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Anti-accusation Strategies in Donald Trump's Trial: A Pragma-Cognitive Approach

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A B S T R A C T

This paper aims to examine Donald Trump's trial from a pragma-cognitive perspective. Drawing on Searle's (1969) speech acts, Grice's (1975) implicature, Yule's (1996) presupposition, and Lakoff and Johnson's (1980) conceptual metaphor theory, the paper analyzes two excerpts from two different trials of Donald Trump (Trump) depending on the pragmatic and cognitive devices stated above. As Trump was brought before the court for some charges, he resorted to defying these accusations, using anti-accusation techniques. Anti-accusation (AC) is a technique used by a presumed defendant to defy certain charges or accusations. Based mainly on linguistic forms, AC is better manipulated by people who are known for their top-profile status, including politicians, celebrities, and other social figures. As this paper endeavors to investigate the pragmatic and cognitive structures of AC, it is therefore important that these structures are analyzed, decoded, and made plain. Following the analysis of the two excerpts, the study finds that Trump employs strategic speech acts, violates conversational maxims, and uses conceptual metaphors to construct alternative narratives and challenge the legitimacy of accusations while maintaining his credibility through carefully structured linguistic patterns. The study finds that AC has been a conceptual component that is mixed with linguistic and pragmatic devices to convey meanings, to mitigate defense strategies, and to construct legal grounds.

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استراتيجيات مواجهة الاتهام في محاكمة دونالد ترامب: مقاربة براغماتية–إدراكية

الباحثة: إقبال جواد كاظم أ.م. محمد ناصر عبد السادة
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المستخلص

يهدف هذا البحث إلى دراسة محاكمة دونالد ترامب من منظور تداولي–معرفي. واستناداً إلى نظرية الأفعال الكلامية لسيرل (١٩٦٩)، والاستلزام الحواري لغرايس (١٩٧٥)، والافتراض المسبق ليول (١٩٩٦)، ونظرية الاستعارة المفاهيمية للاكوف وجونسون (١٩٨٠)، يحلل البحث مقتطفين من محاكمتين مختلفتين لدونالد ترامب (ترامب) اعتماداً على الأدوات التداولية والمعرفية المذكورة أعلاه. وحيث أن ترامب قد مَثُلَ أمام المحكمة بسبب بعض التهم، فقد لجأ إلى تحدي هذه الاتهامات مستخدماً مكافحة الاتهام. تُعد مكافحة الاتهام تقنية يستخدمها المدعى عليه المفترض لتحدي تهم أو اتهامات معينة. وإذ تعتمد مكافحة الاتهام بشكل رئيس على الأشكال اللغوية، فإنها تُستغل بشكل أفضل من قبل الأشخاص المعروفين بمكانتهم الرفيعة، بمن فيهم السياسيون والمشاهير والشخصيات الاجتماعية الأخرى. وبما أن هذا البحث يسعى إلى تحديد البنى التداولية والمعرفية لمكافحة الاتهام، فمن المهم تحليل هذه البنى وفك شفرتها وتوضيحها. وبعد تحليل المقتطفين، توصلت الدراسة إلى أن ترامب يوظف أفعالاً كلامية استراتيجية، وينتهك مبادئ المحادثة، ويستخدم استعارات مفاهيمية لبناء سرديات بديلة وتحدي شرعية الاتهامات مع الحفاظ على مصداقيته من خلال أنماط لغوية مدروسة بعناية. وتجد الدراسة أن مكافحة الاتهام كانت مكوناً مفاهيمياً يمتزج مع الأدوات اللغوية والتداولية لنقل المعاني، وتخفيف استراتيجيات الدفاع، وبناء أسس قانونية.

الكلمات المفتاحية: مكافحة الاتهام ، الخطاب السياسي، الأفعال الكلامية ، الأدوات المعرفية، المنهج التداولي المعرفي.

1.Introduction

Verschueren (1999, p. 20) defines pragmatics as the study of meaning as conveyed by a speaker (or writer) and understood by a listener (or reader). Hence, pragmatics investigates the use of language in communicative events and how meaning is produced from context of situation (Levinson, 1983). The cooperative principle, first introduced by Grice (1975), has been instrumental in the understanding of how language is invisibly used to certain ends. Furthermore, this principle is a foundational idea in pragmatics where a certain conversation is governed by rational principles such as quality, quantity, relation, and manner. Based on these premises, our talk exchanges do not generally comprise a sequence of disparate remarks, and would not be rational if they did.' In general, they are characteristically, to some degree at least, cooperative efforts" (Grice, 1975, p. 45).

In the scope of inquiry, pragmatics is involved in several important areas (Thomas, 1995). Speech act theory is the study of how linguistic expressions perform such actions as statements, questions, and commands; implicature is the study of inferences drawn from contextual assumptions rather than those encoded (Grice, 1975). While presupposition studies implicatures that are based on given background knowledge (Levinson, 1983), politeness decodes the norms of polite interaction (Brown & Levinson, 1978). Place, time, and

participants, along with their mutual knowledge, are also very influential and contextual (Yule, 1996). Other important areas beyond these examples are deixis, conversational maxims (Grice, 1975), coherence (Giora, 1985), reference and linguistic pragmatics of form and use (Leech, 1983). The study of language in application is further illuminated by investigating such diverse yet interrelated phenomena, as pragmatics (Verschueren, 1999).

Cognitive linguistics is a theoretical and empirical perspective on language from the perspective of cognition, perception and embodied experiences (Croft & Cruse, 2004). The study of metaphor and conceptual metaphor theory has also been well enriched by cognitive linguistics (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). This theory suggests that metaphors cannot be just linguistic expressions, but they can reflect fundamental cognitive process in which abstract concepts are understood and reasoned about with mappings from more concrete, embodied domains (Kövecses, 2010).

The intersection of cognitive science and political talk has emerged as an exciting new area of research and can provide important insights into the processes by which individuals perceive and frame information and how they participate in persuasive communication (Fiske & Taylor, 1991; Pinker, 2007). Trump's trial, marked by its high-profile nature and the consequential accusations brought forth, serves as a compelling case study to explore the complicated dynamics between language, cognition, and political strategy.

In recent times, the political landscape has experienced a clear increase in the adoption of anti-accusatory strategies, with which public figures use a broad range of rhetorical and communicative means to fight back against accusations and to control the narrative in the public mind (Benjamin, 2018; Tannen, 2020). In analyzing political discourse on social media, Abdulsada and Kareem (2018) demonstrated how pragmatic analysis can reveal underlying patterns in political communication, particularly in their examination of Trump's tweets which showed how linguistic choices reflect strategic communication goals.

This study employed pragma-cognitive framework, which is based on the principles of pragmatics; that is, the study analyzes how language is used in context to achieve certain communicative goals (Sperber & Wilson, 1986; Levinson, 1983). The cognitive dimension also examines the mental processes that underlie the production and interpretation of discourse, and how communicators use cognitive strategies to manipulate perception (Gernsbacher, 1995; Gibbs, 2006).

Accordingly, this study formulates two research questions:

1. In what way do SAs, IMPs, and PRSs serve AC in Trump's trials'?

2. How do CMs influence the interpretation of evidence, witness testimony, and legal concepts in order to support AC strategies in that trial?

Moreover, this study aims to analyzing how pragmatic strategies (SAs, IMPs, and PRSs) serve AC in Trump's trials. Also, it aims to examining how CMs frame and influence the interpretation of evidence, witness testimony, and legal concepts in order to support AC strategies.

2.Trump's Trial

It is a series of legal cases set in 2022 through 2024 against the former US president Donald Trump in his capacity as a president in which have or might not have led to court trials. Following certain investigations, Trump was found guilty of several accusations and counts regarding money payments to some persons, mishandling of classified documents, obstruction of election process, and incitement of the Capitol insurrection. The trials were concluded in 2024 with most accusations eliminated or cleared.

3.Anti-accusation

Accusation and AC are related concepts closely linked to the playing of the game in various spheres – legal proceedings, political discourse, and interpersonal interaction. The act of charging someone with a fault, offense, or wrongdoing is called accusation (Bousfield, 2008). On the other hand, AC denotes the defensive strategies which the accused party employs to counter, diminish, or refute a certain accusation (Benoit, 1995).

4.Pragma-cognitive Approach

It is a linguistic approach where pragmatics is merged with cognitive linguistics in order to underline certain invisible meanings and functions in a certain discourse. While pragmatics can provide insights into speech acts and locutionary meanings, cognitive linguistics can help readers understand these meanings based on preset concepts through metaphors, presuppositions, and hidden messages. As Al-Hilu and Al-Badri (2024) indicated, a valid and functional foundation for the examination of various styles is provided by pragmatic theories of SAs, Gricean metaphoric implicature, and deixis contextualization. Similarly, Hussein and Alghezzy (2022:408) posited, metaphor is present in language, cognition, and action. The analysis of meaning, whether it is in the form of visual images or written text, is the essence of conceptual metaphor.

5.Relevant Literature

Several studies have explored accusations and AC discourses by examining the use of language strategies, metaphors, and rhetorical devices in various contexts from pragmatic, discursive, or cognitive perspectives. These studies can provide valuable insights into the role of language in constructing and challenging ideologies, managing crises, and engaging in accusation and AC rhetoric.

Benoit (2015) deconstructed the rhetorical strategies employed by British Petroleum to react to the 2010 Deepwater Horizon oil spill crisis. The study analyzed BP's public statements, press releases, and advertisements to understand how the company attempted to repair its public image and counter accusations. Benoit posited that BP employed a combination of strategies, such as denial of responsibility, evasion of direct blame, AC, and promises of corrective action to manage the crisis and repair its public image. Al-Hindawi and Al-Juwaid (2017) investigated how two US presidential candidates utilized pragmatic devices to reject and create accusations. Their study concluded that both Obama and Romney used speech acts, presuppositions, and metaphors in order to attack each other in the first presidential debate in 2012.

In a study on political accusations reported in US and UK newspapers, Chernobrov (2019) explored treason and disloyalty as pivotal points of accusations. His study concluded that print media featured accusations in a rather broad perspective that is entangled with both linguistic and extra-linguistic factors.

Badarneh (2020) found that the parties accused of corruption in Jordan used positioning as a political strategy to both refute accusations and to launch counter-accusations. The study examined various discursive constructions in order to highlight accusations and related stances. The study found that the parties involved in corruption charges invoked certain linguistic, particularly pragmatic, devices so as to form accusatory statements. A study by Ella (2021) aimed to recognize the development of accusations and ACs in the Cameroonian political sphere. This study indicated that these political speeches explicitly demonstrated metaphors and pragmatic references so as to face accusations of negligence, bias, popular unrest, and domestic violence initiated by other opposition leaders.

Altohami (2024) analyzed Donald Trump's speech in the United Nations assembly in 2020 in terms of meaning and implications. This study revealed that Trump at that speech used framing as a strategy to achieve certain ends. For example, Trump repeatedly denied accusations of a US interference in other countries or that the US intends to topple some regimes.

In their study of public opinion on external political affairs in Japan, South Korea, and China, Bae and Lim (2025) indicated that the US-Chinese conflict has been widely reflected in the dominant political rhetoric of some Japanese, South Korean, and Chinese newspapers. While the headlines in the Japanese and South Korean newspapers criticized China, the Chinese newspapers accused Japan and South Korea of the increasing US role in the region. Additionally, the study found that the Japanese and South Korean newspapers denied China's accusations that the two countries stabilize the Chinese sovereignty.

6.Methodology

This paper adopts a pragma-cognitive analysis that underlines specific pragmatic and cognitive frameworks. Therefore, the pragmatic dimension examines three key elements: Searle's (1969) speech acts (SA), Grice's (1975) implicature (IMP), and Yule's (1996) presuppositions (PRS). The cognitive dimension is analyzed through Lakoff and Johnson's (1980) conceptual metaphor (CM). The study is descriptive-qualitative with a little focus on frequencies, as the main goal of the study is to highlight devices.

The data is drawn from two trials: the Hush Money Trial and the New York Civil Fraud Case (2023-2024), with particular focus on judicial instructions and legal discourse that contain AC elements. The hush money trial, formally known as The People of the State of New York v. Donald J. Trump, represents a significant legal challenge for the former U.S. President. This high-profile case, unfolding in the Supreme Court of the State of New York, centers on allegations that Trump falsified business records in connection with hush money payments made to adult film actress Stormy Daniels prior to the 2016 presidential election. The Trump civil fraud trial, formally known as The People of the State of New York v. Donald J. Trump and The Trump Organization, is a pivotal legal case brought by the New York Attorney

General, Letitia James. This high-profile trial centers on allegations that Trump and his company engaged in years of financial fraud by inflating and deflating asset values to secure favorable loans, insurance rates, and tax advantages. The case, which commenced in 2023, is being heard in the New York State Supreme Court, with Justice Arthur Engoron presiding.

7.Analysis

The figure below demonstrates the components of the model adopted in this study. It is a two-approach model, consisting of pragmatics and cognitive linguistics. There are fourteen pragmatic devices (five SAs (assertives, directives, commissives, expressives, and declaratives), four IMPs (quantity, quality, relevance, and manner), and five PRSs (factive, lexical, structural, non-factive, and counterfactual), and one cognitive device (CM).

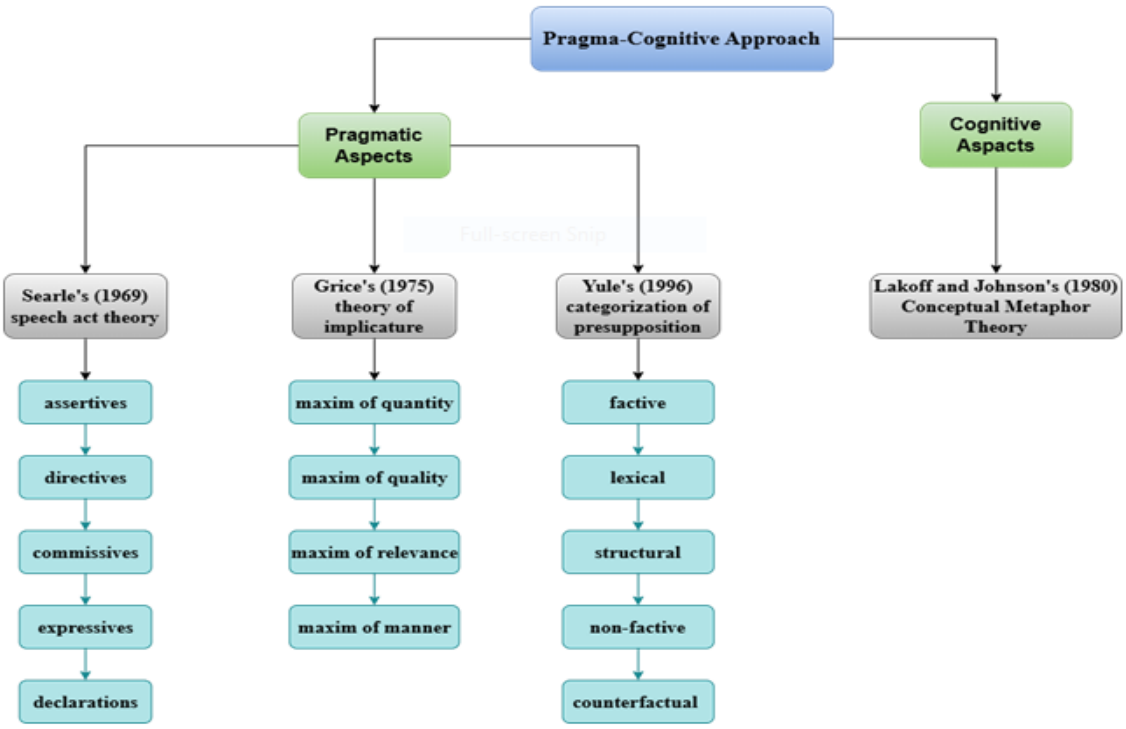


Figure (1) The model adopted in this study

Excerpt from The Hush Money Trial

This trial features three parties; Trump, the judge, and Trump's lawyer.

Pragmatic Analysis

A: SAs

The discourse in this part of the trial is rich with various SAs, predominantly assertives, directives, commissives, and declaratives. The Court (Judge Merchan) employs a significant number of assertives to provide information and establish facts about the trial proceedings. For instance, when the judge states, "In substance, I determined that all of the areas that were in dispute, which at this point weren't really very many, they should all come in," he uses an

assertive speech act that not only informs the parties of his decision but also establishes it as a fact of the proceedings.

The judge also frequently uses directive SAs to guide the behavior of the attorneys and the jury. When the judge says, "You can bring in the jury now," he is issuing a clear directive to the court officers. Similarly, when addressing the jury, the judge uses directives such as "Please be seated" and "You may not speculate as to what material was redacted or why, and you may not draw any inference."

Commissive SAs, though less frequent, are present in the discourse. When the judge says, "We have located that testimony, and we are ready to read it back to you in just one moment," he is making a commitment to a future action. This commissive act serves to manage the expectations of the jury and maintain the orderly progression of the trial.

Declarative SAs are primarily used by the Clerk, who officially opens the court session with "This is The People of the State of New York against Donald J. Trump. Indictment 71543 of 123." This declarative act serves to formally establish the context of the proceedings.

The attorneys, Mr. Steinglass and Mr. Blanche, primarily use assertives SAs when responding to the judge's queries, such as when they agree to the judge's decisions or confirm their understanding of the proceedings. Their SAs are generally brief and focused on procedural matters, reflecting their professional roles in the courtroom.

Although SAs in Jury Foreperson's presentation are limited, yet they are significant. They use assertives to confirm the accuracy of the judge's reading of their requests, which plays a crucial role in ensuring clear communication between the jury and the court.

B: IMPs

The discourse generally adheres to Grice's conversational maxims, but there are instances where IMPs arise through subtle violations or exploitations of these maxims.

The quantity maxim is generally observed, with participants providing necessary information without excessive detail. However, the judge's detailed explanation of how to draw inferences, including the rain metaphor, could be seen as providing more information than strictly necessary. The IMP here is that the process of drawing inferences is complex and crucial to the jury's task, warranting extra attention and explanation.

The quality maxim is strictly adhered to throughout the proceedings, with all participants presumed to be truthful in their statements. This adherence is crucial in maintaining the integrity of the legal process.

The relevance maxim is generally observed, but there are instances where slight deviations create IMPs. For example, when the judge mentions that the laptop doesn't have Wi-Fi capability, it implies a concern about the jury's potential access to outside information, without explicitly stating this concern.

The manner maxim is generally followed, with participants striving for clarity and brevity. However, the use of legal jargon and formal language creates an IMP of the seriousness and official nature of the proceedings.

C: PRSs

Various types of PRSs are evident in the discourse, contributing to the shared understanding of the trial proceedings. Existential PRSs are abundant, particularly in references to elements of the trial such as "the disputed sections of read-back," "the jury," and "the evidence laptop." These presuppose the existence of these entities within the context of the trial. Factive PRSs are present in the statements "Remember, a stipulation is information the parties have agreed to present to the jury as evidence," which presupposes that such agreements have indeed been made.

Lexical PRSs are evident in the phrases "Testimony which was stricken from the record," which presupposes that some testimony was indeed stricken. Structural presuppositions are embedded in "Did I read that correctly, Mr. Foreperson?" which presupposes that the judge has read something and that the Foreperson is in a position to confirm its accuracy.

Non-factive PRSs are less common but present in conditional in the statement "if I was going to include one section, that I should include another," which doesn't commit to whether the inclusion will actually occur. Counterfactual PRSs are not prominently featured in this excerpt, which is consistent with the focus on actual proceedings rather than hypothetical scenarios.

Cognitive Analysis: CMs

The judge's instructions employ several CMs, which serve to make abstract legal concepts more accessible to the jurors by grounding them in everyday experiences.

The most prominent and extensively developed CM is the rain metaphor used to explain inference. This CM employs the concepts of "UNDERSTANDING IS SEEING" and "KNOWLEDGE IS OBSERVATION" to map the abstract concept of logical inference onto the more concrete domain of observing weather phenomena. The judge asks the jury to imagine a scenario where they go to bed when it's not raining and wake up to see wet streets and people with umbrellas. The inference that it rained during the night is presented as analogous to the kind of logical deductions the jury might need to make based on the evidence presented in the trial.

This CM is particularly powerful because it takes an abstract cognitive process (inference) and grounds it in a common, easily visualized experience. It conceptualizes the process of drawing conclusions from evidence as similar to inferring that it rained based on observable effects. This helps to demystify the notion of inference and provides the jury with a concrete model for how to approach circumstantial evidence.

Another CM present in the instructions is "LEGAL PROCESS IS A JOURNEY." This is implied in the phrase "when you judge the facts," which suggests that the jury's deliberation is a journey through the evidence. This CM helps to frame the jury's task as a process with a clear direction and purpose, rather than a static evaluation.

The CM "EVIDENCE IS A PHYSICAL OBJECT" is evident in the phrase "Exhibits that were received in evidence." This conceptualizes evidence as something that can be physically handled and examined, which may help jurors to think about evidence in more concrete

terms. It also reinforces the idea that evidence is something discrete and identifiable, rather than abstract or ambiguous.

The concept of "IRRELEVANT INFORMATION IS HIDDEN" is used in the discussion of redacted information. By describing certain information as "blacked out or redacted," the instructions conceptualize irrelevant or inadmissible information as something physically obscured or removed from view. Hence, this CM helps to reinforce the idea that the jury should focus only on the information presented to them and not speculate about what might be hidden.

These CMs serve several important functions in the judge's instructions. They help to bridge the gap between abstract legal concepts and the jurors' everyday experiences, making the instructions more accessible and memorable. They provide cognitive frameworks that can guide the jurors' approach to evaluating evidence and drawing conclusions. Additionally, they help to shape the jurors' understanding of their role in the trial process.

In the context of AC strategies, this careful cognitive framing of how evidence should be considered could be considered as laying groundwork for how the defense might want the jury to approach the evidence. The emphasis on direct, admissible evidence and the caution against speculation or unsupported inference could potentially benefit the defense by encouraging the jury to maintain a high standard of proof and to be wary of drawing conclusions not directly supported by the evidence presented.

The pragma-cognitive analysis of this segment of the Trump hush money trial reveals several potential AC strategies at play, albeit subtly and indirectly. The judge's careful instructions about how to consider evidence and draw inferences can be regarded as laying groundwork that could potentially benefit the defense's AC strategy. By emphasizing the importance of direct, admissible evidence and cautioning against speculation or unsupported inference, the judge's instructions could encourage the jury to maintain a high standard of proof. This aligns with a common AC strategy of creating doubt by highlighting the need for concrete evidence rather than circumstantial reasoning.

Furthermore, the CMs employed, particularly the extended rain metaphor for drawing inferences, could inadvertently support an AC stance. By framing the process of inference as something requiring multiple, clear indicators (wet streets, people with umbrellas), the metaphor potentially sets a high bar for the prosecution's case. This could be leveraged by the defense to argue that any gaps in the direct evidence should be interpreted in favor of the accused. Additionally, the judge's instructions about redacted information, emphasizing that jurors should not speculate about redacted content, could be taken as beneficial to an AC strategy. It potentially limits the jury's ability to fill in gaps in the prosecution's narrative, which the defense could exploit to create reasonable doubt. While these elements are not explicitly part of the defense's strategy in this excerpt, they create a cognitive and procedural framework that a skilled defense team could utilize in their AC approach.

Excerpt from The New York Civil Fraud Trial

This trial features three parties; the judge, Trump, and Trump's lawyer.

Pragmatic Analysis:

A: Speech Acts

The extract reveals multiple types of SAs employed strategically in Trump's AC defense about financial statements. The predominant SAs are assertives, with some expressives interwoven throughout the discourse.

The primary assertive SAs function to establish what Trump presents as factual claims about the banks' practices and attitudes. For example, "The banks didn't find them very relevant" is a fundamental assertive that sets the tone for his defense. This assertive act directly challenges the prosecution's premise about the significance of the financial statements. Another significant assertive is used in "they were done in such a way that they really were — you talked about it here recently, a compilation." This statement serves to reframe the nature of the documents themselves.

Multiple compound assertives are deployed to build a layered defense. For instance, in "They looked at the deal. They looked at the asset. If it is real estate, they looked at the location," Trump uses a series of related assertives to construct a narrative about bank practices that minimizes the importance of financial statements. The repetitive structure of these assertives serves to reinforce his central claim about the peripheral nature of the statements in lending decisions.

An interesting shift occurs with the quasi-commissive SA embedded in "we will explain that as this trial goes along," which functions both as a promise of future evidence and as a strategic device to defer detailed scrutiny of his claims. This is immediately followed by an expressive speech act in the phrase "this crazy trial," which serves to delegitimize the proceedings while maintaining his defensive narrative.

The statement concludes with a complex assertive-commissive combination: "we are bringing in some bankers, and the bankers will tell you — very big bankers, bankers that dealt with me, and they will explain exactly what their processes were." This functions both as an assertion about future testimony and a commitment to providing supporting evidence.

IMPs

The extract demonstrates sophisticated manipulation of Grice's conversational maxims to generate strategic IMPs that support Trump's defense narrative.

As for the quantity maxim, Trump frequently provides more information than strictly necessary, creating IMPs that serve his defense. For instance, when he elaborates on "very big bankers, bankers that dealt with me," the apparent violation of the quantity maxim generates an IMP about his credibility and the quality of his business relationships. The redundancy is strategic, implying that his banking relationships were both significant and

personal. The quality maxim is interestingly handled through qualified statements and hedges. When Trump says "I guess people are starting to say I was very under levered anyway," he obviously adheres to the quality maxim while introducing favorable information through indirect attribution. This generates an IMP about the broader recognition of his financial stability while maintaining plausible deniability about the claim's source. The relevance maxim is strategically flouted when Trump shifts from discussing the financial statements to mentioning "this crazy trial." This apparent deviation generates an IMP questioning the legitimacy of the proceedings while maintaining surface coherence with the topic at hand. The manner maxim is notably manipulated through the use of repetitive structures and seemingly casual language. When Trump refers to "a worthless statement clause," he flouts the manner maxim's requirement for clarity, generating an IMP that minimizes the documents' significance through deliberately informal characterization.

PRSs

The extract contains multiple layers of PRSs that work together to support Trump's defensive position. Existential PRSs are evident throughout the text. The reference to "the disclaimer clause" presupposes its existence and legitimacy as a standard feature of such documents. Similarly, "the banks" and "very big bankers" carry existential PRSs that establish the credibility of his claims through reference to supposedly verifiable entities.

Factive PRSs play a crucial role in the defense strategy. When Trump states "as this trial goes along," he presupposes the ongoing nature of the trial while simultaneously characterizing it as "crazy," embedding his criticism within a factive framework. The statement "the bankers will tell you" presupposes not only the existence of these witnesses but also the factuality of their future testimony.

Lexical PRSs are strategically employed throughout. The phrase "very under levered" presupposes a spectrum of financial leverage and positions Trump favorably on it. The term "compilation" presupposes a technical understanding of different types of financial documents and their varying levels of formality.

Structural PRSs are evident in "If it is real estate, they looked at the location," which presupposes a standard procedure in banking evaluations while reinforcing his argument about what banks prioritized in their decision-making.

Non-factive PRSs are used in the statement "I guess people are starting to say," which presupposes ongoing discourse about his financial situation while maintaining distance from direct claims. Counterfactual PRSs are less prominent, yet implicit, in the contrast between how the financial statements are being treated in the trial versus how Trump claims they were treated by banks, suggesting an alternative reality where the documents were appropriately understood as inconsequential.

Cognitive Analysis

CMs

Throughout the extract, Trump consistently employs the CM "DOCUMENTS AS PHYSICAL OBJECTS", which manifests in his treatment of financial statements as tangible items that can be possessed, held, and contained. This is evident in the phrase "They had a clause in it" and his description of them as "something that you would have for yourself." This metaphorical framing serves to make abstract financial information more concrete and manageable, while simultaneously enabling him to conceptualize these documents as items that can be dismissed or set aside. The physical object metaphor also supports his characterization of these documents as potentially "worthless," mapping physical value onto documentary significance.

The CM "IMPORTANCE AS WEIGHT/POWER" features prominently in Trump's discourse, particularly when discussing the relative significance of different elements in the banking relationship. His reference to "a disclaimer clause that was very, very powerful" and repeated assertions that the documents "weren't very important" leverage this metaphorical mapping to diminish the statements' significance while enhancing the disclaimer clause's impact. This metaphorical framework allows him to present complex questions of legal and financial significance in terms of readily understood physical attributes.

Trump also employs the BUSINESS PROCESSES ARE JOURNEYS as a CM, evident in "as this trial goes along" and "to start off with." This metaphorical construction helps frame the trial as movement through space and time, suggesting that current interpretations of the documents represent deviations from their original intended path. Similarly, the CM "ATTENTION AS A PHYSICAL RESOURCE" has been used when he was discussing how banks interact with documents, manifested in repeated phrases about banks "paying attention to" or "looking at" various aspects of business deals. This metaphorical framework reinforces his argument that banks allocated their attention to more important aspects of the lending relationship than financial statements.

The extract reveals sophisticated use of the CM "DECISION-MAKING IS ARCHITECTURE" in discussions of banking processes. By presenting decision-making as a structured, built system, Trump can position financial statements as non-structural elements in this architecture, further diminishing their importance. This architectural metaphor works in concert with another CM, that is "VALUE IS VERTICAL POSITION", evident in his discussion of being "under levered," to create a spatial understanding of financial security and business relationships.

Trump consistently employs the CM "INSTITUTIONS ARE PERSONS" when discussing banks, anthropomorphizing them through "The banks didn't find them" and "Some banks wanted them." This personification serves to humanize institutional decision-making and make banking relationships seem more personal and direct, supporting his narrative about understanding bank preferences. Additionally, the TRIALS ARE PERFORMANCES serves as a CM as it emerges in his characterization of the proceedings as a "crazy trial" with various actors who will "explain" and "tell," implying an element of artificiality in the proceedings.

Table (1) Frequency of pragmatic and cognitive devices

Type	Attribution	Device	No.	Frequency
PRAGMATIC	SA	Assertive	23	36%
		Directive	8	
		Commissive	19	
		Expressive	1	
		Declarative	31	
	IMP	quantity	8	8.5%
		quality	7	
		relevance	2	
		manner	6	
	PRS	factive	15	50%
		lexical	32	
		structural	27	
		non-factive	22	
		counterfactual	19	
COGNITIVE	CM	----------	12	5.5%
Total			231	100

Table (1) above demonstrates that PRSs are highest devices used in the trial while CMs and IMPs are the lowest devices used in same trial. Higher frequencies of PRS suggest that the speakers in the trial relied heavily on invoking presupposed ideas to support or refute accusations, defend claims, and reformulate narratives, while they rarely used metaphorical figures and implicated topics purportedly to create similarities in the proceedings. As for SAs, they made a noticeable use in the trial particularly to diversify meanings, utilize linguistic functions, and change situations.

8.Conclusions

Pragmatic strategies have been utilized to function systematically as AC mechanisms. Through careful examination of SAs, IMPs, and PRSs across multiple trial contexts, several significant patterns emerge in how these linguistic devices serve defensive purposes. SAs

emerge as a primary tool in Trump's AC arsenal, with strategic alternation between different types serving distinct defensive functions. Assertive SAs are predominantly employed to establish alternative narratives, particularly evident in the New York Civil Fraud trial where Trump repeatedly uses assertions like "The banks didn't find them very relevant" to minimize the significance of financial statements. There is a sophisticated manipulation of IMPs through systematic violations of Grice's conversational maxims. The quality maxim is frequently flouted to generate defensive IMPs. The quantity maxim violations serve to create strategic ambiguity, as seen in the Civil Fraud trial where vague references to "these banks" generate IMPs about widespread institutional support while avoiding specific claims that could be challenged. Manner maxim violations, through indirect and euphemistic language, consistently generate IMPs that minimize culpability while maintaining plausible deniability.

PRSs were found to be powerful AC tools, operating at multiple levels to construct favorable interpretative frameworks. Existential PRSs are strategically deployed to establish contested elements as given facts, notably in the Hush Money trial where references to "these crooked ballots" presuppose the existence of electoral fraud without requiring direct assertion. Factive PRSs consistently work to embed favorable assumptions within the discourse structure, as seen in statements like "when the banks saw the statements," which presupposes specific institutional behaviors without directly claiming them.

CMs are so dominant in Trump's trial, including "Legal process is a game sport.", "Crazy play", "Evidence is a physical object", "Authority is possession", "Legal responsibility is distance", and "Truth is a malleable object". All these create strategic moves to re-conceptualize potentially illegal actions, to reject claims, to generate ACs, to frame events, and to help normalize unconventional or questionable legal actions.

As for research question (1); In what way do SAs, IMPs, and PRSs serve AC in Trump's trials? SAs, IMPs, and PRSs contribute to AC by formulating defenses, rejecting accusations, and wording meanings.

As for research question (2); How do CMs influence the interpretation of evidence, witness testimony, and legal concepts in order to support AC strategies in that trial? Analysis shows that CMs affects the interpretation of evidence, witness testimony, and legal concepts in favor of AC formation in the trial by suggesting examples, citing real world events, and mitigate consequences. The findings demonstrate that AC, as a legal or procedural tactic, has been conceptual mixed with linguistic and pragmatic devices in order to convey meanings, to mitigate defense strategies, and to construct legal grounds. All these strategies jointly highlight the central role of metaphorical thinking in legal-political discourse.

Additionally, if compared with the previous studies elaborated on earlier, this study demonstrates that AC has been used in various techniques and strategies depending on the charges, the parties, and other factors. While AC has been mainly concerned with political events, as shown by the previous studies, in this study it is uncovers it from a legal perspective.

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