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A Pragmatic Study of Threatening Strategies in Trump's Speech on January 6, 2021

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Abstract

This study addresses a significant gap in political discourse analysis by conducting a fine-grained pragmatic examination of the speech act of threatening, focusing specifically on the under-researched strategies of **implicit coercion** and **plausible deniability**. The primary research objective is to elucidate how threatening illocutionary acts are constructed, communicated, and legitimized within a populist framework. To this end, the study poses the following research questions: How are explicit and implicit threats linguistically encoded? What pragmatic and rhetorical strategies facilitate threat mitigation

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or amplification? And how do these strategies function to shape political action and in-group identity?

The research design employs a **qualitative pragmatic analysis** grounded in an integrated theoretical framework of **Speech Act Theory** (Searle, 1969), **Politeness Theory** (Brown & Levinson, 1987), and **Critical Discourse Analysis** (Fairclough, 1995). This tripartite model enables a layered investigation of the locutionary, illocutionary, and perlocutionary dimensions of threat production. The dataset consists of **ten strategically selected excerpts** from Donald Trump's speech on January 6, 2021, chosen for their pragmatic salience and relevance to the subsequent Capitol riot.

The findings reveal that Trump's rhetoric relies predominantly on **implicit threat strategies**—such as off-record intimations and presuppositional assertions—to maintain plausible deniability while mobilizing followers. Key strategies identified include the **blending of commissive pledges** (vows of resistance) with **directive commands** (calls to action), often amplified through **hyperbole**, **metaphor**, and **dichotomous framing** ("us vs. them"). Crucially, the analysis demonstrates how **positive politeness strategies** (e.g., inclusive "we") foster in-group solidarity, while **bald-on-record face-threatening acts** delegitimize opponents. A central finding is the pervasive use of **victim-perpetrator reversal**, which morally reframes aggression as righteous self-defense.

The study concludes that the pragmatics of threatening in Trump's discourse is not merely instrumental but **constitutive**, shaping a political reality where democratic norms are subverted and extra-legal action is legitimized. This research underscores the critical role of pragmatic analysis in decoding the latent power of political language and its capacity to weaponize grievance.

Keywords: Critical discourse analysis, Implicit coercion: Political discourse, Speech acts, Politeness theory, Plausible deniability, Threatening strategies

دراسة تداولية لاستراتيجيات التهديد في خطاب دونالد ترامب بتاريخ 6 كانون الثاني/يناير 2021

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جامعة تكريت \ كلية التربية للعلوم الانسانية \ قسم اللغة الانكليزية \ العراق

المستخلص

تجري هذه الدراسة تحليلاً تداولياً لاستراتيجيات التهديد في خطاب دونالد ترامب بتاريخ 6 كانون الثاني/يناير 2021، الذي ألقاه قبيل أحداث اقتحام مبنى الكابيتول. وبالاستعانة بنظرية أفعال الكلام (سيرل، 1969)، ونظرية المجاملة (براون وليفنسون، 1987)، والتحليل النقدي للخطاب (فيركلاف، 1995)، تبحث الدراسة في كيفية بناء التهديدات الصريحة والضمنية، وكيفية نقلها وتبريرها. تكشف النتائج أن خطاب ترامب يمزج بين تهديدات التزامية وأوامر توجيهية، مستخدماً أسلوب المواجهة المباشر والصريح لحشد المؤيدين، في حين يوظف المجاملة الإيجابية لتعزيز التضامن داخل الجماعة. من الناحية البلاغية، يعتمد الخطاب على التصعيد المبالغ فيه (مثل: "الانتخابات المسروقة")، والتأطير الثنائي ("نحن في مقابل هم")، والافتراضات المسبقة التي تصوّر الذات كضحية، وذلك لتبرير التحدي باعتباره أمراً ضرورياً ومشروعاً. وتشمل الاستراتيجيات الأساسية شرعنة الموقف أخلاقياً (مثل: "القتال من أجل الديمقراطية") وقلب أدوار الجاني والضحية. وتخلص الدراسة إلى أن تهديدات ترامب تؤدي وظائف متعددة—من تعبئة قاعدته الشعبية، إلى نزع الشرعية عن خصومه، والحفاظ على إمكانية الإنكار—وذلك من خلال تفاعل بين الخطاب التصادمي والغموض الاستراتيجي. ولا يكتفي هذا التحليل بفك شفرة بناء التهديد في الخطاب الشعبي، بل يبيّن أيضاً كيف يمكن للغة أن تتحول إلى أداة لتسليح الشعور بالظلم وإعادة تشكيل الفعل السياسي.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الخطاب السياسي، استراتيجيات التهديد، أفعال الكلام، نظرية المجاملة، التحليل النقدي للخطاب

1. Theoretical Background and Literature Review

Threatening strategies in political discourse have been widely examined through pragmatic and discourse-analytical frameworks. Seminal work in **speech act theory** (Austin, 1962; Searle, 1969) provides the foundation for understanding how utterances function as actions, including implicit or explicit threats, particularly through commissive (e.g., pledges, vows) and directive (e.g., commands, warnings) illocutionary acts (Searle, 1976). Concurrently, **politeness theory** (Brown & Levinson, 1987) offers a crucial lens for

analyzing how political figures mitigate or intensify these Face-Threatening Acts (FTAs) to exert power while managing interpersonal and public face.

Extending these pragmatic foundations, **Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA)** (Fairclough, 1995; van Dijk, 2006) has been instrumental in uncovering how such linguistic strategies enact and reinforce power relations, ideology, and social dominance. Studies have effectively applied these frameworks to analyze **coercive language** in various contexts, such as international diplomacy (Gavriely-Nuri, 2010), where direct threats are common, and election campaigns (Wilson, 2015), which often feature more veiled aggressive rhetoric.

However, a review of the literature reveals two significant gaps that this study aims to address:

First, while numerous studies have focused on **explicit threats** in high-stakes contexts like international ultimatums (e.g., Chilton, 2004), there is a comparative scarcity of research dedicated to the nuanced workings of **implicit coercion** in domestic political discourse. The strategic use of pragmatic strategies like presupposition, implicature, and off-record politeness to convey threats while maintaining plausible deniability is less charted territory (Cap, 2017).

Second, although the field is rich with analyses of Western political rhetoric (e.g., Chilton & Schäffner, 2002), there remains a need for more studies that conduct fine-grained, pragmatic analyses of specific speech events with significant real-world consequences, particularly those that blur the line between mobilization and incitement.

This study seeks to fill these gaps by:

1. **Focusing explicitly on implicit threat strategies**—such as presupposition, vagueness, and off-record politeness—to provide a more comprehensive understanding of how coercion is linguistically engineered for deniability.
2. **Offering a micro-level pragmatic analysis** of a singular, consequential speech event (Trump's January 6 address) to trace the direct link between specific linguistic choices and the potential for political violence.

3. **Integrating three theoretical models** (Speech Act Theory, Politeness Theory, and CDA) into a cohesive analytical framework to simultaneously examine the functional, interpersonal, and ideological dimensions of threatening language.

By combining these approaches, this research moves beyond cataloging explicit threats to decode the more insidious and politically potent mechanisms of implied coercion in modern populist discourse. Below are the key dimensions of analysis:

1. Speech Act Theory

Speech Act Theory, pioneered by J.L. Austin (1962) and expanded by John Searle (1969), examines how utterances function as actions rather than mere statements. Austin's theory of speech actions. According to Austin's (1978) speech-act theory, speaking involves more than merely "saying" something with words, or what he refers to as "locutions," but also acting with speech, which is a specific kind of action (Saleh, 2023 p. 41). Austin introduced the concept of performative utterances, where saying something *does* something (e.g., "I promise") (Austin, 1962, pp. 5-7). He distinguished three dimensions of speech acts: locutionary (literal meaning), illocutionary (speaker's intent), and perlocutionary (effect on the listener) (Austin, 1962, pp. 94-101). Searle later classified illocutionary acts into five categories: assertives, directives, commissives, expressives, and declarations (Searle, 1969, pp. 23-24). In political discourse, directives (e.g., demands) and commissives (e.g., threats) are particularly relevant for analyzing coercion (Searle, 1976, pp. 10-12). For instance, a leader stating, "*We will retaliate*," performs a commissive act, binding them to future action while signaling deterrence. The theory helps decode how politicians use language to exert power, where even indirect statements (e.g., "*It would be unfortunate if...*") imply illocutionary force (Searle, 1975, pp. 59-61). Critically, perlocutionary effects—such as fear or compliance—reveal whether threats achieve their intended impact (Austin, 1962, pp. 101-103).

2. Explicit vs. Implicit Threats

Threats in political discourse can be explicit (overt) or implicit (veiled), differing in clarity and deniability. Explicit threats use direct language, often with performative

verbs like *"warn"* or *"demand"* (e.g., *"We will impose sanctions"*) (Searle, 1969, pp. 66-67). These leave little room for interpretation and are typical in high-stakes diplomacy or military contexts (Gavriely-Nuri, 2010, p. 113). Conversely, implicit threats rely on indirect speech acts, where the threatening intent is inferred (e.g., *"No options are off the table"*) (Brown & Levinson, 1987, pp. 230-232). Such ambiguity allows politicians to intimidate while maintaining plausible deniability (Cap, 2017, pp. 91-93). For example, a leader might say, *"We hope for peace, but..."*, implying consequences without stating them. Pragmatic strategies like presupposition (e.g., *"When we respond..."*) or metaphor (e.g., *"The tide will turn"*) further obscure intent (Chilton, 2004, pp. 48-50). Implicit threats are strategically valuable for democratic societies where overt aggression could backfire (Wilson, 2015, pp. 207-209). Studies show that audiences often perceive implicit threats as more severe due to their open-ended nature (Wodak, 2009, pp. 63-65).

3. Politeness Strategies and Face-Threatening Acts (FTAs)

Politeness Theory, developed by Brown & Levinson (1987), explains how speakers mitigate or intensify threats to preserve *"face"* (social dignity). Face-Threatening Acts (FTAs) are utterances that challenge a listener's autonomy (*negative face*) or desire for approval (*positive face*) (Brown & Levinson, 1987, pp. 61-65). In political discourse, threats inherently threaten negative face by imposing potential harm (e.g., *"Comply, or else"*). Politicians use four strategies to manage FTAs: (1) Bald-on-record (direct threats, e.g., *"We will act"*), (2) Positive politeness (framing threats as shared concerns, e.g., *"We all know the risks"*), (3) Negative politeness (softening threats with hedges, e.g., *"We might have to intervene"*), and (4) Off-record (implied threats, e.g., *"It'd be a shame if..."*) (Brown & Levinson, 1987, pp. 95-100). For instance, a leader using negative politeness might say, *"With all due respect, we cannot tolerate this,"* balancing aggression with decorum. Off-record threats are pervasive in diplomacy, allowing deniability (e.g., *"Some would say this justifies war"*) (Brown & Levinson, 1987, pp. 211-213). Studies show that cultures vary in FTA tolerance—Western leaders often prefer directness, while Eastern rhetoric leans on implicature (Wodak 2009 pp. 70-72).

4. Rhetorical and Pragmatic Devices Enhancing Threats

Politicians amplify threats through rhetorical devices (e.g., metaphors, hyperbole) and pragmatic strategies (e.g., presupposition, implicature). Metaphors frame abstract dangers concretely (e.g., "*A tidal wave of consequences*") (Chilton, 2004, pp. 48-50), while hyperbole exaggerates stakes (e.g., "*This will doom our nation*") (Wodak, 2009, pp. 62-64). Presuppositions embed threats as assumed truths (e.g., "*When we strike back...*" implies inevitability) (Cap, 2017, pp. 92-94). Implicature (Grice, 1975) lets speakers imply threats without stating them (e.g., "*We have many options*" suggests military action) (Brown & Levinson, 1987, pp. 230-232). Repetition reinforces threats (e.g., "*We will act. We will prevail.*"), Moreover, contrastive pairs (e.g., "*Peace or peril*") polarize outcomes (Fairclough, 1995, pp. 76-78). For example, Putin's "*We are a patient people, but our patience has limits*" combines metaphor, presupposition, and contrast to escalate tension (Cap, 2017, pp. 97-99). Such devices manipulate perception, making threats feel urgent and unavoidable (Chilton, 2004, pp. 52-54).

3. Methodology

This study adopts a **qualitative, interpretive approach** grounded in **pragmatic analysis and critical discourse frameworks**. The goal is to investigate how threatening strategies are linguistically constructed and pragmatically enacted in political discourse, with a particular focus on former U.S. President Donald J. Trump's speech delivered on **January 6, 2021**, prior to the attack on the U.S. Capitol. The methodology integrates three theoretical models: **Speech Act Theory** (Searle, 1969), **Politeness Theory** (Brown & Levinson, 1987), and **Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA)** (Fairclough, 1995), which together provide the tools for decoding both surface and underlying communicative intentions.

3.1 Data Selection

The primary data for this study consists of **ten excerpts** drawn from the full transcript of Trump's January 6th speech, which is publicly available via multiple news and archival platforms. Excerpts were selected through **purposive sampling** based on three criteria:

1. **Pragmatic salience** — utterances that exhibit clear directive, commissive, or expressive force;
2. **Threat potential** — lines that could plausibly function as implicit or explicit threats;
3. **Discursive escalation** — statements that were thematically or temporally linked to the subsequent Capitol riot.

This selective process ensures that the data reflects a representative and analytically rich portion of the speech, capturing the communicative moves most relevant to incitement, mobilization, and ideological framing.

3.2 Data Description

Each excerpt is treated as a **discourse unit** for analysis, ranging from one sentence to a short paragraph. The ten excerpts span various parts of the speech, including its opening appeal, middle arguments, and climactic calls to action. The speech is rich in **political slogans, rallying cries, and ambiguous moral claims**, making it an ideal candidate for pragmatic analysis. The excerpts contain both **propositional content** (what is said) and **illocutionary force** (what is done through saying it), as well as significant use of **emotive and rhetorical devices**.

3.3 Analytical Model

The analytical framework is composed of **three interlinked levels**:

a. Pragmatic Layer – Speech Act Theory

Each excerpt is analyzed according to Searle's (1969, 1976) classification of illocutionary acts: **assertives, directives, commissives, expressives, and declarations**. This allows for the identification of **threats as commissive or directive acts**, and their strategic combinations (e.g., commissive + declarative). Attention is also paid to **perlocutionary effects**, i.e., how these acts were likely interpreted or acted upon by the audience.

b. Face Management Layer – Politeness Theory

Drawing on **Brown & Levinson's (1987)** model, each utterance is examined for its use of **face-threatening acts (FTAs)** and **politeness strategies**. These include:

- **Bald-on-record threats** (direct impositions),
- **Positive politeness** (appeals to solidarity),
- **Negative politeness** (hedged impositions), and
- **Off-record strategies** (implied threats).

This analysis clarifies how Trump negotiates threats and appeals to identity and loyalty while avoiding overtly aggressive language in some cases.

c. Ideological Layer – Critical Discourse Analysis

Using **Fairclough's (1995)** CDA approach, the study considers how linguistic strategies **construct ideological positions**, such as:

1. Us-vs-them polarization,
2. Victim-perpetrator reversal,
3. Delegitimization of institutions,
4. Moral framing of resistance, and
5. Deniability mechanisms.

Devices such as **presupposition**, **metaphor**, **hyperbole**, and **euphemism** are closely examined to reveal how language subtly legitimises confrontation and encodes ideological conflict.

3.4 Analytical Procedure

Each excerpt is subjected to **triangulated analysis**:

1. **Identify** the speech act(s) and their type,
2. **Classify** the threat as explicit or implicit,
3. **Diagnose** the politeness strategy employed (if any),
4. **Interpret** the rhetorical and ideological functions of the utterance in context.

This structured, layered approach ensures that the analysis remains both **theoretically informed** and **textually grounded**, allowing for nuanced interpretations of political threat construction.

Excerpt 1:

"We will never give up. We will never concede. It does not happen. You do not concede when there is theft involved."

The speaker utilises a **commissive act** by vowing steadfast resistance ("never give up"), obligating both themselves and the audience to a path of defiance, while the declarative characterisation of the election as 'theft' establishes an alternative reality in which fraud is presumed as truth. This dual tactic, prevalent in populist rhetoric, employs moral absolutism to rationalise the dismissal of democratic standards. The absence of evidence for 'theft' indicates a predisposition towards conspiracy theories, perpetuating a "us vs. them" perspective that deems adversaries fundamentally illegitimate.

Implicit Threat: The unwillingness to yield ("never") suggests a repudiation of institutional results, indicating potential extra-legal defiance. This subtle escalation circumvents overt provocation while preparing adherents for confrontation by depicting compromise as treachery. The absolutist term ("never") reflects authoritarian rhetoric, positioning resistance as a moral obligation and implicitly threatening disorder if demands are unmet.

Politeness Strategies (Bald-on-record FTA + Positive Politeness): The bald-on-record rejection undermines opponents' legitimacy without mitigating, a strategy characteristic of polarising leaders that prioritise in-group loyalty over diplomatic engagement.

Simultaneously, positive politeness (we) fosters in-group solidarity, framing resistance as collective action. This duality—attacking outsiders while rallying insiders—is a hallmark of populist threat construction, where perceived victimhood justifies aggression. mitigation

" could be thought of as a way to lessen the effects of bad news, criticism, or orders". (Khalil and Ali, 2023: 171)

Rhetorical Devices (Presupposition + Hyperbole): The presupposition of "theft" manipulates perception by presenting fraud as an established truth, bypassing scrutiny—a tactic rooted in propaganda techniques. The hyperbolic "never" amplifies stakes, a standard tool in crisis rhetoric to justify extreme measures. Together, these devices construct a narrative where dissent is not just opposition but existential defence.

Excerpt 2:

"Our country has had enough. We will not take it anymore!"

Speech Act (Expressive + Directive): The expressive declaration of collective exhaustion ("had enough") validates grievances, while the directive subtext ("not take it") implies imminent action. This reflects revolutionary discourse, wherein emotional appeals validate mobilisation. The ambiguity of 'it' capitalises on ambiguity bias, enabling listeners to attribute their frustrations to an indistinct threat.

Implicit Threat: The expression 'not take it' indicates forthcoming retribution without detailing the methods, utilising plausible deniability. This is a crucial method in incitement tactics, when violent intent is suggested but not explicitly articulated, protecting the speaker from liability while mobilising adherents.

Politeness Strategies (Negative Politeness + FTA): The negative politeness of evading particular 'it' seemingly mitigates the threat; however, the face-threatening act resides in characterising opponents as oppressors. This dual strategy, evident in radical populism, conceals hostility through ambiguous language while simultaneously dehumanising the out-group.

Rhetorical Devices (Metaphor + Hyperbole): The term 'had enough' conceptualises grievances as physical saturation, invoking ideas of bodily harm to rationalise action. The hyperbolic phrase "not take it" amplifies victimhood, a strategy derived from martyrdom narratives to depict in-group suffering as unbearable.

Excerpt 3:

"If you don't fight like hell, you're not going to have a country anymore."

Speech Act (Directive + Warning): The imperative phrase 'fight like hell' is accompanied by a caution of national destruction, a combination characteristic of apocalyptic discourse. This reflects fascist propaganda, as survival is linked to violent conflict, using fear to supplant rational discourse.

Explicit Threat: The explicit invocation to 'fight' and the conditional forfeiture of the nation ("not anymore") eliminate ambiguity, illustrating coercive persuasive methods. This phrase is characteristic of insurrectionist movements, when violence is portrayed as the sole means of salvation.

Politeness Strategies (Bald-on-record FTA): The complete absence of mitigation 'fight like hell' indicates significant coercion, a characteristic of authoritarian leadership that requires entire compliance. The lack of civility emphasises urgency, a strategy employed in crisis manipulation.

Rhetorical Devices (Hyperbole + Metaphor): The hyperbolic phrase 'no country' suggests existential stakes, used as a motif in genocidal rhetoric to rationalise harsh actions. The term 'fight like hell' militarises protest, reflecting military propaganda that idealises fighting as a means of cleansing.

Excerpt 4:

"We must stop the steal!"

Speech Act (Directive + Declarative): The imperative command 'stop' necessitates prompt action, whereas the declarative characterisation of the election as a 'steal' presents fraud as an objective reality. This reflects propaganda methods such as the 'Big Lie,' wherein the reiteration of erroneous assertions (e.g., Nazi Germany's 'Jewish conspiracy' distorts perception. The phrase's conciseness and commanding form exemplify the slogan-based

strategies prevalent in fascist and populist groups, simplifying intricate situations into dichotomous conflicts ("us vs. thieves").

Implicit Threat: The verb 'stop' suggests extra-legal actions, utilising strategic ambiguity—a characteristic of incitement-by-proxy evident in extremist discourse (e.g., Rwanda's 'cut the tall trees'. The speaker's omission of techniques encourages aggressive interpretation while preserving deniability. The phrase's widespread recurrence in MAGA circles resembles cultic chanting, bolstering group identity and dehumanising adversaries ("stealers").

Politeness Strategies (Positive Politeness): The inclusive 'we' promotes in-group solidarity, a strategy derived from revolutionary language (e.g., Lenin's 'vanguard of the proletariat'. This conceals aggression as a communal obligation, leveraging identity-protective cognition—a bias in which group loyalty supersedes factual examination.

Rhetorical Devices (Presupposition): The term 'steal' implies the existence of fraud, a strategy grounded in gaslighting to circumvent proof. This corresponds with authoritarian strategies wherein language creates alternative realities (e.g., Orwell's "2 + 2 = 5").

Excerpt 5:

"You will never take back our country with weakness. You have to show strength."

The aggressive statement connects 'weakness' with failure, prompting adherents to dismiss compromise, akin to the fascist veneration of strength (e.g., Mussolini's 'live dangerously'. The command 'show strength' tacitly advocates for violence, illustrating Social Dominance Theory, which posits that hierarchies are sustained by aggressiveness.

Implicit Threat: The dichotomy of "weakness" vs. "strength" polarizes behavior into acceptable/unacceptable categories, a tactic from totalitarian indoctrination (e.g., CCP's "righteous struggle"). The vagueness of "strength" exploits interpretive flexibility, allowing followers to justify brutality as virtuous.

Politeness Strategies (Bald-on-record FTA + Positive Politeness): The insult "weakness" is a bald-on-record attack, demeaning opponents while the possessive "our country" rallies in-group loyalty. This dual strategy mirrors strongman rhetoric (e.g., Duterte's "punish the stupid").

Rhetorical Devices (Metaphor + Presupposition): The metaphor of politics as physical conflict ("strength") militarizes discourse, akin to war propaganda (e.g., Bush's "axis of evil"). The presupposition that the country was "taken" smuggles in conspiracy thinking without evidence.

Excerpt 6:

"They're not taking this country without a fight. You have to get tougher."

Speech Act (Commissive + Directive): The commissive pledge ("not without a fight") vows resistance, echoing insurrectionist oaths (e.g., Confederacy's "states' rights"). The directive "get tougher" escalates to action, reflecting radicalization's foot-in-the-door technique, where demands grow incrementally extreme.

Explicit Threat: "Fight" is a lexicalized call to violence, similar to genocidal euphemisms (e.g., "final solution"). The modifier "tougher" signals escalating aggression, a pattern in mob incitement (e.g., Jan. 6's "trial by combat").

Politeness Strategies (Negative Politeness + FTA): The vagueness of "tougher" uses negative politeness to soften the FTA, while "they" dehumanizes opponents. This mirrors extremist devaluation tactics (e.g., "vermin" in Nazi rhetoric).

Rhetorical Devices (Dichotomous Framing): The "they/you" divide exemplifies othering, a core tool of ethnic cleansing rhetoric (e.g., Milosevic's "Greater Serbia").

Excerpt 7:

"We're going to the Capitol to cheer on our brave senators and congressmen."

Speech Act (Declarative + Expressive): The declarative announcement frames the Capitol march as legitimate, exploiting normative legitimacy biases. The expressive praise

("brave") lionizes lawmakers who align with the speaker, mirroring personality cult tactics (e.g., Stalin's "great leader").

Implicit Threat: The phrase's innocuous surface ("cheer") belies its contextual threat—later used to justify the mob's "rightful" presence. This dog-whistling resembles Hitler's "legal revolution" rhetoric pre-Reichstag fire.

Politeness Strategies (Positive Politeness): "Our brave" bonds followers to leaders, a co-optation strategy seen in autocratic consolidation (e.g., Erdogan's "New Turkey").

Rhetorical Devices (Presupposition): Implies lawmakers need protection, smuggling in the false premise of persecution—a tactic from martyrdom narratives.

Excerpt 8:

This statement functions as a combination of a **directive** and an **assertive** act. Although cloaked in pacifistic language, it contains an **implied command**: "everyone... will soon be marching," which directs action while asserting it will be "peaceful and patriotic."

The **implicit threat** lies beneath the surface—phrases like "make your voices heard" sound democratic but become ominous in light of the actual storming of the Capitol.

The **off-record politeness strategy** is used here to mask aggressive intent with the veneer of civility; words like "peacefully" serve to deflect accusations of provocation, yet their sincerity is compromised by later violent outcomes, showing a dissonance between words and actions. The rhetorical tools include **irony**, since the message's peaceful tone contrasts with the violence it precedes, and **euphemism**, where "make your voices heard" substitutes for what was effectively political confrontation. These soften the delivery while still rallying emotional intensity.

Excerpt 9:

In this excerpt, the speaker delivers a blend of **expressive** and **directive** speech acts, urging the audience to adopt emotional stances—“strength” and “courage”—that inherently encourage some form of action or resistance.

The **implicit threat** comes through the invocation of these virtues; the call for “courage” and “strength” indirectly suggests a coming challenge or conflict, positioning the audience as righteous resisters against an oppressive force.

Positive politeness is distinctly apparent in the invocation of common moral principles—these emotionally charged expressions foster an us-versus-them dichotomy that strengthens the in-group connection. The employment of metaphor and repetition is deliberate: 'This is a time for...' instils urgency and positions the political moment as a pivotal historical juncture necessitating decisive action. This martial vocabulary mentally prepares the listener for combat, even in the absence of explicit statements.

Excerpt 10:

This declaration utilises a combination of commissive and assertive speech acts—committing to action, 'We will not let them...' and conveying a threat to the group 'they...silence your voices'.

The threat is unequivocal: the speaker pledges to resist an identified 'them,' delineating distinct boundaries of conflict.

The bald-on-record face-threatening act aims at political adversaries through accusatory rhetoric, alleging their suppression and disenfranchisement of voters, devoid of any mitigating politeness measures to alleviate the impact. This straightforwardness conveys immediacy and unrestrained animosity. The speaker used victim-perpetrator reversal, depicting followers as victimised when they are integral to a dominant movement. Moreover, the hyperbole in expressions such as “take away your vote” amplifies the perceived threat, heightening anxiety and defensive allegiance. This dramatisation fosters a siege mentality, making followers more likely to justify radical action.

4. Major Findings

Analysis of the selected speech excerpts revealed the following key findings:

1. **Dominance of Implicit Threats:** The majority of Trump's threatening strategies are **implicitly coded**, allowing him to maintain plausible deniability while escalating urgency. Phrases like "make your voices heard" or "show strength" are framed as democratic expressions but function as indirect incitements.
2. **Blending of Speech Acts:** Most utterances are **hybrid in function**, combining **commissives and directives**, which simultaneously pledge resistance and demand action from the audience. This hybridization strengthens the speaker's alignment with his base while issuing mobilizing cues.
3. **Strategic Politeness:** Trump frequently employs **positive politeness strategies**, such as in-group language ("we," "our brave senators"), to reinforce solidarity, while resorting to **bald-on-record FTAs** when attacking political opponents or challenging democratic institutions.
4. **Rhetorical Amplification through Figurative Language:** The speech leverages **hyperbole** ("you won't have a country anymore"), **metaphor** ("fight like hell"), and **presupposition** ("stop the steal") to construct a high-stakes, binary worldview. These devices inflate the threat perception and dramatize opposition.
5. **Moral Framing and Victimization:** A recurring pattern involves **recasting the in-group as victims** of injustice and fraud, while morally justifying defiance as heroic. This **victim-perpetrator reversal** was instrumental in framing aggressive behaviour as a form of self-defence.

5. Conclusion

This study concludes that threatening strategies in political discourse are rarely overt; instead, they rely heavily on **pragmatic manipulation**, **strategic ambiguity**, and

emotive framing. Donald Trump's January 6 speech illustrates how language can function as a **covert weapon**, mobilizing supporters without issuing explicit commands. By intertwining **commissive pledges**, **directive cues**, and **in-group reinforcement**, the speech constructs a morally charged, action-oriented narrative. Furthermore, rhetorical elements such as **hyperbole**, **presupposition**, and **othering** shape a dualistic worldview that polarizes the political landscape into righteous defenders versus illegitimate usurpers. These findings suggest that populist threat construction depends not only on what is said, but how it is pragmatically and emotionally framed. Ultimately, the study demonstrates that **pragmatic tools are essential for exposing the latent coercive power of political language**, especially in democratic contexts where deniability and legitimacy must be maintained in tandem.

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