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**RESEARCH ARTICLE**

## **A Study of Speech Acts in Joe Biden's Opening and Closing Remarks at the Virtual Summit for Democracy: A Pragmatic Perspective**

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**ABSTRACT**

This article aims at showing to what extent the speech acts theory can be useful to text analysis and meaning deciphering. It further seeks to unveil, beyond what is literally said in President Joe Biden's opening and closing remarks, the underlying meanings subtly encoded via the different speech acts embedded therein to help grasp the ins and outs of the first summit for democracy. The study employs the mixed method to attain its objectives. The investigation has disclosed that representative speech acts have been used to describe the state of democracy worldwide today. They further reveal that the statistical data presented in the opening remarks as regards democracy is real and trustworthy. Democracy is therefore in trouble in virtually all countries in the world even those held up or taken as models in this matter. Commissive speech acts have been used to reveal the plans President Biden has in mind for the re-establishment of democracy all over the world. Joe Biden's special language use via the directive speech acts despite his rank and the social power he embodies shows that he is not an autocratic president. It also evokes the notion of politeness. In fact he has been tactful, modest and very nice in his address to his audience. He has by so doing shown awareness and consideration of the face of the people attending the summit. The felicity Sincerity and essential conditions testify to the validity of the direct speech acts recorded in the remarks. These felicity conditions indicate that the plans made, and decisions reached at the summit as encoded via the commissive speech acts, are going to be enforced for a better democratic world to live in. Achievement reports at the second upcoming summit for democracy will unquestionably help assess this accurately.

**KEYWORDS**

Act, face, illocution, politeness, speech

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### **1. Introduction**

Language, means of communication in society, is not used anyhow. No one has ever used a given language for the sake of using it. In fact, language is used to achieve different purposes. Actually, speaking is acting, especially as we use language to get things done. In a similar vein, Austin (1955) stated that speaking is "doing things with words". Indeed, we usually use language to commend, request, ask, or inform. These actions, which we perform through different utterances, are referred to as speech acts. According to the different functions language serves to fulfill; there are different types of speech acts. In the process of interaction, speakers almost always encode communicative intentions in their utterances. As a result, this state of affairs leads to communication breakdowns between interlocutors and writers and readers, especially as the literal meanings of the words in the utterances used in that case are no more sufficient for the full understanding of the latter ones. From that perspective, Yule (2010) stated: "Communication clearly depends on not only recognizing the meaning of words in an utterance but recognizing what speakers mean by their utterances" (p.127). It emerges from Yule's (Ibid) statement that the literal meanings of the words of an utterance have to be combined with their implied meanings for successful communication. From a pragmatic perspective, this scholarship explores President Joe Biden's (2021) opening and closing remarks at the first virtual summit for democracy to grasp beyond their literal meanings, his communicative intentions via the study of speech acts. Indeed, Joe Biden's (Ibid) Opening and

closing remarks encode a number of important messages that are not easily decipherable. The study uses Searle's (1969) taxonomy of speech acts to show to what extent the speech acts theory is useful to text analysis and meaning decoding. It further seeks to unveil, beyond what is literally said in President Joe Biden's opening and closing remarks, the underlying meanings subtly encoded via the different speech acts embedded therein to help grasp the ins and outs of the first summit for democracy. The study goes around six cruxes. In addition to this introduction, the study provides an abstract that summarizes the objectives, method, and some of the study's key findings. The theoretical framework and literature review recaps the applied speech acts theory and reviews a few former recently published related works to check if there is still room for the current research work. The methodology crux that ensues specifies the methodology employed for the study. In the next section, the different speech acts identified in the studied remarks have been statistically summarized and described paving the way to the interpretation of findings that follows. At this point, the recorded data have been interpreted to uncover Joe Biden's communicative intentions behind the different speech acts that he used in his remarks. The final section that rounds the study off is the conclusion that summarizes the study's key findings and highlights the different avenues the study has opened up for further research. Like any piece of scientific scholarship, this article also has a reference list.

## **2. Theoretical Framework and Literature Review**

This section of the article summarizes the speech acts theory in the application and explores a few previous recently published related research works to see if there is still room for it to be carried out.

### **2.1. Theoretical Framework**

First introduced by such philosophers as Austin (1962) and Searle (1969), the speech acts theory aroused great interest and got later on elaborated by both pragmatists and discourse analysts. In fact, the latter group of scholars examines speech acts in "real discourses, pointing to their linear and hierarchical organization, trying to identify recurring patterns in various genres (Simon & Dejica-Cartis, 2004, P. 234)". Indeed, Austin (1962:147) defines speech acts as expressions of psychological states (e.g. embarrassment, gratitude, irritation, regrets, etc.) or of involvement in social interaction (e.g. ordering, requesting, promising, warning, etc.). More to the point, Searle (1994), on his part, views speech acts as "the basic or minimal units of linguistic communication" (P.16). He underpinned that definition by stating that "speaking a language is performing speech acts" (1994: 16). Yule (2010) perceived a speech act as "the action performed by a speaker with an utterance" (p.133). From Austin's (1962:108) perspective, three kinds of acts are simultaneously performed while uttering a sentence: the locutionary act, which describes the action of saying something, the illocutionary act, which has to do with what is done by saying something, and the perlocutionary act which is related to the conclusion of what is said and tells the effect left on the hearer. To be more specific, locution is the act of uttering, illocution the intention behind what is uttered, and the perlocution the effect.

Austin (1962) broadly divided speech acts into two basic groups: the constative speech acts and the performative ones. According to him, constative speech acts are statements that describe things, a situation or an incident and give information (Embugushiki, 2010). Actually, they are truth-evaluable; that is to say, they are either true or false. On the other hand, performative speech acts are those types of utterances that perform actions and are consequently not truth-evaluable. They are rather evaluated in terms of felicity (Happy or unhappy). It is important to highlight that the locutionary, the illocutionary and perlocutionary acts are all performative speech acts.

Pioneer of the speech act theory, Austin (1962) classified speech acts into five categories: Verdictives, Exercitives, Commissive, Behabitives, and Expositives. Following his taxonomy, the verdictives are used to exercise judgment, while the exercitives are used to exert influence or exercise power. Whereas commissive speech acts assume obligation or declare intention, Behabitives are used to adopt the attitude or express feeling. Finally, Expositive clarify reasons, argument, or communication. Actually, Austin (Ibid) advanced the above five categories very tentatively, more as a basis for discussion than as a set of established results. As he put it himself, "I am not putting any of this forward as in the very least definitive" (Austin, 1962, p. 151). Acknowledging that Austin's above taxonomy form an excellent basis for discussion, Searle (1969) postulated that the taxonomy needs to be revised because it contains some weaknesses. So drawing upon this pioneering classification, Searle (1969), Austin's student, today proponent and advocate of the theory, made some modifications but still came up with five different categories of speech acts. It's key to mention that this investigation uses Searle's (1969) taxonomy of speech acts, especially as they are more elaborated. The following is how he classified speech acts. The first category is that of declarations in which the propositional content matches the reality. Austin refers to it as a performative utterance. They include *baptizing, resigning, appointing, pronouncing sentences or declaring the bride and bridegroom wife and husband*. Next are the commissives. They have to do with what is intended to be done by the speaker in the future. *Promises and oaths*, for instance, fall into this category of speech act. The third category is that of expressives or those speech acts which reveal the speaker's psychological state of mind with regard to a situation. Such speech acts include: *congratulating, apologizing or making excuses and thanking*. The fourth type of speech acts, as classified by Searle (Ibid), is that of Directives. These are used to get the hearer to do something. They encompass *commending/ordering, requesting, forbidding and advising*. The last but not least type is the category named representatives, which deal with the assertion of a speaker's beliefs.

More specifically, representatives commit a speaker to the accuracy viz. the truth of the expressed proposition. Alternatively put, they basically describe the state of affairs as perceived by the speaker in terms of truthfulness. *Reciting a creed, swearing and claiming* are illustrative examples of this type of speech act. Austin (1962) called this category of speech acts assertives.

Each of the above presented different categories of speech acts can be expressed either directly or indirectly, hence direct and indirect speech acts. As a matter of fact, a direct speech act is one that uses an interrogative syntactic structure for the function of a question, an imperative syntactic structure for the function of a command or request, and a declarative syntactic structure for the function of a statement (Yule, 2010, p. 134). For instance, we usually use direct speech acts when we need pieces of information about something or a place we have never been to by asking questions. Such instances would include: do you know Peter James? Or what does Germany look like? Likewise, we use imperative sentences when we want to get our children to do this or not to do that, as in: it is cold outside don't go out; give me that stuff over there.

In other respects, whenever an interrogative, imperative or declarative syntactic structure is used to perform a function other than the one they are literally recognized for, the result is an indirect speech act. For example, *can you pass the salt?* We are not really asking a question about someone's ability. We rather use it to make a request. More specifically, we are using a syntactic structure associated with the function of a question, but in this case, with the function of a request. In the same vein, the utterance *you left the door open* has a declarative syntactic structure and, if considered a direct speech act, would be used to make a statement. However, if this were said to someone who has just come in whereas it is really cold outside, one would really want that person to close the door. In that case, the imperative structure is not used. A declarative structure is rather used to make a request which is a perfect example of an indirect speech act. According to Yule (2010), indirect speech acts are used because such actions as requests presented in an indirect way (as for example in *could you close that door for me?*) are generally considered to *be more gentle or more polite in our society* than direct speech acts (*close that door for me*).

The concept of politeness is important to help assess both direct and indirect speech acts. Indeed, politeness in pragmatics is showing awareness and consideration of another person's face. In fact, it is being tactful, modest and nice to other people. Ideas about the appropriate language to mark politeness differ substantially from one culture to the next. The key concept in studies related to politeness is face. The face is one's public self-image, viz., the emotional and social sense of self that everyone has and expects everyone else to recognize. If what is said represents a threat to another person's self-image, it is called a face-threatening act. For example, when you behave as you have more social power than the other person though you don't by using a direct speech act to have that person do something (*give me that pen*), you are performing a face-threatening act. An indirect speech act in the form associated with a question like, *could you give me that pen* removes the assumption of social power. One is only asking if it's possible. In fact, this makes the request less threatening to the other person's face. When what is said lessens the possible threat to another's face, it is described as a face-saving act

In pragmatics, the face can be positive or negative (Yule, 2010:135). While a negative face is the need to be independent and free from imposition, a positive face is the need to be connected, to belong, to be a member of a group. Such phrases as *"I am sorry to bother you...., I know you are busy, but..."* are face-saving acts emphasizing a person's negative face and showing concern about imposition. On the contrary, phrases like: *"let's do this together...., you and I have the same problem, so...."* and *alike* are face-saving acts that emphasize a person's positive face showing solidarity and drawing attention to a common goal.

For direct and indirect speech acts to be valid, there are a number of conditions to meet. Such conditions include the existence of an accepted conventional procedure having a certain conventional effect, the presence of particular persons and circumstances, the correct and complete execution of a procedure, and (when appropriate to the act) certain thoughts, feelings, or intentions (Shiffrin, 1994: 51). These circumstances are called felicity conditions. Yule (1996: 50) identified five types of felicity conditions: general conditions, content conditions, preparatory conditions, sincerity conditions and essential conditions.

General conditions presuppose the participants' knowledge of the language being used and his non-play acting. Content conditions concern the appropriate content of an utterance. Preparatory conditions deal with differences of various illocutionary acts. They relate to whether the person performing a speech act has the authority to do so (e.g. not everyone is qualified to fine, christen, arrest, etc.). Sincerity conditions count with the speaker's intention to carry out a certain act. They relate to whether the speech act is performed sincerely (e.g. the speaker is not lying). Essential conditions combine with a specification of what must be in the utterance content, the context, and the speaker's intentions, in order for a specific act to be appropriately (felicitously) performed.

## **2.2. Literature Review**

The theory of speech acts has aroused so much interest that a large number of researchers have used it to carry out a wide range of investigations. Actually, the theory has proved very useful for meaning decoding in various oral and written discourses. This

state of affairs has significantly contributed to enlarging the limits of knowledge in the field of pragmatics and in humanities by and large. This section of the paper critically reviews a few recently published works that use speech acts theory as a theoretical lens and foundation to examine, analyze, and interpret written texts, speeches and advertisements.

To start with, Bayat (2012) conducted research work on: A study on the use of speech acts. The researcher's objective by carrying out such research work is to find out the strategies by which 150 participants continuing their education in the Preschool Teacher Education Program carry out the acts of apologizing, complaining, refusing, and thanking. To reach that goal, he collected data through content analysis of the short memories that participants wrote. After analysis, he identified ten apologies, six refusal and six thanking strategies. The researcher arrives at the findings that while the targeted participants generally express the acts of thanking, apologizing and refusing explicitly, they mostly perform the act of complaining implicitly. A close look into this investigation shows that by studying how the studied participants use apologizing, complaining, refusing and thanking speech acts, the researcher has actually examined only one category of speech acts, especially the expressive, which reveal the speaker's state of mind with regard to a situation. The researcher will have arrived at far better results if he has explored all the five different categories of speech acts as this current paper does.

Simon & Dejica-Cartis (2015) investigated Speech Acts in Written Advertisements: Identification, Classification and Analysis. The researchers approach speech acts from an interdisciplinary perspective. The research uses a qualitative methodology. The quantitative analysis is performed on a corpus of eighty-four written advertisements selected from various newspapers and magazines, and the results can be viewed as genre-defining. In fact, the paper identifies, classifies and analyses the types of speech acts used in written advertisements using a series of illocutionary force indicating devices; the findings point out that advertisers prefer to use some speech acts to others with the aim of obtaining the intended effect on the target audience. The research would have yielded better findings if the researchers had examined the felicity conditions of the studied written advertisements. This would have allowed us to look into the appropriateness of both their contents and the language used for the ads and see if the advertisers are professionals or amateurs. Extending this investigation to the felicity conditions would have ultimately permitted assessing the trustworthiness level of the studied written advertisements.

Azhari, Priono, and Nuriadi (2018) carried out an investigation on Speech Acts of Classroom Interaction. Their study aims at looking into the types and frequency of speech acts performed by teachers and students in their interactions. Their research work has also focused on analyzing strategies used by teachers and students in performing the illocutionary act of imperatives. To reach these research objectives, they appealed to the qualitative method. The study reveals that the examined teachers and students use four types of speech acts, namely imperatives, assertive, expressions, and commissives. The overriding speech acts in the light of the results they arrived at are the imperative, assertive speech acts, which represent 43% and 42%, respectively. They found that expressive and commissive speech acts are less occurring in the teacher-student interactions investigated. The study further recognizes that requests are used as strategies in the realization of request include (a) formal completeness (propositional completeness and modification), (b) level of directness (mood derivable, performative, hedged performative, locution derivable, and conventionally indirect), (c) point of views, (d) context, and (e) mood. The research unveils that imperatives are the most type of illocutionary act performed in classroom interaction. It also shows that students lack pragmatic competence in performing such an act. The researchers then conclude that teachers need to expose the learners to communication strategies in order to allow them to speak accurately and appropriately in different contexts. Acknowledging limits to their investigation, the researchers suggest that further studies about pragmatic competencies needed in EFL context and material designs for teaching such competencies to be carried out in addition to theirs for better results. Though a very interesting research work, it has failed to explain why the directive speech acts, which were the most expecting ones in the teacher-students type of interactions explored, are missing and what their absence in their collected data really implies. The investigation would have provided greater results if it had explored the politeness dimension in the teacher-student relationships studied.

Kone (2020) examined Speech acts in UN treaties from a pragmatic perspective. The article investigates linguistic behaviour, especially the illocutionary forces used in international conventions formulation discourses. It further discusses such research questions as; what types of illocutionary acts are found in the discourse of U.N. treaties? To what extent are they used? How do those types of illocutionary acts reflect the nature of the discourse pattern of a treaty? The findings of the research reveal that there is no exclusive use of a single speech act type. However, there is a higher frequency of constitutive and commissive categories, whereas the directive is only used to a lesser extent. This high frequency of commissive and constitutive is understood as a reflection of the nature of a treaty that is not so much about command as it is about commitment and clear definitions of the relative terms. In addition to the great investigation carried out, the researcher could have examined the felicity conditions around the UN treaties. This would have contributed to assessing their appropriateness in terms of contents and contexts the degree of sincerity of what is written therein, to name but a few.

As it can be witnessed from the wide-ranging literature reviewed so far, no research work has, to our best knowledge, been carried out on the examination of speech Acts in Joe Biden's opening and closing remarks at the virtual summit for democracy recently held on December 9, 2021, from a pragmatic perspective. As a consequence, the present research is relevant, and there is still room for it to be carried out for the extension of knowledge in the field of pragmatics. The present research work takes into account the different aspects of the speech acts theory presented above and adopts the methodology presented below.

### 3. Methodology

The current American president's opening and closing remarks at the international summit for democracy held virtually last December 09, 2021, being speeches that he delivered on that occasion, are absolutely conducive to the study of speech acts to better grasp his perspectives about democracy. That is the key reason why both remarks have been chosen for this investigation. The investigation appeals to the mixed quantitative and qualitative methodology for the attainment of its objectives. The quantitative segment of the mixed method has allowed collecting, categorizing, organizing, tabulating, numerate and presenting data in an informative way. To get down to specifics, the unit of analysis is the selected texts, especially as the study falls within the scope of discourse-semantics; both speeches have been broken down into their utterance constituents to favour a clear identification of the different speech acts the speeches are made up of. The identification of the different speech acts has been carried out based on Searle's (1969) definition of each of the five different speech acts presented in the theoretical framework above. Once statistically summarized, the collected data has been described emphasizing the prevalence or dominance of some types of speech acts over others, paving the way by so doing to the qualitative method that ensued via which the interpretation of the findings has been carried out.

### 4. Speech Acts Identification in the Selected Remarks

President Joe Biden's opening and closing remarks at the first virtual summit for democracy have been described in the light of the speech act theory presented above in the theoretical framework. The analysis has allowed us to collect the statistically tabulated data hereafter.

Types of Speech Acts	Number in the Opening Remarks	Number in the Closing Remarks	Number of each type in both speeches	Percentage (%)
Commissives	27	13	40	31.74
Declaratives	01	00	01	0.79
Directives	08	08	16	12.69
Expressives	02	04	06	4.76
Representatives	41	22	63	50
Total number in each speech	79	47		
Total number in both speeches	126			

As it can be witnessed from the above statistical table, each of the different types of speech acts has been recorded in every single of the studied remarks except the declarative speech act, which is systematically missing in the second excerpt. It is important to highlight that the different speech act types recorded after analysis occur in different proportions. While the opening remarks embed a total number of seventy-nine (79) speech acts, the second count a fewer number of forty-seven (47) speech acts. More to the point, the opening remarks embed more representative speech acts (41) than the closing remarks (22). In the same vein, the opening remarks contain more commissive (27) speech acts than the closing remarks (13). The above statistical table accounts for this. Curiously enough, both studied remarks count exactly the same number of directive speech acts. More specifically, they equally embed eight (08) directive speech acts. Conversely, the opening remarks contain less expressive speech acts than the closing remarks. To descend to particulars, while the opening remarks contain two (02) expressive speech acts, the closing remarks count that number twice viz. four (04). The closing remarks contain no declarative speech act. Likewise, they enclose fewer commissive and representative speech acts than the opening remarks, as one can witness in the above statistical table.

A close look into the statistical table reveals that representative speech acts override, by far, the other types of speech acts, whether in the first or the second remarks. To get down to specifics, they count a total number of sixty-three (63) representing (50%) of the overall number of speech acts recorded in both remarks. They are followed in the ranking order by the commissive speech acts, which are forty (40) in number for a percentage of 31.74%. Directive speech acts occur equally in each of the remarks and are third in the ranking order with a total number of sixteen (16) and a percentage of 12.69%. Expressive speech acts come forth and is a global number of six (06) in both studied speeches. They represent a percentage of 4.76% of the total number of speech acts recorded in both remarks. The least occurring speech acts are declarative. They are completely non-existent in the closing remarks. The opening remarks embed just one declarative speech act representing 0.79% of the overall speech acts in both studied remarks.

Drawing upon the applied theory, these statistical configurations of the data collected from the analyzed remarks encode a number of meanings that are going to be unveiled in the subsequent section of the article entitled findings and interpretation.

### **5. Findings and Interpretation**

The analysis of the selected remarks delivered to the audience at the first virtual conference by American President Joe Biden and its data will be of no relevance if the interpretation of the recorded findings doesn't ensue. As a result, this subsection looks closely into the collected data to unveil encoded meanings beyond what is said literally to help grasp Joe Biden's concerns and perspectives about democracy in the ongoing period of time when the latter is put to the test by the disastrous political governances of a large number of political leaders worldwide.

To start with, the predominance of the different types of speech acts over one another in the order they occur in the examined speeches account for the latter ones structuring. To be explicit, the preponderance of the representative speech acts over the commissive speech acts, and that of the commissives over the directives and expressive speech acts respectively is revelatory of the key points of articulation of the studied opening and closing remarks. Conspicuously, the prevalence order in both speeches is the same. Whether in the opening or closing remarks, the representative speech acts overrides the other types of speech acts. They are followed in the ranking order by the commissives, the directives, the expressives and the declaratives, which are second, third, fourth and fifth, respectively. This constant way of using the different recorded speech acts in the studied remarks cannot be a matter of chance. Actually, this recurring feature in both speeches delivered at different times, under different circumstances, is evocative of the president's archetypal style of communication on the occasion of the summit. Knowing that representative speech acts describe the state of affairs as perceived by the speaker in terms of truthfulness, President Joe Biden has used them to express his point of view about democracy today in America in particular and in the whole world by and large. This category of speech acts as used in these speeches has allowed the president to let those taking part in the summit know about the true state of democracy today all over the world. What is the matter with democracy? Reading the opening remarks carefully, one can discover that there are "sustained and alarming challenges to democracy" all around the globe. Highlighting the state of democracy worldwide today with statistical data, Biden (2021) states: ". Freedom House reports, in 2020, that it marked the 15th consecutive year of global freedom in retreat". In the same vein, Biden (ibid) added, "Another recent report, from the International Institute of Democracy and Electoral Assistance, noted that more than half of all democracies have experienced a decline in at least one aspect of their democracy over the last 10 years, including the United States" (p.1). Presenting the statistics about the state of democracy today using representative speech acts as done in these opening remarks indicates that these latter ones are real and trustworthy. Furthermore, they indicate that president Joe Biden has not just brandished alibi to justify why he has called for the summit. On the contrary, he has touched on a crucial matter calling the attention of those taking part in the summit to the fact that the current state of democracy worldwide is a serious one to really worry about. Politicians are liable to tell lies on occasions of this kind, but Joe Biden is not doing so here. He is rather presenting democracy in its real facet to allow the participants to the summit to know about the real key challenges democracy is currently facing in order to take serious measures against its negative trends. As a result, the felicity content condition that requires the appropriateness of the content of the locutions or utterances is met. Therefore, whatever has been said about democracy by the American president is appropriate and can be trusted. The representative speech acts in the closing remarks have basically served to indicate the concrete achievements of the virtual conference towards altering the wrong direction democracy is currently pointing to.

In other respects, the genuine statistics about the state of democracy all over the world as descriptively presented via representative speech acts clearly show that democracy is in trouble in virtually all countries on the globe, even those held up or taken as models in the matter. In the face of these global negative trends, there is a need to think of what to do to avoid the worst to occur. In this perspective, commissive speech acts have been predominantly used in both studied remarks after the representative speech acts. As provided by the theory, commissives deal with what is intended to be done by the speaker in the future. Indeed, the commissive speech acts of the explored remarks have been used to disclose or lay bare the plans Biden has in mind for the re-establishment of democracy by inviting leaders from more than 100 governments together with activists, trade unionists, and other members of civil society, leading experts and researchers, as well as representatives from the business community to the summit. In fact, Biden would like the summit to be one at which great decisions are made towards stifling the current threats to democracy. To that effect, Biden (2021) says the following via commissive speech acts:

over the next two days, we're bringing together leaders ... not to assert that any one of our democracies is perfect or has all the answers, but to lock arms and reaffirm our shared commitment to make our democracies better; to share ideas and learn from each other; and to make concrete commitments of how — how to strengthen our own democracies and push back on authoritarianism, fight corruption, promote and protect human rights of people everywhere (p.2).

He further adds: "This summit is a kick-off of a year in action for all of our countries to follow through on our commitments and to report back next year on the progress we've made." Careful consideration of the commissive speech acts as used in the opening and closing remarks clearly reveal that Biden is not just delivering these remarks for the sake of doing so but that he is determined

to get all the summit resolutions done. This actually testifies to the president's pragmatism. Mr. President Joe Biden is certainly not a theoretician but a practical person. As an illustration of his practicality, he said: "From the earliest days of my administration, we've pursued a broad-based agenda to prove that American democracy can still do big things and take on challenges that matter most." More to the point, he passed the American Rescue Plan to help get the Covid-19 pandemic under control in America and the whole world. In addition, last November 2021, he signed a bipartisan piece of legislation, a true act of consensus between Democrats and Republicans in America. This act is aimed at strengthening Americans' democracy. As he put it through the commissive speech act, he used, the legislation makes a generational investment to deliver such most important needs of the 21st century as clean water, safe roads, high-speed broadband Internet, good-paying union jobs for working people with better access to the tools and resources they need to thrive. Moreover, as if it were not sufficient, he promises to sign very soon into law a bill called the Build Back Better plan, which is going to be an extraordinary investment in American workers and give American families just a little more breathing room to deal with their problems and their opportunities. All these concrete realizations reassure that Joe Biden is going to carry out his plans that led to the organization of the summit. Hence, the felicity Sincerity conditions are then met. These felicity conditions allow us to say that Joe Biden and participants to the summit are going to enforce all the plans made and decisions reached at the summit as encoded in the commissive speech acts in the studied remarks. The countries that took part in the summit and the whole world by and large can expect to live a better democratic world with these initiatives of the American President Joe Biden in the future.

The use of directive speech acts in the examined remarks is also evocative of meanings. Following Searle's definition, as presented in the theoretical framework, directive speech acts are used to get the hearer to do something. These speech acts evoke the notions of power, politeness, and face and highlight the interpersonal meaning dimensions of the remarks. In fact, who gets whom to do what, why, when, where, and under what circumstances? This question also helps to probe the experiential meaning of the studied remarks. Actually, a close look into all the directive speech acts reveals that the actor roles have been carried out by the subject personal pronoun "We". This implies that the fight for democracy is a collective one. People, governments, and institutions have to come together hand in hand to look for the solutions to the various problems democracy is facing today all around the world. The actor roles in the directive speech act carried out via the first person plural is also revelatory of Joe Biden's personality. Indeed America being the first worldwide power today, Joe Biden, President of the United States, could consider himself as the most powerful of all the attendance at the summit and sound bossy and swollen with pride. But that is not the case. More to the point, as the bearer of the initiative, he could have worked on it all alone. However, he has rather shown that though he is all-powerful, he can't face all alone the current challenges democracy is facing. This is certainly one of the left unsaid reasons that led to the summoning of the summit. All the processes in the directive speech acts are ones that express advice or suggestions towards restoring or re-establishing democracy. None of them is used by the American president to command or order. This, indeed, is a token of his humble personality and collaborative character. Besides, despite his rank and the social power he embodies, this special use of language evokes the notion of politeness. As a matter of fact, President Joe Biden has, through his language use, been tactful, modest and very nice to his audience. He has by so doing shown awareness and consideration of the face of the people attending the summit. Though he does, he has not behaved, via his language use, as someone who has more social power than those attending the summit. As a result, no directive speech act in both the opening and closing remarks has been used to perform a face-threatening act. Conversely, the directive speech acts numbered 30, 51, 77, and 79 in the opening remarks and those numbered 19, 36, and 44 in the closing remarks are very good instances of face-saving acts that emphasize the president's positive face showing solidarity and drawing attention to the common goal of saving democracy from jeopardy all over the world. Definitely, the essential conditions are perfectly satisfied for his audience to take into account his pieces of advice and suggestions. Drawing upon all this, one can undoubtedly say that President Joe Biden is not autocratic. The absence of declarative speech acts in the studied remarks confirms this. The only declarative speech act recorded in the opening remarks has been used to match the welcoming of the participants to the summit to the reality of its real occurrence. At this critical period when democracy is collapsing down, Biden would like his contemporaries all over the world to stand up as one person to restore by all possible means the democratic gains for better governance and better life on the planet.

The expressive speech acts recorded reveal President Joe Biden's psychological state of mind with regard to the declining state of democracy worldwide. Some of them have been used to thank the governments, activists, trade unionists, and other members of civil society, leading experts and researchers, as well as representatives from the business community who have taken part in the first virtual summit for democracy in support of the shared democratic values.

## 6. Conclusion

This research work has explored speech acts in President's Joe Biden's opening, and closing remarks at the democracy summit held virtually last December 2021. The study aims at showing to what extent the theory of speech acts is useful for text analysis and meaning decoding. It further seeks to unveil, beyond what is literally said in the President's opening and closing remarks, the underlying meanings subtly encoded via the different speech acts used by President Joe Biden to help grasp the ins and outs of the first summit for democracy. The study has appealed to the mixed quantitative and qualitative methodology to reach these

objectives. The quantitative method has permitted gathering, organizing and presenting the collected data in a statistically informative way. The qualitative method that ensued has opened the avenue for the interpretation of the recorded findings. Some of the results the research has arrived at include the following.

As used in the studied remarks, the recorded representative speech acts show that democracy is in trouble in virtually all countries in the world, even those held up or taken as models in this matter. The commissive speech acts have unveiled President Joe Biden's dream for the summit. In fact, he would like the summit to be one at which great decisions are made towards stifling the current threats to democracy. These speech acts as used in both remarks show that President Joe Biden is not a theoretician but a sensible and realistic activist. Besides, the directive speech acts have revealed Biden's humble personality and collaborative character. Actually, his special use of language via the directive speech acts despite his rank and the social power he embodies evokes the notion of politeness. Although he does, he has not behaved, via his language use, as someone who has more social power than those attending the summit. On the contrary, he has been tactful, modest and very nice to his audience. He has by so doing shown awareness and consideration of the face of the people attending the summit. The directive speech acts numbered 30, 51, 77, and 79 in the opening remarks and those numbered 19, 36, and 44 in the closing remarks are very good instances of face-saving acts that emphasize the President's positive face showing solidarity and drawing attention to the common goal of saving democracy from jeopardy all over the world. From all this, it can be said without being mistaken that President Biden is not an autocratic President. At this critical period when democracy is collapsing down, he would like his contemporaries all over the world to stand up as one person to restore by all possible means the democratic gains for better governance and better life on the planet.

Exploring the Gricean cooperative principle maxims, the field, tenor, and mode variables in the examined remarks would contribute to uncovering additional meanings to the ones unveiled by this study.

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## Appendix

### Opening Remarks by President Biden at the Summit for Democracy

1. Well, hello everyone, and welcome to the first Summit for Democracy (**Declarative**).
2. This gathering has been on my mind for a long time for a simple reason (**Expressive**): 3. In the face of sustained and alarming challenges to democracy, universal human rights, and — all around the world, democracy needs champions (**representative**).
4. And I wanted to host this summit because here is the — here in the United States; we know as well as anyone that renewing our democracy and strengthening our democratic institutions requires constant effort (**Representative**).
5. American democracy is an ongoing struggle to live up to our highest ideals and to heal our divisions; to recommit ourselves to the founding idea of our nation captured in our Declaration of Independence, not unlike many of your documents (**Representative**).
6. We say: "We hold these truths to be self-evident" that all women and men are created equal, endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, among them life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness (**Representative**).



7. Democracy doesn't happen by accident **(Representative)**. 8. We have to renew it with each generation **(Representative)**. 9. And this is an urgent matter on all our parts, in my view **(Representative)**. 10. Because the data we're seeing is largely pointing in the wrong direction **(Representative)**.

11. Freedom House reports, in 2020, that it marked the 15th consecutive year of global freedom in retreat **(Representative)**.

12. Another recent report from the International Institute of Democracy and Electoral Assistance noted that more than half of all democracies had experienced a decline in at least one aspect of their democracy over the last 10 years, including the United States **(Representative)**.

13. And these trends are being exacerbated by global challenges that are more complex than ever and which require shared efforts to address these concerns: By outside pressure from autocrats **(Representative)**. 14. They seek to advance their own power, export and expand their influence around the world, and justify their repressive policies and practices as a more efficient way to address today's challenges **(Representative)**. 15. That's how it's sold **(Representative)**. 16. By voices that seek to fan the flames of societal division and political polarization **(Representative)**.

17. And perhaps most importantly and worrying of all — most worrying of all, by increasing the dissatisfaction of people all around the world with democratic governments that they feel are failing to deliver for their needs **(Representative)**.

18. In my view, this is the defining challenge of our time **(Representative)**.

19. Democracy — government of the people, by the people, for the people — can at times be fragile, but it also is inherently resilient **(Representative)**. 20. It's capable of self-correction, and it's capable of self-improvement **(Representative)**.

21. And, yes, democracy is hard **(Representative)**. 22. We all know that **(Representative)**. 23. It works best with consensus and cooperation **(Representative)**. 24. When people and parties that might have opposing views sit down and find ways to work together, things begin to work **(Representative)**.

25. But it's the best way to unleash human potential and defend human dignity and solve big problems **(Representative)**. 26. And it's up to us to prove that **(Representative)**.

27. Democracies are not all the same **(Representative)**. 28. We don't agree on everything, all of us in this meeting today **(Representative)**. 29. But the choices we make together are going to define, in my view, the course of our shared future for generations to come **(Representative)**.

30. And as a global community for democracy, we have to stand up for the values that unite us **(Directive)**.

31. We have to stand for justice and the rule of law, for free speech, free assembly, a free press, freedom of religion, and for all the inherent human rights of every individual **(Directive)**.

32. My late friend Congressman John Lewis was a great champion of American democracy and civil rights around the world, learning from and gaining inspiration from other great leaders like Gandhi and Mandela **(Representative)**.

33. With his final words, as he was dying, to our nation last year, he reminded our country, quote, "Democracy is not a state; it is an act **(Representative)**." 34. "Democracy is not a state; it is an act **(Representative)**."

35. So, over the next two days, we're bringing together leaders from more than 100 governments alongside activists, trade unionists, and other members of civil society, leading experts and researchers, and representatives from the business community, not — not to assert that any one of our democracies is perfect or has all the answers, but to lock arms and reaffirm our shared commitment to make our democracies better; to share ideas and learn from each other; and to make concrete commitments of how — how to strengthen our own democracies and push back on authoritarianism, fight corruption, promote and protect human rights of people everywhere **(Commissive)**. 36. To act **(Commissive)**. 37. To act **(Commissive)**.

38. This summit is a kick-off of a year in action for all of our countries to follow through on our commitments and to report back next year on the progress we've made **(Commissive)**.

39. And as we do this, the United States is going to lead by example, investing in our own democracy — in our democracy, supporting our partners around the world at the same time **(Commissive)**.

40. From the earliest days of my administration, we pursued- — we've pursued a broad-based agenda to prove that American democracy can still do big things and take on challenges that matter most **(Commissive)**.

41. That's why we immediately passed what we call the American Rescue Plan to get shots in people's arms as fast as possible at home and around the world to help get this pandemic under control and to stimulate inclusive and lasting economic recovery that's also helping to drive global growth **(Commissive)**.

42. Last month, I was proud to sign a bipartisan piece of legislation, a true act of consensus between Democrats and Republicans in our country: the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act **(Commissive)**.

43. This legislation will make a generational investment to deliver what people need most in the 21st century: clean water, safe roads, high-speed broadband Internet, and so much more — all of which strengthen our democracy by creating good-paying union jobs that will translate to lives of opportunity and dignity for working people, with better access to the tools and resources they need to thrive **(Commissive)**.

44. And soon — and soon, I hope — I hope to sign into law a bill we call the Build Back Better plan, which will be an extraordinary investment in our people and our workers and give American families just a little more breathing room to deal with their problems and their opportunities **(Commissive)**.

45. Our domestic agenda has been focused on delivering for the needs of the American people and strengthening our democratic institutions at home **(Commissive)**.

46. On my first day in office, I signed an executive order to advance racial justice and equality. And my administration recently released our first National Strategy on Gender Equality and Equity **(Commissive)**.

47. We're fostering greater worker power because workers organizing a union to give them the voice in their workplace, in their community, and their country isn't just an act of economic solidarity; it's democracy in action **(Commissive)**.

48. We're making it easy for Americans to register to vote, and we've doubled the number of attorneys defending and enforcing voting rights laws through our Department of Justice **(Commissive)**.

49. And my administration is going to keep fighting to pass two critical pieces of legislation that will shore up the very foundation of American democracy: the sacred right of every person to make their voice heard through free, fair, and secure elections **(Commissive)**.

50. We need to enact what we call the Freedom to Vote Act and the John Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act to prevent voting discrimination, provide baselines for assessing — accessing the ballot box, and ensure the will of the voters is upheld, and so much more **(Directive)**.

51. We should be making it easy for people to vote, not harder **(Directive)**. 52. And that's going to remain a priority for my administration until we get it done **(Commissive)**.

53. Inaction is not an option **(Representative)**. 54. And as we continue to work at home to bring the United States closer to what we call a "more perfect union," we're doubling down on our engagement with and support of democracies around the world **(Commissive)**.

55. Earlier this week, I released the first U.S. government Strategy on Countering Corruption, which elevates our fight against transnational corruption — a crime that drains public resources and hollows out the ability of governments to deliver for the people and just evaporates confidence that the people much need to have in their government **(Representative)**.

56. The strategy includes working with other partners — all of you around the world — to improve transparency, hold corrupt actors accountable, reduce their ability to use the United States and international financial systems to hide assets and launder money **(Commissive)**.

57. And today, I'm proud to launch the Presidential Initiative for Democratic Renewal, which will focus efforts across diplomacy — across our diplomacy and foreign assistance programs to bolster democratic resilience and human rights and — globally **(Commissive)**.

58. Working with our Congress, we're planning to commit as much as \$224 million [\$424 million] in the next year to shore up transparent and accountable governance, including supporting media freedom, fighting international corruption, standing with democratic reformers, promoting technology that advances democracy, and defining and defending what a fair election is **(Commissive)**.

59. Let me give you a few examples of the kind of work this initiative is — will entail: a free and independent media **(Representative)**. 60. It's the bedrock of democracy **(Representative)**. 61. It's how the public stay informed and how governments are held accountable **(Representative)**. 62. And around the world, press freedom is under threat **(Representative)**.

63. So, we're committing critical seed money to launch a new multilateral effort — our International Fund for Public Interest Media — to sustain independent media around the world **(Commissive)**.

64. And through the — our USAID, we're going to be standing up a new Defamation Defense Fund for Journalists to help protect investigative journalists against nuisance lawsuits designed to prevent them from doing their work — their vital work around the world **(Commissive)**.

65. We're going to launch new programs to help connect anti-corrupt- — anti-corruption activities across civil society, the media, academia, labour, and protect whistleblowers and help partners eliminate money laundering and safe havens **(Commissive)**.

66. To ensure that our democracies are strengthening by the voice — are strengthened by the voice of all citizens, this Presidential Initiative includes programs to advance women and girls and civic engagement and political leadership, empowering the LGBTQ [sic] community — plus community — individuals to participate in democratic institutions, promote labour law reform, working or — and worker organizations **(Commissive)**.

67. It includes new lines of efforts with our partners to address online harassment and abuse and reduce the potential for countries to abuse new technologies, including surveillance technologies, to suppress the rights of their people to express their views **(Commissive)**.

68. And we'll stand up two — and we're going to stand up two rapid-response, cross-cutting initiatives that support the key goals of this summit: the Fund for Democratic Renewal and the Partnership for Democracy — for Democracy program **(Commissive)**. 69. It's going to allow State Department and USAID to surge funds to support our partners working on democratic frontlines around the world **(Commissive)**.

70. My fellow leaders, members of civil society, activists, advocates, citizens: We stand at an inflection point in our history, in my view **(Representative)**. 71. The choices we make, in my view, in the next — at this moment are going to fundamentally determine the direction our world is going to take in the coming decades **(Representative)**.

72. Will we allow the backward slide of rights and democracy to continue unchecked **(Representative)**? 73. Or will we together — together — have a vision and the vision — not just "a" vision, "the" vision — and courage to once more lead the march of human progress and human freedom forward **(Directive)**?

74. I believe we can do that, and we will if we have faith in ourselves, in our — and in our democracies, and in each other **(Representative)**.

75. That's what this summit is about **(Representative)**. 76. I'm so looking forward to a productive session and discussions that we'll have — we'll have over the next two days — **(Directive)**. 77. I'm looking forward to the connections we'll build to support our work moving forward **(Directive)**.

78. So, let's get to work **(Directive)**. 79. Thank you all so very much for your patience **(Expressive)**.

### **Closing Remarks by President Biden at the Summit for Democracy**

1. THE PRESIDENT: Thank you, everyone, for participating in the Summit for Democracy and for renewing our dedication to the shared values that are the root of our national and international strength **(Expressive)**.

2. In the lead-up to this gathering, over the last two days, we've heard government leaders, as well as democratic reformers from every region of the world, talk about the challenges that democracy is facing and the opportunities for its renewal **(Representative)**.

3. We've facilitated conversations and connections among mayors around the globe — from Mesa, Arizona, to Mannheim, Germany — and other leaders who are on the frontlines of demonstrating the power of democracy through local governments — governance **(Representative)**.

4. We've shown a spotlight on the importance of protecting media freedom and how advancing the status of women and girls is an investment in the success of our democracies **(Representative)**.

5. And we've focused on the need to empower human rights defenders and make sure technological and — technology enables so much of our lives that are used to advance democracies to lift people up, not to hold them down **(commissive)**.
6. We've heard the concerns of young people who have had a greater stake in the future than anyone else — and they've made that clear — about what matters to them most and how important it is to make sure their voices are included in our democracies **(Directive)**.
7. And though each of our nations faces unique challenges and many of the specific circumstances are different, the threat we face and the solutions we seek have a common antecedent **(Representative)**. 8. This is not a struggle of anyone facing it alone; it's all of us **(Representative)**.
9. And the commitments we've made to ourselves, to our own people, to one another will not only strengthen our own democracies by pushing back against autocracies fighting corruption and promoting human rights for all people — this is going to help seed the fertile ground for democracy to bloom around the world **(commissive)**.
10. And I'm so encouraged by the energy and the enthusiasm we've seen to rally people around the world in support of our shared democratic values **(Expressive)**.
11. As just one example: In advance of the Summit, the presidents of Panama, Costa Rica, and the Dominican Republic formed, quote, an "alliance to strengthen democratic institutions," end of quote, to cooperate — to cooperate on transparency, human rights, economic development, and strengthening democracy throughout the region **(Directive)**.
12. This is the sort of inspiring commitment and partnership that I hope we'll see more of as we undertake this issue in the next year of action **(commissive)**.
13. And I hope that each of our countries is going to measure the results of our efforts so that we can report back on our progress at a second Summit for Democracy next year when I hope to welcome each of you in person **(commissive)**.
14. For the — for our part, as I said yesterday, the United States is committed to strengthening our democracy at home and to working with parties around the world — around the globe to prove that democracies can deliver for people on issues that matter most to them **(commissive)**.
15. Here at home, that means working to make real the full promise of America, including by enacting both the Freedom to Vote Act and the John Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act **(commissive)**.
16. Because what's true around the world is also true in the United States: The sacred right to vote, to vote freely — the right to have your vote counted is the threshold of liberty for democracy — for every democracy **(Representative)**. 17. With it, anything is possible **(Representative)**. 18. Without it, virtually nothing is possible **(Representative)**.
19. So, we have to come together and get it done, and we will **(Directive)**.
20. The United States is also going to continue its efforts to beat the pandemic, working with the World Health Organization, COVAX, and other partners to save lives, vaccinate the world against COVID-19, and advance health security for everyone **(commissive)**.
21. We're leveraging our democratic partnerships, like the G7 and the Quad, to amplify our shared capacity to produce and to deliver vaccines and to help get shots in arms for everyone everywhere **(commissive)**.
22. We're taking on the climate crisis — the climate crisis with seriousness and urgency, responding to the moral — with moral clarity we're seeing coming from young people around the world **(commissive)**.
23. And we're affirming the democratic values that are at the heart of our international system and which have been the foundational elements of — for decades — of global growth and prosperity **(commissive)**.
24. And we're committed — we're committed to working with all who share those values to shape the rules of the road that are going to govern our progress in the 21st century, including on issues of cyber security and emerging technologies so that future generations continue to reap the benefits of liberty and democracy, as we have **(commissive)**.
25. And the final message I want to impart as we close out this Summit for Democracy is that we know how hard the work is that's going to be ahead of us, but we also know we are up to the challenge **(commissive)**.
26. Because, as I have said before, and as this gathering has demonstrated, the democratic world is everywhere **(Representative)**.

27. Autocracies can never extinguish the ember of liberty that burns in the hearts of people around the world, in every portion of the world **(Representative)**.
28. It knows no borders **(Representative)**. 29. It speaks every language **(Representative)**. 30. It lives in anti-corruption activists, human rights defenders, journalists, peaceful protestors on the frontlines of this struggle all around the world **(Representative)**.
31. And it lives in town council meetings, union elections, daily small acts that occur around the globe whenever people come together to solve problems and to bridge differences, and in all the ways, civil society empowers individuals to have a direct say in the issues that impact on their — their lives — impact on them personally **(Representative)**.
32. And so, defending democracy demands a whole-of-society effort **(Representative)**. 33. It requires all of us **(Representative)**.
34. As the leaders of governments, we — we have a responsibility to listen to our citizens, to strengthen the guardrails of democracy, and to drive reforms that are going to make transparent, accountable governments — governance more resilient against the buffering and — the buffeting forces of autocracy and those who want — and the naked pursuit of power ahead of the public good **(Directive)**.
35. You know, we have to work together with the private sector to combat corruption, to build more equitable economies where more people can share in the benefits **(Directive)**.
36. We have to empower our citizens to hold accountable — to hold all of us accountable to the highest ideals and to make sure our actions align with our words **(Directive)**.
37. And as we close out the first gathering, let's — let us together reaffirm our determination that the future will belong to those who embrace human dignity, not those who trample it; who unleash the potential of their people, not those who stifle it; and who give their people the ability to breathe free, not those who seek to suffocate their people with an iron hand **(Directive)**.
38. You know, as the great Irish poet Seamus Heaney once wrote: "...once in a lifetime, The longed-for tidal wave Of justice can rise up, And hope and history rhyme **(Representative)**."
39. That tidal wave doesn't come out of nowhere **(Representative)**. 40. It doesn't happen by accident **(Representative)**.
41. It happens because people unleash the irresistible power of their dreams and their determination **(Representative)**.
42. Democracy is what makes it possible for hope and history to rhyme **(Representative)**.
43. And today, hope and history lie in our hands **(Representative)**.
44. So let's rise up our ambitions and rise up to meet the challenges together **(Directive)**.
45. Thank you **(Expressive)**, 46. and I look forward to following through in the next year on all of the commitments that we're making individually **(Commissive)**. 47. Thank you **(Expressive)**.