

PRAGMATICS OF URGENCY AND ALLIANCE MOBILIZATION: SPEECH ACTS IN VOLODYMYR ZELENSKY'S 2024 MUNICH SECURITY CONFERENCE ADDRESS

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Abstract: Speech act theory has long provided a useful framework for examining how political leaders do more than describe events through action justification, responsibility distribution, and international response shaping. This article investigates Volodymyr Zelenskyy's speech at the Munich Security Conference of February 17, 2024 as a strategic act of wartime diplomacy. The study focuses on how speech acts are employed to construct urgency, frame Russia's aggression as a systemic threat, and press Ukraine's partners toward concrete security commitments. Drawing on Austin's (1962) and Searle's (1969) taxonomies of speech acts, and reading them against a broader geopolitical-pragmatic context, the study combines qualitative and quantitative analysis. The findings reveal that representative acts predominantly structure Zelenskyy's address. However, they do not function as neutral descriptions of war. In fact, they work to transform battlefield facts, civilian suffering, and geopolitical risks into argumentative evidence for collective action instead. Directive acts emerge as the second most salient category and are strategically deployed to urge military assistance, tighten sanctions, delegitimize passivity, and reposition the defense of Ukraine as inseparable from the defense of Europe and of the broader rules-based order. Expressive acts help sustain solidarity and moral alignment with partner states. Although less frequent, commissive and declarative acts have been used to reinforce resolve, diplomatic positioning, and the performative staging of Ukraine as both victim of aggression and agent of resistance. The central claim of this paper is that Zelenskyy's Munich speech operates as a pragmatic instrument of alliance mobilization, i.e. it recasts war discourse into diplomatic pressure, converts gratitude into strategic alignment, and relocates the question of the war's continuation from Ukraine's endurance to the international community's willingness to act. In this sense, the speech is best understood as a discursive intervention in the politics of security, responsibility, and coalition-building under conditions of prolonged war.

Keywords: alliance mobilization; political pragmatics; rules-based international order; Russia-Ukraine war. speech acts; wartime diplomacy.

PRAGMATIQUE DE L'URGENCE ET MOBILISATION DES ALLIANCES : LES ACTES DE LANGAGE DANS LE DISCOURS DE VOLODYMYR ZELENSKY A LA CONFERENCE DE MUNICH SUR LA SECURITE DE 2024

Résumé : La théorie des actes de langage constitue depuis longtemps un cadre d'analyse précieux pour examiner comment les dirigeants politiques font davantage que décrire des événements, à travers la justification de l'action, la répartition des responsabilités et la mise en forme des réponses internationales. Cet article examine le discours prononcé par Volodymyr Zelensky à la Conférence de Munich sur la sécurité, le 17 février 2024, en tant qu'acte stratégique de diplomatie de guerre. L'étude porte sur la manière dont les actes de langage sont mobilisés pour construire l'urgence,

présenter l'agression russe comme une menace systémique, et inciter les partenaires de l'Ukraine à prendre des engagements sécuritaires concrets. En s'appuyant sur les taxonomies des actes de langage établies par Austin (1962) et Searle (1969), et en les mettant en perspective avec un contexte géopolitico-pragmatique plus large, l'étude combine analyse qualitative et analyse quantitative. Les résultats révèlent que les actes représentatifs structurent majoritairement le discours de Zelensky. Cependant, ils ne fonctionnent pas comme de simples descriptions neutres de la guerre. En effet, ils contribuent à transformer les faits du champ de bataille, les souffrances civiles et les risques géopolitiques en éléments argumentatifs en faveur d'une action collective. Les actes directifs constituent la deuxième catégorie la plus saillante et sont déployés de manière stratégique pour exhorter à l'assistance militaire, renforcer les sanctions, délégitimer la passivité, et repositionner la défense de l'Ukraine comme indissociable de la défense de l'Europe et de l'ordre international fondé sur des règles. Les actes expressifs contribuent à entretenir la solidarité et l'alignement moral avec les États partenaires. Bien que moins fréquents, les actes de langage commissifs et déclaratifs ont été employés pour renforcer la détermination, le positionnement diplomatique, ainsi que la mise en scène performative de l'Ukraine à la fois comme victime de l'agression et comme actrice de la résistance. La thèse centrale de cet article est que le discours de Munich de Zelensky fonctionne comme un instrument pragmatique de mobilisation des alliances, c'est-à-dire qu'il transforme le discours de guerre en pression diplomatique, convertit la gratitude en alignement stratégique, et déplace la question de la poursuite de la guerre de l'endurance de l'Ukraine vers la volonté d'agir de la communauté internationale. En ce sens, le discours doit être compris comme une intervention discursive dans les politiques de sécurité, de responsabilité et de construction de coalitions en contexte de guerre prolongée.

Mots-clés : mobilisation des alliances ; pragmatique politique ; ordre international fondé sur des règles ; guerre russo-ukrainienne ; actes de langage ; diplomatie de guerre.

Introduction

Language in political crises is never a neutral vehicle of information. In moments of war, it becomes a medium through which leaders assign responsibility, frame threats, legitimate action, and attempt to reorder the moral and strategic imagination of their audiences. Speech, in such circumstances, does not merely describe reality; it acts upon it. This performative dimension of political language is particularly evident in wartime addresses delivered to influential international audiences. In such contexts, a leader's words are intended not only to communicate a position, but also to influence how others respond to the situation. An utterance may for example call for action, seek support, justify a decision or place responsibility on another party. From a pragmatic perspective, such addresses therefore provide a useful site for examining the relationship between linguistic choices, political intentions, and the circumstances in which the speech is delivered. It is within this perspective that Volodymyr Zelenskyy's address to the Munich Security Conference on February 17, 2024 deserves renewed scholarly attention. Considering the fact that the speech is delivered at a critical stage of the Russia-Ukraine war (amid mounting battlefield pressure, anxieties over military aid, debates over sanctions enforcement, and widening uncertainty about the resilience of the rules-based international order) it cannot be reduced to a ceremonial political statement. It is more accurately read as a strategic act of wartime

diplomacy aimed at transforming military urgency into diplomatic pressure, moral outrage into coalition solidarity, and international sympathy into material commitment. Zelenskyy's discourse at Munich was not only aimed at informing the world of Ukraine's plight but it was also a deliberate attempt to mobilize allies, reframe the war as a systemic security crisis, and redistribute the burden of responsibility for the continuation of the conflict.

It is against this background that speech act theory provides a useful way of approaching political discourse of this kind. Instead of focusing only on what political leaders say, the theory draws attention to what they seek to accomplish through their words. Austin's (1962) and Searle's (1969) contributions are particularly relevant in this respect, as they show that utterances can perform different kinds of social actions. For instance, leaders can make claims, issue warnings, urge others to act, express attitudes, or undertake commitments. Such possibilities are especially important in political speeches, where a statement about an event may at the same time serve a persuasive or strategic purpose. Existing studies of political discourse, particularly presidential and diplomatic speeches, have nevertheless tended to concentrate on identifying and classifying speech acts. While this approach is useful for establishing the illocutionary profile of a speech, it does not always explain how particular acts derive their significance from the political circumstances in which they are produced. In wartime discourse, for example, an assertion about military developments may also be intended to create a sense of urgency, while an appeal for assistance may simultaneously place responsibility on those being addressed. Examining speech acts in relation to their context therefore makes it possible to connect linguistic choices with the political purposes they serve.

This concern is particularly relevant to Zelenskyy's wartime rhetoric. His speeches are delivered in circumstances in which military developments, international support, sanctions, and the future of European security are closely intertwined. Consequently, representative and directive acts cannot be considered apart from the circumstances in which they occur. What matters is not simply how frequently a particular type of speech act appears, but what it contributes to the broader argument of the speech as well. Previous studies have shown that Zelenskyy's speeches frequently draw on representative and directive acts, yet less attention has been paid to the way these acts operate within the pressures of an ongoing war, including military attrition, uncertainty over external support, sanctions politics, and competing understandings of peace and European security. This leaves room for a more context-sensitive examination of the pragmatic work performed by speech acts in his wartime discourse.

The present study takes up this concern by examining Zelenskyy's Munich address as a pragmatic intervention in wartime diplomacy. It does not seek merely to identify and classify the speech acts occurring in the address. Rather, it considers how they are used to present the war as an immediate security concern, challenge international passivity, assign responsibility, and encourage a stronger collective response. The focus is therefore on the relationship between the linguistic form of the acts, their intended force, and the geopolitical circumstances in which they are produced. Alternatively put, the study asks how language becomes part of diplomatic action when a head of state addresses an international audience whose political decisions can have direct consequences for the course of an ongoing war.

The following research questions guide the investigation. First, what major speech acts structure Volodymyr Zelenskyy's 2024 Munich Security Conference speech? Second, how are these speech acts used to convey wartime urgency, present Russia's invasion as a wider international security concern, and encourage action from Ukraine's partners? Third,

how does the combination of these acts contribute to the speech's diplomatic and persuasive purposes in the context of the Russia-Ukraine war?

The study is guided by three hypotheses. First, representative speech acts are expected to occur most frequently, but their role is likely to go beyond the presentation of information. They are expected to help establish the seriousness of the situation and provide grounds for the demands that follow. Second, directive acts are expected to play an important persuasive role, particularly where Zelenskyy seeks stronger military assistance, continued sanctions, and a more decisive response from partner states. Third, the interaction of representative, directive, expressive, and commissive acts is expected to show that the speech performs several functions at once: it describes the war, expresses moral and political positions, calls for action, and commits the speaker to a particular course of resistance. The study consequently seeks to make three related contributions. First, it treats speech act analysis as more than a matter of categorizing utterances by illocutionary type, paying closer attention to the circumstances and purposes that give those acts their force. Second, it places Zelenskyy's rhetoric within the concrete political realities of wartime diplomacy, particularly the need to maintain military and political support from international partners. Third, it contributes to research on political pragmatics and war discourse by showing how speech acts can operate simultaneously as linguistic choices and as instruments of political action. From this perspective, Zelenskyy's Munich address is not simply a text describing the Russia-Ukraine war. It is also an attempt to influence how the war is understood, who is held responsible for its continuation, and what the international community should do in response. Last but not least, it contributes to wider debates in discourse studies, political communication, and war rhetoric by demonstrating that speech acts in high-stakes political addresses may function simultaneously as linguistic acts, diplomatic instruments, and strategic attempts to reorder the moral architecture of international response. The discussion that follows therefore approaches Zelenskyy's Munich address as more than a speech about war. Indeed, it reads it as a discursive site where language, diplomacy, and geopolitical struggle meet, and where the pragmatics of saying becomes inseparable from the politics of making others act.

1. Literature Review

The study of political discourse has consistently shown that the language of heads of state cannot be approached as a transparent vehicle of information alone. In moments of crisis, political speech becomes a site of action. During these periods, it legitimizes policy, distributes blame, mobilizes publics, seeks external support, and projects moral authority. This is particularly evident in wartime discourse, where political communication takes place under conditions of military uncertainty, diplomatic pressure and competing demands for both domestic resilience and international coalition support. In such circumstances, what a political leader says is closely tied to what s/he wants others to understand, accept, or do. Within this broader field, speech act theory has offered, an influential framework for understanding how political leaders do things with words, that is, how they assert, warn, promise, accuse, thank, exhort, and thereby attempt to shape both perception and conduct.

First set out, by Austin (1962) and subsequently formalized by Searle (1969), speech act theory remains one of the most productive approaches for investigating the performative force of utterances in context. Austin's distinction between locutionary, illocutionary, and perlocutionary acts opened a conceptual path for examining language not only as the expression of meaning but also as action accomplished through saying. Searle's taxonomy of

speech acts that includes representatives, directives, commissives, expressives, and declarations further refined this approach by offering a practical model for classifying the social functions performed by utterances. In political discourse analysis, these theoretical insights have been particularly generative as they make it possible to identify how leaders linguistically frame realities, seek compliance, perform solidarity, or project commitment.

A large number of studies have applied speech act theory to presidential and high-level political discourse. Yokossi (2022), examined Joe Biden's opening and closing remarks at the Virtual Summit for Democracy, and found representative acts to be dominant. He reads this pattern as the evidence that the speech leaned on assertions and statements of principle to frame democratic values and reassure audiences. In a related investigation, Yokossi, Dadjo, and Koutchadé (2022), analyzed Volodymyr Zelenskyy's speech before the Japanese Parliament and reached a similar conclusion that representative acts occupied a central place in his discourse, particularly in foregrounding the human and geopolitical consequences of the war in Ukraine. Dadjo's (2022) reading of Harvest of Corruption likewise revealed the predominance of representative acts. In the same vein, Loko (2018), in a speech-act analysis of Donald Trump's acceptance speech, identified representative, commissive, and expressive acts as key components of Trump's rhetorical strategy. Dadjo (2018), who examined two speeches by Nana Akufo-Addo, similarly reported the prevalence of assertive speech acts in the articulation of Africa's developmental concerns. In addition, Koutchadé (2017) working on Buhari's address at the 71st United Nations General Assembly, highlighted the importance of representative acts in expressing national priorities and ideological positioning.

Two conclusions emerge from this body of work. First, speech act theory is highly effective in revealing the functional architecture of political discourse. Second, depending on the communicative situation, presidential speeches in different contexts often rely heavily on representative acts, supported by directives, expressives, and commissives. Although speech acts are generally identified, counted, and illustrated across these studies, less attention is given to how they operate within wider questions of legitimacy, diplomacy, security, and coalition politics. This limitation matters particularly for the present study because its focus is a wartime political address delivered by a sitting president at an international security forum. Such a speech differs considerably from an electoral speech, a ceremonial address, or a routine diplomatic statement. It is shaped by military developments, alliance relations, sanctions, humanitarian concerns, deterrence, and competing claims about responsibility. The issue, therefore, is not simply to identify the speech acts that occur, but to examine what they accomplish in this particular geopolitical setting. Representative acts, for example, may provide the basis for policy demands rather than merely report facts. Likewise, directives may put pressure on allies rather than simply request assistance. Expressive acts may help strengthen solidarity and shared moral positions; and commissives may communicate determination while reassuring international partners of Ukraine's continued agency and commitment.

A further strand of scholarship on wartime rhetoric and strategic communication reinforces this need to move beyond decontextualized description (Larsen & Ihlen, 2025). Political communication in war is inseparable from the management of audiences, the production of legitimacy, and the attempt to shape the terms on which external actors interpret obligation, risk, and intervention. Within this strand, Zelenskyy's speeches since the Russian full-scale invasion have been widely recognized as central to the country's diplomatic survival, not least because they seek to transform Ukraine's battlefield struggle

into a matter of shared democratic security. Yet, notwithstanding this interest, relatively little attention has been paid to how speech acts function within his rhetoric as mechanisms of wartime alliance mobilization. Existing analyses (Abat & Santika, 2025; Kivimäki, 2026) have often documented the prevalence of representative and directive acts, but seldom examine how those acts operate within a discourse that simultaneously names the aggressor, moralizes delay, broadens the frame from Ukraine to Europe and the rules-based order, and turns international spectators into implicated actors.

The Munich Security Conference speech of February 17, 2024 is a particularly apt case through which to pursue this gap. Delivered at a moment marked by battlefield strain, ammunition shortages, intensified uncertainty about the continuity of Western support, and renewed debates over the future architecture of European security, the speech was directed at an audience whose decisions had immediate consequences for the course of the war. Zelenskyy's address did not merely recount Russian aggression or celebrate Ukrainian resistance. It also sought to redefine the meaning of inaction, to represent the defense of Ukraine as the defense of international order, and to convert military necessity into diplomatic urgency. A purely taxonomic account of speech acts is therefore insufficient to capture the full significance of this discourse. Actually, what is needed is an approach that retains the analytical precision of speech act theory while embedding it in the geopolitical and strategic conditions that give the speech its force.

This is where the present study makes its contribution. Rather than viewing Zelenskyy's Munich speech simply as a collection of representative, directive, expressive, and commissive acts, the paper examines it as a pragmatic intervention in wartime diplomacy as well. It considers how these acts work together to mobilize allies, heighten the urgency of action, challenge passivity, and shift responsibility for the continuation of the war. In doing so, the study addresses a twofold research gap: first, the limited attention paid in speech-act scholarship to the geopolitical functions of wartime presidential discourse; and second, the absence of a sustained pragmatic reading of Zelenskyy's Munich 2024 speech as an act of diplomatic pressure situated within the wider politics of sanctions, security guarantees, and the defense of the rules-based international order.

Read together, these studies supply a necessary foundation, yet they also point to a further analytical step which requires moving from identifying speech acts in political texts to explaining how those speech acts become instruments of strategic persuasion in moments of international crisis. This article takes up that task by examining Zelenskyy's Munich address at the intersection of pragmatics, wartime rhetoric, and geopolitical communication.

2. Theoretical framework

This study is grounded in speech act theory, but draws on that theory in a deliberately focused way: not as a general account of how language functions in ordinary interaction, but as an analytical framework for understanding how a wartime head of state uses discourse to exert diplomatic pressure, construct urgency, and mobilize allied action in a high-stakes international security setting. Actually, Volodymyr Zelenskyy's speech at the Munich Security Conference is not merely a political text to be described. It is, in fact, a strategic communicative act performed before an audience whose decisions bear directly on the military, financial, and geopolitical conditions of Ukraine's survival. In a context like this, the value of speech act theory lies in its ability to connect linguistic form with political action. Indeed, it further resides in its capacity to show how utterances do not simply represent war,

but intervene in the management of war by assigning responsibility, legitimizing demands, and reshaping the horizon of acceptable international response as well.

Initially developed by Austin (1962) and further elaborated by Searle (1969), Speech act theory, advocates that speaking is a form of action. From Austin's perspective, an utterance is never exhausted by its propositional content. In fact, in saying something, a speaker also performs an act. He distinguishes three interrelated dimensions of this process. These include the locutionary act, the illocutionary act, and the perlocutionary act. To get down to specifics, the locutionary act refers to the production of a meaningful utterance. As for the illocutionary act, it concerns what the speaker does in producing the utterance (asserting, warning, requesting, promising, condemning). As far as the perlocutionary act is concerned, it refers to the effects that the utterance is intended or likely to produce in its audience, such as persuading, alarming, mobilizing, or reassuring. While Austin's tripartite distinction provides the general architecture of the analysis, Searle's (1969) classification of illocutionary acts offers the main descriptive tool for examining the speech. Searle distinguishes five broad categories of speech acts namely representatives, directives, commissives, expressives, and declarations. Representative speech acts commit the speaker to the truth of a proposition. As for the directives, they attempt to get the hearer to do something. Commissive speech acts, on the other hand, commit the speaker to a future course of action. While expressive speech acts convey the speaker's psychological stance, declarations perform an act by the very fact of being uttered under appropriate conditions.

In this article, Searle's taxonomy is not used in a purely mechanical or inventory-like fashion. Rather, it is treated as a heuristic instrument for mapping the strategic organization of Zelenskyy's discourse. The point is not simply to identify whether an utterance is representative, directive, expressive, commissive, or declarative, but to examine what these acts are made to do within a wartime diplomatic speech delivered to an international security audience. Accordingly, the framework adopted here links each speech-act category to a specific geopolitical-pragmatic function.

2.1. Representatives as Evidential and Strategic Framing Devices

Representatives are speech acts through which a speaker asserts, describes, reports, claims, or presents something as true. In political discourse, such acts often appear to function as statements of fact or opinion. In Zelenskyy's Munich speech, however, representative acts do more than narrate the state of the war. More is going to be said about them in the interpretation of the findings section. An example of a representative speech act taken from the speech under study is the following: "our resistance, with the support of our partners has put on hold the destruction of this system - a rules-based world order."

2.2. Directives as Mechanisms of Diplomatic Pressure and Alliance Mobilization

Directive speech acts serve to influence the conduct of others. Speakers use them to request, urge, call, advise, warn, or instruct. Conventionally speaking, directives are often associated with commands or requests. However, within Zelenskyy's Munich address, directives operate as the central mechanism of wartime diplomatic pressure. Here is an example culled from the analyzed speech: "Please, do not ask Ukraine when the war will end."

2.3. Expressives as Performances of Solidarity, Moral Alignment, and Affective Legitimacy

Expressive acts communicate feelings, attitudes, appreciation, grief, pride, or indignation. Nevertheless, when taken in the context of Zelenskyy's wartime diplomacy, expressive acts are analytically significant especially as they do more than just express emotion. The following excerpt from the studied speech is an illustrative instance: "Thank you very much!"

2.4. Commissives as Signals of Resolve, Reliability, and Political Agency

Commissive speech acts commit the speaker to future action. They do so through promises, vows, pledges, or declarations of resolve. As can be witnessed in the following pledge taken from the speech being scrutinized: "We will do everything for this", commitments to continue resisting, to do everything possible to protect citizens, or to pursue victory, perform more than a motivational function in a wartime setting.

2.5. Declarations and the Performative Staging of Political Position

Declarations are speech acts that bring about a change in social or institutional reality by the very act of being uttered under appropriate authority and conditions. Classic examples, include such acts as pronouncing someone married or sentencing a defendant or a criminal to imprisonment or death. In political speeches like the one being examined in this study, declarative force rarely appears in its strongest institutional form. Certain utterances, however, still perform symbolic acts of positioning. These ones name communities, mark solemnity, formally align speaker and audience, and stage moments of collective identification. Such examples from the speech being scrutinized include: "ladies and gentlemen!"

3. Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative-dominant mixed-method design to analyze the speech acts deployed in Volodymyr Zelenskyy's address at the Munich Security Conference on February 17, 2024. The choice of this method is informed by the dual objective of the study: first, to identify the speech-act categories structuring the address; and second, to explain how these acts function within a discourse of wartime diplomacy, alliance mobilization, and geopolitical pressure. A purely quantitative approach would not capture the strategic force of the speech, while an exclusively impressionistic reading would weaken analytical rigor. The study therefore combines quantitative mapping with close pragmatic interpretation.

3.1. Research Design and Corpus

The research is descriptive and interpretive in orientation. It is descriptive because it identifies and classifies the speech acts occurring in the selected discourse on the basis of Austin's (1962) and Searle's (1969) speech act theory. It is interpretive because, beyond taxonomic labelling, it examines the pragmatic and geopolitical work performed by these acts in context. The corpus is made up of the speech delivered by Zelenskyy at the Munich Security Conference on February 17, 2024. The selection of the speech was purposively motivated by its strategic importance within the diplomatic communication of the Russia-Ukraine war and its delivery before a high-level international security audience. The official English-language transcript, circulated through Ukrainian diplomatic channels, serves as the primary text for analysis.

3.2. Unit of Analysis and Procedure

The unit of analysis is the individual utterance as it functions within the unfolding discourse of the speech. Segmentation was guided by pragmatic rather than purely grammatical criteria: an utterance was isolated when it performed a recognizable illocutionary act such as asserting, urging, thanking, committing, or publicly positioning the audience. The analysis proceeded in three stages. First, the speech was read repeatedly to establish its thematic structure, argumentative progression, and diplomatic orientation. Second, the utterances were manually coded according to Searle's five major categories - representatives, directives, expressives, commissives, and declarations-while remaining attentive to Austin's distinction between locutionary, illocutionary, and perlocutionary dimensions. Where an utterance appeared multifunctional, it was classified according to its dominant illocutionary force in context. Third, the coded data were quantified and tabulated, after which representative excerpts from each category were analyzed qualitatively in relation to their broader communicative function in the speech.

3.3. Coding Principles and Analytical Orientation

The coding process followed a contextualist approach to speech acts. Knowing that in wartime political discourse, a representative act may also operate as a warning, and that a rhetorical question may function as a directive or rebuke, utterances were not classified solely on the basis of formal markers such as imperatives, modal verbs, or evaluative vocabulary. They were also classified in relation to speaker intention, audience, co-text, and the political circumstances of the speech. Moreover, for the sake of consistency preservation, each utterance was assigned the category that best captured its dominant pragmatic force, while secondary functions were considered during interpretation. Instead of treating speech acts as isolated linguistic items to be counted in abstraction from the conflict they address, each category is rather interpreted in relation to the geopolitical-pragmatic functions it performs in the discourse at hand. To go into detail, representative acts are examined as mechanisms of evidential framing through which battlefield realities and Russian aggression are transformed into arguments for action. As for the directive speech acts, they are analyzed as instruments of diplomatic pressure and alliance mobilization. Furthermore, expressives are read as performances of solidarity and affective legitimacy while commissives are considered signs of resolve and political agency. As far as declarations are concerned, they are interpreted as acts of public positioning and coalition staging. In this way, the study retains the analytical precision of speech act theory while adapting it to the demands of political-pragmatic inquiry into wartime diplomatic discourse.

4. Data Analysis

The analysis is based on Searle's (1969) categorization of speech act. In order to get a thorough appreciation of the linguistic analysis, different speech acts have been identified in the selected speech based on the Searlean taxonomy of speech acts. For transparency sake, the full transcript from the official transcript circulated by the Ukrainian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (2024), with each utterance numbered and tagged according to its dominant illocutionary force, is appended to this paper verbatim as coded primary-source data. The Statistical results of the identified speech acts in the selected speech are compiled. The different categories of the identified speech acts in the analyzed speech have been counted and presented in the following statistical table.

Table 4.1. Recap statistical table of the identified speech acts

Speech Acts	Frequency	Percentage
Representative	112	78.32%
Directive	19	13.29%
Expressive	06	04.19%
Commissive	01	00.70%
Declaration	05	03.50%
Total	143	100%

The table provides a comprehensive breakdown of the speech acts identified in the Ukrainian President's analyzed address. As can be observed in the above statistical table, five distinct types of speech acts have been recorded: Representative, Directive, Expressive, Commissive, and Declaration. It appears conspicuously that the different recorded speech acts occur in different proportions in the analyzed speech, reflecting the diverse nature of communicative strategies employed within the discourse. Upon closer examination of the statistical data, it becomes evident that representative speech acts predominate over other categories within the Ukrainian President's address. Specifically, they account for a substantial portion, totaling one hundred and twelve (112), representing 78.32% of all identified speech acts. Following in prominence are directive speech acts. They count nineteen (19), comprising 13.29% of the total. Expressive speech acts rank third, with a total of six (06), representing 4.19% of the speech. Declaration speech acts come fourth totaling five (05) occurrences representing 3.50% of the total. Commissive speech acts are the least frequent, comprising only one (01) instance, accounting for 0.70% of the overall speech acts recorded. Overall, the analysis has recorded a total of 143 speech acts offering valuable insights into the president's encoded messages that are going to be laid bare in the upcoming section devoted to the discussion of the findings for the deeper understanding of the speech at hand.

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5. Discussion

This study examined the speech acts deployed in Volodymyr Zelenskyy's address at the Munich Security Conference through the lens of Austin's (1962) and Searle's (1969) speech act theory. Consistent with Austin's conception of language as action and Searle's taxonomy of illocutionary acts, the findings demonstrate that Zelenskyy's discourse is not merely descriptive but strategically performative. They also address the research gap identified earlier by showing how speech acts function as instruments of wartime diplomacy within a rapidly evolving geopolitical context. Moreover, the findings show that the speech draws on all five major Searlian categories that is to say representatives, directives, expressives, declarations, and commissives. Of them all, representative speech acts are head and shoulders. They are followed by the directive speech acts in the ranking order. This distribution is not only a formal characteristic of the speech, but it also reveals the structure of Zelenskyy's wartime diplomatic strategy. Looking into it carefully with regard to the statistical summaries, one captures that the address is built first on establishing a factual and moral case, and then on converting that case into pressure for international action.

The predominance of representative acts suggests that Zelenskyy's speech is anchored in assertion, description, and evaluative presentation. Yet these acts do more than

convey information. They function as evidential framing devices through which the war is narrated as a threat not only to Ukraine, but to the wider architecture of international order. Zelenskyy's repeated references to Russian aggression, the erosion of the rules-based world order, and the risk of broader instability reposition the conflict from a national emergency to a geopolitical crisis with transnational consequences visible for example in his statement that "Our resistance, with the support of our partners, has put on hold the destruction of this system - a rules-based world order" and in his warning that "The longer this Russian aggression against the rules-based world order continues, the greater are the changes it provokes" (Zelenskyy, 2024, cited in Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine, 2024). These utterances do more than describe the war; they also give the audience a particular way of understanding it. Their force comes from linking continued support for Ukraine to the defense of international norms, European security, and the credibility of collective deterrence. This finding is consistent with Searle's characterization of representatives as acts through which speakers commit themselves to the truth of what they say, while also showing that, in wartime diplomacy, such acts can serve to establish credibility, justify a moral position, and heighten the sense of urgency surrounding the conflict.

If representative acts establish the argumentative foundation of the speech, directive acts transform that foundation into a call for response. Zelenskyy repeatedly urges his audience to act, not only by asking for support, but also by framing inaction itself as politically consequential. Statements of his calls such as "We must make security a reality again" and "Please, do not ask Ukraine when the war will end. Ask yourself. Why is Putin still able to continue it?" (Zelenskyy, 2024, cited in Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine, 2024), illustrate this strategy. The significance of the directive speech acts lies in their ability concerning responsibility redistribution. Rather than presenting Ukraine as the sole bearer of the war's burden, Zelenskyy shifts attention to the decisions of external actors whose hesitation, caution, or delayed commitments help shape the duration of the conflict. In this way, directive acts function as instruments of diplomatic pressure: they move the speech from testimony to accountability and from solidarity to obligation. This discussion supports Searle's view of directives as attempts to influence the hearer's future actions. However, the present findings suggest that, in wartime diplomatic discourse, directives function less as conventional requests than as mechanisms of alliance mobilization and shared political accountability.

Although expressive, declarative, and commissive speech acts are less frequent in the examined speech, they play an important supporting role in the architecture of the speech. Zelenskyy's expressions of gratitude, such as "Thank you very much!" and "Thank you for your attention and for every expression of support..." (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine, 2024), have contributed to maintain solidarity with international partners and strengthen the moral basis of Ukraine's appeal. These expressions are not merely polite additions to the speech; but they also contribute to the interpersonal side of wartime diplomacy by connecting strategic cooperation with recognition, shared values, and a sense of common responsibility. Declarations such as "Ladies and gentlemen!" and "Dear friends!" (Zelenskyy, 2024, cited in Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine, 2024) serve to stage the speech as a collective political moment rather than a solitary national plea. They help construct a coalitionary space in which speaker and audience are discursively aligned against a common threat. Commissives, though limited in number, are equally significant. The pledge "We will do everything for this" (Zelenskyy, 2024, cited in Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine, 2024) project resolve, reassure allies of Ukraine's continued agency, and

counter any impression that support for Ukraine is support for a passive recipient rather than an active wartime actor. Although commissive speech acts are quantitatively less prominent in the examined speech, they confirm Austin's insight that utterances perform social actions beyond conveying information. Their contribution to the speech lies in the fact that they help strengthen interpersonal trust, reinforce coalition identity, and project Ukraine as a credible and resilient international partner.

Zelenskyy's reliance on such international legal and institutional mechanisms as the rules-based world order, the G7 security declaration, Article 5 of the NATO treaty, the Charter of the United Nations, and the International Criminal Court, is the striking feature of the studied speech. As they broaden the frame of responsibility, these references are central to the geopolitical pragmatics of the speech. By invoking these international legal and security frameworks, Zelenskyy presents the war as a challenge to the institutional, legal, and moral foundations of the post-war international order rather than a bilateral conflict between Russia and Ukraine.

Zelenskyy's reference to the UN Charter as the document defining the basic rules of coexistence among nations, or when he cites the ICC warrant for Putin's arrest makes this strategy specifically clear. Such references strengthen Ukraine's claims while also reminding the international community of the standards and obligations it has publicly endorsed. The speech therefore draws on legal and institutional language not only to lend authority to its argument, but also to connect moral concern with a shared political responsibility to respond. The findings further indicate that speech acts gain additional force when they are framed through widely recognized legal and institutional norms. In this respect, the geopolitical context becomes an integral component of illocutionary force rather than a mere backdrop to communication. Taken together, the findings show that Zelenskyy's Munich speech is not simply an account of war, nor merely a plea for sympathy. It is a strategically organized act of wartime diplomacy in which representative acts establish the evidential and moral frame of the conflict, directive acts press allies toward action, and the remaining speech-act categories (expressives, declarations, and commissives) reinforce solidarity, legitimacy, and resolve. The speech works by moving from description to interpretation, from interpretation to urgency, and from urgency to collective responsibility. Overall, the findings answer the research questions by demonstrating that the strategic distribution of speech acts enables Zelenskyy to construct the war as a collective security concern, mobilize international support, and legitimize continued assistance to Ukraine. They also support the study's central proposition that speech acts in wartime presidential discourse operate simultaneously as linguistic actions and geopolitical interventions. Ultimately, the findings point to a discourse that seeks to influence the way the war is understood and responded to politically. Zelenskyy is not simply informing his audience about Ukraine, but he is also drawing attention to who bears responsibility for the continuation of the conflict and to the wider consequences of delaying action. From this perspective, the Munich address can be understood as a pragmatic instrument of alliance mobilization, through which language serves not only to describe the war but also to influence the diplomatic and geopolitical circumstances in which it unfolds.

As a result, the findings validate all three hypotheses advanced in this study. They confirm that representative speech acts predominate while functioning as instruments of evidential urgency rather than mere factual reporting; that directive acts constitute the principal persuasive mechanism through which Zelenskyy seeks to influence partner states toward stronger collective action; and that the interaction of representative, directive, expressive, and commissive acts reveals the address as a performative act of wartime

diplomacy aimed at reshaping the international distribution of responsibility for ending the conflict.

Conclusion

This study set out to examine the speech acts deployed in Volodymyr Zelenskyy's address at the Munich Security Conference of February 17, 2024 and to determine how those acts contribute to the broader communicative strategy of the speech within the political and diplomatic context of the Russia-Ukraine war. Drawing on Austin's (1962) and Searle's (1969) speech act theory, the analysis has shown that Zelenskyy's address mobilizes all the major categories of speech acts namely representatives, directives, expressives, declarations, and commissives with a marked predominance of representative acts. However, the numerical dominance of representatives in the examined speech is not what matters as such. What actually matters is the strategic function they perform within the speech. Far from serving as neutral descriptions of events, representative acts operate as evidential and interpretive devices through which battlefield realities, Russian aggression, and geopolitical risk are transformed into arguments for collective action. As far as the directive speech acts are concerned, they emerge as the speech's principal mechanism of diplomatic pressure, urging allies to move beyond rhetorical support toward firmer political, military, and moral commitment. As for the Expressive speech acts, they help maintain solidarity and affective alignment, while commissives and declarations reinforce resolve, public positioning, and the staging of coalition.

These findings, on the whole, position Zelenskyy's Munich address as a pragmatic act of wartime alliance mobilization rather than as a simple political speech about war. Indeed, the speech seeks to document aggression, enlarge the frame of the conflict from Ukraine to the international order, redistribute responsibility for the continuation of the war, and press external actors toward more decisive engagement simultaneously. It thereby illustrates how language, in moments of geopolitical crisis, functions both as strategic action and as representation. Beyond its immediate focus on Zelenskyy's studied speech, the study truly contributes to political pragmatics. As a matter of fact, it does so by showing the analytical value of reading speech acts in relation to diplomatic context, security discourse, and the material pressures of war. As a result, it invites future research to move beyond the mere identification of illocutionary categories and to examine more closely how political speech operates as a site where language, power, and international responsibility intersect under circumstances of conflict.

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Appendix

The data analyzed in this paper were culled from Volodymyr Zelenskyy's address at the Munich Security Conference of February 17, 2024 as published by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine (2024). The speech is reproduced below verbatim in its original form. The systematic speech-acts analysis carried out allowed the identification and classification of the various speech acts embedded in the address. The analysis used the following coding scheme: Rep = Representative, Dir = Directive, Com = Commissive, Dec = Declaration, Exp = Expressive. The speech is broken down into its utterance constituents. These individual utterances were subsequently numbered and assigned a speech-act category according to the coding scheme presented above for analytical purposes.

Volodymyr Zelenskyy's address at the Munich Security Conference of February 17, 2024 published by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine (2024).

1-February 24th could have marked the end of the world as we all know it. (Rep) 2-A world of rules. (Rep) 3-Rules that are meant to protect life. (Rep) 4-Our resistance, with the support of our partners, has put on hold the destruction of this system– a rules-based world order. (Rep) 5-2024 must become a time for a full restoration of a rules-based world order. (Dir) 6-Ladies and gentlemen! (Dec) 7-It is not the rules that define the world's life that should remain in the past, but rather such Russia that doesn't respect the rules should remain in the past. (Rep) 8-And we can ensure this. (Rep) 9-Not just by doing something. (Rep) 10-But by doing everything necessary. (Rep) 11-The Conference today represents different parts of the world and many nations. (Rep) 12-Among us, there is no one for whom the ongoing war in Europe does not pose a threat. (Rep) 13-This war defines more than just the place of Ukraine or entire Europe in the world. (Rep) 14-This is Russia's war against any rules at all. (Rep) 15-But how long will the world let Russia be like this? (Dir) 16-This is the main question today. (Rep) 17-The longer this Russian aggression against the rules-based world order continues, the greater are the changes it provokes. (Rep) 18-Perhaps, people will have to live in a world where local wars will not remain local – any outbreak of a war risks turning into a global catastrophe. (Rep) 19-Perhaps, the weaponization of food or migration will break existing regional balances and undermine many political systems – not only in Europe but also in the Middle East. (Rep) 20-In Africa. (Rep) 21-In the Americas. (Rep) 22-Perhaps, Europe is facing times when the question of invoking Article 5 of the NATO treaty will not be a question for Washington at all but rather for European capitals. (Rep) 23-There are hundreds of such “perhaps”. (Rep) 24-On February 23, 2022 none of them existed. (Rep) 25-Now they are a part of reality. (Rep) 26-And what do we lack in this reality? (Dir) 27-Security. (Rep) 28-Neither for the largest nor for the smallest state. (Rep) 29-We must make security a reality again. (Dir) 30-Ladies and gentlemen! (Dec) 31-Are you ready to leave behind everything you value in life in the world of yesterday? (Dir) 32-Ukrainians will not do it! (Dec) 33-This is our response. (Dec) 34-The year of 2024 demands your response – from everyone in the world. (Rep) 35-If we do not act now, Putin will manage to make the next years catastrophic for other nations as well. (Rep) 36-Intelligence communities are aware of this. (Rep) 37-Ukraine has already shattered myths with which Russia tried to cloud reality and which the world, unfortunately, believed. (Rep) 38-The myth that Russia could capture another country in a few days or weeks whenever it wants. (Rep) 39-Ukrainians have been holding for 724 days. (Rep) 40-724 days! (Rep) 41-Would you have believed 725 days ago that this was even possible? (Rep) 42-We have demolished another insane Russian

myth about Ukraine as supposedly “not a real country.” (Rep) 43-And it was in Russia that a massive mutiny began, leading to the capture of cities, internal fights, and an armed march on Moscow. (Rep) 44-This is a typical sign of a not a real state. (Rep) 45-We have ruined the myth that Russian weapons supposedly have some advantage over Western ones. (Rep) 46-In reality, Russia is worse in all respects. (Rep) 47-That's why for the first time in Russian history, Putin bowed to Iran and North Korea for help. (Rep) 48-There was a myth that Europe is too weak to defend itself. (Rep) 49-Instead, Europe has become a global force overcoming dependencies on Russia. (Rep) 50- Europe now demonstrates that our community deserves to be called EuroAtlantic. (Rep) 51-There are two coasts. (Rep) 52-Nearly 80 years of preventing a continental war in Europe relied on the strength of the American coast. (Rep) 53-Now we see that the European coast can also be the force that prevents chaos. (Rep) 54-Every defense coalition we have created proves this. (Rep) 55-Every security agreement we have signed implements it. (Rep) 56-We already have such an agreement with the UK. (Rep) 57-And I am grateful for the security agreement with Germany that we signed with Olaf in Berlin a day before. (Exp) 58-We signed a security agreement between Ukraine and France with Emmanuel in Paris. (Rep) 59-And this is just the beginning of implementing agreements based on the G7's security declaration. (Rep) 60-We were told for a long time – go to Putin so that he would allow the restoration of cargo movement in the Black Sea. (Rep) 61-In our Black Sea. (Rep) 62-But we did it without Putin. (Rep) 63-More than twenty-three million tons of cargo have been transported through the Black Sea and the Ukrainian export corridor. (Rep) 64-Since the beginning of this year, there is already normal shipment of goods to China, Spain, Egypt, Türkiye, Italy, Pakistan, the Netherlands, Tunisia, Libya, and others. (Rep) 65-Some claimed that there is no effective defense against Russian missiles. (Rep) 66-We know for sure, all of us, – with “Patriots” and some other Western air defense systems, any Russian missile can be shot down. (Rep) 67-And if there are enough air defense systems in Ukraine, we will be able to bring home millions of Ukrainians, millions of our people, millions of our refugees. (Rep) 68-And thank you for your attitude in all your countries to our people. (Exp) 69-Thank you very much! (Exp) 70-But I hope they will come back. (Rep) 71-We will do everything for this. (Com) 72-And, of course, our economy will be able to regain independence from external support. (Rep) 73-Ukrainians have proven that we can force Russia to retreat and that we are capable of restoring the rules. (Rep) 74-And with this, we leave absolutely nothing of the key Russian myth – the myth that Ukraine supposedly cannot win this war. (Rep) 75-We can get our land back. (Rep) 76-And Putin can lose. (Rep) 77-And this has already happened more than once on the battlefield. (Rep) 78- Our actions are limited only by the sufficiency and length of the range of our strength – by what does not depend on us. (Rep) 79-And Andiiivka situation proves this exactly. (Rep) 80-Dear friends! (Dec) 81-Unfortunately, keeping Ukraine in artificial deficits of weapons, particularly in deficits of artillery and long-range capabilities, allows Putin to adapt to the current intensity of the war. (Rep) 82-This self-weakening of democracy over time undermines our joint results. (Rep) 83-Russia has only one specific military advantage at this time, namely – the complete devaluation of human life. (Rep) 84-Constant Russian “meat assaults” prove this. (Rep) 85-International tolerance of the lack of rule of law in Russia after 1991 and Putin's policy of controlled poverty have led to the fact that human life is worthless for the Russian state. (Rep) 14 86-In addition to this, Putin's years of self-isolation and his impunity have led to his complete degradation. (Rep) 87-Absolutely. (Rep) 88-He now openly justifies Hitler, absolving him of responsibility for World War II. (Rep) 89-He has made the genocide of our people just an ordinary part of his

policy. (Rep) 90-Putin kills whoever he wants, be it an opposition leader or anyone else who seems as a target exactly to him. (Rep) 91-After the murder of Alexei Navalny, it's absurd to perceive Putin as a supposedly legitimate head of the Russian state. (Rep) 92-He is a thug who maintains power through corruption and violence. (Rep) 93-Coming to his so-called "inauguration", shaking his hand, considering him an equal means to disdain the very nature of political power. (Rep) 94-One may have different attitudes towards international institutions, but the International Criminal Court's warrant for Putin's arrest for kidnapping and forced deportation of children from Ukraine clearly demonstrates where Putin's so-called "career" should end. (Rep) 95-He has only two options ahead – to be in the dock in The Hague, or to be killed by one of his accomplices who are now killing for him. (Rep) 96-Destroying the source of wars and destabilization is our key task. (Rep) 97-It is fair. (Rep) 98-First. (Rep) 99-We all must do not something, but everything possible to defeat the aggressor. (Dir) 100-Please, everyone remember that dictators do not go on vacation. (Rep) 101-Hatred knows no pause. (Rep) 102-Enemy artillery does not fall silent due to procedural issues. (Rep) 103-Warriors standing against the aggressor need sufficient strength. (Rep) 104-Second. (Rep) 105-We should not fear Putin's defeat. (Rep) 106-Putin is a threat to all free nations. (Rep) 107-And yes, for those who still haven't heard – Putin is the monster who invaded Ukraine and killed thousands and thousands of people and kidnapped and deported at least tens of thousands of Ukrainian children. (Rep) 108-But that's not all. (Rep) 109-Putin butchered Chechens and Syrians; invaded Georgia; ordered the execution of his opponents both outside the walls of the Kremlin and in the heart of London and Berlin; and yes, just yesterday he tried to send us all a clear message as the Munich Security Conference opened – Putin murdered another opposition leader. (Rep) 110-So, please, let's not fear Putin's defeat and the destruction of his regime. (Dir) 111-Let's instead – work together to destroy what he stands for. (Dir) 112-It is his fate to lose, not the fate of the rules-based world order to vanish. (Rep) 113-If we don't defeat Putin now, it won't eventually matter who is the president of Russia. (Rep) 114-Because every new Russian dictator will remember how to maintain power by annexing the lands of other peoples, killing opponents, and destroying the world order. (Rep) 115-If this happens Europe and Central Asia and the whole world will be a very dark place. (Rep) 116-Third. (Rep) 117-We must close all loopholes in the sanctions against Russia. (Dir) 118-And there should be no sectors of the Russian economy involved in its aggression that are still free from sanctions. (Dir) 119-This particularly relates to the nuclear sector. (Dir) 120-Also, Russian assets that are already frozen should be confiscated. (Dir) 121-And we need to go further – find, freeze, and securely pacify every dollar accumulated by Putin and his friends. (Dir) 122-Fourth. (Rep) 123-Evil will never prevail if the forces of good are united and act together. (Rep) 124-History has proven it many times – when empires of evil and tyranny, which seemed eternal, crumbled right in front of our eyes. (Rep) 125-And this increased the space of freedom in the world. (Rep) 126-And the bolder and more active America was – along with the others on the right side of history – the more successful freedom was. (Rep) 127-The world would have long been divided among the dreams of a few dictatorships, if it was not for the American dream, which always left enough space for people's dreams. (Rep) 128- Major decisions happening in unity of the whole world including the US. (Rep) 129-And finally, fifth. (Rep) 130-Putin must be deprived of any ability to manipulate anyone in the world to constrain the activity of others. (Dir) 131-The world has a document that defines the basic rules of co-existence of nations – the Charter of the UN. (Rep) 132-Russia disregards it. (Rep) 133- Ukraine has offered the world a Peace Formula, based on the principles and norms of the UN Charter. (Rep) 134-We have managed

to unite representatives of all parts of the world to work on the Peace Formula and to develop details regarding the organization of the first Global Peace Summit. (Rep) 135-The summit is planned in Switzerland. (Rep) 136-And there the world must decide how to restore the full strength of the rule-based world order, almost destroyed by Russia. (Dir) 137-Please, do not ask Ukraine when the war will end. (Dir) 138-Ask yourself – why is Putin still able to continue it? (Dir) 139-I thank you very much for the invitation. (Exp) 140-Thank you for your attention and for every expression of support for our state, our people, our children! (Exp) 141-Please – be grateful to our warriors. (Dir) 142-And may our world, based on rules, never become the world of yesterday. (Dir) 143-Glory to Ukraine! (Exp)



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