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## **DEICTIC MITIGATION VS COMMISSIVE ACTS IN POLITICAL INTERVIEW (BASED ON THE MODERN EUROPEAN DISCOURSE OF AID TO UKRAINE)**

Стаття вивчає проблему кореляції між ілокутивною силою непрямих актів коміссивів і шильдами як дейктичними мітігаторами, які зменшують ступінь ілокутивної сили обіцянок, впливаючи на умови успішності коміссивів і їхню здійснюваність.

*Метою* статті є визначення функції дейктичних шильдів у послабленні ілокутивної сили непрямих обіцянок у європейському політичному дискурсі допомоги Україні шляхом аналізу впливу таких мітігаторів на умови успішності актів. Завдання дослідження – виявити умови успішності коміссивів, які мітігуються дейктичними засобами через вплив на ілокутивну силу актів; уточнити дейктичні координати висловлювань, референція до яких послаблює ілокутивну силу коміссивів; виокремити лексико-семантичні і синтаксичні дейктичні засоби-шильди. Для досягнення поставленої мети та завдань у статті застосовано такі *методи* дослідження: модифікований метод аналізу мовленнєвих актів, метод інференції імплікатур, індексованих шильдами, і елементи компонентного аналізу.

Основні висновки полягають у тому, що умовами успішності коміссивів, на які впливають шильди, є умова щирості мовця та його здатність виконати обіцяну дію, оскільки завдяки дейктичним мітігаторам актуалізується не стільки сфера дій, скільки можливостей мовця. Встановлено, що ілокутивна сила непрямих коміссивів пом'якшується шильдами, пов'язаними з персональними, часовими та об'єктивними дейктичними координатами. Ідентифіковано набір дейктичних прийомів, що пом'якшують коміссивну ілокуцію, включаючи засоби рольового дейксису, епістемологічні модальні дієслова та їх замітники, які денотують або конотують семи «здатності» та «можливості», засоби заперечення, темпорального дейксису – лексико-граматичні маркери майбутнього часу, що зумовлюють невизначеність обіцянок, прислівники з пресупозицією «перешкодження обіцяній дії», пасивні структури, які виводять мовця – виконавця дії з позиції фразового суб'єкта, дієслова та прислівники, що містять денотативні або контекстуально конотовані семи, які реферують до невизначеного майбутнього та метонімічне узагальнення агента промісивної дії.

Перспективою подальших досліджень вбачається аналіз усіх типів мітігаторів, зокрема бушів, хеджів і шильдів, у їх проекції на риторико-маніпулятивні методи аргументації в політичному дискурсі у ракурсі актуалізації дискурсотвірного концепту «Обережність».

*Ключові слова:* ілокутивна сила, непрямий коміссив, шильди, дейксис, політичне інтерв'ю, умови успішності.

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## Introduction

The scientific relevance of the article is due to insufficient study of its key concepts and their interface, which is the focus of this study.

Deictic mitigation, introduced by C. Caffi along with hedge and bush mitigators [Caffi, 2006, p. 171–175] is an understudied category compared to the other mitigation types. The problem of commissive illocutionary force in terms of its felicity conditions and their effecting mitigators is raised only in a few articles, moreover, on the material of legal discourse [Kravchenko, Yudenko, Chaika, Kryknitska, Letunovska, 2022].

At the same time, the study of commissive acts of different illocutionary intensity is of primary importance for political discourse, since the promises of politicians vary significantly in the degree of their feasibility depending on the level of speakers' responsibility for their words indexed by deictic and other mitigating devices. In the current situation, the degree of illocutionary force of promises in the European discourse of aid to Ukraine is of extreme interest, which explains the main research focus of this article.

## Literature Review

The theoretical basis of the article includes two research aspects, namely the concept of softening and the theory of speech acts, which most contributed to the choice of the presented approach and methods of analysis. C. Caffi [2006, p. 171] defines mitigation, as an all-embracing category employed in pragmatics and labels the wide set of strategies by which interlocutors attenuate one or more aspects of their speech. Investigating mitigation, scientists have repeatedly drawn attention to its connection with the illocutionary force of speech acts. B. Fraser [Fraser, 1980, p. 342] relates the concept of mitigation with the intention of the speaker to reduce unwelcome effects of a certain speech act. Similarly, J. Holmes [Holmes, 1984, p. 346] defines mitigation as a strategy to “reduce the anticipated negative effect of a speech act”. In the same vein, Caffi [Caffi, 2007, p. 40] associates mitigation means with the interactional parameters, which effect intensity and urgency of speech acts. To distinguish between types of mitigation Caffi [Caffi, 2007, p. 49] relies on the level of their implementation, highlighting propositional, illocutionary, and deictic scopes of utterance, correlating with bushes, hedges, and shields, respectively. Even though the researcher associates the illocutionary force parameter with hedges, no less important for our study is her observation that “mitigating devices of all types may be employed simultaneously and, conversely, a specific mitigating device (...) may affect more than just one scope of the speech act” [Caffi 2007, p. 49]. Defining shields, which are the focus of this article, Caffi [Caffi 2007, p. 49] specifies their associated acts as “dislocated, displaced”, de-focalized, or even deleted of the utterance source. The downgrading operates on a deeper, often syntactic level, as in passive transformations, or morphologically, as in the transition from first person singular pronouns to other person pronouns.

The article *hypothesizes* that, although researchers consider hedging as a means of influencing the illocutionary force of acts, deictic devices also affect its degree. In the case of commissives, this effect is mediated by the influence of deictic mitigators on the felicity conditions of these speech acts, namely on the key condition of the possibility of their implementation and on the condition of the speaker's sincerity regarding his promises. Both conditions are not met / partially met when the responsibility is transferred from the speaker's self as the agent of the utterance to someone else or to an impersonal source provided by shields.

The question of the relationship between mitigators and the conditions for the successful performance of speech acts was touched upon only in a few studies and concerned the

mitigation of the illocutionary force of assertive speech acts and, in part, the directives where mitigators are used to reduce the potentially undesirable effects of the provided information [Haverkate, 2010, p. 510] and make acts more acceptable to their addressee. These studies describe mitigation as a form of illocutionary force modification [Blum-Kulka, 1985; Caffi, 1999, 2006, 2007; Kravchenko, Pasternak, Korotka, 2021; Kravchenko, Prokopchuk, Pozhar, Rozhkov, Kozyarevych-Zozulya, 2022; Sbisa, 2001] when mitigation processes are viewed as operations on components of illocutionary force, including the preparatory conditions, the sincerity conditions and the degree of their strength decreased due to mitigation devices.

The problem of the influence of mitigators on commissive illocution and its felicity conditions was studied, as far as we know, on the basis of legal discourse, without singling out shields as a separate type of deictic mitigators [Kravchenko, Yudenko, Chaika, Kryknitska, Letunovska, 2022]. Political speech in this perspective has not yet been investigated.

Accordingly, *the aim of this paper* is to partially bridge this gap by focusing on the function of deictic shields in weakening the illocutionary force of indirect commissive promises by affecting their felicity conditions.

### **Methods and Material**

The research material includes a DER SPIEGEL Interview with German Chancellor Olaf Scholz, conducted by Melanie Amann and Martine Knobbe, April 22, 2022. The main criterion for selecting material was the presence in the answers of the interviewee simultaneously of two types of pragmatic devices – deictic mitigating markers termed shields and markers of commissive illocution, including indexes of “self-obligation” and responsibility, equivalent to a promise, deictic reference to the future simple in combination with personal pronoun, which meets the criterion of propositional content for commissive acts, explicit and implicit lexical means to denote “readiness”, help, as well as dynamic verbs *to deliver*, *to arm*, and others related to types of assistance.

The underlying in the paper is the method of speech acts analysis, with an emphasis on illocutionary force mitigating devices. The article relies on canonical definition of commissives as the speech acts by which the speaker commits himself to some course of action in the near or far future as described by the propositional content. The speaker’s intention is to make the world fit his words through promises, pledges, vows, oaths, etc. [Kravchenko, 2017, p. 142]. Since only indirect commissives are presented in the interview, the article relies on Searle’s definition of indirect speech acts’ illocution as combining the “secondary” illocutionary act (the direct one, performed in the literal utterance of the sentence) and “primary” illocutionary act (a speaker’s utterance meaning that is not literally performed) [Searle, 1969, p. 178].

The article also uses the technique of specifying indirect acts according to the degree of their illocutionary force, based on the types of mitigations markers, their location in either illocutionary or propositional parts of the acts, and their impact on speech acts felicity condition [Kravchenko, Pasternak, Korotka, 2021; Kravchenko, Prokopchuk, Pozhar, Rozhkov, Kozyarevych-Zozulya, 2022; Kravchenko, Yudenko, Chaika, Kryknitska, Letunovska, 2022]. In addition to speech acts method, the study partially addresses the G.P. Grice’s concept of conventional implicatures [Grice, 1975, pp. 41–58] since some words, including those associated with personal or other types of deixis (as shown by a preliminary analysis of political discourse), has a particular inference pattern due to their presupposed additional meaning (about the markers of conventional implicatures, see: Abbott, 2000; Beaver & Condoravdi 2003; von Stechow 2004; Potts 2007). Conventional implicatures based on shields “blur” the components of the denotative situation represented by speech acts, and thereby cast doubt on such preparatory conditions for commissives as the speaker’s ability to successfully perform an act, along with the condition of sincerity and the condition of benefit – performing an action in the interests of listener.

In addition to the method of speech acts analysis and the method of inferencing conventional implicatures based on shields, the article uses elements of componential analysis aimed at identifying the denotative and connotative components of political speech associated with the sincerity/insincerity of the speaker and the high/low probability of his promises.

## Discussion and major findings

When selecting shields, the article was guided by the classification of three types of deixis: personal, spatial, and temporal, introduced by Fillmore [1975].

In the analyzed interview, the accumulation of deictic shields is often observed, as evidenced by examples (1) and (2).

(1) *That's why we are ready to help our allies in rapid training on these devices and to see if suitable equipment can still be obtained from our side.*

(2) *In the medium term, we will help Ukraine develop its defensive capability, also with Western weapons.*

Both fragments are indirect commissives, which include numerous mitigating operators, a significant part of which are semantic and grammatical deictic shields. Personal deixis is denoted by the first person plural pronoun *we* and its possessive form *our*, which are marked by non-specificity and therefore “should be described as a distancing technique applied by the speaker in order to minimize his/her own role (...) in the state of affairs described” [Haverkate, 2010, pp. 516-517]. In addition to the strategy of personal distancing from promises, this deictic device also implements another discursive strategy that reflects the intention “to create a symbolic form of in-group solidarity” [Haverkate, 2010, p. 520].

The grammatical device of personal deixis is a passive structure that removes the speaker from the position of a phrasal subject and, accordingly, from his own discourse as an agent promising action. Personal deixis is also “blurred” to a certain extent by the qualifying construction “also with Western weapons”, which defocuses the speaker’s responsibility due to the metonymic transfer of a specific obligation into the framework of generalized plans. In this case, metonymic generalization is carried out both by type and by the subject-agent of help. In addition, due to the adverb of the mode of action *also* in combination with the preposition *with*, the meaning of the previous part of the sentence is modified by the conventional implicature “there may be other types of assistance, not necessarily the provision of assistance with weapons.”

Along with personal deixis the speaker uses two explicit indicators of temporal deixis *in the medium term* and *will* referring to an uncertain future, which moves the statement from the realm of reality to the realm of possibility.

In above fragments temporal deixis is also marked in an implicit way by lexical semantic means – the adjective *ready* in combination with an adverb *still*, verbs *to see* and *to develop*, which in their inference patterns contain the denotative or contextually connotated sense of a temporal reference to an indefinite future.

Thus, the predicative construction of readiness in combination with the verb *to help*, serves as a semantic de-intensifier of the action denoted by the verb, since the readiness to perform the action does not mean the action itself “displacing” the action into the sphere of potential future

In this regard, the predicative construction of readiness, in combination with the verb *to help*, serves as a semantic de-intensifier of the action denoted by the verb, since the readiness to perform an action does not mean the action itself, “displacing” the action into the sphere of a potential future (when compared to the stronger forms of “commit to help”, “promise to help”, or at least “will help”).

The meaning of the potential future is further enhanced by the combination of the predicative construction of readiness with the verb *to see* (*we are ready (...) to see*), which implies the sense “to observe”, rather than “to act”, implying a duration with an indefinite time framework.

In the same vein, the adverb *still* emphasizes duration on a denotative level and connotes the possibility of refusal. A similar meaning is conveyed by the verb *develop* with a semantic presupposition of an “indefinite process” with a future orientation.

As a result, the accumulation of deictic mitigators affects such felicity conditions for the commissive speech acts as a key condition for their realization in the future and the condition of the speaker’s sincerity, which significantly reduces the acts illocutionary force.

In the aspect of the implementation of other pragmatic techniques, the complication of a phrase by hedging and softening is a trigger both for conventional implicatures based on lexical presuppositions of words, and for violating the maxims of the quantity and style (transparency) of information, which, in turn, becomes a trigger for discursive implicature.

In addition to local conventional implicatures “For now, we will watch”, “Help with weapons will be in the future”, “there may be other types of help, not necessarily the supply of weapons”, the analyzed fragment also contains the discursive implicature “For the time being, Germany will take a wait-and-see position in terms of arms supplies”. Its inference is context-bound and correlates with the interviewer’s question: “Others are supplying heavy equipment, but Germany is pulling out its checkbook. Is that the distribution of roles in this war?”.

Based on the definition of deixis by T. Lyons, who understands by this concept the location and identification of persons, objects, events, processes and activities talked about, or referred to, in relation to the spatio-temporal context created and sustained by the act of utterance and the participation in it [Lyons, 1997, p. 377], and also taking into account that the deixis contains a reference to the components of the denotative content of the utterance, among which, in addition to local-temporal and personal coordinates, there is an object, the article also highlights an object deixis that impacts the commissive illocutionary force as shown by (3).

(3) But *we will* certainly deliver *whatever is still available*.

On the one hand, the implicit commissive illocution is strengthened by the modifier adverb *certainly*, which reinforces the promise expressed by the verb *deliver*. However, on the other hand, the means of object deixis *whatever is still available*, due to their vagueness, blur the propositional content of the statement as it is not clear what exactly is promised to be delivered – especially in the context of the journalist’s specific questions about the need to supply tanks.

Accordingly, the non-specific reference to the object of the denotative situation affects such a key felicity condition for the commissives as the feasibility of the promised action.

An additional mitigation in the degree of illocutionary force is carried out by the adverb *still*, which, by its lexical presupposition, indexes the conditional implicature “we have already given away almost everything, and we have nothing to deliver”.

Based on the understanding of shields as the markers that affect either the speaker’s / addresser’s face-protection or the deictic space-temporal-object coordinates of the utterance, the paper singled out a set of deictic devices such as role-playing deixis, epistemological modal verbs and their substitutes, which denote the semes “capabilities” and “possibilities”, means of negation, temporary deixis, lexical and grammatical markers of the future tense, resulted in vagueness of promises / commitments as in (2), presuppositional adverbs with inference pattern of “obstruction of the promised action”, passive constructions that remove the speaker from the position of the phrasal subject and the agent of the promised action as in (2), verbs and adverbs with a denotative or contextually connotated seme of an indefinite future as in (1) and (2), a metonymic generalization of the agent of action as in (2), etc.

Let’s analyze each of the identified devices.

The means of role deixis refocus the subjects of responsibility with the replacement of personal pronouns with generalized forms to protect the speaker’s own face, as evidenced by (4) and (5).

(4) *We will* arm them so that their safety is guaranteed. And *we will be available* as a guarantor power.

(5) As *trans-Atlanticists*, it is *our* job not only to focus on *ourselves*, but also to understand that the desire to live in a democracy in a free society is universal.

In addition to the generalized personal deixis, the phrase *will be available* in (4) does not fully meet the condition of the sincerity of the speaker and the fulfillment of his promise – in comparison with the direct commissive “we undertake / promise to be the guarantor of power” or the indirect commissive “we undertake / promise to be a guarantor power” or indirect commissive “we will be a guarantor power”, both of which, unlike the original utterance, are structurally simpler, reduce the distance between the audience and the speaker and make his promise more believable.

In (5), the personal deixis is conveyed by a metonymic reference to the trans-Atlanticists as well as contextual substitutes for this nomination – the possessive plural personal pronoun *our* and the reflexive pronoun *ourselves*.

The indirect commissive in (5) is weaker than (4), since, in addition to the absence of a performative verb, it lacks a direct designation of the subject of action in the position of the phrasal subject, which is occupied by the pronoun *it*. However, in the local context, *our job*



denotes “our responsibility”, closely related to the commissive illocutionary force of promise and guarantee. In this regard, the statement can easily be reformulated as follows: since our job is not to focus on ourselves, we are committed to ensuring democracy in a free society for others.

The data examined showed that the shift of personal deixis from the singular to the plural, indicating a transition from personal to collective responsibility for the promised actions, sometimes occurs within the same utterance, as shown in (6) and (7).

(6) As such, it is *my* responsibility to say: *We* cannot allow that to happen.

(7) *I* maintain my position: *We* will consider everything carefully,

In the presence of explicit means of personal deixis, the speaker’s responsibility for the promised actions is reduced by the mitigators of the propositional part of his utterance. Among such devices the article identifies epistemological modal verbs and their substitutes that bring into the deontic commissive modality the connotations of the epistemological modality of the speaker’s uncertainty about what is being reported.

In (8) and (9), the semes “ability” and “possibility” are marked by the phrases *do my best* and *everything I can*, weakening such a preparatory felicity condition for the commissive as the speaker’s ability to perform the promised action, for they refer not so much to his specific actions as to the extent of his possibilities.

(8) In the current threat situation, particularly, *I will do my utmost not to forget* this commitment.

(9) *I am doing everything I can* to prevent an escalation that would lead to a third world war.

In addition to lexical operators, a mitigating device in this example is such a grammatical category as negation as it “transforms a statement to an understatement (...) The affirmative sense of the negated concept dilutes the negativity of the negation marker, resulting in a more positive or less negative account of an undesirable situation” [Fein, Ganzi, Giora, Levi, Sabah, 2005, p. 85].

Personal deictic mitigation is also achieved with the help of presuppositional adverbs with the “obstruction of the promised action” inference model, as suggested in (10).

(10). *Nonetheless, I still* have to act now.

The commissive illocution is marked by the verb of obligation *have to*, which, in combination with the explicit index of personal deixis *I*, actualizes the seme “self-obligation”, associated in political speech with commissive illocutionary force. In addition, the phrase contains an explicit temporal deixis “now”.

However, the force of the promissive is reduced by the conjunctive concessive adverb “nevertheless” as a marker of conventional implicature, by means of which some obstruction of the action is implied, connected with the promise contained in the main part of the sentence. The need to act contrary to the circumstances (or the desire of the speaker) is also implied by the adverb *still*, which also weakens the scope of the speaker’s personal deixis in terms of his responsibility for his words.

## Conclusion

An analysis of an English-language interview with the German Chancellor about the prospects for assistance to Ukraine led to the main conclusion that the illocutionary force of indirect commissives, prevailing in the speech of a politician, is significantly reduced by mitigators – deictic markers that affect the felicity conditions for commissives.

Among the felicity conditions for commissives, affected by shields, the article specified the conditions of the speaker’s sincerity and ability to perform the promised action, which, by means of deictic mitigators, shift the emphasis from the fulfillment of the promise to the capabilities of the speaker or his group. The illocutionary force of indirect commissives is mitigated by shields associated with personal, temporal and object deixis.

Deictic devices identified by the research include means of role-playing deixis, epistemological modal verbs and their substitutes, which denote or connote the semes of “ability” and “opportunities”, means of negation, temporal deixis, i.e. lexical and grammatical markers of the future tense, implying the uncertainty of promises/obligations, presuppositional adverbs with the inference model “obstacle to the promised action”, passive constructions that

take the speaker out of the position of the phrasal subject as an agent of the promising action, verbs and adverb, which in their inference patterns contain the denotative or contextually connotated senses of a temporal reference to an indefinite future and a metonymic generalization of the agent of action.

The prospect of further research is the analysis of all types of mitigators, including bushes, hedges, and shields, in their projection on rhetorical and manipulative techniques of argumentation in political discourse, manifesting the discourse-forming concept "Caution".

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### DEICTIC MITIGATION VS COMMISSIVE ACTS IN POLITICAL INTERVIEW (BASED ON THE MODERN EUROPEAN DISCOURSE OF AID TO UKRAINE)

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**Key words:** *illocutionary force, indirect commissive, shields, deixis, political interview, felicity conditions.*

The article deals with the problem of correlation between the illocutionary force of indirect commissive acts and shields as deictic mitigating markers that reduce the level of promises by influencing their felicity conditions. The purpose of the article is to clarify the types of deictic shields and their function in weakening the illocutionary force of indirect promises in the European political discourse of assistance to Ukraine.

The *purpose* is achieved by solving the following objectives that determine the research algorithm, including (a) felicity conditions revealing for commissives, weakened by shields that affect the illocutionary force of acts; (b) identifying those deictic coordinates of statements, the reference to which weakens the illocutionary force of commissives; (c) lexical-semantic and syntactic deictic mitigators complex determination.

To achieve the purpose and objectives set in the article, the following *research methods* are used: the method of speech acts analysis and the method of inferencing the shields-based conventional implicatures, supplemented by elements of componential analysis.

The article reached the following principal *results*. Firstly, among the felicity conditions for commissives weakened by shields, the article highlights the condition of speaker's sincerity and the preparatory condition of his / her ability to perform a promissive act. Due to the shields, the promise is transferred from the scope of the action to the scope of the speaker's possibilities.

Secondly, based on the understanding of shields as the markers affecting either the speaker's / addresser's face-protecting attitude to the proposition or the deictic space-temporal-object coordinates of the utterance, the paper has identified that the illocutionary force of indirect commissives is mitigated by personal, temporal and object shields.

Thirdly, we have singled out and specified a set of illocution-mitigating deictic devices, including means of role-playing deixis, epistemological modal verbs and their substitutes, which denote or connote semes of "capabilities" and "possibilities", means of negation, temporary deixis devices, i.e. the lexical and grammatical markers of future tense, resulting in the vagueness of promises / obligations; presuppositional adverbs with inference pattern of "impediment to a promised action"; passive structures that withdraw the speaker from the position of phrasal subject and an agent of the promising action; verbs and adverbs, which in their inference patterns contain the denotative or contextually connotated semes of a temporal reference to an indefinite future; metonymic generalization of the agent of action.

The prospect for further research is the analysis of all types of mitigators, including bushes, hedges and shields, in their projection on rhetorical and manipulative methods of argumentation in political discourse as manifested by the discourse-forming concept "Caution".

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