakenly reprimanded the addressee. Regarding the addressee, he should be satisfied with the speaker as the typical person with a strong charisma so as to yield a successful performance of the act at issue. By the same remark, the addressee must make an offence (Cook, 2003).

## **4 Textual Analysis**

For the curtailed space allotted to the current work, the researcher adopts only five texts from Biden's speech in Warsaw concerning the Russian-Ukrainian crisis in which he seizes the opportunity to attack against the Russian President. The SAs involved are enclosed between brackets within the original texts selected (ABC, 2022).

### **4.1 Text (1)**

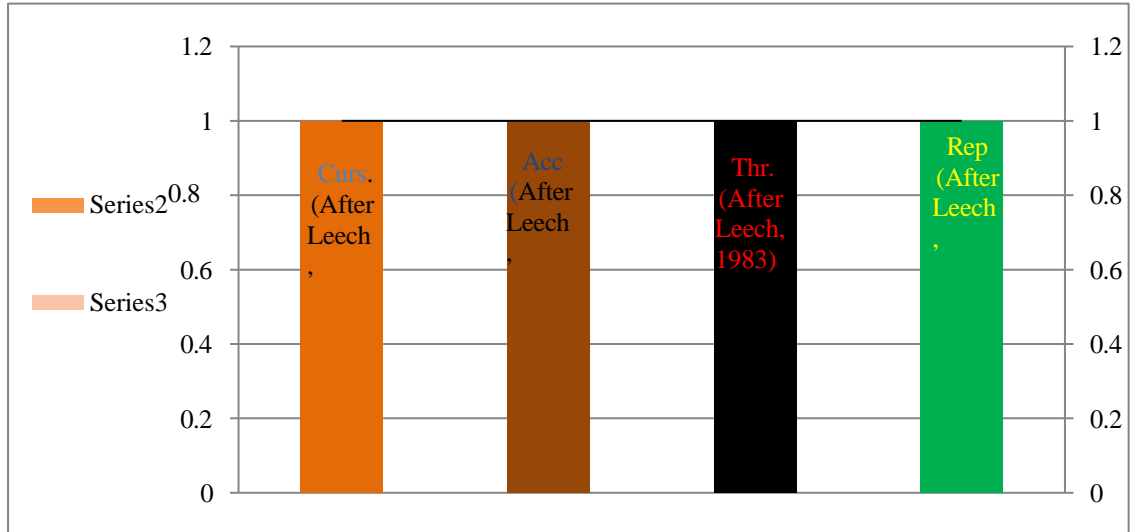
Biden says "Ten years later, the Soviet Union collapsed and Poland and Central and Eastern Europe would soon be free. Nothing about that battle for freedom was simple or easy. It was a long, painful slog (Curs.). Fought over not days and months but years and decades. But we emerged anew in the great battle for freedom. A battle between democracy and autocracy. Between liberty and repression. Between a rules-based order and one governed by brute force (Acc.). In this battle, we need to be clear-eyed. This battle will not be won in days or months either (Thr.). We need to steel ourselves of a long fight ahead" (Rep.) (ABC, 2022).

In accordance with (Little, 1993), Biden first issues cursing SA in this extract, condemning the dominance of the former Soviet Union which stifles the freedom of Polish and European people for ages, an implication that Russians are not a peace-loving people right from the beginning. This act is followed by accusing SA to hold Russia responsible for all



[8]

battles that took place in Europe, an accusation that precedes Biden’s indirect threat by which he undertakes to wage a long-term war that extends for years if Russia does not stop invading Ukraine. In this extract, the president, by using reprimand SA, suggests a quick and effective response against Russia to avoid a long and bloody struggle. The aforementioned SAs, as illustrated in Figure (2) below, are designed to intensify the audience’s dislike and hatred for the current Russian President (ibid).

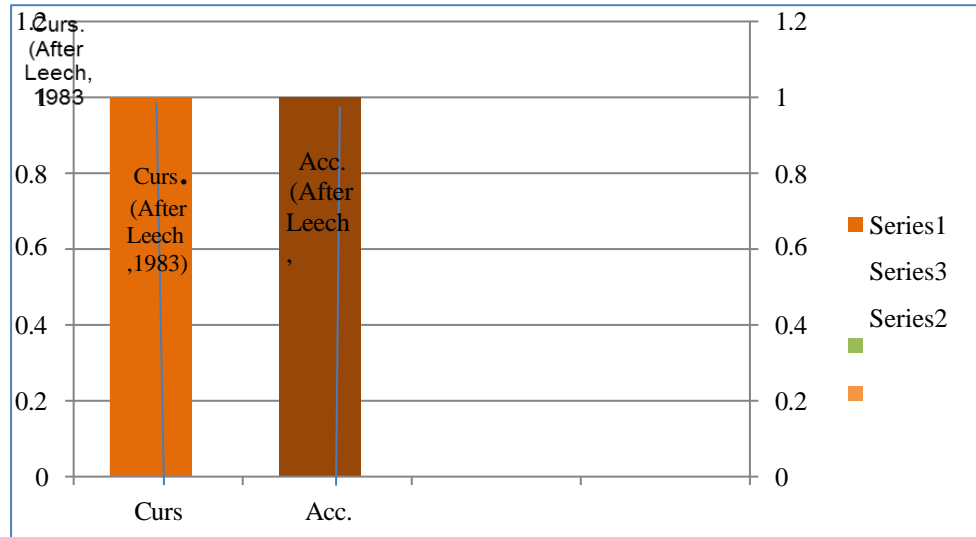


#### 4.2 Text (2)

In his speech, Biden claims “In my own country, a former president named Abraham Lincoln voiced the opposing spirit to save our union in the midst of the Civil War. He said let us have faith that right makes might (Curs.). Today, let us have that faith again. Let us resolve to put the strength of democracies into action to thwart the designs of autocracy. Let us remember that the test of this moment is the test of all time (Curs.). A criminal wants to portray NATO enlargement as an imperial project aimed at destabilizing Russia (Acc.). Nothing is further from the truth. NATO is a defensive alliance. It has never sought the demise of Russia. In the lead up to the current crisis, the United States and NATO worked for months to engage Russia to avert war. I met with him in person, talked to him many times on the phone” (Acc.) (ABC, 2022). Excerpt 2 begins with indirect cursing triggered by means of an imperative when the president asks the public to follow Abraham as their example with the implication that Russian politicians, unlike their American counterparts, are predisposed to hostility and enmity, as (Mey & Brown, 2009) remarks. Then, another cursing is formulated pertaining to autocracy that Russia, claims Biden, advocates to assault on other states. To intensify the plight in the audience’s mentality, Biden proceeds his harsh attack against Russia by performing two SAs of accusing, describing Putin as a criminal who evaluates NATO as occupation forces wanting to get rid of Russia, as (Levinson, 1983) suggests. In reply, Biden said

[9]

that NATO is a defensive system attacking no state at all and, hence, should be praised by all states, including Russia. As soon as Biden goes on blasting Putin, dissatisfaction and scorn are accumulated and get fiercer in the audience's mind towards Russia. As shown in Figure (3) below, this is the ground that Biden heavily relies on to formulate conflictives, as (Leech, 1983) argues.



**Fig. 3** Conflictives used in Text (2) (Leech, 1983)

### 4.3 Text (3)

Addressing the attendants, Biden declares “To date, the United States has sanctioned 140 Russian oligarchs and their family members, seizing their ill-begotten gains, their yachts, their luxury apartments, their mansions. We've sanctioned more than 400 Russian government officials, including key architects of this war (Thr.). These officials and oligarchs have

reaped enormous benefit from the corruption connected to the Kremlin. And now they have to share in the pain (Thr.).

The private sector has acted as well (Acc.). Over 400 private multinational companies have pulled out of doing business

in Russia. Left Russia completely). From oil companies to McDonald's (Thr.). As a result of these unprecedented sanctions,

the ruble almost is immediately reduced to rubble (2). The Russian economy -- that's true, by the way, it takes about 200

rubles to equal \$1” (Thr.) (ABC, 2022).

Extract (3) inaugurates with an indirect threat, concedes (Levinson, 1983), by the American president when he adverts

to huge number of the senior Russian officials, singling out oligarchs. He implies that the future sanctions are much more

severe than those nowadays if Russia does not withdraw from Ukraine and show no compliance with NATO's decisions.

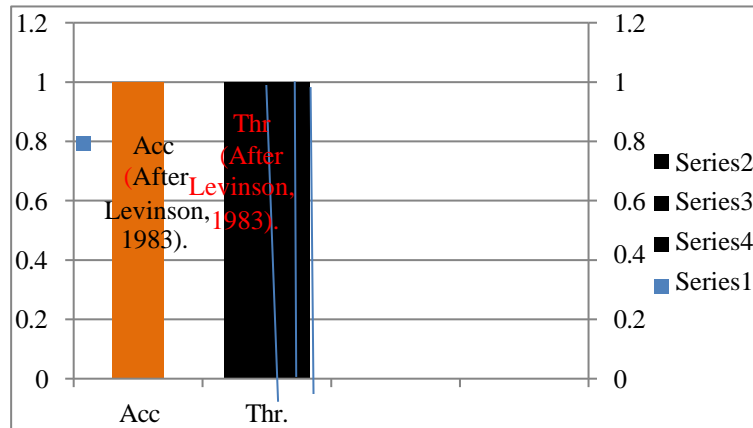
Embodying the dire consequences that would inflict rich Russian officials, Biden makes another threatening in which he

persists in paralyzing their financial potentials that they in no time have achieved (Hernández, 2001). Then accusing act

is indirectly produced concerning the corruption of Kremlin and the Russian oligarchs. At the end of this text, two threat-

[10]

ening acts emerge; the first, which is indirect, is couched via Biden’s statement that more companies had left Russia to imply that he would withdraw all the giant firms that Russia badly needs; the second, which is expressly made, is in connection with Russian currency which is deteriorated considerably due to the economic sanctions imposed by America on Russia. The intense conflictives, as portrayed by Figure (4) below get the accused psychologically and socially confused due to the burden of charges directed to him from the accuser and audience. The enormous number of conflictives may hinder the accused’s ability to make convincing counter-arguments (ibid.).



**Fig. 4** Conflictives used in Text (3) (Following Levinson, 1983:247-60)

#### 4.4 Text (4)

“There's simply no justification or provocation for Russia's choice of war” (Curs.), says Biden, adding that “It's an example, one of the oldest human impulses, using brute force and disinformation to satisfy a craving for absolute power and control (Acc.). It's nothing less than a direct challenge to the rule-based international order established since the end of World War II (Curs.). And it threatens to return to decades of war that ravaged Europe before the international rule-based order was put in place (Curs.). We cannot go back to that. We cannot. The gravity of the threat is why the response of the West has been so swift and so powerful and so unified, unprecedented and overwhelming (Thr.). Swift and punishing costs are the only things that are going to get Russia to change its course” (Thr.) (ABC, 2022).

In this excerpt, cursing SA emerges with regard to Russia’s option of fight which, Biden claims, cannot be justified.

Next, a direct accusation is conducted, following (Halmari & Virtanen, 2005), of Russia’s starting war against Ukraine,

Biden affirms that gone is the time of war and people everywhere are after democracy. This accusation is endorsed by

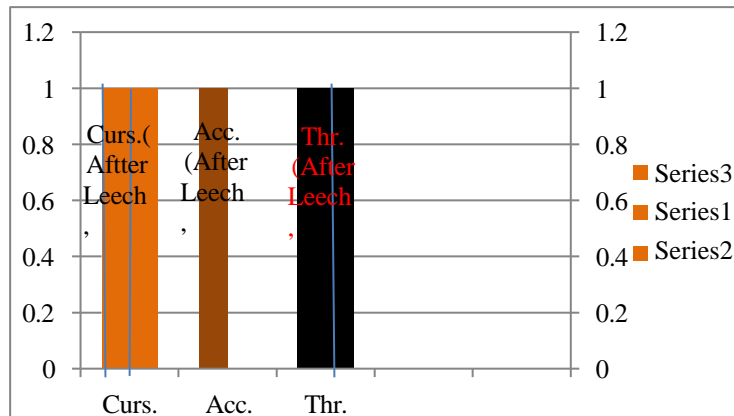
two cursing SAs which zero in on Russian’s violation of the international law because Russia, Biden remarks, is reiterating

the era of wars that ravaged Europe before. Intending to intimidate Russia’s officials and its military leaders, Biden tries

to limit Russia’s capabilities by issuing two consecutive threats with respect to the West’s swift and effective response in

[11]

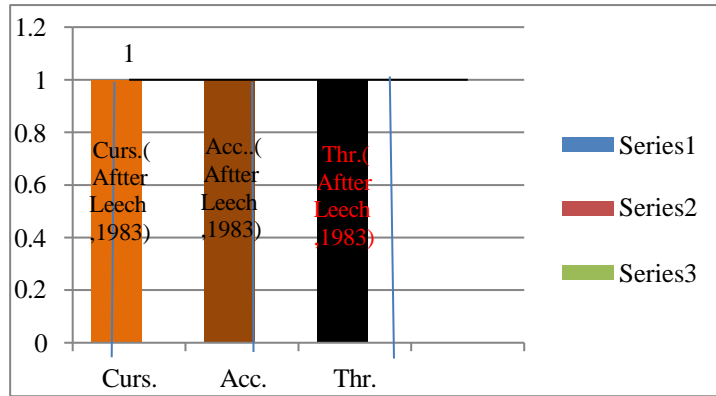
conjunction with the necessary forces needed to curb Russia from further aggression and bullying as depicted by Figure (5) below (ibid.)



**Fig. 5** Conflictives used in Text (4) (Leech, 1983)

#### 4.5 Text (5)

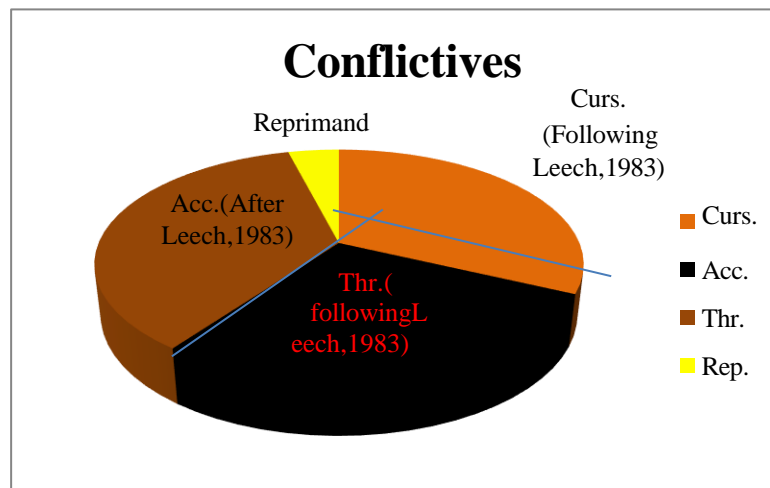
Commenting on Russian's alleged hostilities, Biden confirms that "Russia wanted less of a NATO presence on its border other members of NATO (Thr.). The democracies of the world are revitalized with purpose and unity found in months that we've once taken years to accomplish (Thr.). It's not only Russia's actions in Ukraine that are reminding us of democracy's blessing. It's our own country, his own country, the Kremlin, it's jailing protesters (Curs.). Two hundred thousand people who have allegedly already left. There's a brain drain leaving Russia. (Curs.). Shutting down independent news (Acc.). State media is all propaganda. Blocking the image of civilian targets, mass graves, starvation tactics of the Russian forces in Ukraine" (Acc) (ABC, 2022). Talking about NATO presence, this excerpt, (Levinson, 1983) suggests, starts with threatening SA by which the U.S. president expresses his defiance for Russia concerning the huge increase of NATO number in Ukraine that Russia first voices objection to. This threat is demonstrated by the American president's insistence that America is able to place NATO forces near Russian lands. That is to say, the threat is quite clear, though indirect, since the threatened party (Russia), according to (Hernández, 2001) encounters one of two inevitable losses: immediate withdrawal or huge and destructive war. To further underrate the Russian policy which argues against democracy as Biden has alleged, the American president makes two SAs of cursing by highlighting the significance of democracy in America and its allies, a sign that Russia's committal of this offence is not rationalized as (Leech, 1983) remarks. This offence, Biden points out, is illustrated by the emigration of brain drains. By the same token, Biden bitterly criticizes the absence of independence of news channels in Russia, arguing against starvation policies and the targeted civilians in Ukraine as embodied by Figure (6) below.



**Fig. 6** Conflictives used in Text (5) (Leech, 1983).

It should be emphasized that the conflictive SAs issued by Biden vary in number and intensity of offences committed

as Biden claims. Such asymmetry is made evident in Figure (7).



**Fig. 7** Conflictives used in Text (5) (Leech, 1983).

## 5 Conclusion

- Conflictive SAs serve as arms the speaker employs against the addressee to convince the audience with the offences and sins the latter commits.
  - Biden opts to threatening and cursing SAs in preference to accusing and reprimanding.
  - Reprimanding SAs are rarely used in political addresses because of their somewhat reformatory nature.
- Conflictive SAs are mostly issued indirectly so that the audience is satisfied that the speaker does not speak out of hatred.
- Conflictive SAs demand more justification than others in order to challenge the hearer's ideas and assumptions and get them altered.

**Funding:** No funding was received to assist with the preparation of this manuscript.

**Data Availability:** Most datasets generated and analyzed in this study are in this submitted manuscript. The other datasets are available on reasonable request from the corresponding author with the attached information.

### Declarations

### Conflict of interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

ABC, N. (2022). *Full transcript of President Biden's speech in Warsaw on Russia's invasion of Ukraine*. Retrieved March

, 2022 from <https://abcnews.go.com/Politics/full-transcript-president-bidens-speech-warsaw-russias-invasion/story?id=83690301>

Aitchison, J. (1999). *Teach yourself linguistics*. McGraw-Hill, Inc.

Allan, K. (1986). *Linguistic Meaning*. Routledge.

Austin, J. L. (1962). *How to do things with words* (Vol. 88). Oxford university press.

Blakemore, D. (2002). *Relevance and linguistic meaning: The semantics and pragmatics of discourse markers* (Vol. 99).

Cambridge university press.

Bloor, M., & Bloor, T. (2013). *The practice of critical discourse analysis: An introduction*. Routledge.

Brown, P., & Levinson, S. C. (1987). *Politeness: Some universals in language usage* (Vol. 4). Cambridge university press.

Cook, G. (2003). *Applied linguistics*. Oxford University Press.

Culpeper, J. (2011). *Impoliteness: Using language to cause offence* (Vol. 28). Cambridge University Press.

Gino, E. (2001). *A critique of Politeness Theories*. St Gerome Publishing.

Halmari, H., & Virtanen, T. (2005). *Persuasion across genres: A linguistic approach*. John Benjamins Publishing.

Hernández, L. P. (2001). *Illocution and cognition: a constructional approach*. Servicio de Publicaciones Universidad de La Rioja.

Hornby, A. S. (1986). *Oxford advanced learner's dictionary of current English*. Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press.

Hughes, G., Mehtta, M., Bresciani, C., & Strange, S. (2019). Ugly Emotions and the Politics of Accusation: Introduction.

*The Cambridge Journal of Anthropology*, 37(2), 1-20.

Leech, G. N. (1983). *Principles of pragmatics*. Longman.

Levinson, S. C. (1983). *Pragmatics*. Cambridge university press.

Little, L. K. (1993). *Benedictine maledictions: liturgical cursing in Romanesque France*. Cornell University Press.

Mey, J. L., & Brown, K. (2009). *Concise encyclopedia of pragmatics*. Elsevier.

Mirza, R. A. (2011). *A Pragmatic Study of Argumentation in Selected Novels* [MSc Thesis, University of Babylon]. Hillah, Iraq.

Roach, P. (2000). English phonetics and phonology. In: Cambridge University Press.

Searle, J. R. (1969). *Speech acts: An essay in the philosophy of language* (Vol. 626). Cambridge university press.