

**A Critical Pragmatic Analysis of President
Joe Biden's Speech on the Attack
of Israel by Hamas**

By

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Abstract

Critical pragmatics is concerned with analyzing the three modes of classification, positive, neutral and negative. Critical pragmatics is still in its infancy and a lot of research is needed to fill this gap. Thus, the current study analyzes Joe Biden's Speech on the Attack of Israel by Hamas from critical pragmatic perspective. It adopts Chen(2020) as a model for analysis. The data is analyzed quantitatively and qualitatively. Results of statistical analysis show that the positive mode scores the highest percentage which is (39.7%). In the next place, the neutral mode is located as its percentage is (34.7 %). The less dominant mode is the negative mode which scores (25.7%).The most common speech act that occurs in the positive mode is the speech act of condoling and the most prevalent speech act in the neutral mode is the assertive speech act whereas the speech acts of threatening and prohibition are the most recurrent ones in the negative mode.

Keywords: Critical Pragmatics, Positive Mode, Neutral Mode, Negative Mode, Notion of Criticality

المستخلص

تهتم التداولية النقدية بتحليل أنماط التصنيف الثلاثة، الإيجابية والحيادية والسلبية. لا تزال التداولية النقدية في مهدها وهناك حاجة إلى الكثير من الأبحاث لسد هذه الفجوة. ومن ثم، فإن الدراسة الحالية تحلل خطاب جو بايدن حول هجوم حماس على إسرائيل من منظور تداولي نقدي. وتتبنى هذه الدراسة تشن (2020) نموذجاً للتحليل. ويتم تحليل البيانات كما ونوعاً. أظهرت نتائج التحليل الإحصائي أن الوضع الإيجابي حصل على أعلى نسبة وهي (39.7%). وفي المرتبة التالية، يقع الوضع الحيادي حيث تبلغ نسبته (34.7%). أما الوضع الأقل هيمنة فهو الوضع السلبي حيث حصل على نسبة (25.7 %). وأكثر أفعال الكلام شيوعاً التي تحدث في الوضع الإيجابي هو فعل الكلام التعزية، وأفعال الكلام الأكثر شيوعاً في الوضع الحيادي هي فعل الكلام التوكيدي، في حين أن أفعال التهديد والمنع هي الأكثر تكراراً في الوضع السلبي.

الكلمات المفتاحية: التداولية النقدية, الوضع الإيجابي, الوضع الحيادي, الوضع السلبي, مفهوم النقدية

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1. Introduction

In 1993, Mey coined the term "critical pragmatics" in his book *Pragmatics An Introduction*. In the 1980s and 1990s, there were several attempts to incorporate the notion of criticality into language use. Since pragmatics is concerned with language users, then a critical pragmatic approach has to limit itself to those areas where language use is determined by power relations in society and at the same time put language users in a critical position (Mey,2001,p.316). Thus, by putting language users in critical positions, problems of social language use like deceit, oppression, inequality and naturalization are tackled in their socio-cultural contexts (Chen,2020,p.26).

In 2011, Korta and Perry made another attempt that may add something to critical pragmatics when they introduced their book *Critical pragmatics: An Inquiry into Reference and Communication*. That was the first book that carries this title. According to Korta and Perry (2011,p.3), three key notions to critical Pragmatics are : language as action, communicative intentions and reflexive versus referential conditions.

Several researches have been done on critical pragmatics but the picture is far from being complete. For example, Al-Hindawi and Al-Khazali (2021) have conducted a theoretical study on critical pragmatics and they state that critical pragmatics is a sub field of CDA and it follows the same methods of analysis adopted in CDA. Another study which is conducted by Muhammed (2020) Which analyzes the notion of racism in the Holy Quran also followed CDA principles .In other words, it focuses on negativity which is the main concern of CDA. Therefore, most studies on critical pragmatics are done in a CDA fashion. In other words, these studies use CDA theoretical tools and concepts by focusing on negativity

in language which creates a confusion between critical discourse analysis and critical pragmatics. Briefly speaking, critical pragmatics is new area of research that needs more research. The present study is different from previous studies since it explores positivity, neutrality and negativity in discourse and hence it attempts to find answers for the following questions:

1. Which mode is more dominant in Biden's speech?
2. Which speech acts does Biden use in the positive mode?
3. Which speech acts does Biden manipulate in the negative mode?
4. Which speech acts are more prevalent in the neutral mode?

2. Literature Review: Critical Pragmatics

According to Chen (2020,p. 29) critical pragmatics(CPA, henceforth) is concerned with revealing the positive, neutral and the negative modes in discourse. In is approach, to critical pragmatics, Chen relies on pragmatic theories in showing the three modes of critical pragmatics. Figure (1) below shows the orientations of CPA.

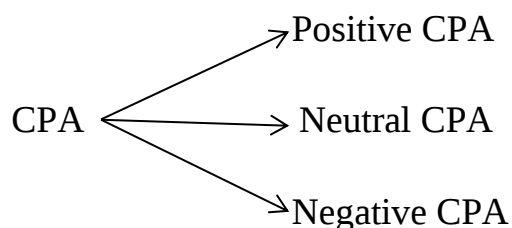


Figure (1) Orientations of CPA

Based on Chen (2020,p. 29)

2.1 Criticality in Critical Pragmatics and Critical discourse analysis

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One might be a bit confused about the difference between critical pragmatics and critical discourse analysis (henceforth, CDA). Are they alike? Is Critical pragmatics an alternative to critical discourse analysis? The answer is that they are two different areas of study and the distinction between them can be made clear through explaining the notion of criticality in each field. In critical discourse analysis, the analysts look for the negative mode in texts only. That's they try to unravel how notions like power, oppression, racism and ideological beliefs are used in discourse. On the other hand, in critical pragmatics, linguistic texts are analyzed according to the three modes positive, negative and neutral and it gives a priority to positivity in communication unlike CDA whose only concern is negativity (Chen, 2020,p.26).

2. 2 Positive, Neutral and Negative Modes

According to Chen,(2020,p. 34), adhering to politeness strategies and accepted social communication norms in communication indicates positivity . On the other hand , negativity can be identified when interlocutors breach that norms of communication. As far as neutrality is concerned, it is described as in between value. An utterance is neutralized when it does not show politeness nor impoliteness towards the addressee. It is noteworthy that the three modes of critical pragmatics are seen as three values arranged on a continuum with the positive on one end, the negative on the other and the neutral is in the middle. In other words, there are no clear-cut boundaries between them. An expression might be perceived as being negative in one context and might not be so in another. The analysis of positivity, neutrality and negativity is context dependent. For example, irony is seen on the surface as polite yet the intended meaning of it is to mock the hearer and thus it is impolite and reveals the negative attitude of the speaker. Culpeper (2011,p.14) maintains that impoliteness

often involves a clash with expectations, particularly concerning behaviours associated with particular contexts. That is when a behaviour is unexpected, it can be described as being impolite since it goes against people's sense of appropriacy, something which feeds into politeness. Culpeper (2011,p.2) also holds that the offence does not lie in 'what is said' but in 'how it is said'. Jacobs (2002,p.125) also adds that "what makes for the difference between a tactic being obstructive or constructive is not the tactic per se, but the way in which the tactic in text functions in its context of use".

3. Methodology

This section describes the practical part of the study. It introduces the model adopted in the analysis. It also discusses results obtained from data analysis.

3.1 The Model of Analysis

The model of analysis adopted in the current study is Chen (2020) which relies on previous pragmatic theories on politeness and impoliteness. Thus, Chen's model of analysis is an eclectic one. The theoretical tools that Chen (2020) manipulates in his approach to critical pragmatics are like deixis, speech act theory, (im)politeness theories, implicatures, Grice's cooperative principle, presupposition and Verschueren (1999) adaptation theory. It manipulates Culpeper (1996,2011) as a model for analyzing the negative mode and other pragmatics theories like Brown and Levinson (1987) politeness theory and Leech (2014) politeness maxims for showing the positive and neutral modes. Chen (2020,p.34) states that polite linguistic forms indicate positive aspect in CPA while impolite linguistic forms show negative

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aspect in CPA. These tools are surveyed briefly in the next sections below

3.1.1 Deixis

Deixis means "pointing via language " and this pointing is achieved through using linguistic forms called deictic expressions. Deictic expressions are often referred to as indexicals. Their meanings can only be interpreted by depending on the speaker, the hearer and the context. They are usually common in spoken discourse where referents are easily identified. Indexicals are categorized into: **personal deixis** which is used to refer to people such as (me, you), **temporal deixis** which is used to refer to time like (now, then) and **spatial deixis** which is used to refer to location such as (here, there) (Yule,1996,p.9). Deictic expressions are tied to the speaker and the context for their interpretation. They can be either **proximal** (near the speaker) like this, now and here or **distal** (away from the speaker) like that, then, and there (p.9).

Social deixis indicates the social status of interlocutors engaged in communicative events and their relationships. For instance, a T/V distinction, where T (tu) is used for the familiar and V (vous) is used for the unfamiliar (p.10).

3.1.2 Speech Act Theory

In his speech act theory, Austin proposes that when people speak, they do not only produce words but they perform actions through the utterance of these words (Haung,2007,p.93). Austin (1962) distinguishes between **constatives** (when we produce an utterance like " China has the biggest population in the world , we describe facts or a state of affairs) and **performatives** (when we produce an utterance like " I promise I'll come here tomorrow on time", we perform a particular action) (Chen,2020,p.31).

Any speech act consists of three levels: **locutionary** (refers to the literal production of sounds), **illocutionary** (indicates the intention of the speaker behind the utterance), **perlocutionary**(refers to effect of the utterance on the hearer) (Austin,1962,p.101-102). The threefold classification makes it clear that language users, rather than language, perform actions via their use of language.

Some years later, Searle (1969) modifies Austin classification of speech acts and he identifies five categories, assertives, declaratives, expressives, commissives and directives. Searle also adds that, in order to a speech act to be felicitous, that is to be performed happily or successfully, it must meet a number of conditions called "felicity conditions". Felicity conditions are: general conditions, preparatory conditions, propositional or content conditions, sincerity conditions and essential conditions (Schiffrin,1994,p.56).

A speaker performs a direct speech act when there is a direct correlation between the structural form (declarative, imperative and interrogative) and the communicative form (statement, question, command). On the other hand a speaker performs indirect speech act when when there is no direct correspondence between the structural forms and the communicative function (Yule, 1996,p.55).

3.1.3 Leech's (2014) Politeness Principles

Leech (2007) proposes six maxims of politeness that interlocutors have to observe in communication. Later, Leech (2014) expands his six maxims into ten specific pragmatic constraints under a single term called the **grand strategy of politeness (GSP)**: in order to be polite, S expresses or implies meanings that place a high value on what pertains to **others** (

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O=other person[s], [mainly the addressee]) or place a low value on what pertains to S(S = self, speaker). Table (1) shows Leech (2014) GSP and its ten maxims.

Table (1) Leech (2014) GSP

Based on Leech (2014,p.91)

Maxims	Sub- maxims
1. Generosity Maxim	Place a high value on O’s wants
2. Tact Maxim	Place a low value on S’s wants
3. Approbation Maxim	Place a high value on O’s qualities
4. Modesty Maxim	Place a low value on S’s qualities
5. Obligation (of S to O) Maxim	Place a high value on S’s obligation to O
6. Obligation (of O to S) Maxim	Place a low value on O’s obligation to S
7. Agreement Maxim	Place a high value on O’s opinions
8. Opinion Reticence Maxim	Place a low value on S’s opinions
9. Sympathy Maxim	Place a high value on O’s feelings
10. Feeling Reticence Maxim	Place a low value on S’s feelings

3.1.4 Culpeper’s (1996) ‘ Anatomy of Impoliteness’

Impoliteness can be defined as a negative attitude towards certain behaviours that may occur in certain contexts. It is supported by the individual’s desires, expectations and social beliefs. A behavior is condemned to be ‘impolite’ when it confronts with how people expect it or want it to be and when this behavior causes offence to others (Culpeper,2011,p.23).

According to Culpeper (2011), impoliteness may include being rude, aggressive, inappropriate, being sarcastic, being hurtful, belittling others and not treating others decently or seriously (Archer et al, 2012 ,p.91). Other important impoliteness formulae types are like challenging, criticisms, threats, complaints, curses and ill-wishes (See Culpeper 2011 for more impolite strategies).

Culpeper (1996,p.356) sets his ‘anatomy of impoliteness’ model which consists of five strategies:

(1) *Bald on a record impoliteness* - FTAs are performed in a clear, direct and unambiguous way.

(2) *Positive impoliteness*- the use of strategies that damage the addressee’s positive face- wants, for example, ignoring others; not addressing others by their address forms; disinterested; unsympathetic; disagreeing with others; calling the other names; using taboo words and using secretive language.

(3) *Negative impoliteness* subsumes behaviours which explicitly damages the negative face of the addressee such as scorning, frightening, not being serious, being contemptuous, belittling others and invading the other’s space.

(4) *Sarcasm or mock impoliteness*- it is equivalent to Leech’s notion of ‘irony’ in which the speaker seems to be polite on the surface but he does not really intend to be so.

(5) *Withhold politeness* where it would be expected like failing to thank others (Archer et al, 2012 ,p.91).

3.1.5 Grice's Cooperative Principle

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Grice (1975,p.41-58), introduces his cooperative principle in which he states “*Make your contribution such as is required, at the stage at which it occurs, by the accepted purpose or direction of the talk exchange in which you are engaged*”. This underlying principle determines the way interlocutors use language efficiently in communication. Thus, in any communicative situation, people do not talk in a mechanical disconnected way because it would be irrational to do so but rather they cooperate jointly communicate smoothly and achieve their interactional purposes(Archer,2012,p. 51).

Grice (1975) categorizes the cooperative principle into four maxims: quantity, quality, relation and manner. According to the cooperative principles and its maxims, in any conversation, people interact with each other by providing the right amount of information, in truthful, relevant and perspicuous way (Huang,2007,p.25).

3.1.6 Implicatures

Grice (1975,p.47-58) argues that when one of the four maxims of the cooperative principle is violated, implicatures are generated . Implicature refers to the additional conveyed meaning that speaker does not state literally or explicitly.

(Archer et al, 2012,p.47). It is speakers who implicate this additional meaning through implicature and it is the task of the hearer to work out and recover the intended meaning of utterance via making inferences(Yule,1996,p.40).

The generated meaning that the hearer creates to arrive at the intention of the speaker is made by means of depending on the context and the hearer pragmatic sense that enables him to infer the speaker's implicit message. Thus, Implicatures and inferences are two closely related

pragmatic notions that are adopted by the speaker and the hearer respectively (Archer et al,1996,p. 48).

According to Cap (2011, p.60), presupposition and implicature are inherently complementary because both concepts are concerned with how the speaker decodes meaning and how the hearer encodes the speaker's message. Levinson (1983,p.126) states that there are three types of implicatures: generalized implicatures (which are context-dependent), particularized implicatures (which are context-free) and conventional implicatures which depend on the existence of certain conjunctions like *but* , *however* and *therefore* etc.

3.1.7 Pragmatic Presupposition

Pragmatic presupposition refers to the relationship between two propositions whose truth is taken for granted due to the mutual knowledge between the speaker and the hearer (Kryk-Kastovsky, 2009, P.514). It is an implicit assumption that the speaker assumes to be true prior to uttering the sentence. Pragmatic presupposition is concerned with the relation between the utterance and the speaker. It is speakers not sentences, who have pragmatic presuppositions. In other words analysts are interested in showing how speakers draw on pragmatic presupposition as a linguistic device of expressing implicit meaning (Haung ,2007,p.65).

Fetzer (2011 ,p. 32) adds that speakers may presuppose information in order to achieve economy because they assume that this information is known to the addressee and need not be stated explicitly. For example, when S produces an utterance like " Will you open the door?", he assumes that H understands what door S is talking about. Thus, when the producer of an utterance U pragmatically presupposes some information I, U is the

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appropriate only if I is mutually known to both the speaker and the hearer. This felicity condition of pragmatic presupposition is context dependent and influences the appropriateness of speech acts (Chen,2020,p.36) .

3.1.8 Adaptation Theory

In his adaptation theory, Verschueren (1999,p.61) suggests that pragmatics is the study of linguistic adaptation or adaptability and that human communication is a form of adaptation. In other words, communication is something essential for life and survival. Thus, adaptation theory considers communication as a vital need for human beings that has to be satisfied

Verschueren's adaptation theory is based on three main notions :variability, negotiability and adaptability. Variability refers to “the property of language which defines the range of possibilities from which choices can be made” (p.59). Negotiability, on the other hand is "the property of language responsible for the fact that choices are not made mechanically or according to strict form- function relationships, but rather on the basis of highly flexible principles and strategies”. Finally, “adaptability” refers to “the property of language which enables human beings to make negotiable linguistic choices from a variable range of options in such a way as to approach points of satisfaction for communicative needs” (Verschueren,1999,p.61). Thus, using language in any communicative situation involves continuously making linguistic choices. Making choices takes place at all linguistic levels and these choices also includes pragmatic strategies. When producing an utterance, not only do speakers make linguistic choices, but hearers also choose how to interpret the utterances made by the speakers.

In order to make negotiable choices, language users must account for the context involved. According to Verschueren, context includes the **communicative context** (including the **physical world**, the **social world**, the **mental world**, the **utterer**, and the **interpreter**) and the **linguistic context** (p. 76). It is noteworthy that context is not a static notion but rather being constantly generated by endless domain of possibilities during communication by the **dynamics** of communication and through joint cooperation between speakers and interpreters. Interlocutors engaged in communication, speakers and interpreters, compose a context based on their understanding of the ingredient relevant to current communication.

3.2 Data Analysis

Being objective and unbiased is one of the essential prerequisites of any scientific research; therefore Biden's speech is analyzed according to his own intention and not according to the researcher' viewpoint. This is recommended by pragmatic analysis because pragmatics is the study of the intention of the speaker. In other words, when he is being negative when he attacks, criticize or threat. On the other hand, he is adhering to the positive mode when he is supportive, helpful and so on, regardless of the state or the people he supports. Finally, statements that are classified as neutral are those that do not indicate negativity or positivity or those that are lying in between.

3.3 The Unit of Analysis

The unit of the analysis in the present study is the clause in the Hallidayan sense. Edggins (2004,p.255) defines the clause complex as “a

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grammatical and semantic unit, and it is a unit that occurs in both spoken and written language". The term clause complex is used to refer to a combination of two or more clauses while the term clause simplex refers to a single clause unit or a sentence of one clause .

Clause complex consists of two or more clauses joined together according to two systems: tactic system and logico-semantic system. Tactic system is divided into parataxis and hypotaxis(respectively, co-ordination and subordination in the conventional grammars sense). Parataxis relations combine two clauses of an equal status while hypotaxis links two clauses of unequal status). In other words, in the paratactic relation, the two clauses are independent whereas in the hypotactic relation, one clause is dependent and the other is independent. On the other hand, logico-semantic system describes the kind of meaning relation between the joined clauses. There are two types of relations between clauses. They can be linked through projection (where one clause is quoted or reported by another clause), or through expansion (where one clause develops or extends on the meanings of another) (Eggins,2004,p.258-289). In hypotactic relation, there is an independent clause which can stand alone and a dependent clause which cannot stand alone by itself (p.267).

4. Results and Discussion

The aim of this section is to present the results and discuss them quantitatively and qualitatively.

4.1 Quantitative Analysis

The results of data analysis indicates that the positive mode in Biden's speech exceeds the other modes as its percentage is (39.6%). In the next place, the neutral mode is located as it scores (34.7%) whereas the negative mode is less frequent one as its percentage is (25.7%). It is apparent that Biden tries to be moderate as he tries to maintain a kind of equilibrium. This is justified by the fact that when politicians speak, they do not take into their consideration the audience they are talking to only but the whole world. In other words, a politician might resort a masked positivity to achieve his goals and his country own behalf. Figure (2) below shows the percentages of the three modes of critical pragmatics, positive, negative and neutral in Biden's speech.

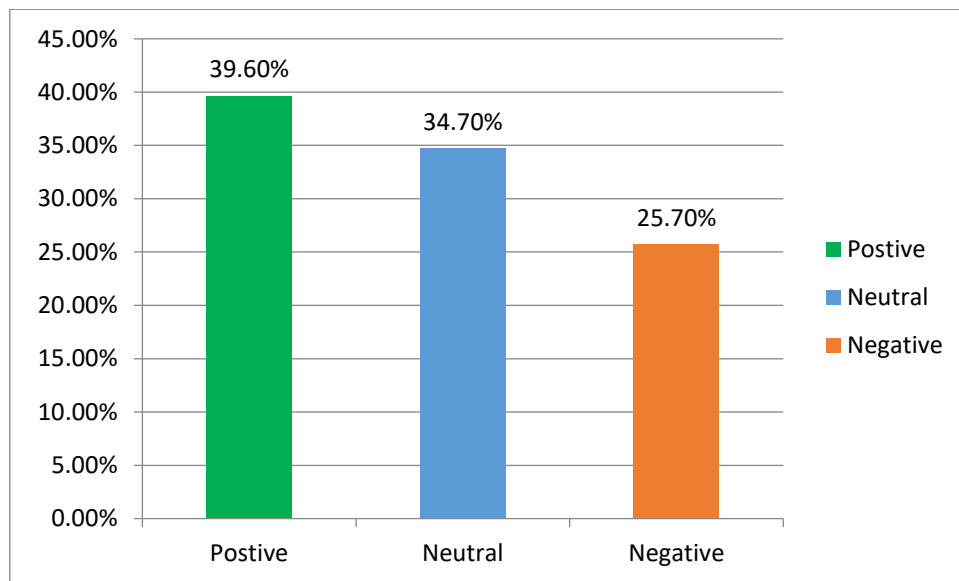


Figure (2) Percentages of CP three Modes in Biden's Speech

4.2 Qualitative Analysis

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This section is devoted to analyze the data from a qualitative perspective. It is sub-divided into three sections: the positive mode, the neutral and the negative mode.

4.2.1 The Positive Mode

Positivity in Biden’s speech is centred around showing sympathy and support to Israel. For instance, when Biden says: *“This is a moment for the United States to come together, to grieve with those who are mourning”*, he is adhering to the sympathy maxim through placing high value on others’ feelings. He feels sorry for those who have lost theirs in the attacks. Biden also manipulates another repetitive style *“We stand with Israel. We stand with Israel”*. Here, he is observing the obligation (of S to O) maxim as he places a high value on S’s obligation to O. Biden flouts the maxim of quantity by repeating the same sentence. Again, Joe Biden uses direct speech act in which he declares that his state is with Israel. This speech act indicates support, commitments and obligation on the part of America to defend Israel. Table (2) bellows shows some examples in the positive mode used by Biden.

Table (2) Examples in the Positive Mode used by Biden

<i>Speech acts in the positive mode</i>
<i>“The people of Israel lived through one such moment this weekend”.</i>
<i>“There is no justification for terrorism”.</i>

“Today, Americans across the country are praying for all those families that have been ripped apart.

A lot of us know how it feels. It leaves a black hole in your chest when you lose family, feeling like you’re being sucked in. The anger, the pain, the sense of hopelessness”

2.4. 2 The Neutral Mode

Instances where the speaker is neither being positive nor negative are neutralized. For example, ***“You know, just over 50 years ago — I was thinking about it this morning, talking with the Secretary of State, the Vice President in my office and — over 50 years ago, as a young senator, I visited Israel for the first time, as a newly elected senator”***. Here, Biden uses assertive speech acts and he is merely narrating past events that had experienced without harming others. Biden is neither being positive nor being negative and hence, his talk is neutralized. Table (3) shows some examples on the neutral mode used by Biden in his speech.

Table (3) Examples in the Neutral Mode used by Biden

<i>Speech acts in the Neutral Mode</i>
<i>“And I had a long, long trip — or meeting with Golda Meir in her office just before the Yom Kippur War. And I guess she could see the consternation on my face as she described what was being faced they were facing”.</i>
<i>“My administration has consulted closely with Congress throughout this crisis. And when Congress returns, we’re going to ask them to</i>

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take urgent action to fund the national security requirements of our critical partners”.

4.2.3 The Negative Mode

Negativity is identified in Joe Biden's speech when he says: ***“We uphold the laws of war — the law of war”***. Here, Biden explicitly performs a declarative direct speech act. This is a *bald on a record impoliteness*, done in a clear, direct and unambiguous way. He issues a speech act of threatening and therefore he is being negative. Biden infringes the maxim of quantity by repeating the last phrase and hence being informative more than required. This is done to assert the negative mode he is adhering to. Another instance of negative mode is when the American president states: ***“Let me say again — to any country, any organization, anyone thinking of taking advantage of this situation, I have one word: Don't. Don't”***. He resorts to automatization by repeating the “any” and “don't” to attract attention and to make emphasis. Thus, he is challenging and threatening “any country and any organization and anyone” who might think of standing against his policy. Using the imperative repeated contracted form “Don't” and omitting the verb and being satisfied with it indicates the strength of the verb that may come after it. This strong “Don't” is sufficient and need not be followed by a verb. The audience can work out the meaning of it. What is strikingly interesting about this “don't” is that Biden is observing and flouting the maxim of quantity at the same time. He repeats the same word and thus gives more information than required and withholding the verb at the same

time and hence, doesn't provide the sufficient amount of information. Thus, he creates an implicature and the intended meaning can be worked out depending on the context.

Biden is also being negative when he states : “ ***The brutality of Hamas — this bloodthirstiness — brings to mind the worst — the worst rampages of ISIS***”.

In these lines, he is describing Hamas as being brutal and he compares them to ISIS and thus, he is making accusations. Table (4) below shows some of the speech acts used by Biden in the negative mode.

Table (4) Examples in the Negative Mode used by Biden

<i>Speech acts in the Negative mode</i>
<i>“our response would be swift, decisive, and overwhelming”.</i>
<i>“Hamas offers nothing but terror and bloodshed with no regard to who pays the price”.</i>
<i>“Its stated purpose is the annihilation of the State of Israel and the murder of Jewish people”.</i>

5. Conclusion

The present study has come with a number of conclusions. First, the positive mode is more prevalent than the other modes as it occupies (39.6%) of Biden's talk. Second, the neutral mode is located on the next level as its percentage is (34.7%). Third, the percentage of negativity is

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the least one as it is (25.6%). Fourth, as far as negative mode is concerned, speech acts of threatening, warning and challenging are the most frequent ones. Fifth, in the positive mode, he uses speech acts of condoling. Concerning the neutral mode, Biden uses assertive speech acts. Sixth, Biden relies heavily on repeating speech acts in the positive and the negative modes to achieve emphasis and clarity and makes his words more effective and thus infringes the maxim of quantity.

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