



MEDIA CONTROL THROUGH DIRECTIVE SPEECH: A SPEECH ACT ANALYSIS OF THE DONALD TRUMP–JIM ACOSTA PRESS CONFERENCE

Avenia Widya Krisnawati¹, Miftahulkhairah Anwar², Saifur Rohman³

Applied Linguistics, Universitas Negeri Jakarta^{1,2,3}.

Email: avenia.widya@mhs.unj.ac.id¹, miftahulkhairah@unj.ac.id²,
saifurrohman@unj.ac.id³

ABSTRACT

Democracies depend on the assumption that those in power can be questioned by the press, yet press conferences often become sites where this assumption is contested through language. This study examines how President Donald Trump used directive speech acts to control media participation during the November 7, 2018, White House press conference exchange with CNN correspondent Jim Acosta. Employing a qualitative descriptive method integrated with Searle's (1976) speech act theory and Fairclough's (1995) Critical Discourse Analysis, the study analyzed seven directive utterances drawn from a transcript triangulated across The Washington Times, TIME, and Bloomberg. The findings reveal four directive subtypes: command, prohibition, turn allocation, and delegitimizing indirect directives, with delegitimizing indirect directives constituting the largest category. These directives function cumulatively through a three-stage progression procedural termination, professional delegitimization, and categorical delegitimization, that narrows Acosta's participation from an interrupted journalist to a delegitimized threat. The study demonstrates that media control is accomplished not through any single utterance but through the sequential combination of directive speech acts. These findings extend speech act theory toward power relations, contribute a pragmatic-analytic model for examining political discourse, and offer teachable linguistic mechanisms for critical media literacy.

Keywords: *critical discourse analysis; directive speech acts; media control; political press conference; speech act theory.*

INTRODUCTION

Democracies depend, in part, on the assumption that those who hold power can be questioned by those who do not. When that assumption breaks down, the erosion is rarely announced by a single dramatic act; more often it proceeds through the steady, almost unremarkable accumulation of small moments in which the powerful narrow who may speak, and about what (Levitsky & Ziblatt, 2018). Habermas's (1989) classical account of the public sphere imagined a rational forum in which citizens and their representatives could deliberate as equals, holding government accountable through open exchange. Press conferences occupy a peculiar place within that imagined forum: they are among the few recurring, camera-facing occasions on which an elected executive is obliged to answer, in real time, to journalists acting on the public's behalf. Whether that obligation is honored or merely performed is, ultimately, a question about language about what is said, to whom, and with what effect.

At a broader level, the relationship between political power and media coverage has long been theorized as a struggle over control of the communicative agenda. White's (1950) foundational gatekeeping model described how decisions about what counts as reportable news are made by actors positioned between events and audiences; McCombs and Shaw (1972) later showed that those controlling the agenda can shape not what the public thinks, but what the public thinks about. Audiences, in turn, do not receive this coverage neutrally: Vallone, Ross, and Lepper (1985) demonstrated that partisans on opposing sides of a conflict tend to perceive identical coverage as biased against their own side, a hostile-media effect that political actors can exploit rhetorically. Critical discourse scholars have pushed this further, arguing that language is not merely used to describe power but is itself one of the principal means by which power is exercised and reproduced (Fairclough, 1989, 1995, 2015; Van Dijk, 2001, 2006). Van Dijk (2006) in particular treats elite control over public discourse who is permitted to speak, when they must stop, and which topics may proceed, as a form of discursive manipulation rather than incidental communicative style.

Narrowing from media-power theory to the American presidency specifically, communication scholars have documented a long historical shift toward what Tulis (1987) calls the "rhetorical presidency" a mode of governance in which presidents appeal directly and continuously to the public, treating rhetoric itself as an instrument of governance rather than a mere accompaniment to it. Press conferences, within this rhetorical presidency, are not neutral information sessions but instances of institutional talk, a category of interaction in which turn-taking, topic control, and participation rights are systematically organized by the institutional roles of the participants rather than negotiated freely as in ordinary conversation (Drew & Heritage, 1992; Sacks, Schegloff, & Jefferson, 1974). Clayman and Heritage (2002) show that news interviews are normatively expected to sustain a degree of journalistic adversarialness, yet officials routinely deploy interruption, non-answers, and topic redirection to blunt that adversarialness in practice; Thornborrow (2002) similarly argues that institutional power is not a fixed possession but something continuously built and contested turn by turn. Ekström (2009), examining presidential press conferences specifically, finds that interruption functions as a resource for asserting conversational dominance, while Bhatia (2006) describes such conferences as inherently asymmetrical, structured by unequal access, unequal turns, and unequal institutional standing between officials and journalists. Comparable dynamics recur in broadcast political interviews more broadly (Huls & Varwijk, 2011; Roca-Cuberes, 2014) and in adversarial talk generally, where confrontation itself becomes a resource through which power is displayed rather than merely exercised (Hutchby, 2013).

This dynamic sharpens considerably when a political leader treats the press not merely as an adversary to be managed, but as an institution whose legitimacy is itself worth contesting. In a special report for the Committee to Protect Journalists, Downie (2020) documents what he characterizes as an unprecedented pattern of hostility toward journalists throughout the Trump administration, sustained through rallies, tweets, and direct exchanges with reporters. Linguistic scholarship on this pattern has focused substantially on the recurring label "fake news," which Schubert (2020) analyzes as a pragmatic device for rhetorical delegitimization rather than a substantive factual rebuttal, and which Schneider and Eitelmann (2020) situate within a broader repertoire of



discursive strategies characteristic of Trump's public language. What remains comparatively underexamined in this literature, however, is the finer-grained pragmatic architecture of a single, live, adversarial exchange; the moment-by-moment linguistic choices through which a political figure asserts control over a specific journalist's speech in real time, as opposed to the broader rhetorical patterns visible across many speeches or tweets.

Addressing that finer grain requires a theoretical apparatus built for exactly this purpose: pragmatics, and speech act theory in particular. Austin first proposed that utterances do not merely describe the world but perform actions within it, a claim Searle systematized into a taxonomy of illocutionary acts organized by illocutionary point, direction of fit, and the speaker's expressed psychological state (Searle & Vanderveken, 1985). Among Searle's (1976) five categories, directives utterances designed to get a hearer to do something are especially revealing in institutional settings, because they make a speaker's assumed authority over another's conduct explicit (Levinson, 1983; Leech, 1983), with their felicity resting on background conditions of authority and sincerity that Grice's (1975) cooperative principle helps to specify. Empirical studies confirm that directive choice is rarely arbitrary: Stephenson (2020) shows that directives negotiate what she calls deontic rights, whose authority governs an ongoing activity, while studies of directive speech acts in classroom and everyday contexts (Georgalidou, 2008; Thuruvan & Yunus, 2017; Prayitno, 2017) confirm that speakers systematically vary between commanding, requesting, and prohibiting forms according to their relative social or institutional standing (Yule, 1996).

More specifically, studies of directive speech acts in political and media contexts have demonstrated their function as instruments of control. In presidential press conferences, directives have been shown to regulate turn-taking, restrict follow-up questions, and redirect topics inconvenient to the administration's communication interests (Bhatia, 2006; Ekström, 2009). Research on political interviews has further documented how politicians deploy directives to avoid accountability, terminate adversarial lines of questioning, and reframe journalists' inquiries as illegitimate (Clayman & Heritage, 2002; Hutchby, 2013). However, while these studies have identified the presence of directives in political discourse, they have not systematically examined how multiple directive subtypes, such as commands, prohibitions, turn allocations, and delegitimizing indirect directives operate cumulatively within a single exchange to produce media control. This gap between the identification of directives and the explanation of their cumulative pragmatic function remains underexplored.

Taken together, this body of scholarship establishes three points that motivate the present study. First, press conferences are asymmetrical institutional encounters rather than neutral exchanges. Second, Trump's public language has a well-documented tendency to delegitimize the press. Third, directive speech acts are a proven analytical lens for exposing how authority over another's conduct is asserted through language. What has not yet been done, however, is to bring these three strands together to apply Searle's directive framework, utterance by utterance, to a single, extensively documented press-conference confrontation, in order to show concretely how directive speech accomplishes media control in real time rather than merely asserting that it does so in general. This study addresses that gap by examining the November 7, 2018, White House press conference exchange between President Donald Trump and CNN correspondent

Jim Acosta, a confrontation widely covered in the press and notable for its aftermath, in which Acosta's press credentials were briefly revoked.

Guided by Searle's (1976) theory of directive speech acts and integrated with the interpretive resources of Critical Discourse Analysis (Fairclough, 1995; Van Dijk, 2006), the research questions are formulated as follows:

1. What types of directive speech acts occur in the November 7, 2018, Trump–Acosta press conference exchange?
2. How do these directive speech acts function pragmatically to regulate Acosta's communicative participation?
3. How do these directive speech acts operate as a media-control strategy when analyzed through a pragmatic approach integrated with Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA)?

Correspondingly, this study aims to: (1) identify the types of directive speech acts in the Trump–Acosta interaction; (2) explain the pragmatic function of directives in regulating communicative participation; and (3) integrate a pragmatic approach with Critical Discourse Analysis to demonstrate how directives operate as a media-control strategy.

In answering these questions, the study aims to make three contributions. Theoretically, it extends speech act theory from illocutionary-function analysis to power relations by integrating Searle (1976), Fairclough (1995), and Van Dijk (2006), identifying four directive subtypes, such as prohibition, command, turn-reallocation, and delegitimizing indirect directive in the Trump–Acosta case. Methodologically, it demonstrates a layered analysis moving from form identification to pragmatic function to interpretation of power relations to interpretation as media control. Empirically, it provides a pragmatics-based account of media control to a body of research on political discourse so far dominated by conversation-analytic and critical-discourse-analytic approaches (Fairclough, 1989, 1995; Bhatia, 2006), following a qualitative descriptive method consistent with established practice in pragmatics research (Sudaryanto, 1993). It further aims to extend discussions of critical media literacy (Kellner & Share, 2007, 2019) toward the specific, teachable linguistic mechanisms, such as prohibition, command, turn-reallocation, and delegitimizing assertion, through which audiences might learn to recognize attempts at media control as they happen, rather than only after the fact.

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative descriptive method, an approach well suited to pragmatics research because it allows the form of an utterance to be described alongside the function that utterance performs in its immediate context of use, rather than treating the two as separable objects of analysis (Sudaryanto, 1993; Prayitno, 2017). The pragmatic description is not pursued in isolation, however. Because the object of inquiry here is not merely how directive speech acts are formed but how they operate as a mechanism of media control, the study integrates Searle's framework for classifying directive illocutionary acts with the interpretive resources of Critical Discourse Analysis, principally Fairclough's account of discourse as social practice and Van Dijk's concept of



discourse as a vehicle for manipulation. The pragmatic layer of the analysis identifies what a given utterance is doing illocutionarily; the critical-discourse layer then asks what that illocutionary act accomplishes politically, whose participation it enables or forecloses, and on what authority. Read together, these two layers allow the analysis to move, in a principled and traceable way, from linguistic form to social consequence, rather than asserting a connection between the two impressionistically.

Research Design

This study employs a qualitative descriptive research design. A qualitative approach is appropriate because the study aims to describe and interpret the types and functions of directive speech acts in a specific political discourse event rather than to measure variables or test statistical hypotheses (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The descriptive nature of the design allows the researcher to examine the linguistic features of the data in their natural context while also interpreting their pragmatic functions and social implications (Sudaryanto, 1993; Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014).

The design is particularly suitable for pragmatics research because it enables the analysis to move from the identification of linguistic forms (what is said) to the interpretation of their illocutionary functions (what is done through saying them) and finally to the explanation of their social consequences (what political work they accomplish). This three-tiered movement, such as form, function, and consequence, is central to the study's aim of demonstrating how directive speech acts accomplish media control in real time.

Data and Data Source

The data consist of directive utterances produced by President Donald Trump and directed at CNN correspondent Jim Acosta during the White House press conference of November 7, 2018. The press conference was selected as the data source for three reasons. First, it represents a highly documented instance of presidential-journalistic confrontation, widely covered by national and international media. Second, the exchange was notable for its aftermath, in which Acosta's press credentials were briefly revoked and subsequently restored through a federal court ruling, indicating that the exchange carried consequences beyond the immediate interaction. Third, the exchange has been the subject of extensive public and scholarly discussion, yet its pragmatic architecture; the moment-by-moment linguistic choices through which Trump asserted control over Acosta's speech has not been systematically examined through the lens of speech act theory.

Because no single publicly available source reproduces the entire exchange with identical wording, the working transcript used in this study was compiled and then cross-checked against three independently published accounts of the same event: The Washington Times, TIME, and Bloomberg. This triangulation step was taken specifically because the data function as primary evidence in the analysis; an error or embellishment carried over from a single, unverified transcript would propagate directly into the findings. Table 3.1 presents the sources used for transcript compilation and verification.

Table 3.1 Data Sources for Transcript Compilation and Verification

No	Source	Type	Use in the Study
1	The Washington Times (2018)	News report	Primary transcript source
2	TIME (2018)	News report	Cross-checking and verification
3	Bloomberg (2018)	News report	Cross-checking and verification

The use of three independently published sources ensured that every utterance entered into the classification table could be traced to at least one, and in most cases more than one, verifiable journalistic source. This triangulation procedure is consistent with established practice in qualitative discourse analysis, where data trustworthiness is enhanced through the use of multiple sources (Denzin, 1978; Fairclough, 1995).

Data Collection Technique

Data were collected through a documentation technique combined with repeated close listening and reading of the compiled transcript against the available video record of the press conference, following the observational note-taking procedure common in Indonesian pragmatics scholarship (Sudaryanto, 1993). The data collection proceeded through three stages, as summarized in Table 3.2

Table 3.2. Data Collection Procedure

No	Stage	Activity	Purpose
1	Stage 1	Initial identification of all turns produced by Trump directed specifically at Acosta	To establish the scope of the data
2	Stage 2	Isolation of utterances carrying directive illocutionary force from within those turns, following Searle's (1976) criteria	To focus the analysis on directive speech acts
3	Stage 3	Verification of each retained utterance against three independent source transcripts; discarding any utterance whose wording could not be corroborated across at least one additional source	To ensure data accuracy and trustworthiness

Each pass through the transcript had a narrower purpose than the one before it. The initial pass identified all turns produced by Trump that were directed specifically at Acosta. The second pass isolated, from within those turns, only the utterances carrying directive illocutionary force, in keeping with Searle's criteria for the category. The third and final pass verified each retained utterance against the three source transcripts and discarded any utterance whose wording could not be corroborated across at least one additional source.



Research Instrument

The instruments used in this study are a classification table, Searle's theoretical framework, Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis framework, and Van Dijk's concept of discursive manipulation. The classification table was developed to record each directive utterance, its subtype, its pragmatic function, and its corresponding indication of media control. The theoretical frameworks served as analytical lenses for interpreting the data.

Unit of Analysis

The unit of analysis is the individual utterance, understood as a single turn-constructional unit carrying one identifiable illocutionary point (Sacks, Schegloff, & Jefferson, 1974). An utterance, in this study, refers to a complete grammatical and pragmatic unit produced by Trump and directed at Acosta, which may range from a single word ("enough") to a full clause ("You are a rude, terrible person"). Where a single conversational turn contained more than one directive act as, for instance, when a command was immediately followed by a delegitimizing assertion, the turn was segmented into separate units so that each illocutionary act could be classified and interpreted on its own terms, while its sequential relationship to the surrounding units was preserved for the discussion of cumulative effect in the analysis.

The analysis integrates two complementary frameworks: Searle's taxonomy of directive speech acts and the interpretive resources of Critical Discourse Analysis, principally Fairclough's three-dimensional model and Van Dijk's concept of discourse as a vehicle for manipulation.

Searle's (1976) taxonomy classifies illocutionary acts into five categories: assertives, directives, commissives, expressives, and declaratives. Directives utterances designed to get the hearer to do something—are the focus of this study. Following Searle's framework, directive speech acts can be realized through various forms, including commands, requests, prohibitions, and indirect directives. The classification of each utterance in this study is based on three criteria: (1) the illocutionary point (the speaker's intended purpose), (2) the direction of fit (whether the utterance aims to make the world match the words or vice versa), and (3) the expressed psychological state (the speaker's attitude toward the proposition). Table 3.3 presents the criteria used for classifying directive subtypes in this study.

Table 3.3. Criteria for Classifying Directive Speech Acts

No	Directive Subtype	Illocutionary Point	Direction of Fit	Expressed Psychological State
1	Command (<i>Perintah</i>)	Attempt to get hearer to do something	World-to-words	Desire (want)
2	Prohibition (<i>Larangan</i>)	Attempt to get hearer to refrain from doing something	World-to-words	Desire (want)
3	Turn Allocation (<i>Alokasi/Pengalihan Giliran Bicara</i>)	Attempt to reassign speaking rights	World-to-words	Desire (want)

4	Delegitimizing Indirect Directive	Attempt to get hearer to recognize their subordinate position through assertion	World-to- words	Desire (want)
---	--------------------------------------	---	--------------------	---------------

The critical-discourse layer of the analysis draws on Fairclough's three-dimensional model, which treats discourse as (1) a text (linguistic analysis), (2) a discursive practice (analysis of production and reception), and (3) a social practice (analysis of ideological and hegemonic functions). Van Dijk's concept of discursive manipulation; the use of language by elites to control public discourse and shape social cognition; provides a further interpretive resource for understanding how Trump's directive speech acts function as a mechanism of media control. The integration of these frameworks is summarized in Table 3.4.

Table 3.4. Integration of Pragmatic and Critical-Discourse Frameworks

No	Layer	Framework	Focus of Analysis
1	Pragmatic Layer	Searle (1976, 1979)	Classification of directive subtypes; illocutionary force
2	Critical-Discourse Layer	Fairclough (1995)	Discourse as text, discursive practice, and social practice
3	Critical-Discourse Layer	Van Dijk (2006)	Discourse as vehicle for manipulation and elite control

Data Analysis Procedure

Data were analyzed using the interactive model of qualitative analysis described by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014), which proceeds through three interrelated stages rather than a strict linear sequence: data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification. Table 3.5 summarizes the data analysis procedure.

Table 3.5 Data Analysis Procedure

No	Stage	Activity	Output
1	Data Condensation	Reducing the full set of utterances to those carrying directive force and directly relevant to the research questions	Focused set of directive utterances
2	Data Display	Organizing the condensed data into classification tables recording utterance, subtype, pragmatic function, and media control indication	Classification tables (see Results section)



- 3 Conclusion Van Dijk Drawing Interpretation and
Drawing and conclusions about how synthesis (see Discussion
Verification each directive subtype section)
functions and verifying
interpretations against the
transcript (2006)

In the condensation stage, the full set of utterances collected in the previous step was reduced to those directly relevant to the research question that is, utterances carrying directive force, so that the analysis would remain focused on the specific mechanism of media control under investigation rather than on the press conference as a whole. In the display stage, the condensed data were organized into classification tables recording, for each utterance, its number, its exact wording, its directive subtype following Searle's taxonomy as adapted from prior empirical studies of directive speech acts (Georgalidou, 2008; Stephenson, 2020), its pragmatic function, and its corresponding indication of media control. This tabular format made recurring patterns across utterances easier to detect than a purely narrative treatment of the same data would have allowed. In the final stage, conclusions about how each directive subtype functions and how the subtypes function cumulatively across the exchange were drawn from the display and then verified by returning to the transcript to confirm that the proposed interpretation was consistent with the utterance's immediate sequential context, following Fairclough's critical-discourse framework and Van Dijk's account of discursive manipulation.

Data Interpretation

Interpretation draws on Fairclough's CDA framework and Van Dijk's concept of discourse manipulation to show that directive speech acts function both interactionally and ideologically, making the political press conference an arena of power negotiation rather than a neutral forum for information exchange. The pragmatic layer identifies what each directive is doing in the immediate interaction; the critical-discourse layer then asks what that illocutionary act accomplishes politically, whose participation it enables or forecloses, and on what authority.

Data Validity

Three procedures were used to support the validity and trustworthiness of the analysis, as summarized in Table 3.6.

Table 3.6. Data Validity Procedures

No	Procedure	Description	Purpose
1	Source Triangulation	Transcript compiled from The Washington Times, TIME, and Bloomberg	To ensure data accuracy
2	Transcript checking	Re- Transcript re-checked against available video recordings at two separate points	To catch transcription drift

3	Contextual Confirmation	Each utterance's pragmatic function checked against its sequential context	To ensure interpretations are contextually grounded
---	-------------------------	--	---

First, source triangulation ensured that no utterance entered the analysis on the strength of a single, potentially inaccurate transcription. The working transcript was compiled from three independently published journalistic sources, such as The Washington Times, TIME, and Bloomberg, following the principle that data trustworthiness in qualitative research is enhanced through the use of multiple data sources

Second, the transcript was re-checked against the available video recording of the press conference at two separate points in the research process, once during initial data collection and once immediately before the classification table was finalized, to catch transcription drift introduced during repeated handling of the data. This procedure is consistent with recommended practice in discourse analysis, where repeated verification of transcripts against audio or video recordings is essential for data accuracy (Atkinson & Heritage, 1984; Bucholtz, 2000).

Third, the interpretation of each utterance's pragmatic function was checked for contextual fit by confirming it against the utterance immediately preceding and following it in the exchange, so that no directive was classified or interpreted purely on the basis of its wording in isolation from the interaction it was part of. This contextual verification is consistent with Searle's insistence that illocutionary force is determined not only by linguistic form but also by the context in which an utterance occurs.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This study examined the directive speech acts produced by President Donald Trump during the November 7, 2018, White House press conference exchange with CNN correspondent Jim Acosta. Following the display stage described in the Method, the directive utterances retained after data condensation were organized into a classification table recording, for each utterance, its exact wording, its directive subtype following Searle's taxonomy, its pragmatic function, and its corresponding indication of media control. The analysis proceeds through five interrelated layers: linguistic forms of directive speech acts, politeness strategies, impoliteness strategies, power relations, and ideological hegemony. These layers are presented sequentially, but they function cumulatively: each layer builds on the previous one to show how directive speech accomplishes media control in real time rather than merely asserting that it does so in general.

Classification and Distribution of Trump's Directive Speech Acts toward Acosta

The directive utterances retained after data condensation were first classified according to Searle's (1976, 1979) taxonomy of directive subtypes. As presented in Table 1, Trump's directive speech acts toward Acosta's span four subtypes: command (*perintah*), turn allocation (*alokasi/pengalihan giliran bicara*), prohibition (*larangan*), and delegitimizing indirect directives.



Table 4.1. Classification of Trump's Directive Speech Acts toward Acosta

No	Utterance	Directive Subtype	Pragmatic Function	Indication of Media Control
1	"That's enough."	Command (<i>Perintah</i>)	Terminates Acosta's ongoing turn at talk	Cuts short journalistic questioning
2	"Put down the mic."	Turn Allocation (<i>Alokasi/Pengalih an Giliran Bicara</i>)	Reassigns the speaking floor away from Acosta	Physically enforces loss of the floor
3	"Just sit down, please."	Command (<i>Perintah</i>)	Orders cessation of standing and further speech	Enforces bodily and verbal compliance
4	"CNN should be ashamed of itself having you working for them."	Delegitimizing Indirect Directive	Discredits Acosta's professional standing	Delegitimizes the journalist as a credible source
5	"You are a rude, terrible person. You shouldn't be working for CNN."	Prohibition (<i>Larangan</i>)	Prohibits continued professional conduct	Delegitimizes both journalist and outlet
6	"I think you should; honestly let me run the country, you run CNN."	Delegitimizing Indirect Directive	Confines Acosta to a subordinate professional role	Reframes journalistic inquiry as overreach
7	"When you report fake news, which CNN does a lot, you are the enemy of the people."	Delegitimizing Indirect Directive	Recasts Acosta and CNN as a categorical threat	Delegitimizes the entire news outlet

Beyond the classification of individual utterances, the distribution of directive subtypes across the exchange reveals a systematic pattern that is significant for understanding how media control is accomplished. As shown in Table 2, delegitimizing indirect directives constitute the largest category (42.8%), followed by commands (28.6%), while turn allocation and prohibition each account for 14.3%.

Table 4.2 Distribution of Directive Speech Act Subtypes

No	Directive Subtype	Frequency	Percentage
1	Command (<i>Perintah</i>)	2	28.6%
2	Turn Allocation (<i>Alokasi/Pengalihan Giliran Bicara</i>)	1	14.3%
3	Prohibition (<i>Larangan</i>)	1	14.3%
4	Delegitimizing Indirect Directive	3	42.8%
	TOTAL SCORE	7	100%

This distribution is analytically significant: it indicates that Trump's primary strategy for media control is not simply silencing Acosta through commands but rather delegitimizing him and his professional category through indirect directives that attack his credibility, character, and institutional standing. Commands and turn allocation

regulate the immediate interaction, but delegitimizing indirect directives work at a deeper level; they attempt to withdraw Acosta's symbolic legitimacy as a journalist, making his future questioning less credible even before it begins. This finding confirms that media control operates not only through procedural regulation of the floor but also through symbolic delegitimization of the speaker.

The linguistic analysis also reveals a systematic asymmetry in grammatical choices between the two participants. Trump's directive utterances are overwhelmingly realized through unmitigated imperatives and categorical declaratives: "That's enough," "Put down the mic," "You are a rude, terrible person." These forms encode an unmediated assertion of authority that presumes the speaker's right to command and evaluate. Acosta's utterances, by contrast, are realized through modally hedged declaratives and honorific markers: "Thank you, Mr. President," "Well, if you don't mind, Mr. President," "Pardon me, ma'am." The grammatical asymmetry is iconic of the institutional asymmetry that frames the exchange: the president speaks in the grammar of command, while the journalist speaks in the grammar of request and mitigation. This pattern is not incidental but systematic, and it establishes the linguistic foundation upon which the subsequent politeness, impoliteness, and power relations are built.

Linguistics Units of Directive Speech Acts

Before their pragmatic function can be fully interpreted, the directive utterances must be examined at the level of linguistic form, such as the words, phrases, and clauses through which each directive is realized (Searle, 1976, 1979; Levinson, 1983). At the level of the word, the exchange is marked by short, high-frequency imperatives and evaluative adjectives: "enough," "down," "rude," "terrible." At the level of the phrase, directive force is carried by elliptical imperative phrases such as "Put down the mic" and "Just sit down, please," in which the subject "you" is grammatically absent but pragmatically recoverable from the addressee's presence at the podium. At the level of the clause, directive force is sometimes carried not by an imperative construction at all but by a declarative clause functioning indirectly as a directive, as in "I think you should; honestly let me run the country, you run CNN," where the surface grammar is assertive ("I think...") while the illocutionary force is directive: an instruction that Acosta confine himself to a subordinate professional role (Searle, 1975, as cited in Searle & Vanderveken, 1985; Yule, 1996). This range from bare imperative words to full indirect directive clauses shows that directive force in this exchange is not confined to a single grammatical form; it is distributed across the full lexicogrammatical resources available to a speaker who already holds institutional authority over the floor (Leech, 1983).

The linguistic analysis also reveals a systematic asymmetry in grammatical choices between the two participants. Trump's directive utterances are overwhelmingly realized through unmitigated imperatives and categorical declaratives: "That's enough," "Put down the mic," "You are a rude, terrible person." These forms encode an unmediated assertion of authority that presumes the speaker's right to command and evaluate. Acosta's utterances, by contrast, are realized through modally hedged declaratives and honorific markers: "Thank you, Mr. President," "Well, if you don't mind, Mr. President," "Pardon me, ma'am." The grammatical asymmetry is iconic of the institutional asymmetry that frames the exchange: the president speaks in the grammar of command, while the journalist speaks in the grammar of request and mitigation. This pattern is not incidental but systematic, and it establishes the linguistic foundation upon which the subsequent



politeness, impoliteness, and power relations are built. Table 4.3 presents the linguistic units through which Trump's directive force is realized, organized by grammatical level.

Table 4.3 Linguistic Units of Directive Speech Acts

No	Grammatical Level	Examples	Directive Subtype	Linguistic Feature
1	Word	"enough"	Command	Single-word imperative; elliptical; high-frequency
2	Phrase	"Put down the mic"	Turn Allocation	Elliptical imperative; subject "you" implied
3	Phrase	"Just sit down, please"	Command	Imperative with politeness marker
4	Clause (Declarative)	"CNN should be ashamed of itself having you working for them"	Delegitimizing Indirect Directive	Declarative clause functioning indirectly as directive
5	Clause (Declarative)	"You are a rude, terrible person"	Prohibition	Declarative clause functioning as evaluation and indirect prohibition
6	Clause (Declarative)	"I think you should; honestly let me run the country, you run CNN"	Delegitimizing Indirect Directive	Assertive surface grammar with directive illocutionary force
7	Clause (Declarative)	"When you report fake news, which CNN does a lot, you are the enemy of the people"	Delegitimizing Indirect Directive	Conditional declarative functioning as categorical assertion and indirect directive

At the level of the word, the exchange is marked by short, high-frequency imperatives and evaluative adjectives: "enough," "down," "rude," "terrible." The single-word imperative "enough" is particularly significant because it functions as a complete utterance that terminates Acosta's turn without any grammatical elaboration. Its brevity and directness encode an unmediated assertion of authority: Trump does not need to explain why Acosta should stop speaking; the command is presented as self-evident.

At the level of the phrase, directive force is carried by elliptical imperative phrases such as "Put down the mic" and "Just sit down, please," in which the subject "you" is grammatically absent but pragmatically recoverable from the addressee's presence at the podium (Levinson, 1983). The ellipsis of the subject is itself a marker of authority: in English imperative constructions, the omission of "you" presumes that the addressee recognizes both the command and the speaker's right to issue it. The addition of "please" in "Just sit down, please" is noteworthy because it introduces a politeness marker into

what is otherwise a bald command; however, as the subsequent impoliteness analysis will show, this marker functions ironically rather than sincerely.

At the level of the clause, directive force is sometimes carried not by an imperative construction at all but by a declarative clause functioning indirectly as a directive, as in "I think you should; honestly let me run the country, you run CNN," where the surface grammar is assertive ("I think...") while the illocutionary force is directive: an instruction that Acosta confine himself to a subordinate professional role (Searle, 1975, as cited in Searle & Vanderveken, 1985; Yule, 1996). Similarly, "CNN should be ashamed of itself having you working for them" is grammatically a declarative expressing an opinion, but pragmatically it functions as a delegitimizing directive that instructs Acosta (and CNN) to recognize their professional failure. This range from bare imperative words to full indirect directive clauses shows that directive force in this exchange is not confined to a single grammatical form; it is distributed across the full lexicogrammatical resources available to a speaker who already holds institutional authority over the floor (Leech, 1983).

Beyond the classification of linguistic units, the analysis reveals a systematic grammatical asymmetry between the two participants. Trump's directive utterances are overwhelmingly realized through unmitigated imperatives and categorical declaratives: "That's enough," "Put down the mic," "You are a rude, terrible person." These forms encode an unmediated assertion of authority that presumes the speaker's right to command and evaluate. Acosta's utterances, by contrast, are realized through modally hedged declaratives and honorific markers: "Thank you, Mr. President," "Well, if you don't mind, Mr. President," "Pardon me, ma'am." Table 4 illustrates this grammatical asymmetry.

Table 4.4 Grammatical Asymmetry between Trump and Acosta

No	Speaker	Grammatical Features	Examples
1	Trump	Unmitigated imperatives; categorical declaratives; evaluative adjectives	"That's enough"; "Put down the mic"; "You are a rude, terrible person"
2	Acosta	Modal hedging; honorific markers; politeness tokens	"Thank you, Mr. President"; "Well, if you don't mind, Mr. President"; "Pardon me, ma'am"

The grammatical asymmetry is iconic of the institutional asymmetry that frames the exchange: the president speaks in the grammar of command, while the journalist speaks in the grammar of request and mitigation. This pattern is not incidental but systematic. Trump's grammar assumes authority; Acosta's grammar acknowledges it. The asymmetry establishes the linguistic foundation upon which the subsequent politeness, impoliteness, and power relations are built. It also demonstrates that media control is encoded not only in what is said but in how it is said; in the grammatical choices that position speakers in relations of dominance and subordination.

Politeness Strategies

Brown and Levinson's (1987) model of face-work provides a framework for understanding the marked asymmetry in politeness strategy between the two participants. Acosta's opening turns are systematically mitigated. He opens with the positive-politeness



token "Thank you, Mr. President" an expression that acknowledges Trump's institutional status before any face-threatening act (the challenge that follows) is attempted (Brown & Levinson, 1987; Goffman, 1967). His subsequent question is hedged with the negative-politeness marker "Well, if you don't mind, Mr. President" a conventionally indirect request for permission to speak that minimizes the imposition of the question about to follow (Leech, 1983). Even his physical resistance to the aide reaching for his microphone is accompanied by the mitigating token "Pardon me, ma'am," preserving procedural politeness even while declining to comply. This pattern indicates that Acosta is managing a face-threatening act from an institutionally subordinate position; his politeness strategies function as a form of deference that acknowledges Trump's superior institutional standing while still pursuing his journalistic agenda.

Trump's politeness behavior, by contrast, is better described as mock politeness than genuine face-work (Culpeper, 1996, 2011). His reply to Acosta's correction, such as "Thank you for telling me that. I appreciate it" is polite in surface form only: the thanking formula is retained, but it follows a correction Trump goes on to dismiss ("Because I consider it an invasion"), so that the politeness marker functions ironically rather than sincerely (Culpeper, 1996; Haugh, 2014). This pattern is consistent with what Culpeper (1996) calls sarcasm or mock politeness: politeness deployed "at a level which is obviously insincere, and thus remains surface realisation rather than genuine face-support." The asymmetry is analytically significant in its own right: Acosta's politeness strategies index a speaker managing a face-threatening act from an institutionally subordinate position, while Trump's deploy the surface form of politeness as an instrument of control precisely because his institutional position does not require him to mean it (Fairclough, 1995). The politeness asymmetry, in other words, is not merely a matter of individual style but a manifestation of the institutional power differential that structures the entire exchange.

Impoliteness Strategies

The shift from politeness to impoliteness in Trump's turns is neither sudden nor undifferentiated; it moves through a discernible progression that Culpeper's (1996, 2011) taxonomy of impoliteness superstrategies helps to make visible. Table 4.5 presents the impoliteness strategies employed by Trump across the exchange, organized according to Culpeper's framework and the three-stage progression identified in the sequential analysis.

Table 4.5 Impoliteness Strategies in Trump's Directive Speech Acts toward Acosta

No	Stage	Utterance	Impoliteness Superstrategy	Function	Target
1	1	"That's enough."	Bald-on-Record Impoliteness	Terminates Acosta's turn; no hedging or mitigation	Acosta's procedural participation
2	1	"Put down the mic."	Bald-on-Record Impoliteness	Physically enforces loss of the floor	Acosta's physical presence at podium

3	2	"CNN should be ashamed of itself having you working for them."	Positive Impoliteness	Attacks Acosta's professional standing and CNN's judgment	Acosta's professional identity
4	2	"You are a rude, terrible person. You shouldn't be working for CNN."	Positive Impoliteness	Evaluates Acosta's character and professional fitness	Acosta's personal and professional identity
5	2	"The way you treat Sarah Huckabee is horrible... you shouldn't treat people that way."	Positive Impoliteness	Attacks Acosta's interpersonal conduct	Acosta's character
6	2	"I'm not a big fan of yours, either, to be honest... you aren't the best."	Positive Impoliteness	Redirects attack to intervening journalist (Alexander)	Alexander's professional standing
7	3	"Just sit down, please."	Bald-on-Record Impoliteness	Renewed procedural command with minimal politeness marker	Acosta's physical and verbal participation
8	3	"When you report fake news, which CNN does a lot, you are the enemy of the people."	Positive Impoliteness + Bald-on-Record	Categorical delegitimization; identity-level attack	Acosta, CNN, and the journalistic profession

The impoliteness progression reveals three distinct stages. Stage 1 is procedural rather than personal: bald-on-record impoliteness directed at ending Acosta's turn, realized in the repeated "That's enough" and the bare imperative "Put down the mic." Bald-on-record impoliteness, in Culpeper's (1996) terms, performs the face-threatening act "in a direct, clear, unambiguous and concise way," and both utterances meet that description: they carry no hedging, no honorific, and no justification. These utterances regulate Acosta's immediate conduct at the podium; they instruct him to stop speaking



and to surrender the microphone without yet attacking his character or professional standing. The baldness of the imperatives is itself a display of authority: Trump does not need to mitigate his commands because his institutional position renders mitigation unnecessary.

Stage 2 escalates from procedural control to positive-impoliteness, an attack on Acosta's desire to be regarded favorably; realized in "CNN should be ashamed of itself having you working for them," and most explicitly in "You are a rude, terrible person. You shouldn't be working for CNN," and "The way you treat Sarah Huckabee is horrible... you shouldn't treat people that way." These utterances no longer regulate Acosta's immediate conduct at the podium; they evaluate his character and professional fitness, which is precisely the function Culpeper (1996) assigns to positive impoliteness: strategies that "damage the addressee's positive face wants" rather than merely restricting a specific action. Once Alexander intervenes in Acosta's defense ("In Jim's defense... he's a diligent reporter who busts his butt for the rest of us"), the same positive-impoliteness pattern is redirected at him: "I'm not a big fan of yours, either, to be honest... you aren't the best," showing that the strategy is applied to whichever journalist is, at that moment, contesting Trump's control of the floor rather than to Acosta as an individual target alone. This redirection is significant: it demonstrates that the impoliteness is not personal in the narrow sense but structural, it is a resource for reasserting control over the floor whenever that control is contested.

Stage 3 culminates in a fusion of renewed bald-on-record command ("Just sit down, please") with a categorical, identity-level assertion that also functions as positive impoliteness: "When you report fake news, which CNN does a lot, you are the enemy of the people." This closing utterance is the most consequential in the exchange precisely because it no longer addresses Acosta's conduct at all; it recasts him, and by extension his employer, as a categorical threat. Whether the article in the noun phrase was "the enemy," as most outlets transcribed it, or "an enemy," as CBS's version has it, the illocutionary effect is the same: an assertive speech act performing double duty as the terminal move in a face-attack sequence (Culpeper, 1996; Van Dijk, 2006). The utterance functions simultaneously as a directive (it instructs Acosta to stop reporting in a certain way) and as an assertion (it categorically defines Acosta and CNN as threats), and this dual illocutionary force makes it particularly potent as an instrument of media control.

Table 4.6 Table 6. Escalation of Impoliteness in the Trump–Acosta Exchange

No	Stage	Impoliteness Type	Target	Severity	Effect on Acosta
1	1	Bald-on-Record	Procedural participation	Low	Immediate interruption
2	2	Positive Impoliteness	Professional and personal identity	Moderate	Character assassination; professional delegitimization
3	3	Positive Impoliteness	Categorical identity ("enemy")	High	Symbolic withdrawal of legitimacy

This escalation is not accidental: each stage prepares the ground for the next. The bald-on-record commands establish Trump's authority to control the floor; the positive-impoliteness attacks establish that Acosta is not merely procedurally out of order but

professionally and personally unfit; and the categorical delegitimization completes the progression by redefining Acosta and CNN as threats rather than legitimate participants in the press conference. The full force of media control is only achieved when all three stages are completed sequentially.

Power Relations and Resistance

The directive, politeness, and impoliteness patterns described above do not occur on a level playing field; they are made possible by, and in turn reproduce, an underlying asymmetry of power that can be examined at three interrelated levels: institutional, discursive, and symbolic (Foucault, 1982; Bourdieu, 1991).

At the institutional level, Trump's directive force draws on what Bourdieu (1991) calls authorised language: an utterance's power to compel does not reside in its grammar alone but in the institutionally sanctioned position of the speaker who utters it. "That's enough" carries the force of an order only because it is spoken by an incumbent president from behind the White House lectern; the identical sentence spoken by another reporter in the room would carry no comparable illocutionary force. Acosta's retention of the microphone despite Trump's command is, correspondingly, a rare moment in which linguistic authority and physical control diverge: Trump's institutional authority does not automatically compel bodily compliance, which is why a White House aide, rather than the directive utterance itself, is dispatched to physically retrieve the microphone. This moment of divergence reveals that institutional authority, however powerful, is not absolute; it must be continuously enacted and, when resisted, re-enacted through additional means.

At the discursive level, Foucault's (1982) view of power as a relation that is exercised rather than possessed helps explain why the exchange cannot be reduced to Trump simply silencing Acosta. Power, in this sense, is relational and meets resistance: Acosta's continued questioning after "That's enough," his retention of the microphone, and his procedurally polite but substantively defiant "Pardon me, ma'am" each constitute what Foucault (1982) calls a point of resistance internal to the power relation itself, not a rupture of it. The subsequent legal proceeding that restored Acosta's press credentials, it's a federal court sided with CNN's challenge to the White House's revocation is, on this reading, an institutional extension of that same resistance beyond the press conference itself. The exchange, then, is not a simple case of power exercised over a powerless subject but a dynamic interaction in which power is contested, resisted, and reasserted across multiple turns and, eventually, across multiple institutional arenas.

At the symbolic level, the assertion "you are the enemy of the people" performs a further kind of work that exceeds the immediate interaction: it attempts to withdraw symbolic legitimacy not merely from Acosta but from the professional category he represents. Bourdieu's (1991) account of symbolic power—the capacity to impose categories of perception that come to be accepted as legitimate—helps explain why this utterance became the most widely reported line from the exchange across all four media sources examined in this study (C-SPAN, CNN, Fox News, and BBC): it was not merely an insult but an attempt to relabel an entire category of institutional actor. The term "enemy of the people" carries historical resonances that extend far beyond the immediate interaction; its deployment here invokes a broader discourse in which the press is positioned not as a democratic institution but as a threat to the nation. This symbolic recategorization, if accepted, would fundamentally alter the terms of engagement between



the president and the press, transforming legitimate journalistic questioning into an act of hostility.

Ideological Hegemony and Media Framing

The preceding levels of analysis converge on a single discourse practice that can be examined, following Fairclough's (1995) three-dimensional model, across text, discursive practice, and social practice.

At the level of text, the linguistic asymmetry described in the preceding sections is itself already ideological: short, unmitigated imperatives and categorical evaluative adjectives (rude, terrible) belong to Trump's turns, while modally hedged declaratives and honorifics belong to Acosta's and Alexander's, so that the grammar of the exchange iconically encodes the power asymmetry it enacts (Fairclough, 1995). The textual features are not neutral; they position participants in specific relations of dominance and subordination, and they make those relations appear natural rather than constructed. The grammar of command, in other words, does not merely reflect Trump's authority; it actively constitutes and reproduces that authority in the moment of speaking.

At the level of discursive practice, the same utterances were taken up differently once they left the press conference: the analysis of the four triangulated sources shows CNN's own coverage framing the exchange as an attack on press freedom, Fox News's coverage foregrounding Acosta's refusal to relinquish the microphone as a breach of protocol, and BBC's coverage situating the episode within a broader account of press-freedom concerns under the Trump administration. This divergence in framing itself demonstrates Fairclough's (1995) claim that no single discourse event carries a fixed, self-evident meaning independent of the practices that reproduce it. The same linguistic evidence is the same transcript, the same video is interpreted through different ideological lenses, producing different accounts of what the exchange "really means." This divergence is not a failure of objectivity but a demonstration that meaning is always produced within specific discursive contexts.

At the level of social practice, the phrase "enemy of the people" does not originate in this press conference; its recurrence here is one iteration of what Gramsci (1971) would describe as the reproduction of ideological hegemony is not domination secured by force, but a consensus built and continually rebuilt through the production and reproduction of discourse in public space. Trump's framing invites a binary reading of the confrontation, it's real Americans against an out-of-touch press, that does not need to be imposed by decree because it is offered, repeatedly, as common sense (Gramsci, 1971; Van Dijk, 2006). Yet hegemony, on Gramsci's (1971) own account, is never total or uncontested: the White House Correspondents' Association's public support for Acosta and the subsequent court ruling restoring his credentials are counter-hegemonic moments within the same episode, evidence that the dominance asserted through Trump's directive speech was met, at both the discursive and institutional levels, with organized resistance (Fairclough, 2015).

DISCUSSION

The findings presented in the Results section are now interpreted to answer the two research questions guiding this study and to connect the findings with the theoretical frameworks reviewed in the Introduction. The discussion proceeds through three interconnected subsections: synthesis of cumulative function, extension of the literature, and pedagogical implications.

Synthesis: Cumulative Function of Directive Speech Acts

The six analytical layers presented in the Results, classification and distribution, linguistic units, politeness strategies, impoliteness strategies, power relations, and ideological hegemony; do not function independently. When read together, they reveal a systematic cumulative progression through which Trump's directive speech acts accomplish media control. Table 4.7 summarizes this cumulative progression.

Table 7. Cumulative Progression of Media Control through Directive Speech Acts

No	Stage	Directive Subtype(s)	Impoliteness Strategy	Linguistic Form	Function	Effect on Acosta's Participation
1	Stage 1: Procedural Termination	Command, Turn Allocation	Bald-on-Record Impoliteness	Imperative words and phrases	Stops Acosta's speaking turn; removes him from the floor	Immediate restriction of speech
2	Stage 2: Professional Delegitimization	Prohibition, Delegitimizing Indirect Directive	Positive Impoliteness	Declarative clauses with evaluative adjectives	Attacks Acosta's character and professional fitness	Reduction of credibility; questioning becomes "overreach"
3	Stage 3: Categorical Delegitimization	Delegitimizing Indirect Directive	Positive Impoliteness + Bald-on-Record	Conditional declarative with categorical assertion	Recasts Acosta and CNN as "enemy of the people"	Withdrawal of symbolic legitimacy; questioning becomes "hostile act"

This cumulative progression answers the second research question: Trump's directive speech acts function pragmatically to regulate Acosta's communicative participation through a three-stage escalation. Stage 1 (Procedural Termination) employs bald-on-record commands and turn allocation to stop Acosta's speaking turn and physically remove him from the floor. The baldness of the imperatives is itself a display of authority: Trump does not need to mitigate his commands because his institutional position renders mitigation unnecessary. This stage establishes Trump's authority to control the floor.

Stage 2 (Professional Delegitimization) escalates from procedural control to positive-impoliteness strategies that attack Acosta's character and professional fitness. Utterances such as "CNN should be ashamed of itself having you working for them" and "You are a rude, terrible person" no longer regulate Acosta's immediate conduct; they evaluate his character and professional standing. This stage reframes legitimate journalistic questioning as professional overreach, reducing Acosta's credibility as a participant in the press conference.

Stage 3 (Categorical Delegitimization) culminates in the assertion "When you report fake news, which CNN does a lot, you are the enemy of the people." This utterance functions simultaneously as a directive (it instructs Acosta to stop reporting in a certain way) and as an assertion (it categorically defines Acosta and CNN as threats). It



withdraws symbolic legitimacy not merely from Acosta but from the professional category he represents, transforming legitimate journalistic questioning into a hostile act.

This progression is made possible by, and reproduces, an asymmetry of institutional authority (Bourdieu, 1991). However, as Foucault (1982) reminds us, power is relational and meets resistance: Acosta's continued questioning after "That's enough," his retention of the microphone, and his procedurally polite but substantively defiant "Pardon me, ma'am" each constitute points of resistance internal to the power relation itself. The subsequent legal proceeding that restored Acosta's press credentials is an institutional extension of that same resistance beyond the press conference itself.

Crucially, no single directive utterance in the exchange accomplishes media control on its own. "That's enough" could be dismissed as a procedural interruption; "Put down the mic" could be understood as a request for physical compliance; "You are a rude, terrible person" could be read as a personal insult. It is the sequential combination of these utterances the progression from procedural command to character attack to categorical delegitimization, that produces the full force of media control. Each utterance builds on the previous one, narrowing the scope of Acosta's permissible participation until he is positioned not merely as an interrupted journalist but as a delegitimized threat. This sequential logic is the pragmatic architecture of media control in this exchange.

Extending the Literature

These findings extend the literature reviewed in the Introduction in four ways. First, where prior scholarship on Trump's public language has largely examined recurring labels such as "fake news" across many speeches and tweets (Schubert, 2020; Schneider & Eitelmann, 2020), this study shows how comparable delegitimization is accomplished utterance by utterance within a single live exchange. The analysis confirms that the finer-grained pragmatic architecture identified as a gap in the Introduction is empirically recoverable through Searle's (1976) directive framework. The pragmatic mechanisms of media control are not abstract or general but specific, sequential, and observable in the linguistic details of the exchange, from the single-word imperative "enough" to the full indirect directive clause "you are the enemy of the people."

Second, the analysis demonstrates that directive force and impoliteness escalate together rather than independently. Media control in institutional talk is not reducible to any one linguistic device but to the sequential combination of directive illocutionary acts with face-threatening strategies (Drew & Heritage, 1992; Clayman & Heritage, 2002). The progression from bald-on-record impoliteness to positive impoliteness to categorical delegitimization (Tables 5 and 6) shows that each stage prepares the ground for the next. This finding refines Culpeper's (1996, 2011) framework by specifying how impoliteness strategies are sequenced to produce a particular institutional effect. Impoliteness is not merely a byproduct of Trump's communicative style but a systematic resource for asserting and maintaining control over the floor.

Third, the analysis of power relations reveals that media control is never total or uncontested. Acosta's continued questioning, his retention of the microphone, and the subsequent legal challenge constitute points of resistance that complicate any simple account of presidential control over the press. This finding extends Foucault's (1982) concept of power as relational by showing how resistance operates not only within the immediate interaction but also across institutional arenas beyond the press conference.

Fourth, by tracing the same utterances through Fairclough's (1995) three-dimensional model and through multiple media framings, the study shows that a single

press-conference confrontation can be read simultaneously as a local pragmatic event and as one iteration of a broader ideological hegemony (Gramsci, 1971). This addresses the call in the Introduction to connect pragmatics-based and critical-discourse-analytic approaches to political discourse (Fairclough, 1989, 1995; Bhatia, 2006). The integration of these approaches reveals that the same linguistic forms function simultaneously at multiple levels—as directives in the immediate interaction, as impoliteness strategies in the face-attack sequence, as enactments of institutional power, and as iterations of ideological discourse. This multidimensionality is the hallmark of media control as a discursive phenomenon.

Pedagogical Implications

Pedagogically, these findings support the aim, stated in the Introduction, of extending critical media literacy (Kellner & Share, 2007, 2019) toward specific, teachable linguistic mechanisms. Because each directive subtype identified here, such as command, turn allocation, prohibition, and delegitimizing assertion is tied to recognizable linguistic forms rather than to Trump's speech in general, audiences and students of media literacy may be equipped to notice attempts at media control as they unfold in real time.

The analysis provides a concrete vocabulary for describing how media control is accomplished linguistically: students can learn to identify unmitigated imperatives, to recognize the progression from procedural control to personal attack to categorical delegitimization, to distinguish between bald-on-record impoliteness and positive impoliteness, and to trace how authority is asserted and resisted across turns of talk. This pedagogical extension is particularly important in an era in which political leaders increasingly treat the press not merely as an adversary but as an institution whose legitimacy is itself worth contesting.

CONCLUSION

This study examined the directive speech acts produced by President Donald Trump during the November 7, 2018, White House press conference exchange with CNN correspondent Jim Acosta. The analysis was conducted through a qualitative descriptive method integrating a pragmatic approach with Critical Discourse Analysis to answer three research questions: (1) what types of directive speech acts occur in the exchange, (2) how do these directives function pragmatically to regulate Acosta's communicative participation, and (3) how do they operate as a media-control strategy.

In response to the first research question, the analysis identified four subtypes of directive speech acts in Trump's turns directed at Acosta: command, prohibition, turn allocation, and delegitimizing indirect directives. The distribution revealed that delegitimizing indirect directives constituted the largest category (42.8%), indicating that Trump's primary strategy for media control was not simply silencing Acosta through procedural commands but rather withdrawing his symbolic legitimacy as a journalist through indirect attacks on his credibility, character, and professional standing. Linguistically, these directives were realized across diverse forms, from single-word imperatives ("enough") to elliptical phrases ("Put down the mic") to full declarative clauses functioning indirectly as directives ("You are the enemy of the people") demonstrating that directive force in institutional political discourse is grammatically flexible and contextually sensitive.

In response to the second research question, the analysis revealed that Trump's directive speech acts functioned pragmatically to regulate Acosta's communicative



participation through a systematic three-stage progression. Stage 1 (Procedural Termination) employed bald commands and turn allocation to stop Acosta's speaking turn and physically remove him from the floor. Stage 2 (Professional Delegitimization) escalated to attacks on Acosta's character and professional fitness, reframing legitimate journalistic questioning as professional overreach. Stage 3 (Categorical Delegitimization) culminated in the assertion that Acosta and CNN were "the enemy of the people," withdrawing symbolic legitimacy not merely from Acosta but from the professional category he represented. Crucially, no single directive utterance accomplished media control on its own; it was the sequential combination of these utterances the progression from procedural command to character attack to categorical delegitimization, that produced the full force of media control. Each utterance built on the previous one, narrowing the scope of Acosta's permissible participation until he was positioned not merely as an interrupted journalist but as a delegitimized threat.

In response to the third research question, the analysis demonstrated that directive speech acts operate as a media-control strategy through three interconnected mechanisms. First, control of speaking rights determines who may speak and when questioning must stop. Second, agenda control redirects topics inconvenient to the government's communication interests toward other issues. Third, participation control restricts journalists from developing follow-up questions or seeking clarification. These mechanisms function both interactionally and ideologically: at the micro-level, directives regulate turn-taking, the distribution of speaking rights, and conversational flow; at the macro-level, they shape public perception by delegitimizing the journalist and reinforcing the political actor's authority while weakening the media's position as watchdog. This dual function confirms that the political press conference is not a neutral forum for information exchange but an arena of power negotiation in which language is used to regulate participation and reinforce political authority.

The study makes three contributions. First, it provides a pragmatics-based account of media control by identifying four directive subtypes, such as prohibition, command, turn-reallocation, and delegitimizing indirect directive, in a single live political exchange. Second, it demonstrates that media control is accomplished through a cumulative three-stage progression rather than through any single utterance, revealing the sequential logic that underpins the pragmatic architecture of media control. Third, it offers a layered analytical model that moves from linguistic form identification to pragmatic function to interpretation of power relations to interpretation as media control.

Pedagogically, the findings offer teachable linguistic mechanisms for critical media literacy. Students of media literacy can be equipped to identify unmitigated imperatives as markers of assumed authority, recognize the progression from procedural control to personal attack to categorical delegitimization, distinguish between bald commands and more indirect forms of delegitimization, and trace how authority is asserted and resisted across turns of talk. This pedagogical extension is particularly urgent in an era in which political leaders increasingly treat the press not merely as an adversary but as an institution whose legitimacy is itself worth contesting. By equipping students with the linguistic tools to recognize media control as it happens, educators can foster more critically engaged citizens who are less susceptible to rhetorical manipulation.

This study has several limitations. First, the analysis is confined to a single press-conference exchange, which limits the generalizability of the findings to other political contexts or genres of political discourse. Second, the study relies on transcribed data triangulated across multiple journalistic sources rather than a single verified transcript,

which may introduce minor wording variations. Third, the analysis focuses exclusively on Trump's directive speech acts without systematically examining Acosta's responses, which limits the analysis of how resistance shapes the progression of media control.

Future studies may address these limitations by examining directive speech acts across multiple press conferences or political contexts, by incorporating conversation-analytic methods to analyze turn-by-turn resistance more systematically, and by exploring how directive speech acts function in other genres of political discourse such as debates, interviews, or social media exchanges. Such studies would strengthen the empirical basis for understanding media control as a pragmatic phenomenon and extend the pedagogical implications of this research to broader media literacy contexts.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Atkinson, J. M., & Heritage, J. (Eds.). (1984). *Structures of social action: Studies in conversation analysis*. Cambridge University Press.
- Austin, J. L. (1962). *How to do things with words*. Oxford University Press.
- Bhatia, A. (2006). Critical discourse analysis of political press conferences. *Discourse & Society*, *17*(2), 173-203.
- Bloomberg. (2018, November 7). Trump clashes with CNN's Jim Acosta at press conference. Republished by TIME. <https://time.com/5448101/trump-clashes-acosta-journalists-press-conference/>
- Bourdieu, P. (1991). *Language and symbolic power* (J. B. Thompson, Ed.; G. Raymond & M. Adamson, Trans.). Harvard University Press.
- Bousfield, D. (2008). *Impoliteness in interaction*. John Benjamins.
- Brown, P., & Levinson, S. C. (1987). *Politeness: Some universals in language usage*. Cambridge University Press.
- Bucholtz, M. (2000). The politics of transcription. *Journal of Pragmatics*, *32*(10), 1439-1465.
- CBS News. (2018, November 7). Video: Trump spars with reporters at post-election news conference. <https://www.cbsnews.com/colorado/news/donald-trump-spars-jim-acosta-peter-alexander-election-news-conference>
- Clayman, S. E., & Heritage, J. (2002). *The news interview: Journalists and public figures on the air*. Cambridge University Press.
- Creswell, J. W., & Creswell, J. D. (2018). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches* (5th ed.). SAGE Publications.
- Culpeper, J. (1996). Towards an anatomy of impoliteness. *Journal of Pragmatics*, *25*(3), 349-367.
- Culpeper, J. (2011). *Impoliteness: Using language to cause offence*. Cambridge University Press.
- Denzin, N. K. (1978). *The research act: A theoretical introduction to sociological methods* (2nd ed.). McGraw-Hill.
- Downie, L. (2020). *The Trump administration and the press*. Committee to Protect Journalists.
- Drew, P., & Heritage, J. (Eds.). (1992). *Talk at work: Interaction in institutional settings*. Cambridge University Press.
- Ekström, M. (2009). Announced refusal to answer: A study of norms and accountability in broadcast political interviews. *Discourse Studies*, *11*(6), 681-702.



- Fairclough, N. (1989). *Language and power*. Longman.
- Fairclough, N. (1995). *Critical discourse analysis: The critical study of language*. Longman.
- Fairclough, N. (2015). *Language and power* (3rd ed.). Routledge.
- Foucault, M. (1982). The subject and power. *Critical Inquiry*, *8*(4), 777-795.
- Georgalidou, M. (2008). The contextual parameters of linguistic choice: Directive speech acts in Greek classroom interaction. *Pragmatics*, *18*(1), 1-26.
- Goffman, E. (1967). *Interaction ritual: Essays on face-to-face behavior*. Anchor Books.
- Gramsci, A. (1971). *Selections from the prison notebooks* (Q. Hoare & G. N. Smith, Eds. & Trans.). International Publishers.
- Grice, H. P. (1975). Logic and conversation. In P. Cole & J. L. Morgan (Eds.), *Syntax and semantics*, Vol. 3: *Speech acts* (pp. 41-58). Academic Press.
- Habermas, J. (1989). *The structural transformation of the public sphere: An inquiry into a category of bourgeois society* (T. Burger, Trans.). MIT Press.
- Haugh, M. (2014). *Im/politeness implicatures*. De Gruyter Mouton.
- Huls, E., & Varwijk, J. (2011). Political interviews as a genre: A comparative study of Dutch and German political interviews. *Journal of Pragmatics*, *43*(5), 1189-1206.
- Hutchby, I. (2013). *Confrontation talk: Arguments, asymmetries, and power on talk radio*. Routledge.
- Kellner, D., & Share, J. (2007). Critical media literacy, democracy, and the reconstruction of education. In D. Macedo & S. R. Steinberg (Eds.), *Media literacy: A reader* (pp. 3-23). Peter Lang.
- Kellner, D., & Share, J. (2019). *The critical media literacy guide: Engaging media and transforming education*. Brill.
- Leech, G. N. (1983). *Principles of pragmatics*. Longman.
- Levinson, S. C. (1983). *Pragmatics*. Cambridge University Press.
- Levitsky, S., & Ziblatt, D. (2018). *How democracies die*. Crown Publishing.
- McCombs, M. E., & Shaw, D. L. (1972). The agenda-setting function of mass media. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, *36*(2), 176-187.
- Miles, M. B., Huberman, A. M., & Saldaña, J. (2014). *Qualitative data analysis: A methods sourcebook* (3rd ed.). SAGE Publications.
- Prayitno, H. J. (2017). Directive speech acts in Indonesian classroom interaction. *Indonesian Journal of Applied Linguistics*, *7*(1), 1-10.
- Roca-Cuberes, C. (2014). Journalistic questions in broadcast political interviews. *Journal of Pragmatics*, *63*, 14-28.
- Sacks, H., Schegloff, E. A., & Jefferson, G. (1974). A simplest systematics for the organization of turn-taking for conversation. *Language*, *50*(4), 696-735.
- Schneider, K. P., & Eitelmann, M. (2020). "Fake news": A pragmatic approach to a political buzzword. *Journal of Pragmatics*, *168*, 1-15.
- Schubert, C. (2020). "Fake news" as a discursive device: A pragmatic analysis. *Discourse, Context & Media*, *38*, 100429.
- Searle, J. R. (1969). *Speech acts: An essay in the philosophy of language*. Cambridge University Press.
- Searle, J. R. (1976). A classification of illocutionary acts. *Language in Society*, *5*(1), 1-23.

- Searle, J. R. (1979). *Expression and meaning: Studies in the theory of speech acts*. Cambridge University Press.
- Searle, J. R., & Vanderveken, D. (1985). *Foundations of illocutionary logic*. Cambridge University Press.
- Stephenson, A. (2020). Directives and deontic rights in everyday interaction. *Journal of Pragmatics*, *158*, 1-14.
- Sudaryanto. (1993). *Metode dan aneka teknik analisis bahasa*. Duta Wacana University Press.
- The Blaze. (2018, November 7). Trump scolds Jim Acosta as a 'rude, terrible person' during heated exchange at news conference. <https://www.theblaze.com/news/2018/11/07/trump-scolds-jim-acosta-as-a-rude-terrible-person-during-heated-exchange-at-news-conference>
- The Washington Times. (2018, November 7). Trump vs. CNN's Jim Acosta. <https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2018/nov/7/trump-vs-cnns-jim-acosta/>
- Thornborrow, J. (2002). *Power talk: Language and interaction in institutional discourse*. Longman.
- Thuruvan, P., & Yunus, M. M. (2017). Directive speech acts in the ESL classroom. *International Journal of Academic Research in Business and Social Sciences*, *7*(6), 815-827.
- TIME. (2018, November 7). President Trump clashes with CNN's Jim Acosta, other journalists at fiery press conference. <https://time.com/5448101/trump-clashes-acosta-journalists-press-conference/>
- Tulis, J. K. (1987). *The rhetorical presidency*. Princeton University Press.
- Vallone, R. P., Ross, L., & Lepper, M. R. (1985). The hostile media phenomenon: Biased perception and perceptions of media bias in coverage of the Beirut massacre. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *49*(3), 577-585.
- Van Dijk, T. A. (2001). Critical discourse analysis. In D. Schiffrin, D. Tannen, & H. E. Hamilton (Eds.), *The handbook of discourse analysis* (pp. 352-371). Blackwell.
- Van Dijk, T. A. (2006). Discourse and manipulation. *Discourse & Society*, *17*(3), 359-383.
- Variety. (2018, November 7). Trump rips into CNN's Jim Acosta: 'You are a rude, terrible person'. <https://variety.com/2018/politics/news/trump-slams-cnn-jim-acosta-rude-terrible-person-1203022034>
- Watts, R. J. (2003). *Politeness*. Cambridge University Press.
- White, D. M. (1950). The "gate keeper": A case study in the selection of news. *Journalism Quarterly*, *27*(4), 383-390.
- Yule, G. (1996). *Pragmatics*. Oxford University Press.