

## ASSERTIVE ILLOCUTIONARY ACT USED BY PRESIDENT JOE BIDEN IN HIS SELECTED SPEECH

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### ABSTRACT

This study examines assertive illocutionary acts in President Joe Biden's political speech using Searle's (1979) speech act theory as the analytical framework. In political discourse, language functions not only to convey information but also to perform actions such as stating beliefs, presenting claims, and shaping audience understanding. This research focuses on how assertive speech acts are used to express viewpoints, organize ideas, and construct political messages. The data were taken from President Joe Biden's Farewell Address to the Nation and analyzed using a descriptive qualitative method. A total of 24 assertive utterances were identified and classified into five types: asserting, concluding, describing, claiming, and reporting. Asserting is the most dominant type with 8 occurrences (33.4%), followed by describing and claiming with 5 occurrences each (20.8%). Concluding and reporting each appear 3 times (12.5%). The findings indicate that assertive illocutionary acts are frequently used to present beliefs, explain situations, and evaluate political actions. This study contributes to pragmatic analysis by showing how assertive acts function within an authentic political speech and how they support political communication through structured and purposeful language use.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Language plays an essential role in shaping social interaction, power relations, and political realities. In politics, language is not simply used to convey information; it functions as a strategic resource through which political actors build authority, justify decisions, and influence public opinion. Political leaders deliberately choose certain linguistic forms to present themselves as credible, frame events in specific ways, and persuade a wide range of audiences. As noted by Chilton (2004), political discourse allows leaders to control how social realities are interpreted and to steer public understanding of political issues. For this reason, the analysis of political speech should focus not only on what is said, but also on how language is used to perform political actions within particular contexts.



One linguistic approach that facilitates such analysis is pragmatics, a field concerned with meaning in context and how language is used in real situations. Pragmatics explores how speakers communicate intentions that extend beyond the literal meaning of words. According to Yule (1996), pragmatics examines speaker meaning, highlighting the importance of contextual factors such as the speaker's intentions, the audience, and the surrounding circumstances. In political discourse, this approach is especially relevant because political speech is inherently purpose-driven, often aiming to persuade audiences, justify policies, and maintain public trust van Dijk (2006). Within pragmatics, speech act theory provides a central framework for understanding how utterances function as actions. Originally introduced by Austin (1962) and later developed by Searle (1979), speech act theory proposes that when speakers speak, they are often doing something rather than merely describing reality. Austin (1962) identifies three dimensions of speech acts: the locutionary act, which refers to the act of producing an utterance; the illocutionary act, which reflects the speaker's intended function; and the perlocutionary act, which concerns the effect of the utterance on the listener. Searle (1979) further categorizes illocutionary acts into five types: assertives, directives, commissives, expressives, and declarations. Among these categories, assertive illocutionary acts play a particularly important role in political discourse, as they enable speakers to present opinions as facts, express beliefs, and construct authoritative versions of reality.

Although speech act theory has been widely applied in linguistic research, much of the existing literature focuses on fictional texts, films, animations, or everyday conversations. Comparatively fewer studies examine authentic political speeches. In addition, research on political discourse often prioritizes rhetorical strategies, ideological framing, or thematic elements, rather than systematically analyzing specific illocutionary categories particularly assertive speech acts within real political contexts. Consequently, the pragmatic roles of assertive illocutionary acts in contemporary political leadership remain underexplored, especially in relation to their function within specific political situations and communicative purposes. To address this gap, the present study examines assertive illocutionary acts in selected political speeches delivered by President Joe Biden. As a contemporary political leader navigating complex domestic and international challenges, Biden frequently relies on assertive statements to express policy positions, shape political narratives, and reinforce credibility before diverse audiences. By analyzing these assertive illocutionary acts within their situational and political contexts, this study seeks to contribute to the field of pragmatics and political communication by showing how assertive language operates not merely as a linguistic category, but as a strategic tool for political action and meaning-making.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Language in political contexts functions not only as a means of communication but also as a powerful tool for shaping opinions and influencing public attitudes Fairclough (2001). Political speakers carefully choose their words to present facts, defend positions, and persuade audiences. From a pragmatic perspective, speech act theory has been widely used to examine how speakers perform actions through language.

Speech act theory explains that utterances perform functions such as stating, promising, ordering, and asserting. Among these functions, assertive illocutionary acts play a central role in



political discourse because they are used when speakers commit themselves to the truth of a proposition, such as when stating facts, making claims, or giving reports Leech (1983). In political speeches, assertive acts are especially important because they help speakers build credibility, justify policies, and guide public understanding.

Several previous studies have examined assertive illocutionary acts in public and political speeches. For example, Bagus et al. (2024) analyzed assertive illocutionary acts in Rendall Park's speech at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA). Using Searle's classification and a descriptive qualitative method, the researcher identified five types of assertive acts: informing, stating, asserting, boasting, and complaining. A total of 46 utterances were found, with informing as the most dominant type. This study shows that assertive acts function to deliver information clearly and shape audience understanding in public speeches.

In the Indonesian political context, Handayani & Wibowo (2025) examined locutionary and illocutionary acts in Anies Baswedan's performance during the first presidential debate in 2024. Using a qualitative descriptive approach, the study found that assertive acts were the most frequently used illocutionary category. The findings suggest that assertive utterances were strategically employed to strengthen arguments and persuade the audience during the debate.

In addition to speech act analysis, other studies have explored political discourse through critical discourse analysis. Trisnowati Tanto (2024), in a study entitled "*The Representation of Indonesian Presidential Candidate in Media: A Critical Discourse Analysis*," examined the representation of Prabowo Subianto in a *New York Times* article written by Paddock (2019). Applying van Dijk's framework of Critical Discourse Analysis, the study focused on microstructure elements such as actor description, level of description, and rhetoric. Using a descriptive qualitative and library research approach, the findings revealed a consistently negative representation of Mr. Subianto across macrostructure, microstructure, and superstructure levels. This study demonstrates how media discourse constructs political identities and shapes public perception.

Similarly, Siregar (2024), in a study entitled "*An Analysis of Illocutionary Acts in Vladimir Putin's Election Victory Speech*," applied Searle's framework to analyze the speech. The results revealed that assertive acts were the most dominant category compared to commissive, expressive, directive, and declarative acts. This finding indicates that political leaders frequently rely on assertive language to express certainty, construct authority, and legitimize their political stance. Although these studies demonstrate the importance of assertive illocutionary acts in political discourse, most of them focus primarily on identifying types and frequencies of speech acts rather than examining how assertive acts function within specific political contexts. Moreover, research that focuses on assertive illocutionary acts in contemporary political speeches delivered by American presidents remains limited.

Therefore, the present study seeks to address this gap by analyzing assertive illocutionary acts used by President Joe Biden in selected political speeches. By focusing specifically on assertive acts, this study aims to explain how such utterances are used to state claims, construct credibility, and shape public understanding within real political contexts. This study is expected to contribute to pragmatic and political communication studies by offering a more context-based understanding of how assertive language operates as a strategic resource in political discourse.



### 3. METHODOLOGY

This study uses a descriptive qualitative approach to analyze assertive illocutionary acts in political speech. This approach is suitable because the study focuses on understanding meaning, intention, and language use in context rather than on numerical data. The data were taken from one political speech delivered by President Joe Biden, namely his farewell address to the nation. This speech was chosen because a farewell address is a key moment in political communication, where a president reflects on leadership, states achievements, and expresses final views to the public. In this type of speech, assertive statements are used frequently to present facts, opinions, and conclusions. Focusing on one complete speech also allows the analysis to be more detailed and consistent within a single political context.

The data consist of 24 utterances identified as assertive illocutionary acts, such as stating, claiming, describing, and concluding. The speech was obtained from a publicly available video released by ABC News. Data were collected through repeated listening to the speech, followed by careful transcription to maintain the original context of each utterance. The utterances were then selected and classified based on Searle's (1979) theory of illocutionary acts. For data analysis, each utterance was examined to identify its intended meaning and communicative function. The utterances were categorized into types of assertive acts, and their roles were interpreted within the political context to explain how they convey information, build credibility, and influence the audience.

### 4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This study examines assertive illocutionary acts in one political speech, namely President Joe Biden's Farewell Address to the Nation. This speech was selected because it represents a significant political moment in which the speaker reflects on his leadership, reaffirms national values, and addresses the public for the final time as president. As a farewell address, the speech contains carefully structured statements that aim to assert facts, express beliefs, and shape public interpretation of political events. The analysis applies a descriptive qualitative method and is guided by Searle's (1979) classification of illocutionary acts, with a specific focus on assertive types. The speech transcript was closely examined to identify utterances that convey beliefs, present facts, or evaluate situations, as these characteristics indicate assertive illocutionary acts. The findings show that five types of assertive illocutionary acts were identified in the speech: asserting, concluding, describing, claiming, and reporting. The distribution of these types is presented in Table 1.

*Table 1. Types of Assertive Illocutionary Acts in Joe Biden's Selected Speeches*

Classifications of Assertive Illocutionary Act	Number of Utterance	Percentage
Asserting	8	33,4%
Concluding	3	12,5%
Describing	5	20,8%
Claiming	5	20,8%
Reporting	3	12,5%
Total	24	100%



The results indicate that asserting is the most frequently used type of assertive illocutionary act, appearing in 8 out of 24 data (33.4%). This suggests that the speaker primarily uses direct statements to express beliefs, viewpoints, and convictions. Describing and claiming each occur five times (20.8%), showing that explanatory statements and evaluative judgments play an important role in supporting the speaker's arguments. Meanwhile, concluding and reporting are the least frequent types, each appearing three times (12.5%), indicating that summarizing statements and factual reporting are used more selectively within the speech.

### Asserting

According to Searle (1979), asserting is an illocutionary act used to state beliefs, opinions, or propositions that the speaker holds to be true. The findings of this study show that asserting is the most frequently used type of assertive illocutionary act in Joe Biden's farewell address, indicating the speaker's strong tendency to communicate certainty and conviction.

### Datum 1

Joe Biden: *And I've been thinking a lot about who we are and maybe more importantly who we should be*

*(ABC News, Joe Biden's Full Speech Farewell Address, 0:51-0:56)*

This utterance can be categorized as an assertive illocutionary act, especially asserting, because Biden expresses an idea that he believes to be true about the nation and its future direction. According to Searle (1979), asserting is used when a speaker commits to the truth of a proposition. In this case, Biden is not simply sharing a personal thought, but presenting a view about national identity and what the country should become.

The statement "who we are and maybe more importantly who we should be" shows a contrast between the present condition of the nation and an ideal condition that has not yet been fully achieved. This makes the utterance more than just a reflection. It also functions as a way to guide the audience to think about the moral direction of the country. By using this form of assertion, Biden invites listeners to see national identity as something that must continue to be improved.

In political speeches, assertive utterances are often used not only to share beliefs, but also to shape public understanding. Chilton (2004) explains that political language is closely related to persuasion and legitimacy. From this perspective, Biden's statement can be seen as an effort to influence how the audience interprets the condition of the United States at the end of his leadership. He presents himself as a reflective and responsible leader who is concerned with the nation's values and future.

In addition, the use of the pronoun "we" is important. It creates a sense of togetherness between the speaker and the audience. However, at the same time, Biden still places himself in a position of authority by offering a moral evaluation of the nation. As Fairclough (2001) argues, political discourse is not neutral because language can be used to shape social values and power relations. Therefore, this utterance does not only express opinion, but also builds a particular perspective about the nation and its future.

Moreover, this statement helps Biden construct his image as a thoughtful and ethical leader. Charteris-Black (2014) notes that political speeches are often designed to build leadership image and gain audience trust. By saying that he has been thinking deeply about "who we are"



and “who we should be,” Biden shows himself as a leader who is not only ending his term, but also leaving a moral message for the future.

Overall, this utterance is an assertive act because Biden states a belief that he considers meaningful and true. However, its function is broader than simply giving information. It also encourages reflection, builds moral legitimacy, and guides the audience to accept Biden’s view of national identity and political direction (Chilton, 2004; Fairclough, 2001; Searle, 1979).

### Datum 2

**Joe Biden:** *I've walked by a painting of the Statute of Liberty I don't know how many times in the painting there's several workers climbing on the outstretched arm of the statue that holds the torch reminds me every day I pass it of the story and soul of our nation and the power of the American people*  
(ABC News, Joe Biden’s Full Speech Farewell Address, 14:31-14:52)

This utterance constitutes an assertive illocutionary act, functioning as asserting, as the speaker presents a personal observation and interpretation as a meaningful and credible representation of national identity. Delivered within the political context of a farewell address, the statement serves not merely as a descriptive anecdote, but as a symbolic assertion about the foundational values and collective strength of the United States. By referring to his repeated exposure to the painting “I’ve walked by a painting... so many times”, Biden establishes experiential authority, positioning himself as a long-standing witness to national symbols and their meanings. The depiction of workers climbing the Statue of Liberty is interpreted as embodying “the story and soul of our nation,” which implicitly frames the American identity as rooted in labor, perseverance, and collective effort. Through this assertive act, Biden claims that national power originates from ordinary people rather than political institutions alone. The political purpose of the utterance is to reinforce a unifying narrative of the nation at a reflective moment of leadership transition. Instead of issuing direct political directives, Biden asserts a value-laden interpretation that legitimizes democratic ideals and civic participation. The intended audience the American public and future political actors is guided to accept this symbolic reading as an authentic representation of national character. Pragmatically, the utterance functions to inspire trust, unity, and national pride while subtly shaping how the audience evaluates political power and responsibility. The pragmatic effect lies in encouraging collective identification with the nation’s values and reinforcing the belief that political continuity and strength depend on the people themselves. Therefore, this utterance appropriately qualifies as an assertive speech act that asserts a personal yet politically consequential conviction, inviting the audience to internalize the speaker’s interpretation of national identity.

### Datum 3

**Joe Biden:** *President's power is not limit it's not absolute and it shouldn't be and, in a democracy, there's another danger to the concentration of power and wealth it erodes a sense of unity and common purpose it causes distrust and division participating in our democracy becomes exhausting and even disillusioning*  
(ABC News, Joe Biden’s Full Speech Farewell Address, 13:09-13:32)



This utterance consists of a series of assertive illocutionary acts functioning primarily as asserting, through which the speaker articulates fundamental principles regarding power and democracy. Delivered in the political context of a farewell address, the statement serves as a reflective evaluation of democratic governance rather than a policy announcement or directive. By asserting that presidential power “is not absolute, and it shouldn’t be,” Biden presents a normative claim about democratic limits on authority, framing it as a foundational truth rather than a debatable opinion. This assertion implicitly reaffirms constitutional values and distances democratic leadership from authoritarian tendencies. The subsequent claim regarding the danger of concentrating power and wealth further expands this stance by identifying structural risks that threaten democratic integrity. The clauses describing the erosion of unity, the rise of distrust, and the exhaustion experienced by citizens function pragmatically to justify the initial assertions. These consequences are presented as observable social outcomes, strengthening the credibility of the speaker’s claims. The political purpose of this assertive act is to warn against democratic backsliding while shaping how the audience evaluates power relations beyond a single presidency. The intended audience includes the general public, political elites, and future leaders, who are encouraged to accept this interpretation of democratic health and responsibility. Pragmatically, the utterance legitimizes concern over inequality and power concentration without explicitly assigning blame. The pragmatic effect is the cultivation of critical awareness and moral vigilance among citizens, positioning democratic participation as a shared responsibility that must be protected from structural imbalance. Therefore, the utterance functions as an assertive speech act that not only states beliefs about democratic principles but also influences how the audience conceptualizes power, unity, and civic engagement within a democratic system.

### Concluding

Concluding refers to an assertive act that functions to summarize ideas or draw final judgments based on previously mentioned statements Yule (1996). The use of concluding acts in this speech reflects the speaker’s effort to consolidate his messages and affirm his confidence in the future.

### Datum 1

Joe Biden: *They built not just a single structure but a beacon of freedom.*

*(ABC News, Joe Biden’s Full Speech Farewell Address, 1:10-1:13)*

This utterance can be classified as an **assertive illocutionary act**, especially **concluding**, because Biden gives a final interpretation of the idea discussed in the previous part of the speech. According to Yule (1996), assertive acts are used when speakers state what they believe to be true, and concluding can be understood as an act of drawing a final point from earlier statements. In this case, Biden does not introduce a new idea, but gives a summary judgment about the meaning of what has been built.

The phrase “**not just a single structure but a beacon of freedom**” shows that the speaker moves from a literal description to a symbolic conclusion. The word “**structure**” refers to something physical, while “**beacon of freedom**” gives it a deeper political and moral meaning. This means that Biden is not only talking about a building or an achievement, but also presenting it as a symbol of American values. In this way, the utterance works as a concluding statement because it briefly sums up earlier references and turns them into one strong final message.



In political speeches, concluding statements are important because they help the speaker control how the audience understands previous ideas. Chilton (2004) explains that political language is often used to shape meaning and guide public interpretation. From this view, Biden's utterance is not simply descriptive. It is also persuasive, because it encourages the audience to accept freedom as the main meaning of the historical narrative he has presented. The conclusion is therefore ideological as well as rhetorical.

The metaphor “**beacon of freedom**” also strengthens the emotional impact of the statement. Charteris-Black (2014) argues that political leaders often use metaphor to make their messages more powerful and memorable. By using this expression, Biden gives a positive and inspiring image of the nation. The metaphor helps the audience connect a concrete object or achievement with abstract democratic values such as liberty and hope. As a result, the statement becomes more than a summary; it becomes a value-based conclusion meant to stay in the audience's memory.

In addition, this utterance helps create unity between the speaker and the audience. It offers a shared interpretation of the past and presents freedom as a collective national value. Fairclough (2001) states that political discourse is not neutral because it often reflects and reinforces certain values and power relations. In this case, Biden's conclusion limits other possible interpretations by presenting one preferred meaning of the national story. He guides the audience to see that history in a positive and morally significant way.

Overall, this utterance is best understood as an assertive act functioning as **concluding** because it gives a final evaluative meaning to the earlier discourse. It does not only close the narrative, but also strengthens Biden's political message by connecting history, national identity, and democratic values in one short but powerful statement (Chilton, 2004; Fairclough, 2001; Yule, 1996).

## Datum 2

**Joe Biden:** *Finally giving Medicare, the power to negotiate lower prescription drug prices for millions of seniors, and finally doing something to protect our children and our families by passing the most significant gun safety law in 30 years and bringing violent crime to a 50-year low*

*(ABC News, Joe Biden's Full Speech Farewell Address, 5:50-6:10)*

This utterance can be classified as an assertive illocutionary act, especially concluding, because Biden summarizes several major policy achievements and presents them as clear results of his administration. In pragmatics, assertive acts show the speaker's commitment to the truth of what is being said, while a concluding act draws together earlier points into a final judgment (Searle, 1979; Yule, 1996). In this case, Biden is not opening a new topic. Instead, he is closing a section of the speech by listing concrete outcomes and presenting them as proof of effective leadership.

The repeated use of the word “finally” is important because it signals completion and resolution. It suggests that these issues had remained unsolved for a long time, but were successfully addressed during Biden's presidency. Because of that, the utterance does more than report policy actions. It frames those actions as long-awaited achievements that reached



completion under his leadership. This gives the statement a concluding force, since it turns earlier policy discussion into a final message of accomplishment and closure.

From a political discourse perspective, this kind of statement also works as a form of legitimation. Political leaders often use speech not only to inform the public, but also to justify their actions and strengthen the public image of their leadership. Recent research on discursive legitimation explains that political language helps speakers present their actions as reasonable, necessary, and socially valuable (Vaara et al., 2024). In Biden's case, the policies mentioned—Medicare negotiation, gun safety legislation, and lower violent crime—are presented as evidence that his government was competent and productive. So, the utterance does not simply summarize achievements; it also encourages the audience to see those achievements as legitimate signs of successful governance.

The statement also has a strong persuasive purpose because it shapes how the audience should remember his presidency. Research on political discourse shows that leaders often organize speech in ways that guide public interpretation and social influence, especially when discussing crisis, leadership, or national direction (Takas & Prodromitis, 2023). In the same way, Biden's utterance directs listeners to evaluate his time in office through measurable policy success rather than through political conflict or controversy. By selecting achievements related to healthcare, public safety, and family protection, he highlights issues that are socially meaningful and emotionally resonant for the public.

In addition, the utterance contributes to Biden's leadership image. Studies of presidential speeches show that such speeches often communicate a leader's priorities, achievements, and vision in ways that help shape political memory and public judgment (Arellano et al., 2025). Here, Biden presents himself as a leader who produced real and concrete results. The structure of the statement supports that image: it moves quickly through several achievements without hesitation, which creates an impression of confidence, control, and effectiveness. This is why the utterance sounds more like a final assessment than a neutral report.

Another important point is that the utterance also builds collective alignment. Even though Biden is talking about his administration's achievements, the benefits are described in terms of "millions of seniors," "our children," and "our families." This language links government success to the welfare of ordinary people. Recent research on political discourse shows that inclusive expressions help speakers construct alignment and institutional identity, especially when they want to present themselves as speaking for a wider public rather than for themselves alone (Liu, 2024). In this way, Biden's statement does not only praise policy success; it also connects that success to shared social values and collective well-being.

Overall, this utterance is best understood as an assertive act functioning as concluding because it gathers earlier policy claims into one final statement of achievement. Its function is not only to summarize, but also to legitimize Biden's presidency, strengthen his credibility, and guide the audience toward a positive evaluation of his leadership. Therefore, the utterance works as a concluding assertive act because it closes the discussion with a strong impression of completed results, political competence, and social significance (Searle, 1979; Vaara et al., 2024; Yule, 1996).



### Datum 3

Joe Biden: *That's why I've held my duty to ensure a peaceful and orderly transition of power to ensure we lead by the power of our example I have no doubt that America's in a position to continue to succeed*

*(ABC News, Joe Biden's Full Speech Farewell Address, 7:11-7:24)*

This utterance functions as an assertive illocutionary act with a concluding function, through which the speaker delivers a final evaluative statement about leadership responsibility and national continuity. Situated within the political context of a farewell address, the utterance serves to bring closure to a broader discussion on democratic values, governance, and leadership transition. By stating "I've held my duty to ensure a peaceful and orderly transition of power," Biden asserts the fulfillment of a core democratic responsibility, presenting it as an accomplished fact rather than a promise or intention. The following clause, "to ensure we lead by the power of our example," articulates the underlying principle guiding this action, reinforcing moral leadership as a defining feature of democratic governance. These assertions collectively position the speaker as a legitimate and responsible political actor. The final statement, "I have no doubt that America's in a position to continue to succeed," functions as a confident evaluative assertion that projects stability and optimism. Rather than opening future debate, it consolidates previous themes and frames the nation's future as secure. The political purpose of this concluding act is to affirm democratic continuity and institutional strength at a moment of leadership transition. The intended audience the American public and political stakeholders is encouraged to internalize reassurance and confidence. Pragmatically, the utterance reinforces legitimacy, stability, and trust in democratic processes. The pragmatic effect lies in providing closure while shaping the audience's interpretation of the presidency as one grounded in responsibility, example, and enduring democratic values. Therefore, the utterance is appropriately categorized as an assertive speech act functioning as concluding, as it closes the discourse by affirming duty fulfilled and asserting confidence in America's continued success.

### Describing

Describing is an assertive illocutionary act used to present factual information, situations, or settings in order to provide context for the audience Searle (1979). In political discourse, describing helps listeners understand the circumstances surrounding the speech and supports the credibility of the speaker.

### Datum 1

Joe Biden: *My fellow Americans I'm speaking to you tonight from the oval office.*

*(ABC News, Joe Biden's Full Speech Farewell Address, 0:00-0:04)*

This utterance functions as an assertive illocutionary act with a describing function, as the speaker provides factual information about the communicative situation. By stating the audience being addressed "My fellow Americans" and the location of the speech "from the Oval Office", Biden commits to the truth of the contextual details without expressing intention, evaluation, or directive force. Within the discourse context of a farewell address, this descriptive assertion serves to establish the setting and legitimacy of the speech. The reference to the Oval Office



functions as a neutral situational marker rather than a persuasive or evaluative device. At this stage of the discourse, the speaker does not attempt to influence beliefs or actions but instead orients the audience to the formal circumstances of the communication. The pragmatic purpose of this descriptive assertive act is to ground the audience in a shared context and signal the official nature of the address. Pragmatically, the effect is clarity and authority: the audience is informed about where and how the speech is being delivered, which prepares them for the substantive political content that follows. Therefore, the utterance is appropriately categorized as an assertive speech act functioning as describing, as it conveys factual situational information and establishes the communicative framework of the speech without advancing an argument or concluding a discourse segment.

### Datum 2

Joe Biden: *Today an oligarchy is taking shape in America of extreme wealth power and influence that literally threatens our entire democracy our basic rights and freedoms and a fair shot for everyone to get ahead*

*(ABC News, Joe Biden's Full Speech Farewell Address, 7:46-8:00)*

This utterance functions as an assertive illocutionary act with a describing function, as the speaker presents a contemporary political condition as an existing reality. By situating the statement in the present time through the adverb “today,” Biden frames the situation as current and ongoing rather than hypothetical or predictive, committing to the truth of the condition being described. The description “an oligarchy is taking shape in America” characterizes the political landscape in terms of concentrated wealth, power, and influence. Rather than issuing directives or closing an argument, the speaker delineates the nature of this condition and elaborates on its implications. The clause “that literally threatens our entire democracy, our basic rights and freedoms, and a fair shot for everyone to get ahead” functions to extend the description by specifying the perceived consequences of this emerging structure. Within the political context of a farewell address, this descriptive assertive act serves to define a critical social reality that underpins the speaker’s broader concerns about democracy and equality. The pragmatic purpose is to alert the audience and frame the issue as structurally significant, while the pragmatic effect lies in shaping how listeners conceptualize the current state of American democracy before further interpretation or evaluation is provided elsewhere in the discourse. Therefore, the utterance is best categorized as an assertive speech act functioning as describing, as it portrays and defines a present political condition without directly arguing, concluding, or instructing the audience.

### Datum 3

Joe Biden: *Like a kid with a Stutter from Modest bees in Scranton Pennsylvania Claymont Delaware sitting behind this desk in the Oval Office as president of the United States that's the magic of America it's all around us upstairs in the residence of the White House*

*(ABC News, Joe Biden's Full Speech Farewell Address, 14:13-14:30)*



This utterance functions as an assertive illocutionary act with a describing function, as the speaker presents a personal life narrative as a factual illustration of a broader social reality. By describing a trajectory from “a kid with a stutter from modest beginnings” to “sitting behind this desk in the Oval Office,” Biden asserts the authenticity of his experience and treats it as representative of real possibilities within American society. The descriptive force lies in the speaker’s detailed portrayal of location, social background, and personal circumstance, which are presented as verifiable elements rather than rhetorical exaggeration. The phrase “that’s the magic of America” does not conclude an argument or issue a directive; instead, it interprets the preceding description as an example of an existing condition namely, social mobility and opportunity. This interpretation remains within the descriptive function, as it frames meaning without attempting to close the discourse or persuade the audience to act. Within the political context of a farewell address, this descriptive assertion serves to humanize leadership and ground national values in lived experience. The pragmatic purpose is to illustrate American opportunity through a concrete personal example, while the pragmatic effect is to shape the audience’s understanding of national identity as inclusive and possibility-driven. Therefore, the utterance is appropriately categorized as an assertive speech act functioning as describing, as it depicts and illustrates a state of affairs through personal narrative without performing evaluative closure or directive force.

### Claiming

Claiming is an assertive illocutionary act in which the speaker presents an evaluation or judgment that may invite agreement or acceptance from the audience Searle (1979). Unlike reporting, claiming often carries a stronger evaluative element, as the speaker emphasizes certain viewpoints or assessments.

### Datum 1

Joe Biden: *The very idea of America was so big we felt the entire world needed to see*

*(ABC News, Joe Biden’s Full Speech Farewell Address, 1:13-1:20)*

This utterance can be classified as an assertive illocutionary act, especially claiming, because Biden presents an evaluative judgment about America and invites the audience to accept it as meaningful and true (Searle, 1979; Yule, 1996). In this statement, Biden is not merely describing America in a neutral way. Instead, he expresses a value-based interpretation of America’s significance and moral importance.

The phrase “the very idea of America was so big” is important because it shows that Biden is referring to America not only as a country, but also as an abstract idea. This makes the utterance more ideological than factual. The word “big” does not refer to physical size, but rather to greatness, importance, and symbolic value. Therefore, the statement functions as a claim rather than a simple report, because it reflects the speaker’s judgment and encourages the audience to agree with it. In political discourse, language is often used not only to deliver information, but also to shape public belief and national meaning (Ma et al., 2025).

The second clause, “we felt the entire world needed to see,” strengthens the claiming function because it extends the meaning of America beyond the domestic level. Biden suggests that America represents values so important that they should be recognized globally. This utterance therefore presents America as a nation with universal relevance, not only national



importance. Such a statement is persuasive because it promotes a particular image of the nation and seeks audience acceptance of that image (McGregor, 2025; Wu & Zhang, 2025).

The use of the pronoun “we” is also significant because it creates a sense of shared belief between the speaker and the audience. At the same time, it helps Biden present his view as collective rather than personal. In political discourse, the first-person plural pronoun is often used to build solidarity, alignment, and institutional authority (Liu, 2024). In this case, “we” allows Biden to speak not only as an individual leader, but also as a representative of the nation. As a result, his claim appears more inclusive and legitimate.

From a critical perspective, this utterance also reflects a form of national idealization. Biden presents America as naturally great and globally meaningful, but this remains a subjective political interpretation rather than an objective fact. That is why the utterance is best understood as claiming. It advances a particular view of America and encourages the audience to accept that view. The pragmatic force of the statement lies in shaping how listeners understand national identity and America’s role in the world (Khater et al., 2024; McGregor, 2025).

Overall, this utterance is best categorized as an assertive act functioning as claiming because Biden presents a subjective but confident interpretation of America’s meaning and significance. The statement does not simply provide information, but also promotes a value-based image of the nation, builds collective alignment, and invites the audience to accept America as a country with universal importance (Searle, 1979; Liu, 2024; Ma et al., 2025; McGregor, 2025)

## Datum 2

Joe Biden: *That democracy must defend and be defined and be moved in every way possible our rights, our freedoms, our dreams. but we know the idea of America our institution our people our values that uphold it are constantly being tested*  
(ABC News, Joe Biden’s Full Speech Farewell Address, 2:52-3:14)

This utterance functions as an assertive illocutionary act with a claiming function, as the speaker advances normative and evaluative judgments about democracy and American identity and presents them as truths to be accepted. The use of the modal “must” indicate strong conviction, signaling that the statement goes beyond neutral description and reflects a firmly held belief about democratic responsibility. The phrase “we know” constructs a sense of shared certainty between the speaker and the audience, positioning the claims as collectively recognized rather than individually debatable. By associating democracy with “our rights, our freedoms, our dreams,” Biden puts forward a value-based interpretation of democracy, while the assertion that American institutions, people, and values “are constantly being tested” frames national identity as dynamic and under continuous challenge. Within the political context of a farewell address, this claiming assertive act functions to shape the audience’s understanding of democracy as both essential and fragile. The pragmatic purpose is to legitimize concern and moral vigilance, while the pragmatic effect lies in inviting the audience to align with the speaker’s interpretation of democratic struggle and responsibility. Therefore, the utterance is best categorized as an assertive speech act functioning as claiming, as it presents strong evaluative beliefs about



democracy and America's ongoing challenges rather than merely describing conditions or concluding a discourse segment.

### Datum 3

Joe Biden: *The determination of Advocates standing up for our rights and our freedoms instead of losing their jobs to an economic crisis that we inherited millions of Americans*  
(ABC News, Joe Biden's Full Speech Farewell Address, 4:58-5:08)

This utterance functions as an assertive illocutionary act with a claiming function, despite its incomplete grammatical structure. In spoken political discourse, syntactic fragments may still perform a clear illocutionary function by conveying meaning through emphasis and thematic focus rather than formal sentence completion. Through the phrase "the determination of advocates standing up for our rights and our freedoms," the speaker advances an evaluative claim about civic resilience and moral commitment. The reference to "an economic crisis that we inherited" further frames economic hardship as a shared national condition, while "millions of Americans" expands the claim to a collective scale. These elements do not simply describe isolated facts but assert an interpretation of social reality grounded in values and responsibility. Within the political context of a farewell address, the speaker uses this claiming assertive act to foreground perseverance in the face of economic adversity and to shape how the audience understands recent challenges. The pragmatic purpose is to legitimize a narrative of resilience and inherited difficulty, while the pragmatic effect is to encourage audience recognition of collective struggle and moral strength. Therefore, the utterance is appropriately categorized as an assertive speech act functioning as claiming, as it advances a value-laden interpretation of economic and social conditions and presents it as a truth to be acknowledged by the audience.

### Reporting

Reporting is an assertive act that involves conveying information or events as facts without emphasizing personal judgment Yule (1996). This type of assertive act supports the speaker's claims by presenting information as objective and verifiable.

### Datum 1

Joe Biden: *Before I begin let me speak to important news that from earlier today*  
(ABC News, Joe Biden's Full Speech Farewell Address, 0:04-0:09)

This utterance functions as an assertive illocutionary act with a reporting function, as the speaker announces the delivery of factual information concerning a recent event. By referring to "important news from earlier today," Biden positions himself as a source of information and signals the temporal relevance of the content to be reported. The utterance does not instruct the audience, express obligation, or convey personal emotion. Instead, it establishes an informational frame and prepares the audience for the presentation of factual content. Within the discourse context of a farewell address, this reporting act serves to organize the flow of the speech by indicating a shift to newsworthy material. The pragmatic purpose of this assertive reporting act is to inform and orient the audience, while the pragmatic effect is the creation of expectations regarding the significance and immediacy of the information that follows. Therefore, the



utterance is appropriately categorized as an assertive speech act functioning as reporting, as it announces the provision of factual information without performing directive or evaluative force.

## Datum 2

Joe Biden: *Long ago in New York Harbor, an iron worker installed beam after beam day after day. He was joined by steel workers, stonemasons, and engineers.*

*(ABC News, Joe Biden's Full Speech Farewell Address, 0:57-1:09)*

This utterance can be classified as an assertive illocutionary act, especially reporting, because Biden recounts past events as if they were factual and historically grounded (Searle, 1979; Yule, 1996). He refers to specific workers, actions, and a clear location in the past, which gives the statement the character of a report rather than a claim, conclusion, or command. The utterance mainly serves to provide information about a historical process.

The opening phrase “Long ago in New York Harbor” is important because it places the audience in a definite historical setting. This kind of temporal and spatial framing makes the statement sound factual and narrative-based. Instead of giving a personal opinion, Biden begins by establishing a historical scene. The clause “an iron worker installed beam after beam day after day” continues this reporting function by describing repeated labor in a straightforward way. The next sentence, “He was joined by steel workers, stonemasons, and engineers,” adds more participants and details, which strengthens the sense that the speaker is narrating a concrete historical event rather than expressing a judgment. Because of this, the utterance works primarily as reporting (Searle, 1979; Yule, 1996).

Even though the statement sounds informational, it still has an important function in political discourse. Historical narration in political speeches is often used to build a foundation for later interpretation. Research on narratives and collective memory shows that political narratives help audiences connect past events with shared identity and public values (Lopez, 2025; Sierp, 2025). In this case, Biden reports the labor of workers in a neutral tone, but this historical background prepares the audience to understand the nation as something built through collective effort. So, while the utterance is reporting in form, it also supports a broader political message about unity and national identity (Lopez, 2025; Sierp, 2025).

The focus on workers is also significant. By mentioning iron workers, steel workers, stonemasons, and engineers, Biden highlights cooperation among ordinary people with different roles. This creates an image of nation-building as a shared social effort rather than the achievement of one individual. Studies of political discourse show that speakers often construct collective identity by presenting history as the result of cooperation, sacrifice, and common purpose (Ma et al., 2025; Wu & Zhang, 2025). Therefore, although the utterance is mainly a report, it also subtly encourages the audience to value solidarity and collective contribution.

From a critical perspective, this shows that reporting in political speeches is rarely completely neutral. The utterance presents historical information, but the selection of details is meaningful. Biden chooses to focus on labor, persistence, and cooperation, which gives the audience a particular way of understanding the past. In political discourse, even factual narration can guide interpretation by deciding which events and actors should be remembered (Sierp, 2025;



Bakke et al., 2025). This means the utterance does not only inform the audience, but also helps shape collective memory in a positive and unifying direction.

Overall, this utterance is best categorized as an assertive act functioning as reporting because it narrates past events through clear historical details and presents them as factual information. However, its role is not only informational. Within the context of a farewell address, the statement also builds narrative background, supports collective memory, and prepares the audience for later symbolic and evaluative meanings about America and its national identity (Lopez, 2025; Searle, 1979; Yule, 1996).

## 5. CONCLUSION

This study analyzed the types and functions of assertive illocutionary acts in President Joe Biden's Farewell Address to the Nation. The findings show that five types were identified: asserting, claiming, describing, reporting, and concluding. Among these, asserting was the most dominant type. This indicates that the speech relies heavily on direct statements to present viewpoints, reinforce positions, and emphasize key messages. The results also show that each type of assertive act serves a specific function in the speech. Asserting and claiming are used to express beliefs and strengthen arguments. Describing and reporting help present information about events and achievements, while concluding is used to summarize ideas and signal closure. These patterns demonstrate that assertive illocutionary acts function as a structured way of organizing political messages. From a pragmatic perspective, this study shows how assertive acts operate in a real political context, particularly in a farewell address. The analysis highlights how a political leader uses assertive language to present interpretations of events as credible and reasonable. In terms of political communication, the findings suggest that assertive acts help shape audience understanding by framing statements as facts or justified evaluations. Overall, this study provides a focused analysis of assertive illocutionary acts in one contemporary political speech. It offers a clearer description of how assertive language is used in a specific political situation. Future research may examine other political speeches or compare different leaders to see whether similar patterns of assertive use appear in different contexts.

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