



A Speech Act Analysis of the Utterances of Selected Key Actors in the Russian/Ukrainian Crisis

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Abstract

The interconnection between language and conflict is one that has continued to attract the attention of scholars all over the world. This is not unconnected with the role of language both as an instrument of ensuring peace and for causing crisis. The current research seeks to examine language as employed by state actors in the ongoing crisis between Russia and Ukraine. The research is targeted at finding out how language is used in conveying action even in times of conflict. As a pragmatic explication, the study seeks to examine how meaning is derived from language in conflict situation. The research employs the speech act theory as its analytical tool so as to provide a solid theoretical base for the study. It is also that the study will shed light on the effect of context on the language choices employed in the data selected for the study. The research identifies the various linguistic actions performed in the selected data as being at least one of assertive, commissives, declaratives, expressives and directives. The study shows that the majority of the statements employed by each of these two perform the act of condemning. Criticizing, encouraging and soliciting. The speakers employ these notable strategies to achieve different communicative intentions that are designed to further the aim of the communicative goal. The goal of condemning is achieved through the strategy of positive self-presentation and negative presentation of others.

1. INTRODUCTION

One of the major crises in the world today is the ongoing Russia/Ukraine face-off. A significant incident that escalated the conflict was the full-scale attack on Ukraine by the Russian Army on February 24, 2022, even though the dispute had been brewing since 2014 when Russian-backed separatists in the Eastern Donbas region of Ukraine declared itself independent. In the words of Russian President Vladimir Putin, the objectives of the war include the “demilitarization and denazification of Ukraine” it is noteworthy that even though there had been general condemnation of the invasion which had been described by world leaders as a form of “unprovoked aggression against another sovereign nation, Putin insisted it was a necessary decision aimed at confronting and conquering what he described as a threat to Russian security and the need to protect Russian-speaking territories in Ukraine. It is quite

instructive to note that the way has led to an unquantifiable loss of lives and properties, displacement of citizens and residents of both Ukraine and Russia, as well as the imposition of severe sanctions on Russia by the international community. In all of these, even years after, the situation lingers and keeps getting more complex while efforts continue to be made towards a peaceful resolution of the crisis. The most potent human attribute or feature is language. This explains why scholars like Bolinger (2008) described it as “a complex system of vocal-auditory communication which enhances man’s ability to effect changes in his immediate and remote surroundings. Cavanaugh (2020) also identified the multifunctional nature of language in use because language, for instance, doesn’t just express ideas, but also serves the purpose of moving people to action.

Language makes it possible for man to perform his social functions and without language, humans are reduced to dummies (Omotunde 2021). Despite the usefulness of language, Ukaegbu (2018:p1) opines that it can also serve as a tool for sowing discord. This confirms an earlier position advanced by Taylor (2014) that wherever language is found, conflict also becomes inevitable. It can therefore be stated that language serves both social and anti-social purposes. In essence, when individuals socialize, conflict becomes inevitable. Scholars have examined the role of language in conflict. Amuseghan (2009) raised some pertinent questions relating to language and conflict, he enquires, how do people use language to cause conflict. How do concerned parties use language to advance the course of a conflict? How is a language used in conflict resolution? It is the goal of this study to examine how language is employed to do things in times of conflict. It is expected that the present effort will shed more light on how stakeholders in the ongoing Russian/Ukraine crisis have continued to explore language for either the advancement or resolution of the crisis

Scholars have examined how language is put to use in different conflict situations. Ukaegbu (2018), through the instrumentality of Sperber and Wilson's relevance theory, examined language as a performative tool in conflict situations. He examined how communicative goals are achieved in conflict situations, the intentional use of abusive words and how specific linguistic choices determine the outcomes of conflicts. Conflict is a form of anti-social activity that is often characterized by dispute, disagreement or disharmony between individuals or groups with variations in values, goals, expectations and aspirations. Conflict can come in different dimensions, that is, personal, local or global. Conflict as conceptualized by Chilwa (2021 p.1) extends beyond interpersonal differences or individual grievances. He opines that:

conflict is synonymous with war and defined in terms
of opposing interests or incompatibility of goals that
inevitably graduates from disagreement to hostility or

aggression between groups (i.e., inter-group/ethnic conflicts), inter-state conflict (or national/regional) or global conflicts.

Conflict in this context is viewed as having a wider national or global focus and consequences in terms of its objectives and perceived outcomes

Chiluwa is of the opinion that whatever form a conflict takes, language is always at the centre of it because while violence and war are the constant manifestations of many conflicts, these manifestations are often brought to a halt on the negotiating table where all issues about the conflict are resolved. The subject of conflict has continued to generate interest among language scholars in recent times. This cannot be separated from the ever-growing incidents of conflicts, wars and political, ethnic and economic violence around the world. Scholars like Cohen (2001), Sharndama and Mgbemena (2015) and Evans et al. (2019) have applied linguistic approaches to the study of conflict, activism and all forms of political upheavals by providing important insights into how language is used in the initiation, perpetuation and resolution of conflict.

Amuseghan (2009) believes that because we live in a world that is governed by and directed by words, human beings should maximize the positive attributes of language, both verbal and non-verbal for conflict resolution. He posits that non-violent linguistic strategies like dialogue, mediation, arbitration and adjudication be employed not only in establishing the remote and immediate causes of a conflict but also as tools for providing necessary solutions. The study established the fact that inter-party communication is very necessary in the course of a conflict. He submits that dialogues focusing on strategies like Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR), Western Alternative Dispute Resolution (WADR) and African Traditional Dispute Resolution (ATDR) should be employed to enhance information sharing between affected parties and eliminate distrust suspicion and doubt. This approach, he claims will foster unity and ensure that information required for timely resolution of conflict is readily available.

Donohue et al. (2020) carried out a linguistic analysis of the Oslo Accord towards resolving the Israeli/Palestinian crisis. Using the word count approach, the study monitored the secret talk of each leader and established that the word count approach provides reasonable insights into the minds of each of the leaders. This is because they were identified as employing language to fan the embers of the conflict thereby making a peaceful resolution elusive. Fodang (2018) examined the numerous factors that determined various linguistic choices during the Jos crisis in Nigeria as well as the effect of those choices on the crisis. Informed by the situational context of the crisis, the study adopts the systemic functional theory and submits that lexical choices in conflict situations differ from those employed in non-conflict situations.

The study confirms that language contributes hugely to the escalation of the crisis. Parties involved in the conflict were noted as being fond of using foul and uncensored language to incite trouble. As a result, the relationship between the feuding parties was hugely strained making it more challenging to resolve the conflict.

Furthermore, Adedimeji (2021) explained the central role of language in conflict situations. In the study, he opined that our language choices give life to the picture in our minds and help in creating our own reality. Thus language informs, reforms, transforms and sometimes deforms us.

It is evident from the studies listed above that language is an indispensable tool either in conflict resolution or aggravation. It is noteworthy that most works conducted on the interrelatedness of language and conflict have focused mostly on language as a tool for conflict resolution, partially neglecting what parties in a conflict do with language which has made conflict resolution almost impossible. It is in light of this that the current study examined how language is being put to use in the ongoing conflict between Russia and Ukraine.

2. PRAGMATICS

At the centre of the complex system called language is the study of meaning which is the purview of pragmatics. For O'Grady et al (2011), semantics studies what is physically conveyed by the lexical properties of language while pragmatics examines what the users may want to say that is not included in their lexical choices. Language users often mean much more than they express when they speak or write. This is based on the assumption that their listeners or readers will comprehend them. In general, they will presume that certain strands of meaning can be inferred from context and that shared beliefs, social norms, or worldviews will form the basis of this deducible meaning. Levinson (1983) describes pragmatics as an inferential discipline built on the ability to derive meaning by drawing inferences from contextual and situational assumptions and intentions from strings of utterances and background

Mey (2004) claims that pragmatics is concerned with language users in natural settings and the circumstances that allow them to make appropriate use of language resources and strategies. Crystal (1997) views pragmatics as a branch of sociolinguistics that examines how language users understand and utilize language in practical and functional situations, unlike other schools that concentrate on language's formal qualities and structure to derive meaning. It is the study of meaning that emerges from the language used in context or meaning understood by the listener or text recipient as intended by the speaker or text sender (Griffiths 2006). Chilwa (2016), in describing pragmatics as an invaluable area of language study, opines that, unlike formal semantics, pragmatics provides interesting insights into language's real roles in interpersonal communication, thereby accounting for social and extra-linguistic

meaning which provides flexible perspectives towards the effective understanding, comprehension and interpretation of discourse.

Yule (1996:4) believes that pragmatics is concerned with the "relationships between linguistics forms and its users. It is "the study of meaning as communicated by a speaker (or writer) and interpreted by a hearer (or reader)". As a branch of sociolinguistics, it examines the linguistic decisions made by the speakers when involved in a particular social interaction, the extra-linguistic variables affecting those decisions, and how all of these variables are combined. Jalaludeen (2020) also support this view by asserting that pragmatics allow speakers to mean more than what they say while at the same time, providing listeners the platform to appropriately interpret what is communicated rather than what is said. This raises the issue of performing actions with words. As explained by Austin (1962), in his posthumous publication "*How to Do Things with Words*", Austin explains that language constitutes action and that when we use language, we transform situations from what they are into what we want them to be. Various studies that have been carried out on the interface between pragmatics and conflict include Burienko and Moga, Acheoah et al. (2017) Adedimeji (2021) and Agbara (2014). Burienko and Moga (2019) identify four different stages in conflict with different linguistic requirements, these are the pre-conflict phase, conflict incident phase conflict culmination phase and conflict final phase. While explaining that any of the stages may overlap, they explain that each stage is marked with distinct discursive choices. Focusing more on the final phase which can include the battle phase and the settlement phase with illocutions that are distant, polite and courteous because the goal of the communicants at this level is to override and overshadow the adverse effect of previous language choices. Acheoah et al. (2017), who examined discursive strategies in conflict resolution in Africa submit that pragmatic choices at this stage comprise speech acts that contain imageries, repetition, commissives imagery, special clause structure, invitation and mutual contextual knowledge, among others.

3. METHODOLOGY

The data employed for this study were obtained from different online sources and comprised excerpts of discourse presented by major stakeholders in the Russian/Ukraine crisis. A total of three hundred excerpts were collated and sampled, using the Speech Act model by Austin and complemented by Adebayo Lawal's Mutual Contextual Beliefs model. The sampled excerpts were purposively selected because they contain linguistic items that will advance the achievement of the study's objective. For this study, the key actors involved in the crisis of Russia and Ukraine are:

- i. Joe Biden US President
- ii. Vladimir Putin Russian President

- iii. Volodymyr Zelenskyy Ukrainian President
- iv. Xi Jinping Chinese President
- v. Antony Blinken US Secretary of State

3.1. Aim and Objectives

The study aims to identify how stakeholders in the Russia/Ukraine conflict deploy language. This is to be accomplished through the following objectives.

- i. Examine how those on the frontline of a crisis employ language to achieve their communicative objectives in conflict situations;
- ii. Ascertain the dominant speech acts strategy in the sampled excerpt.
- iii. Examine the implication of the identified speech strategies on the ongoing conflict.
- iv. Examine the contribution of shared contextual knowledge to the meaning and understanding of the selected excerpts.

3.2. Research Questions

The study is aimed at answering these questions.

- i. How do those in the frontline employ language to achieve their communicative objectives in conflict situations?
- ii. What are the most used speech acts in the selected speeches?
- iii. What are the illocutionary acts used by the speakers?

4. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The study adopts the speech act theory to provide the necessary springboard for the study. This is due to its usefulness in explaining what we do with language in relation to context. The speech act theory of pragmatics is premised on the notion that humans employ language to perform activities. Being one of the earliest models that explain meaning in relation to context, the speech act theory bridges the gap between formal semantic interpretation and pragmatics. Yule (1996) defines formal semantics as the study of conventional meaning conveyed by the use of words, phrases and sentences of a particular language. The proponents Austin (1962) and Searle (1969) are of the opinion that human beings actually do things with words. In other words, when men use language, we transmute from the level of saying to the pragmatic realm of causing specific actions to take place. Thus, the speech act theory serves as a tool for establishing the meaning of words in different situations and the various functions to which language can be put. The speech act theory is divided into three levels locutionary, illocutionary and perlocutionary acts. A locutionary act is the basic act of utterance, involving the act of saying something and the content of what is said. For example, when someone says “The sun is shining,” they are performing a locutionary act by making a statement that has a clear meaning. An illocutionary act is performed by saying something, making a statement or promise, thanking, asking a question, etc. Dada (2010) submits that illocutionary acts are the

core of any theory of speech acts. The perlocutionary act is the effect or influence on the feelings, thoughts or actions of the listener/hearer. Perlocutionary acts could be inspiring, persuading, consoling, etc. It brings about an effect on the beliefs, attitudes or behaviours of the addressee. Levinson (1983) describes perlocutionary acts as the intended or unintended consequences of the speaker's utterance. For example, if someone says "You're standing on my foot" and the listener moves away, the speaker has achieved a perlocutionary act by getting the listener to move. Searle distinguishes the speech act theory into two types: direct and indirect speech acts.

The speech act classification proposed by Searle (1976) notably, declaratives, assertives, commissives, directives, and expressives are explained hereunder.

4.1. Assertive Acts

Assertives are the categories of speech acts that are employed in making known the state of affairs in the world. They serve the purpose of reflecting the state of mind of the speaker or writer. Thus, a person who makes an assertion does so based on his or her individual belief and expects his or her interlocutors to believe the same. For Yule (1996, p.53) assertives are speech acts that state what the user believes to be the case or not. They constitute statements or facts that may either be true or false. Examples are: (i) The economy is bad (ii). I value my friends.

4.2. Directive Acts

These are speech acts that are meant to make the recipient act in a particular manner. It is aimed at directing the language receiver towards a particular goal. Holtgraves (2008:15) sees it as getting the recipient to do something he probably, would not have done. He further claims that the objective here is to effect a change in the structure of the world such that it will conform to that favourable to the speaker or writer.

Could you pass the salt, please.

Get out!

4.3. Declarative Acts

Declaratives are those categories of speech acts that change the world from one stage to another (Yule 1996: 53). Mey (2001) refers to declaratives as the most important and original category of speech acts. In using declarations, speakers or writers bring about situations that had hitherto been absent in the world. We change the world via our words. Declaratives therefore can be described as attempts to bring about changes in certain institutional states of affairs. Examples include; naming a child, declaring war, performing a

marriage rite, etc. In performing a marriage rite, for example, the utterance I hereby pronounce you husband and wife automatically causes a hitherto single man and woman to begin living together as man and wife.

- i) You are hereby discharged and acquitted.
- ii) I declare you husband and wife.

4.4.Commissive Acts

Commissives are those categories of speech acts employed by speakers to commit themselves to some future actions. They usually express the future intentions of the user. Yule (1996: 54) states that commissives are employed in committing the individual or a group of people to a particular cause.

4.5.Expressive Acts

Expressive: Expressive, the last classification of speech act by Searle is the group of words which express what the speaker feels on some occasions. According to Huang (in Mey 2009, p.1004), it shows the psychological attitude of the people who say it. These can be the expressions of like, dislike, joy, and sadness or in a real situation can be acts of apologizing, blaming, praising, thanking, regretting, and other expressions of feeling. “I apologize for being late” is an expressive act.

5. DATA ANALYSIS

Table 1: Frequency distribution of speech act types identified in Anthony Blinken’s speech

Speech Act	Frequencies	Percentages
Assertive	15	79%
Commissive	1	5%
Expressive	2	11%
Directive	1	5%
Declarative	0	0
Total	19	100%

Table 1 shows the speech act distribution in Blinken’s speech. It can be inferred that the speech is structured around assertive sentences or statements showing that the speaker is either giving information or saying what he believes. It is remarkable to note that from the nineteen (19) clauses/sentences identified in the speech, the illocutionary act of assertion is dominant [15 (79%)] followed by expressives [02 (11%)]. It can be said that both acts share features of political discourse. In the same line, one can notice a low proportion of the use of commissive acts [01 (5%)] and directives [01 (5%)] in the words of Akinwotu (2016), expressive and directive acts allow language users to express feelings, desires and mood while giving the speech. Finally, all these pragmatic tools present the speaker with the opportunity to inform his

audience of the national and international realities, he has warned them of the repercussions if they do not follow through with the plan.

5.1. Joe Biden's Excerpts

The speech, entitled Statement from President Joe Biden on Russia's Aerial Assault on Ukraine was delivered by the 46th American President on the 29th December, 2023. The United States of America is a major world power with no small stake in the Russia/Ukraine crisis. After a thorough perusal, the various speech act types identified in the speech are presented below.

Table 2: Statistic presentation of speech act types in Joe Biden Excerpts

Speech Act	Frequencies	Percentages
Assertive	25	83.3%
Commissive	0	0
Expressive	0	0
Directive	5	16.7%
Declarative	0	0
Total	30	100%

The above table presents a statistical distribution of the various acts identified in the speech delivered by the American president in the course of the Russia/Ukraine crisis. The frequency distribution shows that only assertives and declaratives were represented in the speech under review. While assertives account for the highest number, representing 83.3%, directives account for 05 16.7%. The commissive, expressive and declarative categories were not represented in the speech under review.

This is because, in the speech, the speaker focuses more on illocutionary acts that assert the position of the American government about the crisis, giving both direct and indirect orders by issuing both direct and indirect orders to make his points. In crafting the speech, the speaker understands the urgency of communicative firmness and employs assertive acts as a communicative strategy for alerting the world to the negative impact of the unprovoked attacks on lives and properties and reaffirming America's unflinching support for both Ukraine and her citizens. Furthermore, the speaker notably desists from making commitments that will necessitate the use of commissive acts. The speaker, as explained by Fafiyebi (2014) avoids the commissive acts as a communicative strategy that allows desisting from making promises for which he may be held accountable in the future. It can be inferred that the choice of acts identified in the speech under review shows that the American nation, represented by the President, rather than express the country's commitment to a particular course of action, issues directives by calling on other nations to arise in defence of Ukraine and its people.

5.2.Vladimir Putin's Excerpts

The third speech, titled No other option delivered by the Russian President, Vladimir Putin on the 24th of February, 2022. As the sitting president of Russia, Putin's speech marked the beginning of fresh hostilities between Russia and Ukraine.

Speech Act	Frequencies	Percentages
Assertive	25	89.3%
Commissive	0	0
Expressive	0	0
Directive	3	10.7%
Declarative	0	0
Total	28	100%

Table 3: Frequency distribution of speech act types identified in Vladimir Putin's speech

Table 3 above shows that, Putin's speech is structured around two categories of speech acts, notably assertive sentences and directives. While the former is employed by the speaker in either giving information or making assertions that may either be true or false, the latter gives instructions. It can be deduced from the table above that the illocutionary act of asserting is the predominant act represented by 89.3% this is followed by acts of directing which accounts for 10.7%. These acts, being the only acts represented in the excerpt under review attest to the preference for these categories of acts in conflict discourse, especially when the aim is not conflict resolution. It can also be said that both acts exhibit features of political communication

5.3.Volodymyr Zelenskyy's Speech Excerpts

The fourth speech tagged Russia-Ukraine Crisis, was delivered by President Zelensky on 24th February 2022 at the onset of the Russia/Ukraine war. President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, who was elected on 21st April 2019 as the sixth president of Ukraine used the occasion provided by the speech to intimate the world of current happenings regarding the spate of attacks launched against Ukraine by the Russian military.

Table 4: Frequency distribution of speech act types identified in Vlodymyr Zelensky's speech

Speech Act	Frequencies	Percentages
Assertive	47	84%
Commissive	2	3.5%
Expressive	3	5.35%
Directive	4	7.15%
Declarative	-	-
Total	56	100%

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The table shows that assertive acts account for 84% while commissives represent 3.5%. Expressive acts account for 5.35% while directives accounts for a total of 7.15%. Assertives are the most frequently deployed speech acts, followed by directives and expressives, while commissive acts are the least employed.

From this statistical presentation, it can be attested that the speaker uses assertive acts to drive home the intention of his country about the conflict. This category of acts also asserts the position of Ukraine and his strong condemnation of the major invasion which triggered the current crisis. He utilised detailed phrases to make his points. In his use of the expressives, he explained the the nature of the war and the degree of attack on Ukrainian territory. The few uses of the directive act identified in the speech serve the purpose of calling for aids and issuing indirect orders to different groups and the international community to rise in defence of Ukraine and humanity.

The speech, tagged The Chinese debate about Russia’s war and its meaning for the world, was delivered in Germany by the Secretary-General of the United Nations, Antonio Guterres, on the 14th of March 2022. In the course of the speech, the speaker emphasised the position of the United Nations on the crisis and activated the UN Charter by announcing immediate peacekeeping operations in Ukraine and imposing international sanctions against Russia.

Table 5: Frequency distribution of speech act types identified in Antonio Gutteres’s speech

Speech Act	Frequencies	Percentages
Assertive	20	54%
Commissive	1	3%
Expressive	6	16%
Directive	10	27%
Declarative	-	-
Total	37	100%

5.4.XI JINPING

This speech, tagged The Chinese debate about Russia’s war and its meaning for the world, was delivered by the Chinese President, Xi Jinping, was delivered on the 11th of July, 2023. China is one of the permanent members of the Security Council of the United Nations.

Table 5: Statistic presentation of speech act types in Xi’s Excerpts

Speech Act	Frequencies	Percentages
Assertive	32	97%
Commissive	1	3%
Expressive	-	%
Directive	-	%
Declarative	-	-
Total	33	100%

The table shows that this speech, like the others examined before it centres around the assertive group of speech acts. The speaker uses the assertives to provide information and express personal opinions. With the predominant speech act being the assertives which stands at 97%, it can be inferred that the speaker achieves the objective of emphasizing and enlightening the people on the position of his government about the current crisis between Russia and Ukraine. The other category of speech acts identified the commissives which represent just 3% of the total number identified. This also serves the purpose of committing the Chinese government to certain future actions. The predominant acts show the Chinese leader as making a concerted effort to sensitize the world on the implications of the crisis on other nations of the world.

6. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

This study examined excerpts from the utterances of key actors in the crisis between Russia and Ukraine using the speech act approach proposed by Searle to the study of language. As a pragmatic model, this approach is suitable for a study of this nature because it captures the entirety of what language users do when they put language to use. Furthermore, the speech act approach allows language users to express their intentions while using as little words as possible. As opined by Taylor (2014), the speech act approach to language study is appropriate as a tool for explaining language choices in conflict situations because it allows users to immediately understand the stage of the particular conflict under analysis. In the current study, This is observable in the sense that all the actors examined show a preference for the assertive category of speech acts. By implication, this goes a long way to show that the primary intention of all of the speaker is to bring their addressees to the awareness of the conflict. This is done by explaining both the immediate and remote causes of the conflict. The majority of the actors also employ the assertive as a descriptive communicative strategy that apportions blames to one party and exonerates the other party. These assertive acts serve to address both domestic and international audiences, emphasizing the gravity of the situation and the need for solidarity. In each of the speeches, actors issue directives that function as calls to action. In the words of Donohue (2020), it is evident that the category of speech acts that asserts are used at the conflict stage where hostilities seem to be at the peak. During this period which is known as the

escalation period, parties involved in the conflict are mostly interested in trading blames and advancing reasons to justify their role(s) in the conflict. This is seen in the statements by the two actors at the centre of the Russia/Ukraine conflict, Putin and Zelensky. The study shows that the majority of the statements employed by each of these two perform the act of condemning. Criticizing, encouraging and soliciting. The speakers employ these notable strategies to achieve different communicative intentions that are designed to further the aim of the communicative goal. The goal of condemning is achieved through the strategy of positive self-presentation and negative presentation of others. As expressed by Ayoola (2005), this communicative strategy is a feature of political communication where one party or group presents the other in a bad light so as to make them lose credibility in the opinion of others. It can be described as a strategy where speakers, especially in political and politically inclined communicative events, use very few words to convey many ideas. It can be observed that in the speeches presented by both Putin and Zelensky, numerous communicative acts were deployed to make the speaker look good while the referent was presented in negative terms. Each of them tries, with the instrument of language, to show that the conflict escalated because of the actions or inactions of the other party. This is equally the case with the act of criticizing where almost all the speakers adopt a critical stand against a particular party in the conflict.

This also shows that the conflict under analysis is at its full-blown stage. As explained by Onwochei (2012), language use at this stage is highly subjective. This is because the parties involved are not aiming at a resolution of the conflict. Assertive statements, the type identified in this study are meant to showcase the subjective views of the individual speakers. Another use of assertive acts in the utterances under review is that it serve the purpose of encouraging. Deployed in all the speeches examined in the study, this pragmatic strategy seeks to encourage the party perceived as the weak one to keep holding on. It is public knowledge that the conflict under study had been globally described as the “Russian invasion of Ukraine” in light of this nomenclature, Ukraine is seen, and rightly so, as the susceptible party. As a result of this, stakeholders in the crisis employ language to encourage both the people and government of Ukraine on the one hand and the strong nations of the world on the other hand. As explained by Elsherbiny (2022), the group that can be described as concerned third parties like NATO members and the international community also employed assertive speech acts to issue threats and assert their positions and encourage Ukraine which is perceived as the weaker and the oppressed party in the conflict. This is seen in utterances like “ any further attack on Ukraine would attract heavy sanctions” and “this is the first batch...and we are preparing to impose more sanctions.”

An immediate follow-up of this act is the one that solicits which shows the parties directly involved in the crisis as soliciting different forms of support and aid from sister countries. In this regard, the speakers identified in the speeches employ both the directive acts as a communicative strategy for requesting for assistance. These directives often target the Ukrainian military, urging them to defend the nation, and the international community, urging support and intervention. For example, in his speech, the American President solicits the support of the major world powers to provide humanitarian aid to Ukraine and sees the invasion of Ukraine by the Russian forces as a violation of the fundamental rights of the people and governments of Ukraine as guaranteed by various Charters of the United Nations. In the same vein, even though sparsely deployed, the commissive strategy serves as the act that shows the future action of the speaker. In the utterances under analysis, the study shows that excerpts like “we will pursue the demilitarisation and denazification of Ukraine and bring to justice those who committed numerous bloody crimes against civilians, including citizens of the Russian Federation” to assure Russians of the commitment of his government to pursue the cause to a determined end.

The study further validates the position held by Agbara (2024) who opined that because language mirrors the true state of the human mind, they contribute to the human desire to resolve or perpetuate a conflict. In the excerpts selected for this study, each of the speakers, through their linguistic acts, which are predominantly assertives provides explanations and counter explanations regarding their position in the ongoing conflict. Thus, an x-ray of the choices clearly points to the view that there may be no end in sight to the crisis which further validates the the view that there is an intimate link between how we communicate and how conflicts are created, escalated and resolved.

Finally, the study reveals that some of the key actors make commissive speech acts by expressing commitment to safeguard Ukraine's sovereignty and protect its citizens. These commissive acts are crucial in maintaining public morale and international trust. Some of these actors employ expressives to convey their emotions and sentiments, often displaying resolve, determination, and empathy for the suffering of Ukrainian citizens. These speech acts play a vital role in rallying public support and solidarity. The research findings demonstrate the multifaceted use of speech acts in key actors' communication strategy during the Russian invasion of Ukraine. The speeches strategically employ various speech acts to convey information, rally domestic and international support, express commitment, and manage the crisis's emotional impact. By understanding the pragmatics of these speeches through the lens of Searle's classification, the study sheds light on the dynamic role of rhetoric in crisis communication and its impact on public perception and international relations.

7. CONCLUSION

This study has undertaken a comprehensive pragmatics analysis of key actors' speeches delivered about the Russian invasion of Ukraine, with a specific focus on John Searle's model of speech acts. The research uncovers the ways in which speech acts were utilized as rhetorical tools to convey information, manage communication, and shape public and international responses to the crisis. The key actors employed a diverse range of speech acts, as categorized by Searle, to address the crisis. These include assertive acts to provide factual information, directive acts to issue calls to action, commissive acts to express commitment, and expressive acts to convey emotions. This research has demonstrated that key actors' speeches during the Russian invasion of Ukraine were a skillful amalgamation of speech acts, strategically chosen to address the multifaceted challenges posed by the crisis. Through the lens of Searle's classification, it becomes evident that the use of speech acts in crisis communication is a powerful tool for political leaders to shape public perception, mobilize resources, and influence international responses.

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