

A Linguistic Study of Russian and American Accusations over Ukraine

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دراسة لغوية للاتهامات الروسية والامريكية حول اوكرانيا

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Abstract

This study presents a linguistic analysis of how Russian and American mainstream media and official statements deployed speech acts of accusation during the 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine. Using Speech Act Theory (Austin, 1962; Searle, 1976) as the framework. The study analyzes 50 texts of English-language official statements and media headlines from both sides. In this research utterances are categorized into assertives, expressives, directives, commissives, and declarations, and analyzes their pragmatic force in shaping narratives. The analysis reveals contrasts in tone and rhetorical strategy: U.S. officials and media overwhelmingly use assertive accusations and expressive condemnations to morally indict Russia, while Russian counterparts issue assertive counter-accusations along with defensive justifications. Both sides employ commissives through Americans vowing punitive action and support for Ukraine, while Russians pledging to achieve war aims, and they use directives, from Western calls for Russia to cease aggression to Russian demands that NATO stop expansion. These findings suggest that speech acts of accusation are not just reporting or opinion, rather they perform actions: condemning, justifying, threatening, and gathering support. This research provides novel insight into how language itself becomes a battleground, and concludes that such starkly divergent rhetorical strategies, though serving immediate political aims. Furthermore, it entrench the conflict by obstructing mutual understanding, highlighting the essential role of linguistic analysis in conflict studies.

Keywords: Accusations - Speech Acts -Media headlines

1. Introduction

The ongoing conflict in Ukraine, which intensified with Russia's full-scale invasion in February 2022, has been marked by an intense war of words (Fafiyebi, D. O. & Fafiyebi, O. F., 2025). Both Russian and American officials have routinely exchanged accusations over culpability for the violence, violations of international law, and interference in Ukraine's authority. These accusatory statements—whether in diplomatic press conferences, state media, or Western news outlets—are not mere descriptions of events; they are actions in themselves. In the field of international politics, language can function as a weapon and a tool of diplomacy, influencing public opinion and international response (Abdel Tawwab, 2023). This research was prompted by the necessity to gain a better comprehension of how pragmatically such language works. The study is able to map out the meanings and implications of the accusation in terms of the Speech Act Theory by considering it. Therefore, this Study raises the following questions: What speech acts are involved in the accusations made by Russian and American sources, and how do they use language to perform the act of accusation in the conflict in Ukraine?

This research examine a linguistic analysis of both sides' English-language government statements and media headlines in order to respond to this query. An examination of accusations offers insight into the narrative framing of each side. For example, Russian officials often accuse NATO and the United States of direct involvement in the conflict or provocation (Sezer & Coskun, 2022), while American leaders accuse Russia of unprovoked aggression and violations of human rights (Toosi & Forgey, 2022). Since the illocutionary force, or the intended action carried out by the utterance, can indicate whether a statement is intended to assert information, express condemnation, urge action, make a commitment, or even enact a policy change, it is crucial to comprehend the speech acts that are embedded in these statements.

Various Studies have tackled different kinds of speech acts in previous years. However, just a few studies have examined speech acts of accusation; therefore, this study intends to investigate the different types of accusation speech acts used in news headlines that covered the exchange of accusations in the official statements of both American and Russian officials over the Russia-Ukraine war in 2022- 2023.

Nozadi et.al (2015) used Persian and English newspapers and magazines as the data study. 100 excerpts of reliable and popular newspapers and magazines in English and Persian, published from 2004 to 2014, were selected with the purpose of discovering the accusation units in them. Accusation units are the parts of excerpts which contain accusation sentences.

Kauffeld and Goodwin (2022) discussed the conditions that make an accusation. The most important of them are the accusation-making statement and the accuser's implied negative evaluation, i.e, the accuser implies that he or she believes that the accused did something wrong and blameworthy.

Trosborg(1995) conducted a comparative study and concluded that accusation is one of four common strategies native speakers of English and Danish employed when complaining. These strategies include expression of disapproval, no explicit reproach ,blame accusation.

To our best knowledge no studies have tackled the speech act of accusing where the data is official statements and media headlines news headlines of various news agencies and the two parties that exchange accusations are the American and Russian officials over the Russian-Ukrainian war. Therefore, this study indicates that examining speech acts in political discourse can highlight verbal acts like accusation, intimidation, and mobilisation. Because accusations entail one party making allegations of wrongdoing by another, they are a rich source for this kind of

analysis. This leads to a judgemental stance and frequently elicits a response (such as denial, counter-accusation, or corrective action). This study compares the linguistic construction of accusations from Russian and American sources in a methodical manner, depending on the theoretical bases of speech act classification and political discourse analysis.

Accordingly, the main function of language in any social situation is communication. In any utterance, there is more than the usual message. Pragmatics seeks to interpret this message. The categories of pragmatics are implicature, presupposition, deixis, and speech acts but this study is concerned with speech acts.

1.2 Research Problem, Objectives, and Questions

Problem: There is limited empirical research on how accusations are linguistically constructed and strategically deployed in international political conflicts, particularly within the Russia-Ukraine war context. This study highlights the role of language as a strategic tool in modern conflicts. It offers insight into how accusations function not only as political statements but as acts that influence international relations, public sentiment, and conflict escalation. The findings contribute to linguistic pragmatics, political discourse analysis, and conflict communication studies.

Objectives:

- To classify the speech acts embedded in Russian and American accusations.
- To compare rhetorical strategies across both sides.
- To examine how accusations function pragmatically to influence public opinion and political legitimacy.

Research Questions:

1. What speech acts are used in Russian and American accusations during the Ukraine conflict?
3. How do the rhetorical strategies differ in framing and intensity?
4. What pragmatic functions do these accusations serve in the conflict narrative?

1.3 Data collection

This study will analyze a corpus consisting of texts in the English language of these two kinds of sources in conflict and the war:

1. Government statements: official messages including press releases, speeches or interviews of the Russian and American officials about the situation with Ukraine. In the case of the Russian side, it involved an English translation of speeches by the Kremlin, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (e.g., briefing by Maria Zakharova, one of the spokespersons), and officials. In the American side, we collected white House, Department of State (e.g. Secretary Antony Blinken statements), and Department of Defense statements. The accusatory and blaming statements in each of the selected entries were very specific about the element that they targeted in the conflict.
2. Media Headlines: media headlines and leading sentences adhering to each of the sides. English language state media (RT, TASS, and so on) were sampled by headlines accusing the U.S., NATO, or Ukraine of some bad deed. In the same way, American and international sources (e.g., Reuters, AP, CNN) were sampled based on their headlines that blame Russia on aggression, war crimes, or practice of disinformation. It is convenient to concentrate on the headlines as the headlines frequently reflect the strongest accusatory statement present in a news item as the

act of speech in a summary form (e.g., Russia accuses US of direct involvement in the war in Ukraine (Reuters, 2022) or US formally accuses Russia of war crimes (CNN, 2022), (Politico, 2022)

This study limits the sample to statements made in 2022-2023, when accusations from both sides were most intense following the invasion. In totality, the data comprises 100 texts; 50 from each side, including 25 official statements and 25 media headlines per side. It is essential into a qualitative analysis software for coding.

1.4 Methodology

This study conducts a qualitative content analysis with a quantitative element. Each text is manually coded for speech acts. It identifies each instance of an accusation or related illocutionary act and classifies it as assertive, directive, commissive, expressive, or declarative, according to Searle's definitions. For example, sentences containing claims of fact or blame were coded as assertives; sentences urging someone to do something as directives; promises or threats as commissives; value judgments or emotional reactions as expressives; and formal announcements with immediate action as declaratives. Each coded act was also noted for its illocutionary intent and perlocutionary context.

2. Review of Literature

2.1 Theory of Speech Acts

J. L. Austin first proposed Speech Act Theory in 1962. It offers a framework for comprehending how utterances can carry out actions. Austin made a distinction between three types of acts: **the locutionary act**, which involves the actual words spoken and their propositional meaning. **the illocutionary act**, which involves the social action of saying those words; and **the perlocutionary act**, which involves the

impact of the utterance on the listener. Illocutionary acts are particularly important in the political sphere because they allow leaders to make statements, pledge support, demand compliance, or accuse others of wrongdoing.

John Searle (1975, 1976) expanded on Austin's work by classifying illocutionary acts into five major groups:

1. **Assertives:** They limit the speaker to a position. These consist of statements, assertions, conclusions, and accusations. This category usually includes accusations, where the speaker claims that the target has committed an offence.
2. **Directives:** They attempt to compel the recipient to take a certain action. These consist of directives, exhortations, cautions, or entreaties. They have a word-to-world direction of fit, meaning that the speaker wants the words to change the world.
3. **Commissives:** They bind the speaker to a future action. These include vows, threats, and promises. In this instance, the speaker's words commit them to making the world match what was said in the future, reversing the word-to-world direction.
4. **Expressives:** They convey the speaker's feelings regarding the circumstance. These include saying "thank you," "I'm sorry," "I'm welcome," or "I condemn." Officials frequently use expressive language when making accusations in order to convey their dismay or dissatisfaction with the other side's behaviour.
5. **Declaratives:** They instantly alter the global situation. Performatives such as "I declare a state of emergency" and "We hereby recognise this territory as independent" are examples. According to Austin, if favourable circumstances are met, declaratives create a new reality (Green, 2021).

This taxonomy offers a helpful prism through which to analyse political rhetoric.. An accusatory statement might involve multiple illocutions at once. For instance, when a government condemns another's actions, it is simultaneously asserting that those actions occurred and were wrong (assertive) and expressing disapproval (expressive); if it comes with a pledge of punishment, it adds a commissive force. Identifying these layers is essential to understanding how political communication works beyond the surface content.

Since Speech acts describe actions such as asserting and accusing. The headline writer can perform this action with the headline sentence. The act of accusing involves three types; accusing others, accusing oneself and reaction to the accusation. Some of the English verbs that denote the first type are accuse, blame, account, charge with, complain about, denounce, impute, indict, and put the blame on. Examples of verbs denoting the second type are admit guilt, blame, confess, go to confession, and make confession. Verbs denoting the third type include acknowledge, admit, apologize, answer for, account for, be frank, beg pardon and confess (Balmer and Brennstuhl, 1981).

2.2 Political Discourse and Accusations

Linguists and discourse analysts have long noted that political conflicts are fought with words as well as weapons (Abdel Tawwab, Ahmad.2023). Van Dijk (1995, 1998) refers to positive self-presentation and negative other-presentation as a common discursive strategy in conflict narratives. Every side has a tendency to present itself as defensive or morally upright while painting the opposition as hostile or evil. The conflict in Ukraine is an example of this divisive framing: Russian officials portray Ukrainian authorities and Western allies as committing crimes or posing a threat to Russia, while they defend their actions as necessary

and protective. On the other hand, U.S. and allied leaders have continuously portrayed Russia as the aggressor in violation of international norms and Ukraine as the victim (Rudakova, 2024).

This study is contextualised by earlier research on political speech acts and war rhetoric. Fafiyebi & Fafiyebi (2025), for instance, used speech act theory to analyse statements made by important players in the Russia-Ukraine conflict. They discovered that the majority of official statements from both sides were used to carry out directive-related acts of criticising and denouncing, frequently using expressives and assertives, as well as acts of urging allies or requesting assistance. The act of condemnation in particular was prevalent, serving the purpose of moral evaluation of the opponent's behavior. Condemnations are mainly expressive illocutionary acts that publicly denounce a transgression (Kampf, Z & Katriel T. 2016), thereby also implicitly asserting the occurrence of that transgression. Furthermore, other studies have emphasised the methods in which the media on both sides use as propaganda tools. According to analyses of media rhetoric in Russia and Ukraine, both countries use techniques like selective reporting, emotional language, and framing to dominate public opinion and influence perceptions (Abdel Tawwab, Ahmad.2023). These linguistic strategies control audience perceptions of the conflict, support nationalistic narratives, and defend the actions of both sides.

3. Analysis

Under this section, the study performs a systematic analysis of accusatory statements made by the Russian, as well as American sources basing on the type of speech acts. It places an emphasis on typical instances (to make it easier, provided simulated quotes) and makes remarks on the patterns or differences noticed.

3.1 Assertives: Accusations as Statement of Fact

Assertive speech acts proves to be the spine of accusing rhetoric on both the parts. They are cases of a source claiming that something is happening and normally trying to place blame or guilt. Naturally, accusations are assertive, that is, the speaker proposes a true thing.

Both Russian and American officials used assertives to advance their narratives: Russian statements often take the form of factual allegations against the West or Ukraine. For example, a Russian Ministry of Defense briefing claimed that all evidence proves the U.S. is directly involved in Ukraine's military operations. This is in line with a real quote in which the Russian party contested that the U.S. was a party in targeting choices (Reuters, 2022). Putting it in such a way that presents it as irrefutable evidence the speaker takes the position that the claim is a true one by carrying out the act of accusing the U.S. of secret involvement. Supposing Ukraine as either a source of or victim of atrocities or false-flag attacks was another leitmotif; e.g., Russian media regularly ran headlines such as: Ukraine faked an attack in order to blame Russia, and that gave rise to a contentious statement as ultimate truth. American officials and the media consistently maintained, however, that the evils of the conflict had been the result of Russian responsibility. Paradigmatic case: Russian troops carried out war crimes in Bucha, a claim in the strong voice against Russia regarding the occurrence of particular atrocities (Politico, 2022). Such statements often cited evidence or investigations, but the illocutionary force is that of stating a conclusion - effectively indicting Russia in the court of public opinion. Another example from an American perspective is the assertion that Russia's invasion was unprovoked and unjustified, which one finds in countless Western statements. This is an assertive that simultaneously accuses (implying Russia had no valid reason, hence it's culpable) and morally judges the act.

While both sides employed assertives heavily, their content differed. Russian assertives tended to focus on accusing the West (the U.S. or NATO) of instigating or prolonging the conflict - for instance, claiming NATO expansion or CIA involvement behind Ukrainian actions. They also accused the Ukrainian government of things like genocide against Russian-speaking populations or of being “neo-Nazis”, which Russia posited as justification for its “special military operation”. These claims were stated as if factual (regardless of their veracity) to legitimize Russia’s stance. American assertives, in contrast, centered on accusing Russia - identifying Russia as the aggressor, cataloguing its alleged war crimes, treaty violations, or misinformation campaigns. For example, U.S. State Department releases would assert Russian disinformation by saying “The Kremlin is spreading false narratives to deflect blame”, thereby accusing Russia of deception as a matter of fact.

In sum, assertive speech acts allowed each side to put forward its version of reality: Russia’s assertives externalize blame “it’s the West’s fault”, whereas America’s assertives assign blame to Russia. These conflicting assertions construct two irreconcilable narratives. Pragmatically, by making such assertions repeatedly, each side attempts to persuade audiences (domestic and international) of their viewpoint and to challenge the opponent’s credibility. The assertive act of accusation thus serves as a building block of each side’s propaganda or public diplomacy effort.

3.2 Directives: Demands and Calls to Action

Accusations often come with an implicit or explicit demand: Directive speech acts, which aim to get the addressee to carry out an action, were indeed prevalent in our corpus, though to a lesser extent than assertives. They appeared frequently in the context of calling upon the other side to change behavior.

American directives typically were addressed to Russia, urging cessation of aggression or compliance with international norms. For example, American officials would say: “We urge Russia to immediately cease all hostilities and withdraw its forces”. This not only casts Russia as the wrongdoer but also attempts to direct Russia’s future actions. Such statements often use imperative wording softened by diplomatic phrasing (“urge,” “call on,” “must”) but they function as demands. Another common U.S. directive was “Russia must allow humanitarian access to besieged areas,” essentially commanding a change in conduct under moral authority. The illocutionary force here is an attempt to oblige Russia to act differently, aligning with the world-to-word direction of fit where the speaker (the U.S.) wants the world to match the directive (Russia stops doing something).

Russian directives were often aimed at the U.S. or its allies, despite the asymmetry (Russia cannot command the U.S. in any literal sense). Nonetheless, Russian spokespersons issued statements like “We demand that the United States stop interfering in our domestic affairs and halt the supply of weapons to Ukraine”. This serves a performative function: even if the U.S. is unlikely to heed the demand, the act of demanding signals Russia’s stance and appeals to an audience that might sympathize with the notion that Western intervention should stop. At times, Russian officials also directed statements at Ukraine (e.g., calling on Ukrainian forces to lay down arms) or at international bodies (“Russia urges the UN to investigate Ukrainian war crimes”), trying to prompt actions that align with their narrative.

It is notable that directives can carry an accusatory tone implicitly. When the U.S. says “Russia must stop bombing civilians,” embedded in that directive is the presupposition that Russia is bombing civilians (an accusation) and that this is wrongful. Similarly, when Russia urges the West to stop “fueling the conflict,” it assumes the West is actively fueling it (accusation) and demands it cease. Thus,

directives in this discourse often reinforce assertive content. In a similar vein, Russia demands that the West stop “fuelling the conflict” because it believes the West is doing so (accusation). As a result, directives frequently support assertive content in this discourse.

In conclusion, directives serve as requests for correction or redress in accusatory situations. In addition to assigning blame, the speaker frequently makes recommendations for what the person who is being blamed should do to make things right (or what others should do in response). This is an important part of how accusations are meant to have an impact rather than merely place blame.

3.3 Commissives: Threats and Promises in Accusations

Commissive acts, frequently in the form of promises or threats, were employed by both sides. Russian rhetoric frequently used threats, such as warnings of retaliation if the West persisted in its “provocations,” and U.S. statements frequently included promises to hold Russia accountable, which implied punishment in the future (Reuters, 2022). Promises were also used: Russian officials promised to protect Russian-speaking populations or otherwise ensure their security, while U.S. leaders often promised to continue supporting Ukraine (“we will support Ukraine as long as it takes”). Such commitments served to reinforce accusations by demonstrating resolve - for example, Russia’s threats aimed to deter further Western involvement, and America’s promises signaled determination to counter Russian aggression and seek justice for atrocities.

In comparing the two sides, we found that Russian commissives tended to emphasize deterrence and retaliation, whereas American commissives emphasized support for allies and consequences for the accused. In either case, adding a commissive component gave accusations more weight: the accuser not only

denounces the misdeed but also declares what will be done about it, thereby increasing the credibility and pressure of the accusatory act.

3.4 Expressives: Emotion and Evaluation in Accusations

The use of expressive speech acts was a feature of both sides of the accusatory language and was in the form of an overt declaration of emotion or attitude. Expressives in politics are used to highlight the moral stand of the speaker with respect to the accused deed.

The most common expressive in our data was condemnation, which is essentially the speech act of expressing strong disapproval. Virtually every official statement reacting to an opponent's move included some form of condemnation: U.S. and Allies' Expressives: Phrases like: "We are horrified by the reports of mass graves", "The United States condemns Russia's unprovoked invasion in the strongest terms", or "NATO is appalled by the blatant disregard for civilian life" were abundant. They are statements of communication of emotion (horror, outrage, disgust) and evaluation (that the actions are morally unacceptable). As an instance, when the signs of atrocities in Bucha surfaced, the Secretary of State of the U.S. published a statement that he was sickened and those acts were horrific, a direct expressive of repugnance, compounded with the assertion of the acts being a war crime (Politico, 2022). These expressives are rallying cries of international condemnation and a tone of moral clarity- they draw a line beyond which Russia has crossed.

Russian Expressives: There was emotional vocabulary used by the Russian officials but the emphasis was different. They would once vocalize outrage or insult at Western accusations and outrage at Ukrainian or Western bad actions. The classic: the accusal of Moscow is groundless (Washington), outrage (Kyiv) at the

shelling of civilians regarding the indifference of the West. In case of TASS interview, when Zakharova claimed that the U.S. had betrayed Ukraine, it was portrayed as something more abhorring than cruel (an emotional judgment) (TASS, 2023). Another frequent Russian expressive was claiming to be “concerned” or “deeply worried” about something (often framing Ukraine as a humanitarian disaster that Russia is trying to alleviate, thus justifying their intervention).

Expressives often co-occurred with assertives and directives, essentially providing the emotional framing. An expressive can amplify an accusation by conveying how terrible the alleged act is in the eyes of the speaker. This not only appeals to the audience’s emotions but also strengthens the illocutionary force: a bare assertion “X did Y” becomes more compelling when accompanied by “... and we condemn Y as heinous.”

In summary, expressives in this conflict discourse serve to morally charge the accusations. They indicate what listeners believe the speaker thinks of the offending act, opening the audiences to experience the same emotion. Whatever it is condemnation, outcry, sorrow, or ridicule such actions are used to convert cold assertions into rallying cry, or protection, and organize the emotions of the audience in support of the speaker.

3.5 Declaratives: Performing Actions by Words

Declarative speech acts were the least common in our analysis but played a crucial role at specific moments. Declaratives are powerful in that, when performed by someone with the requisite authority, they change reality in some conventional sense by the utterance itself (Plato, 2015). In the context of the Ukraine conflict accusations, we identified a few key instances of declaratives: - The prime example on the Russian side was the recognition of breakaway territories. When President

Putin stated, "I hereby recognize the independence of the Donetsk People's Republic and Luhansk People's Republic," in February 2022, it was a formal speech act that altered the diplomatic status of those regions (at least from Russia's perspective) (Scripps, 2022). This utterance was both an assertion (claiming these regions as independent entities) and a declarative (by the power of Russia's presidency, attempting to confer a new status upon them). It was intrinsically accusatory too, because embedded in the justification for this declaration was an accusation against the Ukrainian government (that Ukraine was oppressing these regions, necessitating their recognition for protection). Another Russian declarative related to accusations was the annexation announcement in September 2022, where Putin declared several occupied Ukrainian regions to be part of Russia. In doing so, he effectively declared a new reality ("these are now Russian"), which is a declarative act (null and void internationally, but performative within Russian domestic legal context). Again, that declaration speech was laced with accusations - accusing the West of colonialism and Ukraine of historical wrongs - but the defining speech act was declarative as it claimed to officially change borders.

On the American side, legal or diplomatic designations function as declaratives. An example was when the U.S. government formally declared that Russia had committed "crimes against humanity" or labeled the violence as "genocide" (as advocated by some officials). Such a statement, if coming from an authorized figure in a formal context, is a declarative speech act: it doesn't directly change physical reality, but it changes the official stance and has legal/political weight. For instance, when Secretary Blinken announced the finding that Russian forces committed war crimes (politico, 2022), it was partly assertive but also declarative in that it officially designates Russia's actions under a particular term. The statement "We formally declare these acts to be genocide" (simulated for

illustration) enacts a classification that could trigger international obligations. Similarly, sanction announcements are declaratives that enact punitive measures as a response to the accused behavior. Another kind of declarative is found in UN or international settings, though not exactly by the U.S. or Russia alone. For example, votes on resolutions or ICC indictments “declare” something (e.g., declaring an invasion illegal). However, those are collective acts. In our bilateral context, we mostly see declaratives in unilateral moves like recognition, annexation, or official labelling.

In terms of usage frequency, declaratives were rare and usually associated with major inflection points in the conflict narrative. They are not routine because declaratives often carry irreversible or formal consequences. However, their inclusion is significant. They represent the moments when talk and action intersect most directly - the speech itself is an action that attempts to change the state of affairs. The Russian declarations regarding Ukraine’s territories were meant to legitimize its occupation (and implicitly accuse Ukraine of having no rightful claim). The American declarations about Russia’s conduct aimed to mobilize international action and highlight the gravity of the accusations (signaling that what Russia has done crosses thresholds defined in international law).

In summary, while declaratives were the least frequent speech act in our data, they had outsized importance in framing the conflict. They often encapsulated the culmination of accusatory rhetoric into a formal decision or stance. Each declarative was underpinned by accusations and, in turn, served to reinforce those accusations by giving them formal status (e.g., “genocide” is not just a rhetorical label but an official designation once declared).

4. Comparative Patterns and Strategic Functions

One notable commonality is the heavy reliance on assertive-expressive pairs by both sides. Most rarely is accusation dry fact; it is mantled with emotionalism and ethical opinion. The combination of these two (assertion of wrong doing+ expressions of condemnation) reinforces this legitimization of the position of the speaker. In the case of the U.S. and its allies two rules have been made: (1) stipulation that Russia committed X and (2) denunciation of Russia. What this accomplishes is presenting the war as a matter of morality to prevent a violator of international norms. In the case of Russia, its claims that the west/Ukraine has done X and their outrage are equivalent to claiming that their actions were a reactionary or just course of action against provocation. These narrative frameworks are reinforced by what van Dijk described as positive self- and negative other-presentation (van Dijk, 1995). Each side's speech acts present themselves as upholding some virtue (security, freedom, law) while denigrating the other as violating those virtues.

Despite this symmetry in method, there are asymmetries in usage: Frequency of Directives and Commissives: American officials issued frequent directives to Russia (reflecting an expectation that Russia should change behavior under international pressure), whereas Russian directives to the West, while present, were arguably more performative since Russia has limited means to enforce them. Conversely, Russian commissive threats (e.g. nuclear rhetoric or "red lines") have been more explicit at times, reflecting Russia's attempt to deter Western actions. The U.S. is also employing deterrent rhetoric but mostly in the form of threats to take counter-measures (sanctions, assistance to Ukraine) instead of threats of violence to prevent an escalation. This discrepancy reflects a form of strategic calibration: Russia is playing on fears of escalation (of some accretion to

brinkmanship, through the speech act), whereas the U.S. is playing on the prospect of mass action and legal sanction.

Declaratives and Legitimacy: Declaratives (recognition declarations, annexation declarations) of the Russian side were necessary to legitimize the position because of the attempt to performative speech acts which means that the Russian side attempts to say “now it is considered justified and legal.” Those declarations were generally rejected by the international community which brings to point, an essential part of the theory of speech act; felicity conditions. The speakers need to possess uptake or a presence of the recognized power to have the authority to command the words to be so (Plato, 2015). In the case of Russia’s annexation declaration, most of the world did not grant that uptake - they treated it as null and void. American declarations labeling atrocities, on the other hand, were backed by a coalition of other states and international bodies, thus carrying more weight in practice. This underscores how power and reception (audience uptake) can enable or constrain the effectiveness of certain speech acts in international politics.

Role of Media Headlines: Our inclusion of media headlines shows that not only official statements, but also ostensibly journalistic content, engaged in speech acts akin to accusations. Media often acted as amplifiers of official accusations. For example, Russian state media headlines would take a Russian official’s assertive accusation and repackage it in an even more declarative tone (e.g., “Proof of US biolabs in Ukraine found” - turning an allegation into an asserted fact). Western media similarly often adopted language affirming official Western accusations (e.g., “Russia accused of new war crimes in Kharkiv region” - where “accused of” signals the speech act of accusation being reported as news). The media’s role thus is twofold: it reproduces speech acts from officials (quoting or paraphrasing accusations), and it sometimes performs its own illocutionary acts through editorial choices (selecting

what to highlight or what verbs to use). This interplay between government and media discourse creates an echo chamber that can harden each side's narrative.

Perlocutionary Effects: Although our analysis focused on illocutionary forces, it is worth considering the perlocutionary effects - what these speech acts accomplish in terms of audience reaction. The strategic aim of Russian accusations is likely to sow doubt, create justification for its actions domestically and among sympathizers, and fracture the resolve of the opposing coalition. The strategic aim of U.S. accusations is to isolate Russia, maintain a coalition of support for Ukraine, and reassure the Ukrainian side of unwavering support. The effectiveness of these aims can be partially inferred from our data: for instance, repeated Western expressives of condemnation and assertives of Russian guilt have largely kept Western public opinion aligned against Russia. Despite being rejected in the West, Russian assertives regarding "neo-Nazis" and "Western conspiracies" might have struck a chord with Russian audiences at home or in nations that share their views, demonstrating how different audiences can react differently to the same speech acts.

4.1 Implications for Political Communication

The main function of language in any social situation is communication. In any utterance, there is more than the usual message. Pragmatics seeks to interpret this message (Abood1131: 2025). The analysis reveals that Russian and American accusations over Ukraine, though diametrically opposed in content, share a common pragmatic structure. Communicative goals are achieved by the use of assertives, directives, commissives, expressives, and in some instances, declaratives in both sides. Here we discuss the meaning of the findings, in this context looking at how these speech acts interact and how this affects the discourse of the conflict at hand. This conflict's use of speech acts brings to light a number of

wider implications:

- Accusations as Speech Acts: An accusation may appear straightforward, but breaking it down into speech act components shows it's a complex act involving stating, judging, and sometimes threatening or demanding. This complexity means that responding to accusations also requires multi-layered communication. We noticed a pattern of counter-accusations: each side often responds to being accused by in turn accusing the other, effectively shifting the assertive claim. This reaction can lead to a spiral of increasingly harsh rhetoric. Speech act theory suggests that without a shift to other illocutionary acts (like commissives of compromise or expressives of regret/apology), the discourse remains adversarial, potentially hindering conflict resolution.

Normative Power of Expressives: Expressives like "condemn" have a normative dimension - they reinforce what is acceptable or unacceptable in international conduct. Through continuous expressing condemnation of certain actions (e.g., targeting civilians), the U.S. and its allies are reinforcing international norms, effectively performing what could be called a moral speech act. Russia's expressives of outrage at "hypocrisy" or "interference" try to reframe the moral narrative, suggesting Russia is upholding an alternative set of norms (such as defending compatriots or resisting Western hegemony). Thus, the battle of expressives is about who gets to determine the moral high ground. Each speech act contributes to that contest.

- Miscommunication and Uptake: There are instances where one side's speech acts may not be recognized as intended by the other. For example, when Western leaders make a threat of sanctions (a commissive), Russian officials sometimes publicly dismiss these statements as "bluster" or interpret them as further hostility, entrenching their stance. Conversely, Russian nuclear saber-rattling (commissive threats) is often met with

Western expressives of defiance rather than the fear or concession that Russia may have intended. This suggests that the perlocutionary effect does not always align with the speaker's intention due to the audience's own perceptions and context.

- Authority and Credibility: The weight of certain speech acts depends on the speaker's authority and credibility. As noted with declaratives, not everyone can "hereby declare" something and have it stick. Similarly, the same assertive claim (say, about war crimes) gains influence if coming from a respected investigative body versus a propagandistic source. Both sides sought to bolster the credibility of their assertives by providing evidence or invoking reputable voices (for the West, reports by the UN or NGOs; for Russia, historical grievances or sympathetic foreign commentators). Ultimately, whether an illocutionary act succeeds can hinge on whether its audience accepts it as valid - which in international conflicts often reflects political alignments.

5. Results

The research conducts a linguistic study of how Russian and American sources deploy speech acts when accusing each other over the Ukraine conflict. Adopting a Speech Act Theory framework allowed us to break down the ostensibly simple act of "accusing" into its component illocutionary forces: assertives, directives, commissives, expressives, and declaratives. The analysis demonstrates that accusations in this geopolitical dispute are not monolithic; they are complex speech events where leaders and media simultaneously present facts (or claims), convey moral judgment, demand changes, promise actions, and sometimes enact political moves—all through language. The analysis sums up the following results:

- **Assertive** speech acts (claims of fact) are central, as each side asserts blame on the other for wrongdoing. These create two competing realities - each backed by its own narrative of events.
- **Expressive** acts (condemnations, outrage) imbue these assertions with moral force, rallying audiences and reinforcing normative positions.
- **Directives** (demands, urgings) and commissives (threats, promises) project the accusations into the future by stipulating what should be done or will be done, thereby attempting to influence the opponent's behavior and assure allies of one's resolve.
- **Declaratives**, though rare, play a key role in formalizing aspects of the conflict (such as territory status or legal designations), and are themselves born out of, and serve to reinforce, accusatory contexts.

The Russian and American approaches, while mirror images in many respects, differ in their emphasis and context. Russian accusatory discourse is heavily aimed at justifying its actions and delegitimizing Western involvement, whereas American accusatory discourse is geared towards mobilizing international censure against Russia and supporting Ukraine. Both, however, engage in a performative struggle - doing things with words - that significantly shapes the informational battleground of the war.

6. Conclusions and Recommendations

In conclusion, examining the conflict through the prism of speech acts highlights that wars of narratives are fought through a repertoire of linguistic actions. Accusations are a speech act genre that carries within it multiple layers of meaning and force. By dissecting these layers, scholars and observers can better understand how states attempt to act through speaking: to punish or expose an adversary, to

defend oneself, to persuade the world, or to create new political realities. This understanding is not only academically enriching but also practically relevant, as effective conflict resolution or diplomatic strategy must account for the language actions that are constructing the reality of the conflict.

This study recommends that Future research should include multilingual analysis to capture linguistic nuances. Policymakers should be aware of how speech act framing impacts diplomatic options. Media literacy programs should address the performative role of headlines in conflict narratives act as amplifiers, often reinforcing official accusations.

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Appendix

Accusatory Discourse Dataset: Russian and American Sources on Ukraine War
Russian Sources: Government Statements (25 texts)

Source Country	Source Type	Text	Speech Act(s) Identified
Russia	Government Statement	We accuse the United States of direct involvement in the Ukraine conflict, fueling its escalation through endless arms shipments.	Assertive
Russia	Government Statement	We assert that Washington is deliberately prolonging the war in Ukraine to weaken Russia, a blatantly hostile act that we strongly condemn.	Assertive, Expressive
Russia	Government Statement	We warn Washington that its continued interference in Ukraine will lead to serious consequences for international stability.	Directive, Commissive
Russia	Government Statement	Moscow has evidence that US and NATO military advisers are directing operations in Ukraine, effectively making the US a co-belligerent in the conflict.	Assertive
Russia	Government Statement	We categorically reject the baseless allegations from Washington and accuse the US of violating international law by backing an illegitimate regime in Kyiv.	Assertive
Russia	Government Statement	The Kremlin holds the US responsible for the ongoing hostilities in Ukraine, claiming Washington's proxy war aims to destroy Russia's sovereignty.	Assertive
Russia	Government Statement	Russian officials denounce US sanctions and military aid to Ukraine as hostile acts, part of a broader campaign to undermine Russia's security.	Assertive, Expressive
Russia	Government Statement	We accuse the United States of sabotaging peace negotiations, noting that each time progress is made, Washington imposes new demands through Kyiv to derail talks.	Assertive

Source Country	Source Type	Text	Speech Act(s) Identified
Russia	Government Statement	The Foreign Ministry accuses Washington of waging an information war against Russia by spreading false claims about our operations in Ukraine.	Assertive
Russia	Government Statement	We condemn the United States for turning a blind eye to atrocities by Ukrainian nationalists, effectively encouraging war crimes against civilians in Donbas.	Assertive, Expressive
Russia	Government Statement	Any escalation in Ukraine is a direct result of US actions - we have repeatedly warned that the responsibility lies squarely with Washington.	Assertive
Russia	Government Statement	Russia asserts that the US uses Ukraine as a mere proxy while hypocritically lecturing others about respecting sovereignty and borders.	Assertive
Russia	Government Statement	The current US administration violated its promises on NATO's non-expansion, pushing Ukraine into a needless confrontation with Russia.	Assertive
Russia	Government Statement	By pumping advanced weapons into Ukraine, the US undermines regional stability and bears responsibility for prolonging the suffering of civilians.	Assertive
Russia	Government Statement	We hold the US accountable for supporting the 2014 coup in Kyiv and empowering radicals who have since waged war on their own people.	Assertive
Russia	Government Statement	The Russian government accuses US intelligence of orchestrating provocations in Ukraine to falsely blame Russia and justify NATO's expansion.	Assertive
Russia	Government Statement	We accuse Washington of involvement in sabotage operations, such as the Nord Stream pipeline explosion, to frame Russia and escalate tensions.	Assertive

Source Country	Source Type	Text	Speech Act(s) Identified
Russia	Government Statement	The Kremlin blames Washington for blocking diplomatic solutions, saying the US instructed Kyiv to abandon peace talks in favor of escalation.	Assertive
Russia	Government Statement	We denounce Washington's attempts to label Russia the aggressor, when it is the US that encircles Russia with bases and drives the conflict in Ukraine.	Assertive, Expressive
Russia	Government Statement	Russian officials call out US hypocrisy - Washington condemns others' actions while itself carrying out illegal military interventions worldwide.	Assertive
Russia	Government Statement	We accuse the US of weaponizing human rights rhetoric to smear Russia, all while ignoring the Kyiv regime's abuses against its own citizens.	Assertive
Russia	Government Statement	The Kremlin warns that any further American involvement in Ukraine will be seen as a direct threat to Russia's security, and Moscow will respond decisively.	Directive, Commissive
Russia	Government Statement	Russian defense officials claim the US is supplying targeting intelligence to Ukrainian forces, which makes the United States complicit in strikes against Russian territory.	Assertive
Russia	Government Statement	We charge that the United States is exploiting the Ukraine conflict to reassert its hegemony, with no regard for the destruction it causes.	Assertive
Russia	Government Statement	Moscow maintains that the true instigator of the Ukraine crisis is the United States, and history will hold Washington accountable for this tragedy.	Assertive

Media Headlines (25 texts)

Source Country	Source Type	Text	Speech Act(s) Identified
Russia	Media Headline	Kremlin accuses US of fueling the Ukraine conflict with arms supplies.	Assertive
Russia	Media Headline	Moscow blames Washington for sabotaging peace talks in Ukraine.	Assertive
Russia	Media Headline	Russia alleges US 'directing' Ukraine's military operations behind the scenes.	Assertive
Russia	Media Headline	Putin: West seeks to «destroy Russia» by using Ukraine as a proxy.	Assertive
Russia	Media Headline	Russian MFA slams US for spreading false claims about Russia's actions in Ukraine.	Assertive, Expressive
Russia	Media Headline	Russia accuses US of funding bioweapon labs in Ukraine.	Assertive
Russia	Media Headline	Lavrov: NATO involvement means US is 'waging war on Russia'.	Assertive
Russia	Media Headline	Moscow claims US mercenaries are operating on the ground in Ukraine.	Assertive
Russia	Media Headline	Russia accuses Washington of orchestrating a drone attack on the Kremlin.	Assertive
Russia	Media Headline	Russian officials say US was behind the 2014 coup in Kyiv that sparked conflict.	Assertive
Russia	Media Headline	Moscow says US-led sanctions amount to economic warfare against Russia.	Assertive
Russia	Media Headline	Kremlin: US "adding fuel to fire" in Ukraine by sending longer-range weapons.	Assertive
Russia	Media Headline	Russia blasts US for training and equipping Ukrainian nationalist forces.	Assertive, Expressive
Russia	Media Headline	Russian MoD: Evidence shows US special forces guiding Ukrainian sabotage units.	Assertive
Russia	Media Headline	Putin accuses the US of trying to prolong the conflict "at any cost".	Assertive
Russia	Media Headline	Russia: U.S. and NATO arms shipments make them direct participants in war.	Assertive

Source Country	Source Type	Text	Speech Act(s) Identified
Russia	Media Headline	Russian envoy: Washington wants to weaken Russia, doesn't care about Ukraine's losses.	Assertive
Russia	Media Headline	Moscow accuses US of ignoring Ukrainian war crimes against civilians.	Assertive
Russia	Media Headline	Russian MFA: US 'empire of lies' driving anti-Russian propaganda in Ukraine crisis.	Assertive, Expressive
Russia	Media Headline	Russia alleges US involvement in Nord Stream pipeline «terrorist» attack.	Assertive
Russia	Media Headline	Kremlin says US is using Ukraine to fight "to the last Ukrainian".	Assertive
Russia	Media Headline	Russian media claims US advisors are helping Kyiv select targets against Russia.	Assertive
Russia	Media Headline	Moscow accuses US of blocking any diplomatic solution to the conflict.	Assertive
Russia	Media Headline	Russian officials claim Washington aims to encircle Russia via NATO expansion using Ukraine.	Assertive
Russia	Media Headline	Russia condemns US as a destabilizing force behind the Ukraine war.	Assertive, Expressive

American Sources
Government Statements (25 texts)

Source Country	Source Type	Text	Speech Act(s) Identified
USA	Government Statement	We accuse Russia of launching an unprovoked and brutal invasion of Ukraine in flagrant violation of international law.	Assertive
USA	Government Statement	The United States condemns in the strongest terms Russia's deliberate attacks on Ukrainian civilians and infrastructure.	Expressive, Assertive
USA	Government Statement	We unequivocally charge that Russian forces are committing war crimes and atrocities across Ukraine.	Assertive
USA	Government Statement	We accuse the Kremlin of spreading blatant falsehoods to justify its aggression against Ukraine.	Assertive
USA	Government Statement	We assert that Russia alone is responsible for the death and destruction it has unleashed in Ukraine.	Assertive
USA	Government Statement	We accuse Moscow of weaponizing energy and food supplies to blackmail the world amid the Ukraine conflict.	Assertive
USA	Government Statement	We condemn Russia's cynical disinformation campaign, which falsely blames others for atrocities that Russian troops are inflicting.	Assertive, Expressive
USA	Government Statement	The United States calls on Russia to immediately cease its aggression and withdraw its forces from all Ukrainian territory.	Directive
USA	Government Statement	We accuse President Putin of showing complete disregard for Ukrainian sovereignty and the lives of innocent people.	Assertive

Source Country	Source Type	Text	Speech Act(s) Identified
USA	Government Statement	We warn that Russia will face severe consequences for its continued aggression and threats, including additional sanctions and international isolation.	Directive, Commissive
USA	Government Statement	We denounce Russia's sham "referendums" and illegal annexation attempts as egregious violations of Ukraine's sovereignty.	Expressive, Assertive
USA	Government Statement	We accuse Russia of forcibly deporting thousands of Ukrainian civilians, including children, from occupied territories.	Assertive
USA	Government Statement	We assert that Russia's reckless rhetoric about nuclear weapons is utterly unacceptable and poses a danger to global security.	Assertive, Expressive
USA	Government Statement	We hold Russia accountable for the humanitarian catastrophe in Ukraine, including the millions of refugees created by its aggression.	Assertive
USA	Government Statement	We accuse Russian forces of deliberately targeting hospitals, schools, and shelters—acts that show a wanton disregard for human life.	Assertive, Expressive
USA	Government Statement	We charge that Moscow's claims of "denazification" are baseless propaganda designed to distract from its own aggression.	Assertive
USA	Government Statement	We express outrage at Russia's brutal tactics and vow to support Ukraine for as long as it takes to end Russia's aggression.	Expressive, Commissive
USA	Government Statement	The United States accuses Russia of violating multiple international agreements, including the UN Charter, through its invasion of Ukraine.	Assertive

Source Country	Source Type	Text	Speech Act(s) Identified
USA	Government Statement	We call out the Kremlin's attempts to intimidate its neighbors and warn that such aggressive behavior will not be tolerated.	Assertive, Directive, Commissive
USA	Government Statement	We accuse Russia of using indiscriminate weapons in Ukraine, causing horrific suffering among civilians.	Assertive
USA	Government Statement	We charge that Russia is attempting to eliminate Ukraine as an independent state, an act of aggression that the world must reject.	Assertive, Directive
USA	Government Statement	We officially declare that Russia's atrocities in Ukraine constitute genocide.	Assertive, Declarative
USA	Government Statement	We demand that Russia allow humanitarian aid to reach besieged civilians and stop using starvation as a weapon of war.	Directive
USA	Government Statement	We accuse Russian forces of routinely violating ceasefires and then falsely blaming Ukraine for the continued fighting.	Assertive
USA	Government Statement	We vow to hold Russia accountable for its crimes in Ukraine and ensure that justice is served for the victims of its aggression.	Commissive, Assertive

Media Headlines (25 texts)

Source Country	Source Type	Text	Speech Act(s) Identified
USA	Media Headline	US accuses Russia of committing war crimes in Ukraine.	Assertive
USA	Media Headline	Biden calls Putin a «war criminal» over atrocities in Ukraine.	Expressive, Assertive
USA	Media Headline	Washington blames Moscow for deadly strike on Ukrainian civilians.	Assertive
USA	Media Headline	US officials allege Russia may use chemical weapons in false-flag operation.	Assertive
USA	Media Headline	Blinken: Russia 'weaponizing food' after abandoning Ukraine grain deal.	Assertive
USA	Media Headline	White House says Russian forces are deliberately targeting civilians.	Assertive
USA	Media Headline	U.S. accuses Russia of «genocide» after mass graves found in Ukraine.	Assertive, Expressive
USA	Media Headline	Harris: Russia committing crimes against humanity in Ukraine.	Assertive
USA	Media Headline	State Dept: Moscow spreading disinformation to deflect blame for invasion.	Assertive
USA	Media Headline	Pentagon accuses Russia of reckless nuclear saber-rattling amid war.	Assertive
USA	Media Headline	US claims Russia is bombing Ukraine's power grid to freeze civilians in winter.	Assertive
USA	Media Headline	US accuses Russia of violating humanitarian corridors and targeting fleeing civilians.	Assertive
USA	Media Headline	US accuses Russia of abducting thousands of Ukrainian children from occupied areas.	Assertive
USA	Media Headline	White House: Putin's invasion is unprovoked and unjustified aggression.	Assertive, Expressive
USA	Media Headline	Blinken says Russia routinely breaks ceasefires then blames Ukraine.	Assertive
USA	Media Headline	U.S. warns any Russian use of WMD in Ukraine would bring severe consequences.	Directive, Commissive

Source Country	Source Type	Text	Speech Act(s) Identified
USA	Media Headline	UN Ambassador: Russia abusing its UN veto to shield war crimes in Ukraine.	Assertive
USA	Media Headline	US intelligence: Russia planned false flag operations to justify invasion.	Assertive
USA	Media Headline	Washington accuses Russian mercenaries of atrocities against civilians.	Assertive
USA	Media Headline	Biden: Moscow aims to erase Ukraine's identity through brutal war.	Assertive
USA	Media Headline	US officials say Russia violates nuclear treaty amid Ukraine conflict.	Assertive
USA	Media Headline	State Department: Kremlin's attacks on schools and hospitals are barbaric.	Assertive, Expressive
USA	Media Headline	US accuses Russia of weaponizing energy by cutting gas supplies during war.	Assertive
USA	Media Headline	White House demands Russia withdraw forces, cites «clear evidence» of atrocities.	Directive, Assertive
USA	Media Headline	US vows to hold Russia accountable for «horrific» acts in Ukraine.	Commissive, Expressive

دراسة لغوية للاتهامات الروسية والامريكية حول اوكرانيا

المستخلص

تقدم هذه الدراسة تحليلاً لغوياً لكيفية استخدام وسائل الإعلام السائدة والبيانات الرسمية الروسية والأمريكية لأفعال الكلام المتمثلة في الاتهام خلال الغزو الروسي لأوكرانيا عام 2022. باستخدام نظرية أفعال الكلام (أوستن، 1962؛ سيرل، 1976) كإطار عمل. تحلل الدراسة 50 نص من البيانات الرسمية والعناوين الإعلامية باللغة الإنجليزية من كلا الجانبين. تصنف الأقوال إلى تأكيدية، وتعبيرية، وتوجيهية، ووعدية، وإعلانية، وتحلل قوتها البراغمية في تشكيل السرديات. يكشف التحليل عن تباينات في النبرة والاستراتيجية الخطابية: حيث يستخدم المسؤولون ووسائل الإعلام الأمريكية بشكل ساحق اتهامات حازمة وإدانات معبرة لإدانة روسيا أخلاقياً، بينما يصدر نظراؤهم الروس اتهامات مضادة حازمة إلى جانب المبررات الدفاعية. ويستخدم الجانبان الوعود من خلال تعهد الأمريكيين باتخاذ إجراءات عقابية ودعم لأوكرانيا، بينما يتعهد الروس بتحقيق أهداف الحرب. ويستخدمون الأوامر، من خلال دعوات الغرب لروسيا بوقف العدوان إلى مطالب روسيا لحلف الناتو بوقف التوسع. وتشير النتائج إلى أن أفعال الكلام المتعلقة بالاتهام ليست مجرد تقارير أو آراء بل إنها تؤدي أفعالاً: الإدانة، والتبرير، والتهديد، وحشد الدعم. وتقدم هذه الدراسة رؤية جديدة حول كيفية تحول اللغة نفسها إلى ساحة معركة، وتخلص إلى أن هذه الاستراتيجيات الخطابية المتباينة بشكل صارخ، على الرغم من أنها تخدم أهدافاً سياسية فورية، إلا أنها ترسخ الصراع أيضاً من خلال إعاقة الفهم المتبادل، مما يسلط الضوء على الدور الأساسي للتحليل اللغوي في دراسات الصراع.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الاتهامات - أفعال الكلام - عناوين اخبار