From Incitement to Indictment: Speech Acts of Donald Trump's Tweets in 2020 Presidential Elections

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ABSTRACT

In order to reveal how Donald Trump is crucially involved in inciting riot and instigating insurgency, this pragmatic study strictly investigates and analyzes Donald Trump's tweets over the past months that preceded the unprecedented mob attack on the Capitol in January the 6th to impede the Congress endorsement of the US presidential elections that resulted in Biden's victory. The analyses in this study mainly draw on Austin's (1962) Speech Act Theory and it's sub-versions of Searle's (1969) and the Subsequent taxonomy of Searle (1976). Although Twitter has been created to be a social media platform, Trump used it to run the US foreign and local affairs and policies during his four-year term in office. Due to the thematic limitations and diversity of those tweets, the researcher does not by any means intend to explore Trump's tweets during the first three years; rather, she primarily focuses on examining the last year because it has abundantly and crucially witnessed what Trump really DID with words in his tweets, and this is the utter essence of Austin's How to Do Things with Words. The tweets he made were not pragmatically representatives nor expressives as they might look; rather, most of them were directives and commissives in force oftentimes so that he exploited millions of Americans to rally violent support for him in his ignoble and criminal cause as well as rallying thousands to attack the Us emblem of democracy and freedom in the "Land of the Brave and the Land of Free" as furious crowds stormed and breached the Capitol's barriers while the Congress Session was convening to certify the then president-elect's victory. Such a huge load of explicit and an implicit incitement has lead to the attempt of second time impeachment of an incumbent president in the history of the united states and the ongoing legal endeavors of Trump's indictment months after he left the oval office.

INTRODUCTION

Humans are the best communicators as far as codes are prevaricatively used. Bearing this in mind, one can thinks of semantics as the linguistic field that specifically tackles the theory of meaning at the lexical level and at the sentential levels. Non-linguistically, the word semantics can be paradoxically very expressive as it represents and stands for words that serve nothing except being useless lip service that triggers the reaction of "actions not words" as when we say to somebody who dreams of success, "success requires diligence not semantics". Ironically, politicians are oftentimes accused of semantics in their campaigns and their speeches; i.e. not saying the truth or being insincere in what they promise to do. Therefore, Merriam Webster Dictionary defines the word semantics as "the language used (as in advertising or political propaganda) to achieve a desired effect on an audience especially through the use of words with novel or dual meanings"! Technically and in linguistic terms, these functions are not the within the scope of lexical nor cognitive semantics; rather they belong to the prime concern of pragmatics and/or discourse analysis proper (see Lyons 1978; Palmer, 1981).

This being said, pragmatics as such requires very specific details that explain how meaning can be negotiated and conveyed based on various contextual components that help interlocutor communicate effectively and appropriately such as who is speaking to whom, about what, when, where and how. Each one of these factors is quite essential in determining the exact meaning/message the speaker intends to send directly or indirectly, thus restricting and narrowing the scope of misinterpretation or misunderstanding that might be assumed by the hearers/audience. Pragmaticity of language is a unique faculty and gift that humans enjoy over all animals (Yule, 2000). A husband might solicit his wife to make and serve him a meal simply by saying, "Oh, I can smell the scent of our neighbors' delicious food"! This expressive informative utterance can be interpreted by the wife as an earnest way of begging her for serving lunch although it can receive a cold shoulder by another wife depending on how intimate

and cooperative the relationship between the wife and the husband is (see Leech 1983).

Therefore, we cannot approach Trump's tweets appropriately and specifically unless we are fully aware of the complex US socio-cultural and socio-political scene in order to contextualize those tweets and thus interpret them effectively and objectively within their Dem-Rep ideological and polarization of their liberal vs. conservative rhetoric (see Lakoff, 2002). Accordingly, we need to clearly but briefly set the US political context proper in the past twelve years. The democrats won the presidential elections in 2008 and 2012 and Barak Obama became the first African American president in the history of the united states, with Joe Biden as a vice president. The democrats lost the battle in 2016 when their strong candidate Hillary Clinton lost the race against all the odds and Donald Trump, a billionaire and an unknown politician except for his media shows, won the presidency with all democrats' claims and allegations that the elections were rigged and that the Russians were involved directly and indirectly as they were keen on seeing Hillary Clinton defeated not for any personal reasons but for critical clashing interests and policies between the Russians and the democrats.

Trump ruled the White House for four years and he was the first American president to run the a huge portion of US affairs via his Twitter account and in a non-diplomatic manner that resembles the way he played his role as a businessman on Wrestle-Mania's Arena! Considering Trump's Wrestle-Mania mentality with his business-media style and his lack of political expertise and courtesy as well as his obsession with the idea that elections can be rigged, we can understand and predict a lot of his strategies and techniques that he bluntly used verbally and nonverbally to maintain his narcissistic one-man-show practices, politics and ideologies whether they cohere with his Republican Party's convictions or not and whether they adhere to his democratic nation's values and ideals or not, to the extent that some CNN and world news commentators and analysts compared him to some dictators in the Third-World Countries and Banana States. These socio-political and psycho-political components are quintessential for readers and hearers because language is a unique system that combines the interaction between meaningful units and schematic knowledge within their realities (McDowell 1998; Searle 1999).

DATA AND METHODOLOGY

This piece of research is a qualitative study that primarily aims to highlight and explain specific cases and examples of Donald Trump's tweets that incited millions of Americans to reject the US election results and thousands to storm the Capitol in January 2021. Therefore, the scope of the study is specifically confined to those tweets during the year that preceded the attack; i.e. the last couple of months during the presidential campaign, during the elections and the weeks that followed the results of the elections; this starts at the beginning of Michigan riots on January 20th 2020 and ends by the taking the Capitol in Washington on January 6th 2021. Considering Trump's tweets during this specific period of time is quite essential because it helps the researcher and

the readers understand the socio-cultural and the socio-political dimensions and backgrounds of those tweets and how they can be precisely described and appropriately captured in light of the pragmatic assumptions of Speech Act Theory as such (henceforth SAT). The researcher examined the time line of Trump's relevant tweets for a year as the tweets can be frequently and abundantly found at the websites of hundreds of American mass media, social media and news agencies such as the BBC, the CNN, Reuters, Just Security as well as many other public and private websites. By so doing, the researcher filtered these tweets and sorted them chronologically, thematically and logically in order to decipher how such tweets can be interpreted based on the indications and the implications of SAT in a way that shows the intentionality of incitement and the probability of indictment.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Pragmatics in its technical attire came to existence at the onset of 1960s. Being one of the most acknowledged pioneers in this field, Austin (1962) introduced SAT for the first time in his masterpiece *How to Do Things in Words*, in which he tried philosophically and logically to suggest that many daily sentences do not only belong to the category of *constatives* but they can be *performatives* as well. Therefore, the minimal linguistic units of analysis such as the *phoneme*, the *morpheme*, the *lexeme*, the *phraseme* have shifted their orientation and their motivation from abstract linguistic content to more concrete situational contexts as *pragmemes* (Capone, 2005; Mey, 2010). Such an interesting shift focuses on the functional aspects of contextualized stretches of discourse that pragmaticians refer to as utterances (see Leech, 1983; Levinson, 1983).

However, the argument between what is to be said and what is to intend remains controversial in some cases; therefore, Pratt (1986) contends that "An account of linguistic interaction based on the idea of exchange glosses over the very basic facts that, to put it crudely, some people get to do more talking than others, some are supposed to do more listening, and not everybody's words are worth the same." (1986, p. 68). Nonetheless, words are not only used to represent and to inform others about what they are compositionally comprise or how they are in terms of truth-value hypothesize; rather, they are communicatively and effectively used to apologize, to revolutionize, to mobilize, to chastise, to agonize and to incur demise (cf. Katz, 1977; McGowan, 2009).

Hence, the cornerstone and the touchstone of the validity and the reliability of any cogent argumentation within the scope of SAT entails the solid distinctions between the locutionary content and the illocutionary force of the utterance. This strictly necessitates that the requirements and the mechanisms of such illocutionary acts and forces must be precisely set within their socio-cultural context; otherwise, such communicative force can be thwarted and lost or misfired. Therefore, Searle and Vanderveken (1985) envisage illocutionary force in terms of seven intrinsic characteristics: Illocutionary point, Degree of strength of the illocutionary point, Mode of achievement, Content conditions, Prepara-

tory conditions, Sincerity conditions, degree of strength of the sincerity conditions. In a nutshell, these characteristics delineate the language used, the intentionality, the relationship between the interlocutors and the capacity of the speaker.

Scrutinizing the relationships between locutionary content and illocutionary force, Levinson (1983) resembled Searle's (1976) taxonomy and set an organized categorization of major types of illocutions such as representatives, assertive, directives, commissives, expressive, declaratives. These types might overlap sometimes, but implementing a thorough analysis relying on strict contextual components can disambiguate any relevant overlap of such illocutionary acts such as the subtle distinctions between direct and indirect speech acts in case such as directives and declaratives or assertives and commissives (see Watson, 2004). Hence, the perlocutionary effect can show how such illocutionary acts or the force of such performatives can been captured by the hearers or the recipient (Searle, 1989).

Many recent studies have investigated Trump's speeches during the past five years due to the vast spread of his speeches worldwide and the socio-political impact of his speeches locally and internationally. Mulyana and Engliana. (2021) conducted a pragmatic study o Trump's direct vs. indirect speech acts in his 2016 victory speech and they concluded that Trump used all types of speech acts, yet his most frequent illocutions were direct expressive ones without offering a cogent argument explaining how and why such directness was more dominant than others as discoursal components and factors may reveal in such political speeches on such glorious moments of celebrated triumph (cf. Fairclough, 1989).

Ashfira and Hardianto (2020), furthermore, studied Trump's presidential speeches. The sample of the study comprised the data found in three presidential speeches, and the researchers argued that the illocutionary forces of assertive speech acts he used in his speeches cover many pragmatic functions such as affirming, alleging, asserting, avowing, claiming, declaring, denying, etc. Thus, they concluded that "the act of stating has been commonly used by Trump on his speeches because he wants the hearer to believe him that the policies he has made are the best things to do for the United States" (p. 39).

This goes in harmony with what Mufiah and Nur Rahman (2018) argued for in terms of the significance of assertives in Trump's speeches and for similar persuasive motivations. They, moreover, contended that illocutionary speech acts of Trump's political speech cover all types proposed by Seale; however, Trumps' representatives were dominantly frequent because they represent "what he thinks and what he believes in"; and this needs to be questioned because this researcher believes that Trump always contradicts himself, so what he says does not represent what he believes in but what he desires (cf. Ramadhani, Indrayani and Soemantri, 2019; Sidauruk, 2019; Nurkhamidah, 2020 et al). The implications of studying such tweets can be useful in different fields.

Souri and Merç (2020), specifically studied thirty seven tweets of Trump's and classified them into major categories;

they aimed at explaining how ELT classrooms of English can benefit from such implications. Both native and non-native speakers of English were asked to identify the types of speech acts in those tweets; so the researchers found that native speakers were able to better identify such categories unlike non-native speakers. This is quite predictable because pragmatic competence requires a high level of brain functions and socio-cultural background that non-native fall short to fully capture in some cases. Therefore, shifting the scope of such analyses from pragmatics proper into other fields and domains such as education, critical discourse, marketing, communication, and language and law can be of a great significance for various sectors individually and collectives; and this is the aim of this study.

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

This section is mainly dedicated to examine Donald Trump's tweets during that gloomy period in the history of the United States in order to explain how such tweets had impact the US socio-political scene during that specific period and maybe for decades to come. Trump's dogmatic and demagogical character and inclinations can help any follower easily. It is true that Trump is a democrat, but his political and ideological behavior has been far away from the core foundations of the GPO. Bearing such an essential idea in mind, the researcher claims that Trumps tweets appertaining the results of the presidential elections were intended to arouse the public opinion against the validity of Biden's victory and thus he deliberately committed provocative acts of rebellious consequences, so he incited violence in words; he created divide in words; he enticed discrimination in words and he almost triggered a state of willingness for a looming shadow of civil war in words. These 'acts in words' clothes' can be obviously realized in the force that can be captured once we delve into the propositional content of his tweets and relate this content to the socio-cultural and the socio-political context of his speech acts:

Assertives

Assertives by definition express and manifest how the speaker asserts and affirms what he believes in to be true as such when his opinion is stated in order to claim the credit and the credibility or the legitimacy of what he adopts.

(4.1.a.) The Democrat Party in the Great Commonwealth of Virginia are working hard to take away your 2nd Amendment rights. (January 20, 2020)

(4.1.b) The Governor of Michigan should give a little, and put out the fire. <u>These are very good people, but they are angry</u>. They want their lives back again, safely! See them, talk to them, make a deal. (Trump: May 1, 2020)

(4.1.c.) The only good Democrat is a dead Democrat. (May 28, 2020)

(4.1.d.) When the looting starts, the shooting starts. (May 29, 2020)

Considering (4.1.a.) to (4.1.d.), we can see how such tweets started a year before the attack in January 6th as Trump

tweeted and asserted his support for Richmond's protesters who went against any restrictions on the second amendment that allows the possession of heavy machine guns as in (4.1.a.); then, he described the mobs who stormed Michigan State Capitol and attempted to kidnap the governor as "good people, but angry people" a day after the criminal attack as in (4.1.b.). By the end of May, he continued his escalation by asserting that "the only good Democrat is a dead Democrat" as in (4.1.c.). This speech act is culminated in Trump's association between looting and shooting. The illocutionary force of all these assertives in the aforementioned Trump's tweets cannot and should not be interpreted outside their appropriate context during those months and outside the personal context of Trump's personality and timeline of his behavior. Therefore, they cannot be understood other than incitement and provoking crowds to possess guns and to use these their guns against their opponents. This gives legitimacy to what the rioters did by implementing Trump's words, so he is the one who did those acts in words, especially if we do not ignore the fact that the sincerity condition has been realized since Trump was tweeting in his capacity as the President of the United States of America, not as a normal US citizen.

Commissives

At the face value and unlike assertives, the speaker in commissives is showing a personal future commitments to carry out a sort of obligations that would satisfy the hearers desires or needs. The typical case of commissives can be understood in pledging, vowing and promising. This can be achieved directly or indirectly. In this sense, assertives in (4.1.) can be implicitly analyzed as commissives since the president is justifying their misconduct and their criminal acts; i.e. he pledging to support them officially as possible as he can.

(4.2.a.) No, I'm not going to just say yes. I'm not going to say no, and I didn't last time either. (July 9, 2020)

(4.2.b.) Major consideration is being given to naming ANTIFA an "ORGANIZATION OF TERROR." Portland is being watched very closely. (August 17, 2020)

(4.2.c.) The only way we're going to lose this election is if the election is rigged. (August 17, 2020)

(4.2.d.) Well, I understand that had large numbers of people that were supporters, but that was a peaceful protest…And paint is not — and paint as a defensive mechanism, paint is not bullets.… These people, they protested peacefully. They went in very peacefully. (August 31, 2020)

During an interview with fox news reporter who directly inquired about Trump's willingness to accept the results of the elections in case of his loss, Trump tried in (4.2.a.) to be equivocal and evasive, but the answer for any good hearer was a big NO; i.e. Trump was pledging not to give in nor to accept the results unless they are in his favor, and this is what he said several times on different occasions. Furthermore, he asserted this commissives force as he overtly asserts that rigging the elections is the only way for him to lose as in (4.2.c.); i.e. he is legitimizing his attitude and his belief not to

accept the results as he presupposes that rigging the elections is inevitable. In addition, Trump's condemnation of ANTIFA in (4.2.b.) evidently shows that he is pledging to do whatever it takes to adopt this anti-ANTIFA policy. An implicit promise by the head of the White house cannot be meaningfully contextualized except as a solemn obligation to take strict action against this organization. Contrarious to his negative attitude in (4.2.b.),Trump shows obvious support to armed white and nationalists protestors who committed crimes in Kenosha and Portland by describing them as peaceful protestors as in (4.2.d.). This kind of description in this specific context juxtaposed with his previous attitudes against ANTIFA offers another counter promise to take no action against rioting nationalists except defending what they did by claiming several times that what they did "went peacefully".

Expressives

Expressives are among the most frequent speech acts that people use in their daily interaction because expressives reflect the speaker's psychological and emotional state *vi-a-vis* certain cases that the hearer has undergone. An epitome of expressives is our tendency to express sympathies and apologies.

(4.3.a.) bad things happen in Philadelphia. Bad things. And I am urging my people. I hope it's going to be a fair election (September 29, 2020)

(4.3.b.) It was our people — my people, our people that helped her out. And then she blamed me for it. She blamed me and it was our people that helped her. I don't get it. How did you put her there? (October 7, 2020)

(4.3.c.) I LOVE TEXAS. They had hundreds of cars. Trump. Trump. Trump, and the American flag. These patriots did nothing wrong. (November 1, 2020)

During the first presidential debate and when asked by Chris Wallace about his intention to pacify his followers, Trump showed no sense of phatic or consolidatory interaction as in (4.3.a.). Moreover, Trump did not show any regret in (4.3.b.) concerning the violent attempt of kidnapping the Governor of Michigan although this cat was indicted by the Justice Department on the same day. On the contrary, he expressed great sympathies with those rioters by describing them as "our people". In the same vein, Trump showed brazen rudeness in (4.3.c.) in response to his followers attack on Biden's campaign. He expressed a sense of pride, honor and love and he said it bluntly and shamelessly "they did nothing wrong"! The way these expressives are used within their context of situation can explicitly reveal how trump is inciting such riot and such violence and how he goes against the indictment of those rioters in Michigan by the Justice Department although he should have been the first one to support that decision as a president of the United States.

Directives

Evidently, directives primarily direct others to do what the speakers suggests, orders, advises, requests or wishes

directly or indirectly. Such speech acts vary in the degree of obligation on the part of the hearer depending on the relationship between the speaker and the audience, i.e. the power that the speaker enjoys over other interlocutors. I the case of Donald Trump, it is crystal-clear that these tweets have been uttered by the supreme source of power in the united states.

> (4.4.a.) Wow! Thousands of people forming in Washington (D.C.) for Stop the Steal. Didn't know about this, but I'll be seeing them. (December 12, 2020)
>
> (4.4.b.) Statistically impossible to have lost the 2020 Election… Big protest in DC on January 6th. Be there, will be wild! (December 19, 2020)
>
> (4.4.c.) If you are planning to attend peaceful protests in DC on the 6th, I recommend wearing a body camera. (January 3, 2021)
>
> (4.4.d.) fight like hell. (January 4, 2021)

The illocutionary act of directives can be seen in (4.4.a.) and (4.4.b.) as Trump is calling for rallying implicitly in the former and explicitly in the latter by using the utterances "Be there… Be wild". Apparently, the name of the movement "Stop the Steal" carries the directive function of the utterance, so the imperative form undoubtedly conveys this pragmatic function although Trump's statement in (4.4.a.) semantically seems nothing be a form of pragmatic representative. Such an understanding is awkward or context-free, but within its very communicative and interactive context of situation, the force is 100% directive especially when we think of (4.4.c.) as an overt order to attend the rally in order to stop the certification of Biden's victory as Trump does "recommend"! A day after the suspension of Trump's Twitter account and on the day of arresting the leader of the Proud Boys, Donald Trump Jr. tweeted "fight like hell"! The directive force of the utterance leaves no room to anybody to think that Trump was not directly and fully involved in inciting such tumultuous acts of violence and insurgency as it can be seen in his son's (most likely his) tweet in (4.4.d.) because Donald Trump tweeted hours before the election day and said in similar words, "They're not taking this White House. We're going to fight like hell".

Declaratives

Declaratives are among the least performatives because they require a kind of official and canonical authority on the part of the speaker to create a noticeable effect and change on the part of the hearer(s) such as naming, christening, baptizing, disowning, declaring war, or marrying. Both of the Appropriateness condition and the Felicity condition must be sensitively taken care of; otherwise, misfires inevitably take place and interaction cannot be held effectively if ever.

> (4.5.a.) The States want to redo their votes. They found out they voted on a FRAUD. Legislatures never approved. Let them do it. BE STRONG! (January 6, 2021)
>
> (4.5.b.) These are the things and events that happen when a sacred landslide election victory is so unceremoniously & viciously stripped away from great patriots who have been badly &

unfairly treated for so long. Go home with love & in peace. Remember this day forever! (January 6, 2021)

Similar to the case of the directive "fight like hell" in (4.4.d.) where Donald Trump Jr. is not in an official position to declare war although calling for fight entails a state of war, Donald Trump Sr. is asking for redoing the votes in (4.5.a.). This speech act could have been felicitous if Trump had been the one in power to take such a decision like many presidents in the third World; however, his utterance cannot fit any illocutionary act of declaratives because the judiciary system is in charge in such cases and it is the only authority that can decide on such legal matters. However, (4.5.b.) can be understood and interpreted as a declarative speech act of "ending war" and terminating the riot for two things: Trump is the president and he is the big boss of the rallying crowds, so he is in a position to lead the riot and to dismiss the rioters as a chief commander of the rebellious mobs.

CONCLUSION

Investigated Donald Trump's inflammatory and inciting tweets in the wake of the US presidential elections 2020, the goal of the researcher in this study is not to identify the types of speech acts in Trumps speeches or tweets like what most studies have already attempted to do since 2016; rather, this research sheds light on these speech acts in order to unveil how Donald Trump was involved in storming the Capitol and thus how pragmatics can help the judiciary system pass the right judgment legally in this case and in any similar future case. The study followed and implemented a pragmatic SAT perspective through which Truumps's speech acts were analyzed and discussed to show how his tweets were directly and indirectly used as commissives and directives to instigate a sort of hate speech and to provoke his followers to dogmatically support him during the election campaign and after the election results were announced. Trump's expressive and representatives were manipulated and they were in fact used as indirect speech acts of incitement rather than expressing his beliefs or representing his convictions. The researcher believes according to the analysis of her data that Trump has fallen vulnerable and trapped himself and thus helped his democrat opponents to file various lawsuits that would charge him guilty of hate incitement and insurgence against the US constitution and the American nation as a whole as his fans and followers followed his tweets and acted upon what they triggered as performatives. The researcher believes that further studies should conducted in this very field so that US legal institutions can use the results and the implications of such studies in incriminating Trump and charging him with threatening the national security of the united states and the stability of the whole world during the past five years.

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